Chapter IV

Nicola Griffith: *Ammonite and Slow River*

1. Introduction

An idea or a concept, whether technological or philosophical, is the essence of a Science Fiction novel. To imagine human contact with the alien and develop it into the ‘what if’ story has been one of the major concepts in Science Fiction writing. As we have discussed in the previous chapters, the post 1960 Science Fiction employed the alien theme to reflect on the contemporary issues and transformed Science Fiction into the literature of ideas. They chose to examine the human conditions through the defamiliarised world of whole or partly ‘alien’ universe. Science Fiction has been seen as a literary form to speculate the unfamiliar landscape or alien perspectives within the frame of human context and people. The primary argument in this regard is that humans learn and react to new situations through the process of identification, which is endemic to learning. While formulating the unfamiliar world of the alien, a Science Fiction writer ostensibly extrapolates on the known by relying on scientifically plausible ideas and the contemporary socio-political concerns. The process of conceiving the unfamiliar involves juxtaposing two or more different worlds with an intense degree of alertness. In the process, the writer injects enough familiarity in the ‘alien world’ by providing the frame of reference and then, let her imagination run wild. In this way, the Science Fiction narrative
compels the reader to look at established content and form with fresh eyes.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it presents a brief outline of the context that constitutes the frame of reference for Nicola Griffith’s Science Fiction novels, and secondly it presents the corresponding ways by which Griffith’s fictional world serves the abstract process of creating alien world to influence the narrative strategies within the outlined context. Drawing on Griffith’s conceptual concerns, we will focus on the two major points of intersection relevant for the interpretation of the alien. The two fold process will prompt us to build a point of intersection between the genre of Science Fiction and contexts that shapes the genre. In this regard, we will raise questions like: What are ideological foundations of Griffith’s fictional world? How does she operate the theme of alien in her novels against the ideological foundations? Do her characters represent some kind of model while depicting relationships between the alien and human world? As it is very difficult to study all her novels within the scope of our research, we have limited our analysis by concentrating on Griffith’s two novels: *Ammonite* and *Slow River*. The purpose here is not to give comprehensive survey of each of these novels in chronological way, but to examine established links between the two novels, their contexts and Griffith’s conceptual concerns.

2. Context

According to Nicola Griffith, “A Science Fiction novel not only excites me about the world but it also excites us about
ourselves, how we fit within the systems that govern our universe, and excites, paradoxically, about our potential to change the world.” 37 The key concern underlying in Griffith’s work is to address what it means to be human and she pursues the concerns through Science Fiction since it has changed the discourse on what it means to be human. Griffith, therefore, considers Science Fiction a primary tool that, in her opinion, “introduces us to the notion that the nature of body and mind are mutable through tall tales of human cloning, prosthetics, genetic engineering. … The more we change our story of ourselves, the more we change.” 38

Like several other Science Fiction writings that came forth in the post 1960s, Nicola Griffith’s writing depends on Science Fiction’s improbable of ‘what if’ to reflect on the contemporary world as well as speculate the world she would dream of. Her work, in Pamela Sargent’s words, explores “what we might become if and when the present restrictions in our lives vanish.”39 In a sense, her novels speculate changes and innovations framed within the modes of thought and social organisations of the contemporary time. The speculations allow Griffith to imagine the alternative world free from existing dichotomies and rigid moral values. Griffith stands among those who attempt to break the dichotomies and deal with alternative life-styles to openly transfer contemporary values and circumstances to alternate worlds.

In the course of the historical and thematic survey in the Second Chapter we have referred to variety of themes that attribute the construction of the alien in Science Fiction. Some of them are explorations of new world, imagining alternative societies, ideation of journey into another world, creation of another life in another
world. We have also seen that the devices like characters with the ‘alien’ features, unusual language suitable to qualify the alien features, unfamiliar landscapes are used in exploring alternative scenarios. We are going to extend our discussion to examine construction and significance of uses the alien in Griffith’s Science Fiction. Our interpretations rely largely on drawing the comparative analytical model of the context and use narrative strategies in Griffith’s fiction. Therefore, the succeeding analysis will be based on the contemporary socio-political theories that are supposed to have influenced narrative strategies in Griffith’s Science Fiction writing. Nicola Griffith’s focus in her writing has been to study the ‘conditions of being’ as a woman. She emphasises giving a ‘body blow’ to all those who continue to question the humanity, the subjectivity of women. As she writes in post script to her novel, Ammonite, she is
tired of token women being strong in a man’s world by taking on male attributes: strutting around in black leather, spike heels and wraparound shades, killing people; or riding a horse, swearing a lot, carrying a big sword, and killing people; or piloting a shift through hyperspace, drinking whatever pours, slapping boys on the back, and killing people. (375, Ammonite)

As a response, ideologically, Griffith, through her novels, attempts to ‘redress the balance’ by telling that “women are not inherently passive or dominant, maternal or vicious. We are all different. We are people’ and ‘to look at biology, and wonder what if.’ It goes without saying that Griffith’s Science Fiction is a space to voice her anxieties and to imagine another world that might be
alien to within existing man-centric world. Therefore, it will be fruitful to sharpen our focus by locating *Ammonite* and *Slow River* within the context of women’s Science Fiction writing that aims at challenging establishing gender based hierarchies.

