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Wot For? Rot and Fertility in Katherine Mansfield's "The Woman at the Store" (1912)

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*How can one mobilise limited agency under patriarchal structures which value female fertility as finitely consumable? In "The Woman at the Store", Katherine Mansfield renders ambiguous the boundary between rot and fertility in order to catalyse a shift in conceptualisations of female fertility from finite consumption to decomposition. This change allows for a recycling of materials, where change is cyclical rather than finite, and where matter is changed but not reduced. This rot and decomposition then embody a resistance to patriarchal imperatives that imagine the female body and its fertility as in service to others and to the colonial imperatives which imagine the female and non-human elements of the story as contributing to a colonial 'new world' in New Zealand. I propose that engagement with rot and decomposition embodies a form of agency that mobilises deviance within the story, where rot becomes an aesthetic that reveals limited agency for the subaltern. In *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett argues that "bodies enhance their power in or as a heterogeneous assemblage" rather than as individual beings (23). This essay will argue that in the agentic assemblage in "The Woman at the Store", women appropriate images and ideals of fertility with concurrent images of rot. Moving on to the non-human elements of the assemblage, I explore how the use of unconventional animal metaphors challenges the homogeny of the animal as referent, making them unusable as metaphors aligned with consumption. Lastly, I will argue that plants in the assemblage act both as indicators of geographical fertility and symbols which reveal figurative dualisms and tensions within systems of power as an element of the agentic assemblage. This tracing of the different agentic valences of the assemblage (women, animals, plants) will allow for the identification of their collective assertion of agency in the text.*

In a letter to her husband John Middleton Murry a year before her death in 1923, Katherine Mansfield ruminates on a passage from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1623) which reads: "This common body, / Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream, / Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide / To rot itself with motion" (4.1.48-51). She confesses to find that this passage

contains such a terribly deep psychological truth. 'That rots itself'... and the idea of it returning and returning, never swept out to sea finally. You may think you have done with it for ever, but comes a change of tide and there is that dark streak reappeared, more sickeningly rotten still. I understand that better than I care to. I mean – alas! – I have proof of it in my own being. (Mansfield *Selected Letters* 241)

The proof of rot to which Mansfield here refers is the chronic gonorrhoea with which she was infected as a young woman. After her contraction in 1908, she fell seriously ill with peritonitis, leading to the removal of her left fallopian tube and rendering her infertile (Smith "Common Certain Understanding" 45). The untreated disease later caused arthritis, heart disease, and pleurisy, all of which would later become significant issues in conjunction with the tuberculosis that eventually took her life (Smith "Common Certain Understanding" 45). Although it was not until 1918 that her doctor informed her of the impact of the untreated gonorrhoea on her declining health, Claire Tomalin contends that Mansfield was aware for some time of the relationship between her youthful sexual encounters and her poor health (39, 45). She died at 34 while seeking treatment for her tuberculosis in France (Tomalin 34). The "dark streak" of rot in Mansfield's letter takes on several modes: it is a cyclical movement, ever returning, "sickening". Mansfield's relationship to the concept of rot is linked to sexual desire and to fertility, as well as to a deeply engrained sense of shame in inhabiting a body with "proof" of rot. She was a young woman who was failed by a medical system that was negligent in recognising and treating her condition, and whose fears and hopes became intertwined with a self concept tightly bound to the idea of rot.

Mansfield's "The Woman at the Store" was written in 1911 and published in *Rhythm* magazine in 1912, four years after she likely contracted the disease. The story depicts an aging woman isolated in the New Zealand wilderness, who has murdered her husband and is then visited by three travellers. The story engages with the ideas and aesthetics of rot and fertility through rotting and women's bodies, animals, and plants. In a remarkably innovative turn, the story renders ambiguous the boundary between rot and fertility. This ambiguity catalyses a shift from a finite consumption of fertility to decomposition. In doing so Mansfield's text resists the patriarchal imperatives that imagine the female body as in service to others and the colonial imperative which imagine the female and non-human elements of the story as contributing to a colonial 'new world' in New Zealand.

The aesthetics of rot and fertility in the story and in Mansfield's broader body of work have not yet been interpreted in Mansfield studies. While recent feminist work with Mansfield's earlier short stories, such as that of Elyse Blankley, Doreen D'Cruz, and John Ross, explore gender roles as supporting conceptions of colonial identity, this paper identifies in this convergence between gender and colonialism a shared site for potential agency and resistance against these two forms of oppression.

I want to understand fertility in this text as a state of being in which an object or being has the capacity for production. This production can be of children, through sexual fertility, of labour, in a more virile understanding of fertility, or of edible materials, such as meat or plants. When change is enacted on fertile beings or objects, it is predominantly in the realm of consumption: a finite production of, for example, children, labour, or meat, that ultimately leads to a finite 'using up' of the fertile object/being, for example, the womb, worker, or animal. A shift from consumption to decomposition allows for a recycling of materials, where change is cyclical rather than finite and where matter is changed but not reduced. I propose that engagement with rot and decomposition embodies its own form of agency that mobilises deviance within the story, aligned with Kyla Wazana Tompkins and Melissa Sanchez's argument that the ideas of rot and decomposition are "a mobilized politics of intentional deviance grounded in limited agency and constrained choices" (139). Rot becomes an aesthetic that reveals limited agency for the subaltern, presenting a means of evading a finite 'using up' of fertility. To avoid being consumed, one must become unconsumable. While the agency in the story is limited, it represents a meagre means of resistance in a context where a positive outcome is impossible.

In the case of "The Woman at the Store", the women in the story, the gendered livestock and farm animals, and the local and cultivated plants all play important roles in the overall assertion of agency that engages with rot and decomposition. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett highlights the role of assemblages – groups of human and non-human factors connected by various affects produced on and by one another – in the creation of agency (23). She argues that though each member of the assemblage "has a certain vital force, ... there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage", where "bodies enhance their power in or as a heterogeneous assemblage" rather than as individual beings (Bennett 24, 23). The elements of the assemblage in the story embody a resistance to

the consumption of their fertility in different forms, whether it is the edibility and mobility in animals, the sexual and physical labour of women, or the food and aesthetic uses of plants.

This article will first argue that in the assemblage in “The Woman at the Store”, women appropriate images and ideals of fertility with concurrent images of rot. Then, moving on to non-human elements of the assemblage, I examine how the use of unconventional animal metaphors challenges the homogeny of the animal as referent, making them unstable as metaphors aligned with consumption. Lastly, I will argue that plants in the assemblage act both as indicators of geographical fertility and symbols which reveal figurative dualisms and tensions within systems of power as an element of the agentic assemblage. This tracing of the different agentic valences of the assemblage (i.e. women, animals, plants) will allow for the identification of their collective assertion of agency in the text. Through the aesthetics of rot, this collective agency resists the ‘using up’ of its subjects in the form of sexual violence against women, the exploited labour of animals, and the culinary and aesthetic consumption of plants.

Women’s Bodies

Women’s bodies function as a foregrounding aspect of the agentic assemblage in “The Woman at the Store” in which women appropriate images and ideals of fertility alongside images of rot. Recalling Wakana Tompkins and Sanchez’s argument for rot as a politics of deviance grounded in limited agency (139), the characters’ tarnishing of images of fertility with those of rot allows them to avoid the finite consumption of their fertility by men in the story within their limited agency under the patriarchal oppression they face.

At the dinner table when all the characters are assembled in the woman’s store, the woman drunkenly narrates her own infertility. She announces:

It’s six years since I was married, and four miscarriages. I says to ‘im, I says, what do you think I’m doin’ up ‘ere? If you was back at the coast, I’d ‘ave you lynched for child murder. Over and over I tells ‘im — you’ve broken my spirit and spoiled my looks, and wot for — that’s wot I’m driving at ... Oh, some days — an’ months of them — I ‘ear them two words knockin’ inside me all the time — ‘Wot for!’ but sometimes I’ll be cooking the spuds an’ I lifts the lid off to give ‘em a prong and I ‘ears, quite suddin again, ‘Wot for!’ (Mansfield, “Woman” 16)