2.1 Women Writers and Science Fiction

Historically, Science Fiction, as a literary genre, has been commonly accepted as a male and technological realm. Oftentimes, the authors are men; the heroes are men; and women, when they appear, are sexual and/or decorative creatures that further glorify men. The stories are based largely around central themes of space exploration or developing technology--masculine concerns, since women are effectively denied access to these areas in the real world.\(^42\) Women, when they appeared at all, were presented only in stereotypical images. The well-known Science Fiction writer Joanna Russ has argued that there were no ‘real’ women characters in these stories, only ‘images’ of women. Ursula K. Le Guin calls this type of female character the ‘Oh? and Ooooh!’ type, never the clever brave hero, only the admirer.\(^43\) In addition, although, women’s involvement with the genre of Science Fiction – its production and consumption – dates back to the 1920s, women did not always feel particularly welcome in the genre though they were undoubtedly involved. Since beginning through end of the 1950s, the female audience for Science Fiction was tiny, and those women who were interested in reading it did so with a sense of themselves as alienated or at least sidelined with spectators. Since the first half of twentieth century, women
often wrote under gender natural pseudonym (such as C L Moore who wrote pulp Science Fiction in 1940s), and in general, women writers were considerably lower than that of their male counterparts. Men writing Science Fiction often used role-reversal to depict negative representations of women in the matriarchal societies and positions of dominance, which worked to reinforce existing social roles. In most cases, male characters conquered the ‘wayward’ female communities. In these Science Fiction stories, the representation of action and heroism was traditional. Writers as well as editors identified themselves with ‘male values’. Joanna Russ claims that before 1960s, the reader either male or female ‘identified with male values.’\textsuperscript{44} Similarly, it would be hard to find female characters involved in the action of stories. Supporting this, in her essay \textit{Retrospection}, Anne McCaffrey has commented on the characterisation of women at this time as follows:

\begin{quote}
the convenient ‘idiot’ for whom the ‘science’ of the yarn must be explained; the adjunct to prove that the hero was all male; the stupid wimp who stood in a corner, shrieking and ringing her hands while her hero was being mangled by some E.T. menace, animate or inanimate.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Joanna Russ has criticised the conservative content of the mainstream Science Fiction in the US and the UK which she referred to as intergalactic suburbia. She has problematised not only gender but also class and race politics that has perpetuated within the Science Fiction genre. She opines,

\begin{quote}
White, middle-class suburbia... Mummy and Daddy may live inside a huge amoeba and Daddy’s job may be to test psychedelic drugs or
\end{quote}
It was the ‘Golden Age’ of Clifford Simak, Lester del Rey, James Schmitz and many others in 1950s that ignored women, except when they need a little romance to fill the plot, an ignorant but rapt listener against whom a male character could bounce some scientific explosion, or someone to produce bountiful meal. The Science Fiction writing in this period never appeared to realise that world they recreate in their fiction is senselessly artificial with the lack of genuine participation of the ‘Other’ human being: women. Russ gives the provocative concluding remark in her essay, *The Image of Women in Science Fiction* that “There are plenty of images of women in Science Fiction. There are hardly any women.”

Women writers in the 1960s began breaking into the traditional ‘male-oriented’ genre of Science Fiction and subverted themes and styles from within. They began finding synergies in new concepts from sociology, psychology, anthropology, ethnography, linguistics and incorporated them in creating an imaginative future. As we have discussed in the first chapter, on the one hand, Science Fiction in the post 1960s was the interdisciplinary response to socio-economic conditions and, on the other hand, it was a reaction to stereotypical representation of women in the contemporary Science Fiction writing. The changing perception of Women’s Science Fiction writing coincided with emergence of the New Wave literature in the 1960s. It was Judith Merril who had introduced the term ‘New Wave’ in Science
Fiction in her essay that she wrote for The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction in 1966. With ‘New Wave’ she has referred to the highly metaphorical and sometimes experimental fiction that began to appear in the English magazine New Worlds after Michael Moorcock assumed the editorship in 1964. Basically, the term ‘New Wave’ was first used by Francoise Giroud’s to describe a group of younger French film directors in the late 1950s. Later, it was enthusiastically appropriated by promoters of unconventional literary movements, including Science Fiction, in the 1960s. The New Wave literature represented an attempt to find language and social perspective which was adventurous and progressive in its technological vision. Women writers like Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ had begun writing in this period and they associated themselves with the New Wave to introduce new narrative strategies and progressive content into Science Fiction. Following them, many other women began writing critical and poignant Science Fiction narratives. They brought to the genre radicalism, feminism, socialism and heightened social consciousness in hopes of confronting the problematic human life. Social changes fostered active participation of women in literary culture and women writers appropriated new creative forms to voice their concerns against patriarchy. Science Fiction opened its doors to many more women writers who had previously been denied, or thought that they were denied, access to the genre because of gender discriminations. The genres like Science Fiction, Fantasy, Utopian Fiction, Detective Fiction and Romance were among largely appropriated popular forms by women writers to address their concerns of oppression based on gender discriminations. Joanna Russ in her essay that was
first published in the Science Fiction magazine ‘Vortex’ in 1971 has written that “one would think Science Fiction a perfect literary mode in which to explore (and explode) our assumptions about ‘innate’ values and “natural” social arrangements.”

Science Fiction, as a cultural form and a set of literary protocols, became the paradigmatic model for how fiction can change social perception and influence the interpretation of physical knowledge. Women writers realised that Science Fiction can offer them a particularly useful narrative form to construct imaginative resistances to the limitations of gender representation. ‘Science’ in Science Fiction took a back seat and it became one of the devices for the Feminist Science Fiction writers to speculate ‘their’ world free from the patriarchal exploitation. This relates to the ability of Science Fiction to estrange aspects of the ‘real’ in ways which indicate its contingent and arbitrary nature, and which, at the same time, can both challenge and criticise the structures of the ‘real’. For feminist writers, then, Science Fiction provided with a space to construct female subjectivity. However, obviously enough, the new writers met with the formidable opposition. Male writers such as the highly technical ones in their fictional exploration argued that this new type of writing was not ‘Science Fiction’ because it lacked science in its form. They saw ‘Speculative Science fiction’ as demeaning to ‘true’ Science Fiction. In his book, *Asimov on Science Fiction*, Asimov has clearly expressed his views on such literature being Science Fiction as,

You see, to write good Science Fiction presupposes certain knowledge of science on the part of the writer. Without that knowledge, what
comes out is bad Science Fiction. Don't get me wrong. It might be...good fiction in general--but it is bad Science Fiction.\textsuperscript{49}

Although, Speculative Science Fiction has received criticism, it has lured a number of new writers from the feminist movement partly because it allowed unlimited freedom in settings and situations. Speculation has been seen as the most effective strategy of threading realities together. Speculative Science Fiction, basically, accepts science and established facts to be extrapolated to produce a new situation, new framework for human action. Speculative Science Fiction, they saw, is the most closely tied together to the present apparent reality. Speculation became an imaginative figuring of reality. Marleen Barr looks at ‘Speculative Science Fiction’ as, ‘political appropriation of genre conventions’ and it is not only ‘a potential, but a conscious practice’.\textsuperscript{50} Barr has used the image of two horses pulling together and observers that “Feminist theory and Speculative Science Fiction appear in the critical arena pulling together as a team.”\textsuperscript{51} Barr claims to have a link between feminist theory and Speculative Science Fiction, so both works together against the limiting and restrictive social roles of women within the patriarchal societies. In this background, we would like to argue that Speculative Science Fiction offers a potential platform on which issues related to such diverse fields as technology, science, social theory, reproduction and ecology combine with feminist concerns to call into question the social and ecological policies of patriarchy. Feminists have recognised the political implications of the genre and increasingly employed Science Fiction narratives to explore social relations. In \textit{Terminal
Identity (1993), Pointing at the attraction the genre holds for feminist writers, readers, and viewers, Scott Bukatman has said that, “Given a thematic profoundly engaged with social structures and sexual difference and potentially heterotopic discursive practices, the relevance of Science Fiction to a feminist politics should not be mysterious.” With this, in the following section, we will analyse interconnections between of Speculative Science Fiction and contemporary feminist thoughts that were instrumental in bringing changes in conventional understanding of human values and society as seen in Griffith’s work.

2.2 Feminist Thought and Speculative Science Fiction

In the history of feminist studies, Simon De Beauvoir’s, The Second Sex, a seminal work in women’s liberation movement has been considered the pioneering work that led contemporary discourse of the feminist movements and subverted the established concepts of womanhood and feminity. We would like to focus on one of Beauvoir’s major contributions: the concept of the Other that would help us analyse Griffith’s Ammonite and Slow River. Basically, it is an account of the cultural construction of woman as the Other that laid the foundations for much of the theoretical work in the post 1960s and influenced the forthcoming generations of creative writers. According to De Beauvoir, a woman’s consciousness gets defined by her reference to man. “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” De Beauvoir writes. Further she says in The Second Sex that “No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents
in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.” In The Second Sex, she explains how a woman is viewed by biology, psychology and historical materialism. In the first part of her book, Facts and Myths, De Beauvoir makes a study of sexism in the works of some selected authors and, the second part, Women’s Life Today, deals with the matter of women’s education. The economic self-interest, as she has written, has led men to give partial social and economic emancipation to women. A woman must seize an opportunity to achieve complete economic and social equality. If this done, an ‘inner metamorphosis’ will follow. Woman is trained to think herself as an inferior and for emancipation; women must seek professional autonomy and financial independence and also avoid marriage and children.

The category of the Other, De Beauvoir argues, is fundamental in the formation of all human subjectivity, since our sense of the Self can be produced only in opposition to something which is not-Self. But men have claimed the category of the Self or the Subject exclusively for themselves, and relegated woman to the status of the eternal Other. He is the ‘Subject’ and she is the ‘Other’. She is always treated as the lack, absence and the Other in the society. Throughout the social history, women have been constructed, as man’s Other. As she argues, it is assumed that biological consideration of a woman constitutes as an essential element in giving her the status weaker to man. As a result, the Otherness of a woman gives her subordinate place within the patriarchal society. De Beauvoir’s argument that the key to women’s oppression lay in their cultural construction as the Other
was taken up with varying degrees of theoretical sophistication by the radicalists among second wave feminist theorists and writers.

2.2.1 Radical Feminism

Among the feminist theorists and novelists active in the 1960s, the radical feminists have acknowledged that Simon De Beauvoir’s theory has provided them with a model for theorising. As Shulamith Firestone writes,

In the radical feminist view, the new feminism is not just the revival of a serious political movement for social equality. It is the second wave of the most important revolution in the history. Its aim: overthrow of the oldest, most rigid class/caste system in existence, the class system based on sex relation, lending archetypal male and female roles on undeserved sexual legitimacy and seeming performance. It is believed that the western feminist movement is the dawn of a long struggle to break free from the oppressive power structure set up by nature and reinforce by men.54

Kate Millet, another major theorist in this school of thought observes that sexual politics is the method by which one sex (male) seeks to maintain and extend its power over the other (female) sex. She uses the term ‘patriarchy’ for the domination of male over female. According to Millet, our whole life, personal and social is organized by patriarchy which results in asymmetrical relations of power. Within the patriarchy, roles of women are fixed. In terms of activity, sex roles as domestic service and care of children are assigned to females and rest of human achievement, interest and
ambitions to male. As a reaction to patriarchy and male-dominated society, the radicals proposed the world made only for and by women.