This devastating confession punctuated by the desperate rhetorical question, “wot for”, provides the motive for the subsequent revelation that the woman has shot and buried her

husband. It is important to recognise that in 1921, New Zealand had the second highest maternal mortality rate in the Western world (Pollock). Notably, the likelihood of a miscarriage increases with each subsequent impregnation and miscarriage ("Causes & Prevalence"). Her repeated impregnation at the time, had it continued, would be tantamount to a death sentence when considering the description of the decrepit and unsanitary home (Mansfield, "Woman" 16) and the fact that almost all contemporary maternal deaths were caused by sepsis (Pollock). Cherry Hankin argues that the tone of the text is one of "outrage at the biological helplessness of women" (29). This biological helplessness, in which even the most precarious fertility is grounds for consumption "over and over", is resisted by the woman at the store when she appropriates rot as a form of fertility in the murder of her husband (Mansfield, "Woman" 16). His body is decomposed into fertiliser when he is buried. She will never again have to push out dead babies but he will forever push up daisies. This reversal of fertility in the form of imposed rot is a powerful assertion of agency. Where her fertility was consumed, he is decomposed as she is freed of him and, in a bizarre twist, he becomes more potently fertile as a corpse than she is alive.

Criticism surrounding the story tends to foreground the otherness of the violent woman, sensationalising her violence and, in turn, naturalising the violence enacted on her by the men in the story. Hankin argues that the murder's conditions are caused by a universal hatred of men, which could cause a reproduction of the crime, arguing that the woman "harbours an hostility towards men which might cause her to strike again" (75). Anne Lohead similarly gestures towards misandrist impulses under the pressures of patriarchal violence, arguing that "the angel in the house — has become a demon" (120). I believe that we must instead understand the murder as being an act of survival in its reversal of the finite consumption of fertility, in order to avoid sensationalising patriarchal and colonial violence. The woman should not be reduced to a "figure of fun" in textual interpretation as well as in the story (Mansfield, "Woman" 12), but should instead be understood as a dynamic character with motivations beyond a hatred of men and madness in isolation. To treat women's violence as an undoing of the natural, as atavistic, and men's violence as an inevitable product of the time and their nature is to normalise and be complicit in the latter violence.

The woman's daughter, Else, also embodies images of rot concurrently with images of fertility as a means of protecting herself from patriarchal exploitation. She is described, under the male gaze in the traveller's tent, as "a mean, undersized brat, with whitish hair, and weak

eyes. She stood, legs wide apart and her stomach protruding" (Mansfield, "Woman" 15). The suggestion of legs spread "wide apart" and of a protruding stomach mimicking pregnancy suggests fertility and an invitation to sexuality. However, in conjunction with the image of her small stature and weak eyes, these images take on a different valence. The protruding stomach is more likely to be the result of disease or issues with digestive health, which falls in the realm of decomposition. The weak eyes further speak to an instability with regard to her health and her small size speaks to malnourishment. Images of seduction and fertility become poisonous and uncanny in the figure of the child. Even her mind is seen as diseased through her drawings (Mansfield, "Woman" 17). Her mind and body, diseased and repulsive, are nonetheless left alone by the men. It is notable that she is a young girl without a father figure present, in a remote location, frequently alone with three strange men described as having a ravenous sexual appetite, and that they depart leaving her untouched. Bruce Harding proposes that Else "reads as an atavistic throwback, as though reproduction in the settler outback represents not the future but a return to a debased, marginally human past" (137). I argue instead that in reducing the character to a product of the land and framing her as "marginally human" and "debased", the patriarchal dehumanisation of the character is replicated under a colonial lens. The child's rotting does not represent an atavistic regression, but instead represents a sort of reclamation of her body by rendering it undesirable for consumption. Her name hints at the potential to escape her mother's fate, to be else, to be different, to be saved.

The female characters' deviation from traditional gender roles also works to destabilise conceptions of colonialism in the form of the colonial woman. Blankley argues that the categories of "gender, empire, and exploitation (resources and bodies)" are deeply entwined, where gender roles "provide a stable sense of identity, organized around hierarchized and 'naturally' self-evident truths" which provide "a model of unassailable national unity" (134). The women's engagement with the aesthetics of rot and fertility as a means of challenging gender roles then also does work to unsettle a colonial model of the 'new' world, where women are as fertile and welcoming as the land is imagined to be. In this way, the female body and the colonial land as objects of potential exploitation are both unsettled by images of rot. The unique animals and plants native to the land also embody the aesthetics of rot as a part of the agentic assemblage that resists both patriarchal and colonial violence.