The radical feminist movement came as an intervention into the patriarchy had one of the most far-reaching influences on social and political movements in the twentieth century. An influential outcome of this influence was combination of the radical feminist theory with the practices of creative writing. Science Fiction writing was also one of the responses in direction of rejecting the dominating patriarchy. Feminist activists sought an intervention by appropriating Science Fiction genre that has been ‘male’ to imagine a new conceptual space. In her text, *The Feminisation of Quest-Romance: Radical Departures*, Dana Heller claimed that “Fantasy and Science Fiction have offered liberating strategies for the telling of stories inconceivable within other culturally available forms.” The new imagining with radical social and political ideas transgressed the patriarchal ways of thinking, conceptualising and theorising the world. In the light of the radical approach to Science Fiction, female characters remain no longer remained confined to the traditional definitions of ‘femininity’ and traditional social roles. Science Fiction began to imagine alternative social realities. The construction of alternative social spaces gave the Science Fiction writers more room to imagine radical fictional spaces. Most often, this involves exploring futuristic human societies on Earth as well as (alien) humanlike worlds in space. Speculations of Science Fiction provided new fantasies, affected by the process of social change, constructed symbols which identified them with the contemporary social conditions.
The radical feminists rejected any kind of discrimination on the basis of sex and declared it in an epigraph of one of their books that “The fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles or our empty internal spaces but in our institutions-woman is made not born.” The radicals considered institution of marriage as the organised rape and made outright rejection of it. The members of this group came together against men and questioned their subordination. They demanded equal educational and career opportunities and also a drastic reorganisation of society and gender roles. They wanted that women should be united to achieve self-reliance, self-sufficiency and self-respect to fight together against male chauvinism. Thus the concept of ‘sisterhood’ was born which means women must develop friendship against their identification with one another. According Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley,

The concept of sisterhood means much more than sharing work or responsibility. It involves a redefinition of the value and status of personal experience. The personal becomes the political; that is, the nature of women’s oppression can be analysed through the medium of accounts of private experiences. The radicals have further suggested that a woman must not be a slave to her biological functions. Child bearing must be voluntary and hence, woman must have the right to have abortion on demand. The radicalists with their response to patriarchy avowed to establish the world of only women. Joanna Russ describes the period of the ‘female only world’ narrative as ‘a mini-boom of feminist utopias’. At this stage, we would like to briefly talk
about feminist utopias. We do not intend to explain feminist utopias by tracing the concept and history of utopian fiction. Rather, we would like to limit ourselves to consider feminist utopia as a fictional space that establishes ‘female only world.’ In addition, we would like to concentrate on social and political concerns of the contemporary feminist movements that shaped the feminist utopian world within the genre of Science Fiction. Therefore, what follows is a brief survey of the feminist utopian writings of the women Science Fiction writers contemporary to Nicola Griffith.

3. Speculating with ‘Female Only Worlds’

The female utopias envisioned ‘immortal feminist communities’ of only female world. Within this world writers imagined the world where it was impossible to sideline existence of women. The world, in Barr’s words, “where it is impossible for women to be easily cast aside from the mainstream of contemporary life.”59 The female characters in these texts derived strength from the community of productive female people and interestingly this connection with the community provided fictional discourse with a continuity with the past and the present. This continuity, Barr believes, defined their ‘immortality’60. As said in our earlier discussion, the female utopias are alternative to the contemporary patriarchy which is equivalent to ‘third space’ or ‘elsewhere.’ A number of utopias of female only world were created after 1970s. For instance, the utopias like Suzy McKee Charnas’ Motherlines, Sally Miller Gearhart’s The Wandering Ground:
Stories of the Hill Women and Joanna Russ’ The Female Man were an articulation of societies that are ‘ecology-minded’, ‘classless’, ‘sexually permissive’ and they wrote stories in which ‘gender stereotypes…simply do not apply’. 61 The writers of the female utopias established the universe which is self-sufficient. To exemplify, the Amazonian-like Riding Women in Suzy McKee Charnas’ Motherlines live a nomadic, tribal existence and feed for their horses along well-established seasonally cyclic pathways. Similarly, in Gearhart’s The Wanderground, the female characters are gifted with telepathy so that they can converse with trees, rocks and animals while living in small communities to co-exist with the natural world. The social structure in these texts has been claimed to be non-hierarchical although there are disputes among the community members. The volunteers in Motherlines are only women and they are active in their services in the ‘chief tent’. They participate in a meeting of the minds called a ‘gathersearch’ in to negotiate with the continuing problems between violent male dominated cities and the hill areas. The decision making process in the ‘chief tent’ and the ‘gathersearch’ have the potential to go on for days or even weeks without reaching a resolution. The communities in these stories function through social co-operation and family cohesion. Families can be biological as well as arranged by individual choice and range from short term to permanent relationships. Russ writes that in these utopias: “the only sexuality portrayed is matter-of-factly lesbian.” 62 Further, she claims that the purpose of the separatist texts is to authorise ‘female sexuality as native and initiatory’ as well as to celebrate ‘female bonding.’ 63 In these stories, love relationships tend to be permissively
monogamous without the hierarchy of ownership. Rather, relations involve mutual respect and support, emotional affection and sexual pleasure.

The female utopias respect radical approach of dealing with patriarchy. As a result, in these narratives, the separatist communities wage war against men. The male characters that intrude on these communities are killed because they cannot be assimilated in that system. The men who accidentally breach the desert borders of the Riding Women’s plains in *Motherlines* are killed on sight, without asking any question. In Russ’ *The Female Man*, the war between the sexes on Janet’s world of Whileaway is long over and women have existed without men for eight centuries. Janet, a character, defends herself using judo against the sexual advances of the intoxicated male host at a party and she is puzzled by this experience for several reasons. Firstly, at the stupidity of the situation in which the man does not accept her polite refusal of his advances and secondly, because he is surprised and angry when she physically refuses those advances. Janet’s puzzlement and ease and good humour with which she accomplishes her defense turn into the uneasy familiar situation into the absurdity and amusement. The situation is different for the other character like Jael. ‘Womanland’ has been engaged in a twenty year long ‘cold-war’ with ‘Manland’. The Boss-man with whom Jael attempts to negotiate business is similarly intoxicated and ignorant. He makes unwanted sexual advances towards her, simply because she is a ‘real’ woman. Similarly to Janet’s situation – in different time and place – Boss-man refuses to be dissuaded and Jael the negotiator becomes Jael the assassin and rips him apart with her steel clawed
hands. The intensity of Jael’s anger and her lack of remorse indicate the seriousness of the ‘battle’ that the radical ‘second wave’ feminists engaged in. In Gearhart’s *The Wanderground* the war has been avoided through separatism. Only violent and city men keep the old ways (often the hill women send spies disguised as men into the cities to gain information). In an ecological slight of hand, the hill women’s connection with Earth renders city technology and men themselves impotent outside of the cities. It has been one of the common themes in feminist Science Fiction that it warns and directly critiques global threat to humanity associated with masculine violence, hard sciences and technologies. These are some of the ways the separatist utopias make the strange familiar and the familiar appear strange. In the light of this discussion of the female only worlds of Science Fiction, we will examine *Ammonite* and *Slow River*. Primarily, we will concentrate on finding interconnection between idea of estrangement that we have discussed in the third chapter, female only world in *Ammonite* and *Slow River* and the feminist views that inform Griffith’s writing.

### 4. Experiencing Estrangement

Nicola Griffith’s strategy in her fictional work is to constitute ‘strange’ world and exercise the feeling of estrangement in the reader’s mind. As noted in the second chapter, to give the experience of estrangement, a Science Fiction writer deals with what is not: places, people, things, and events. This exposes the reader to the domain which is not familiar to what they experience.
The most common way to estrange is to make a strange world with appropriation of existing iconography of Science Fiction: the spaceship, the robot, the characters with strange personality traits, alien environments and so on. Nicola Griffith adopts various devices like setting, characters, language, technology, which give a feeling of unfamiliarity within the world we know. As we are going to study, this is an important mark of Griffith’s Science Fiction novels to place within the world we do not know but refer to the things that we might know. Following Suvin’s description, from a phenomenological perspective, the narrative worlds in Science Fiction are experienced as different, in varying degrees, from the degree-zero worlds. This degree zero is the consensual representation of reality that is shared by the implied author and the reader of the novel’s original communicational context. In addition, through the estrangement the reader expects to be engaged in fictional-thought experiment and the experiment is used as the platform to construct a possible world and then, provide with a new, distanced perspective on the consensual world. Formally, the estrangement is also a rhetorical effect created by the use of specific stylistic devices.

5. Alien Atmosphere

In considering Griffith’s fictional appropriations and modifications of the alien mode, it would be apposite to begin with considering how the novels create an alien atmosphere. Krishnamurthy rightly points out:
The most striking feature of Science Fiction is its presentation of a different setting or situation. The Science Fiction story usually takes place in the future or in a present which has been in some way altered by a new factor into a different present, or in some way altered by a new factor into a different present; or in a past similarly altered. It may depict a different world, or our own world that has suffered a change through addition of a new circumstances or the removal of an existing one.  

This fairly exhaustive list of possible settings may give us a starting point to discuss the alien world in Griffith’s novels. In fact, discussing the alien setting is a good place to start as they show the different or the alien context against the well-informed present context. An important way in exhibiting impossibility in Science Fiction is through establishing different atmosphere(s) in the fictional worlds. The setting, or time and place of a story, can be used in many ways in a story. It can set the mood or feel of the scene. The setting can even tell about the denizens while supporting the theme as Griffith writes in the preface to *Yaguara*:

Second, much of my work is about the interaction of people and their places. People, fictional and not, are largely the products of their particular time and culture. So what I tend to do is pluck an unfortunate character from her familiar surrounds, drop her somewhere strange—to herself, and sometimes to the reader—and watch with interest while she struggles to deal with an alien milieu. The type and degree of alienness—time, space, culture—don’t matter as long as the details are made utterly real to the character and, through her, the reader.
Considering Griffith’s work, especially *Ammonite*, Earth and the habitants on Jeep become a point to refer to while creating unfamiliarity. Griffith narrates it as:

A wirrel shrieked. Marghe went very still. This was not Earth; this was Jeep, a planet of alien spaces, a place where the human template of dual sexes had been torn to shreds and throws away. This was something new. She knew these people had evolved cultures resting on bases very different from those of any Earth people; she did not know whether that made these women human or something entirely other….She shook herself. The question, What was humanity? Was as old as the species, one she never expected to answer. She resumed her walk through the trees, but more slowly, thinking and occasionally making notes. (69, *Ammonite*)