The third woman in the story is arguably the narrator, though the narrator's gender was never revealed or identified in the initial version of the story published in 1912. This change was likely not made by Mansfield herself (Harding 136). The resistance and assertion of the woman at the store and her daughter – enacted through the embodiment of the aesthetics of rot and fertility – is dismantled when the narrator is edited to be female. As a woman, the narrator becomes complicit in the violence done to the woman at the store, where a third of the blame of patriarchal violence is placed onto the narrator, a woman herself. The manipulation of a genderless character into a feminine one enacts a form of metatextual patriarchal violence over the female body. Women become both perpetrators and victims of patriarchal violence in the story. Additionally, in making ambiguous the narrator's gender, Mansfield works to unsettle masculinist colonial violence by presenting the violence without the explicit depiction of masculinity. In depicting the colonial and masculine behaviour of the narrator without specifying the character as male, the relationship between masculinity and colonialism as forms of power is disrupted. In prescribing the narrator the gender of woman, this disruption of power is undone. In this editorial manipulation, the importance of gender to the embodiment of the aesthetics of rot and fertility is revealed to be essential. When the narrator is ascribed femininity without an embodiment of rot, the assertion of the other women in the text is lessened, and the resistance to masculinist colonialism is made null.

Scholarship engaging with this text often works with the edited story, which is also used in almost all subsequent republications in collections and anthologies.¹ In analysing the original 1912 text, the only version verifiably intended by Mansfield, I differ greatly from previous scholarly analysis. Engagement with the original text allows me to identify the elements of rot and fertility that are rendered null when the narrator is gendered as female.

¹ D'Cruz and Ross, Dunbar, Hankin, Harding, and Lohead all work with this reading of the text, while Blankley acknowledges the original text in a footnote. The original text reads: "'I'll draw all of you when you're gone, and your horses and the tent, and that one' – she pointed to me – 'with no clothes on in the creek'. I looked at her where she wouldn't see me frown" (Mansfield, "Woman" 16). Here in the original, the pronoun "she" refers to Else. The passage was edited so that the sentence "I looked at her where she couldn't see me frown" is included in the quotation marks. The word "frown" is changed to "from", so that the pronoun "her" refers to the protagonist.

Animal Metaphors

The animals in “The Woman at the Store” represent a significant non-human element of the agentic assemblage. In the story, the use of unconventional animal metaphors challenges the conventional interpretation of the animal as referent, rendering the subject of the metaphor an absent referee. Carol Adams notes that animals become absent referents in metaphor when the metaphor’s meaning is derived from the animal’s essentialised and universalised traits, as well as its reference to the metaphor’s subject (60). To say that an individual “is a lamb” is to use the figure of the animal as almost metonymic for a universalized trait – in this case, innocence. The actual animal itself is absented from the metaphor. However, if the false homogeny of the animal subject is challenged, so too is its erasure. When the animal metaphor strays from typical symbolism (e.g. a lamb means innocence), the animal as an absent referent becomes present in the metaphor as the reader attempts to derive meaning from the metaphor based on the animal’s known traits, instead turning the subject of the metaphor into an absent subject of reference. If the person described as a lamb is not innocent, then what is it about the lamb that the person is being likened to? The lamb becomes more important as a referent than the person does as a referee, where the lamb becomes the ambiguous point of comparison against which the person is judged. Though the livestock in the story are literally fertile in terms of their ability to be consumed as meat and labour, this fertility is challenged through unconventional metaphor.

The story begins with three characters riding through the New Zealand bush on pack horses, an animal species homogenously symbolic for strength and virility. Blankley asserts that the mobility of the characters “places them in the masculinist settler tradition”, where the horse acts as a consumable tool for masculinity through mobility (136). However, the narrator’s specific packhorse is “sick — with a big, open sore rubbed under the belly” (Mansfield, “Woman” 10). The rotting sore at the site of the stomach mirrors the infertility of the woman at the store, who has been the victim of multiple miscarriages prompted by repeated unwilling impregnation by her husband. Poi, the name of the horse, is a traditional Māori dance performed by women and means “ball” (referring to a spherical object involved in the dance) in Māori, further invoking images of pregnancy and femininity in the female horse (Huata and Papesch 12). The homogenous group of virile/fertile pack horses is then disrupted by this singular horse’s deviation from conventional interpretation in its rot and unusability, and the horse aligns itself instead with the rot and infertility of the woman at the

store. The link between the consumption of the horse as a site of fertility and the woman's sexual fertility is further continued when the narrator asks the woman for embrocation because the horse has "rubbed herself to hell!" (Mansfield, "Woman" 12). This masturbatory image further likens the using up of the horse to the sexual using up of the woman, while blaming both for the harm they experience. The similar exploitation and destruction wrought upon the horse and the woman demonstrate the relationship between 'using up' both labour and sexuality, where sexuality becomes a kind of labour. Instead of aligning itself with male power and conquest, the packhorse quietly aligns itself with female rot.