We can also see that the idea of ‘atmosphere’ at Earth and Jeep has certainly different dynamic in the novels chosen for discussion. It breaks away from the literal of meaning of atmosphere as a habitat in the fictional world. The atmosphere in Griffith’s work is linked with science and technology. However, while Nicola Griffith has written as many as four Science Fiction novels, they would not fit into the category of Hugo Gernsback’s idea of hardcore Science Fiction though science and technological aspects play a major role in shaping the identities and expose ‘inner space’ of fictional narrative in speculating with Griffith’s concerns. In the first number of *Science Wonder Stories* published in July 1929, Gernsback has written that, “It is the policy of science wonder stories to publish only such stories that have their basis in scientific laws as we know them, or in logical deduction of new laws from what we know.”"**66**  In these novels, neither the ‘scientific
laws’ play a prominent role in devising the narrative strategies nor the fictional worlds follow changes based on the scientific innovations. Griffith, being far from observing ‘hard’ Science Fiction, is interested in making science as an important ‘character’ in the events of the tale that would allow create a new setting, new social structures, perhaps new life forms, without necessitating a ‘scientific’ explanation of how these all came about. To put it in other words, what is to be a person is Griffith’s novels is determined by putting ‘a tadpole-sized implant...under the scar’ to make that character ‘become someone else’. Griffith also makes it clear saying, “The way I see it, reality is currently too big and too varied for any piece of ‘realistic fiction’ to characterize it. So people are turning again to big themes, mythic sweeps...extra-reality, if you like...which leads to SF.”

Populated by self-designing systems, simulated identities, cyborgs and cyberspaces, terminals and consoles, microbiological life, and self-guiding systems, *Slow River* carries city, climatic changes, computer networks, genetically engineered microorganisms, hacker, into a character’s identity with which reality becomes a kind of simulated program, and a transient manifestation in its fictional space. *Slow River* has some of the characteristics of cyberpunk, a subgenre of Science Fiction. In this, the novel focuses on the shadowy underside of the high-tech world, various technological sub-cultures, especially in the use of information technology like hackers. The literary movement of cyberpunk, born in the 1980s, sought to completely integrate the realms of high tech and of pop culture, both mainstream and underground, and broke down the separation between the organic
and the artificial. Historically, cyberpunk is a member of the genre of fiction known as Hard (or Hard Core) Science Fiction. It is called Hard Science Fiction because of its heavy reliance on technology or biology to tell a story. The cyberpunk Science Fiction is the birthplace of the concept of ‘cyberspace’. This concept was first introduced by writer William Gibson in his critically acclaimed novel *Neuromancer*, probably the most famous cyberpunk book ever. Some of the most frequently explored dystopic visions of the world in the last two decades are the cyberpunk texts. These tend to be set in the near future, on earth as opposed to in extraterrestrial space, and primarily in an urban technological surrounding of degeneration and decay, in which the cityscape plays an integral part in creating an appropriate space for the characters to move across. The cyborg is an important theme in many feminist and non-feminist Science Fiction texts.

*Slow River* is a story of Lore's efforts to survive in and escape the criminal underground with memories of her family life before the abduction. Both the memories and the story are presented through intriguing technological expressions. Over the course of the narrative, Lore gains an understanding of who she is, in the past and the present through a range of jobs that connect her with the world of science. Lore's family has gained its wealth through the creation and patenting of genetically engineered microorganisms and a large part of the action of the novel takes place in an ecologically engineered sewage-treatment plant. In fact, science and technology play vital role in Lore’s life in designing relationship patterns. Lore’s father always tells her that her mother was ‘stupidly rich’ that she took genetic treatment against cancer
and she had paid a lot of money to have her genes fixed so that all her children would have gray hair and the anticancer protection. *Slow River* begins when Lore Van Oesterling, daughter of one of the world's wealthiest families, wakes up in an alley in the rain. She is kidnapped but now abandoned by her abductors. Badly injured and alone, Lore’s Personal Identity, DNA and Account insert (PIDA), the implant that identifies her and would have allowed her family to track her, has been surgically removed from her hand ‘to prevent a trace’. Griffith describes it as follows:

> After thirty days, the nanomechs coloring her head and body hair would be dying off and the natural gray would be showing. Only the very few, the very rich wore naturally gray hair. What else? Her Personal Identity, DNA and Account insert. But when she held out her left hand to the flickers of light flashing in the doorway she saw the angry red scar on the webbing between her thumb and index finger. Of course - the kidnappers would have removed the PIDA on the first day to prevent a trace. (8, *Slow River*)

The PIDA becomes an essential part in forming Lore’s identity. It gives her ‘new name’ and also decides her age. Lore’s partner, Scanner with creamy white scalp, has been living a nocturnal existence with ‘rifling corpses and blackmailing and stealing’. She describes Lore’s identity based on the PIDA as,

> It says your name is Kim Yeau. I've added the middle initial L., but just the initial. Less is better. The PIDAs will change, but as you get to know people, you'll have to have a stable name, one we can call you by. You have forty-three credits. You're eighteen.” She looked up at Lore. “That's right, isn't it?” (40, *Slow River*)
Though Lore is alone and frightened, she realises that she can't return to her family: “if I went back now they would just sip pinot grigio from crystal glasses, eat salad from Noritake china, and pretend that I had not been treated as a thing, had not had to scramble to survive, that nothing had changed.” The PIDA is equivalent to Lore’s identity that would have allowed her family to track her. However, it has been surgically removed from her hand by the kidnappers.

Griffith’s another novel in discussion, *Ammonite* is set at goth’s planet, ‘Grenchstom’s Planet’ (GP-Jeep) and the planet is affected by a deadly virus. The novel opens with an introduction of Marguerite Angelica Taishan of SEC (Joint Settlement and Education Council) whose identity is ‘an ID flash sealed to her shoulder: Marguerite Angelica Taishan, SEC’. Sara Hiam, Marghe’s physician and the creator of the FN-17 vaccine to stop spread of the Jeep virus helps her get at Terragin, a transportation device to travel to Jeep. The novel is narrated from Marghe’s perspective and it becomes clear that the main character, Marguerite Angelica Taishan is assigned by Durallium Company’s team (referred to as ‘Company’ in the novel) on Jeep to deal with virus. For the ‘company’, Jeep is a lucrative planet for its leasing operations and the Company team consists of security personnel, known as ‘Mirrors’, engineers, surveyors and anthropological personnel. There has been no movement on or off the planet since the discovery of the virus, or rather, since the virus discovered them and killed all the men and some of the women in the Company’s team. The Company personnel who survived are now
considered contaminated and exist in isolation on their working base called ‘Port Central’. Not only is the planetary team in isolation from their own people (off planet), but by their own choice, they exist in isolation from the native population as well. Marghe is the first person to proceed to the planet since the virus was discovered. Jeep has over a million of people who had been out contact with humanity for two or three hundred years. Marghe decides going there as she believes that Jeep is the professional opportunity of a lifetime for her. Marghe explains to her father:

This is the most fabulous opportunity for an anthropologist since…since the nineteenth century…The important thing to me is that I get six months on a closed world to research a unique culture. (12, *Ammonite*)

The setting in the first scene of the novel, *Ammonite* sets the ‘alien’ mood. It begins with science playing a key role in the narrative that is set in the scientific facts. The distant planet of Jeep has already been affected by the deadly virus. Jeep has over a million of people who are not in any contact with human beings for two or three hundred years. Marghe has decided going there because ‘There would never be another chance like this, never.’ As she gets ready for the journey to Jeep, she is introduced in the novel through the ID flash display sealed to her shoulder. The display shows the record that she has traveled extensively by Terragin, the interstellar transport owned by the Durallium Company. This sets up the tone for the novel and has an impact on the further development of the plot of the novel. The mood in the story is transformed as she starts handling devices and later, Danner warns her about dangers at the
Jeep. “This is a taped record, Marghe. Let me finish. These procedures consist of: isolation; the removal of all subject’s blood, marrow, lymph and intestinal flora and fauna and its replacement with normal healthy tissues…” (129, *Ammonite*)

*Ammonite* is different from *Slow River* in its approach to science and technology. Science plays more active role in *Ammonite* being a major force in existential concerns of the human beings at Jeep. Marghe and Company both have much to gain and much to lose from this ‘scientific’ assignment. Marghe’s research is almost guaranteed to be successful. Yet, this is also a dangerous assignment. Marghe is testing a vaccine against the virus, a vaccine called ‘FN-17’. If the vaccine works, Marghe will be protected in a way that previous personnel were not. If the vaccine does not work, Marghe risks her life. In such tricky situation, science through the FN-17, an experimental bio-fractured vaccine comes for their rescue and keeps the whole team alive although they are not sure of these things. Traveling through the landscape of Jeep, Marghe encounters the fierceness of Jeep’s environment and its effects on the body. The storm is electromagnetic and she describes it as:

> like being lowered slowly into water, feet first: the hairs on her ankles lifted, then on her legs, her stomach, her arms, the back of her neck…The static grew, crawling through her hair until she thought her scalp would creep right off her skull. An ache started behind her eyes and in the hinge of her jaw…she felt deaf and blind and exposed to the core. Electricity and exhilaration surged and hissed over her bones. (48, *Ammonite*)

Marghe feels the storm intensely but she could manage her
(body’s) reaction to it better because she has had extensive ‘biofeedback’ training. This training involved exercise, music, self-hypnosis and sensitising herself to magnetic and electrical fields. Biofeedback assists Marghe’s awareness of her physical, mental and emotional responses to external situations. She can regulate her breathing and control blood flow to specific areas of her body. Marghe ‘knows’ that she is ‘an intricate mechanism made of interconnecting parts, a homeostatic system: change this, and this alters, which changes this.’ (65, Ammonite) Also, she is aware that the habit of biofeedback, which she engages in, is a ‘scientific’ knowledge that resides in her flesh.

6. Multiple Landscapes

Nicola Girffith in her novels establishes the unfamiliar worlds that are comprised of multiple landscapes of two distinct worlds and the fictional worlds are invariably a game of shifting between two worlds. The two major components of her fictional world: ‘this world’ and ‘that world’ are not separated from each other but they are interrelated as, in Mari Kotani’s words, ‘network spaces.’68 Interestingly, two worlds provide clues to enter into the alien-ness of the other and demystify the world within that world. This makes the narrative worlds in these novels remarkably complicated. Marghe realises that her experience with Echraidhe, a tribal community living on the Tehuantepec plateau has affected the members of the community as deeply as they have affected her. The tribal feud has made her approach a living legend and Uaithne, the Death Spirit and the representative of the Goddess of Death from the tribal legend. Both Port Central and Holme Valley are
involved. Through discussion with Thenike (Marghe’s lover and Marghe’s new family at Olfoss) and her own reflection, Marghe understands that the tribe’s harsh environment is a cause of their harsh existence. The unbending traditions at Holme Valley regulate flexibility of its settlers and the regulation gets tightened as they are very few and “All their memories interlock and look down the same path to the same places…until the known becomes the only.” (200, Ammonite) Consequentially, the Echraidhe community lacks an ability to imagine ways of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ outside the community. Marghe’s experiences and understandings of these cultures, their commonalities as well as their differences from each other directs her to question and challenge to imagine new ways of transformation and living.