The woman is likened again to an animal when Jo asks, "[w]hat's the old bitch got in the store?" (Mansfield, "Woman" 14), in which animals are exploited figuratively within a patriarchal system of violence as the figure of the dog is weaponised to depict the woman as subservient. The woman's fertility is not only identified by her sexuality through the word "bitch", but by her economic status through the word "store". Originally, the vulgarism "bitch" defined a high sexual desire similar to a dog in heat, likening female sexuality to animal fertility (Kleinman et al. 51). The double metaphor reveals the modes of fertility the character intends to exploit – the woman and her store. Pamela Dunbar contends that the woman is presented as a series of male fantasies, of "the dolly bird" and "the provider", and that when "sex is regarded as a commodity the two roles become one: the Woman is as open to appropriation as her goods; her body itself, a store" (47–48). The economic and sexual exploitation of the woman are deeply linked under patriarchal consumption, so that the woman becomes at once animal and product. However, like the comparison to the pack horse, this perceived fertility and abundance is revealed to be inaccurate. The woman is no more fertile than her store is plentiful. In a colonial context, female reproduction is valued as necessary for the production of a 'new' nation, while the store is a capitalist venture that also supports this production. In the failure of both the woman and the store to fulfill their promises of fertility, they fail both a colonial and a patriarchal imperative. Though the assumption of sexual and economic fertility is revealed to be false through unconventional metaphor, it allows the woman and her store to be removed from consideration in patriarchal and colonial frameworks that would consume their fertility.

The woman herself employs an animal metaphor that deceptively implies fertility as a means of entrapment. When describing her anguish at her husband's absence, she says to Jo, who "made sheep's eyes at her": "It's the loneliness ... and bein' shut up 'ere like a broody 'en"

(Mansfield, "Woman" 17). In addition to signalling the woman's isolation and reflective nature, the term "broody" can also define something "apt or fit to breed" ("Broody"). It similarly evokes the word 'brood', often used to refer to a group of animals. The double meaning of the word and its allusion to animalistic breeding allow the woman to signal a false fertility to lure Jo, where an animal metaphor is wielded as a tool. In the subsequent animal metaphor of the "sheep's eyes", Jo is likened to a female animal associated with innocence, creating a moment of patriarchal disruption. This metaphor would suggest him to be feminine, docile, and innocent – traits that are canonically inaccurate. As he does not follow the common metaphorical signification of the sheep, the sheep becomes centered and he becomes an absent referee. If he is not innocent, then the other animalistic associations of a sheep are adopted – he takes on its blindness and its willingness to follow, epitomised when he encourages his companions to leave him behind (Mansfield, "Woman" 19). As the story ends with the store disappearing with a bend in the road, ominously erasing Jo and the woman at the store, it could be interpreted that Jo may be the woman's next blind and willing victim, a lamb to the slaughter (Mansfield, "Woman" 19).

Plants as Symbols

In "The Woman at the Store", plants act both as indicators of geographical fertility and symbols which reveal figurative dualisms and tensions within systems of power. While plants symbolise fertile land and growth, they also reveal modes of decay such as poverty, death, and masculine violence through their symbolism. Angela Smith notes the importance of plants in Mansfield's stories, dating back to "Enna Blake", a story she wrote when she was nine, which, "like so much of Mansfield's later fiction ... pivots on plants" (*Katherine Mansfield* 1). Revealing Mansfield's innovative use of plant symbolism, Sharon Gordon further argues that "in order to evoke 'the sense of novelty and strangeness' in her floral narratives, Mansfield subverts the sentimental metaphoric association of women and flowers in order to indicate something darker, more subversive, even transgressive" (129). In the nineteenth century, books about the language of flowers which focused on a symbolic approach were incredibly popular. To deploy an analysis of the symbolism of the plants in order to establish their role in the agentive assemblage in "The Woman at the Store", I use Kate Greenaway's *The Language of Flowers* (1834), as it is the most contemporary to Mansfield's text and one she was likely familiar with due to her personal love of botany, as well as her frequent use of flower coded symbolism.

Walking up the garden path to the store, the narrator observes that it “was planted on both sides with cabbages ... of flowers there were double poppies and sweet-williams” (Mansfield, “Woman” 12). In the garden, the plants are cultivated for their consumption as food or aesthetic objects. Notably, these three plants require fertile soil, signalling both the fertility of the actual plants and that of the land they inhabit (“Sweet William”; “Cabbages”; “Poppies”). However, these plants are also non-native to New Zealand, and so the fertility of the individual plants are alien to the fertility of the soil that allows for their growth (*Department of Conservation*). This alienation mirrors the titular woman’s alienation from her daughter, who was born of her own body and yet incongruent with it. While the plants in the garden indicate fertile grounds, the relationship is not natural or harmonious. It is likely that the land has been manipulated to make it more fertile through pH changes, tilling, watering, and importing foreign soil. This symbolic violence to the land for the sake of fertility mirrors the woman’s impregnations: the land itself too is pregnant with things it does not want and is not suited to carry.

A symbolic analysis of these plants as signifiers for fertility reveals tensions present as modes of decay in the story. In Victorian flower language, cabbages signify wealth because their coloring resembles money (Greenaway 11). However, these plants are rarely associated with wealth — in fact, they have, since the medieval period, been a staple for lower classes since they are relatively easy to grow in home gardens, which were not then taxed, and were easily stored for the winter (“Vegetables”). This symbolic tension between wealth and poverty is mirrored in the economic disparity of the woman in the store. While dilapidated and impoverished, both the house and the woman at the store have independent economic potential, a rare occurrence for a woman in a colonial setting. However, her poverty acts as a mode of decay: as the house slowly rots without repairs, she and her daughter rot along with it (Mansfield, “Woman” 15-16). This tension between economic potential and desperation results at once in her ability to provide for and entrap the travellers and the desperation that leads her to attempt that entrapment.

Poppies enact a similar tension between symbolic interpretations. In Victorian flower language, poppies represent pleasure and love, as well as remembrance and death depending on the color (Greenaway 33), which is unspecified in Mansfield’s text. The co-existence of love and death is evident in the woman’s murder of her husband. This ambiguity with regard to colour allows the poppies to hold the potential to act as a warning for violence or for love.

Adding further ambiguity, the poppies in the text are double poppies, or *Papaver paeoniflorum*, a variety known as the peony poppy (Pierce). In Victorian flower language, peonies represent shame (Greenaway 32), a third layer of symbolism that casts further friction between the first two interpretations: does the woman feel shame for her amorous liaisons, or for her violence? The text's refusal to identify color and its choice of a unique variety of poppy transform the somewhat commonplace symbol of the poppy into a representation rife with ambiguity, blurring the boundary between desire, violence, and shame.

Finally, sweet williams are strongly associated in Victorian flower language with gallantry, bravery, and masculinity (Greenaway 39). These flowers appear again inside the house in a "light bouquet of sweet-williams on the table" (Mansfield, "Woman" 16), troubling the barrier between interiority and exteriority. The men in the story, present like the three travellers or absent like the woman's husband, are a far cry from the ideals of gallantry and bravery. The inclusion of sweet williams in the garden and in the house represents a literally home-grown version of non-violent masculinity, a reclamation of gallantry and bravery as female traits, a vegetable replacement for the masculine brutality the woman has experienced. It also highlights masculinity and patriarchy as modes of decay. The ambiguity regarding plant symbolism, which signals fertility in the form of wealth, love, and masculinity, also reveals a dual nature to these concepts, signalling the house and its gardens as being an uncanny site for unstable fertility.

To conclude, "The Woman at the Store" renders ambiguous the boundary between rot and fertility in order to catalyse a shift from finite consumption to decomposition of fertility. This agency is enabled by an assemblage: of women's bodies which embrace rot as a means of avoiding exploitation, animals which defy conventional depictions of fertility, and the dual interpretations of plant symbolism and function which destabilise the certainty of fertility. These elements in conjunction achieve a greater agency in their assemblage than as disparate elements, allowing them to challenge patriarchal and colonial consumption of fertility. In the intersection between the female body and the colonial body as sites for the exploitation of fertility, I identify agency as a collective enterprise of human and non-human agents, who enact resistance through the aesthetics of rot that is generative of agency.

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