Similarly, Slow River skillfully blends the different landscapes in Lore's life. It is a story of her efforts to survive in and escape from the criminal underground world with memories of her family life before the abduction. The novel has two narratives running parallel. One narrative is an account of Lore’s childhood and coming of age in the Oest family and another is the narrative depicting concerns of her existence when she starts staying with Spanner after rescuing from her kidnappers. We can see the two alternating landscapes. Interestingly, the narrative technique paraphrases Griffith’s attempt of addressing two worlds while falling apart from the both. As a result, hung between two spaces and not belonging to any, the narrator of the novel provides two entirely different positions as well as different versions of reality the positions would carry. Lore remains the ‘meeting point’ for two realities. A reality in the Lore’s life is that of the rich family of the
van de Oests. The entire family has gray hair from the time of their birth. Lore’s grandmother and the van de Oest matriarch after learning the then-recent medical discovery that people with pigmentless hair were much more prone to develop cancers of the scalp. Once this discovery was made, albinos and people with gray hair began to dye their hair a darker color, to block the rays of the sun. But the van de Oest matriarch has used this discovery as an opportunity to flaunt her wealth, and had the color-producing alleles in her and her family's line deactivated. She was able to do this safely because she could also afford the very costly genetic treatment available to prevent cancer. Lore is kidnapped on the eve of her 18th birthday and held in squalid conditions while her two male kidnappers attempt to collect ransom money from her family. Unable to collect their ransom, the kidnappers eventually remove Lore from her hiding place, at which point she succeeds in escaping. Badly wounded, she comes to stay with Spanner.

Another world that Griffith narrates is world Lore comes to occupy with Spanner. In this world too, she is different from others. Spanner tells her,

Exactly. You see the difference? You're too damn . . . glossy. Like a racehorse. Look at your eyes, and your teeth. They're perfect. And your skin: not a single pimple and no scars. Everything's symmetrical. You're bursting with health. Go out in this neighborhood, even in rags, and you'll shine like a lighthouse. (42, Slow River)

Finally, we are shown that Lore begins to make a life for herself. Spanner introduces her to a highly addictive drug that, like ecstasy, inspires feelings of sexual desire and a relaxation of inhibitions.
However, Lore's dependence on Spanner leads her to make choices that she had never made. Spanner and Lore's sexual relationship and survival partnership set the stage for Lore's alienation from the world she lives in but, in the end, she had to comprise at that level too. Eventually, Lore gains an understanding of how she has, in the past and the present, been the victim of and a player in the international and personal intrigues of her powerful family. Griffith narrates Lore's story during several different periods as it passes through three worlds ‘unfamiliar’ to each other and in effect, establishes ‘multiverse’ spaces.

7. ‘Alien’ Characters

The significance of characterisation in Science Fiction has always been argued upon. While reflecting on the alien-encounter Science Fiction, critics have pursued two different lines of arguments. One line has claimed that whatever forms the alien-encounter might take; it is never really ‘alien’. In this argument, alienation of a character depends on its proximity to human character in real world and they are ‘anthropocentric’ with exaggeration of human traits. A Science Fiction writer relates her characters with the set of character traits of human self and generates new features giving the reader a sense of unfamiliarity. Le Guin’s essays, particularly ‘American SF and the Other’ (1975), ‘Science Fiction and Mrs Brown’ (1975), and ‘Is Gender Necessary Redux’ (1976/88) suggest the degree to which development of a character rather than ‘ideas’ or ‘issues’ she focuses on in her thinking about literature. What is significant in Le Guin’s
assessment of the genre of Science Fiction is that, as she proposes, Science Fiction can and should be character-centered, exploring subjectivity rather than a ‘pseudo-objective listing of marvels and wonders and horrors,’ with ‘a promise of continued life for the imagination, a good tool, an enlargement of consciousness’. We will examine Griffith’s characters against the background of the arguments over the characterisation.

The story of Ammonite is narrated from the perspective of Marguerite Angelica Taishan (Marghe), an anthropologist employed by the Joint Settlement & Education Councils (SEC) and she is assigned to Durallium Company’s team on Jeep. Marghe has ‘the strong face’, ‘the broad jaw and muddy yellow eyes’ and we come to know from Hiam’s dossier that Marghe was Professor of ET Anthropology at Aberystwyth and it has listed her articles on subjects ranging from the evolution of Welsh to deterioration of kinship allegiance among the population of Gallipoli since reintegration. She has contributed two book-length works and has been active in extracurricular activities of tai chi, chi kung and the various biofeedback disciplines. Until Durallium Company’s arrival, people at Jeep had no contact with the rest of humanity. During this period of isolation, Jeep has lost the technological knowledge of the advanced capitalist industrial societies and now functions at the level of the pre-industrial society. It is a world completely different from human world in many ways. The task of Marghe is to liaise with the native population and she is sent to the Jeep to be the guinea pig for a new vaccine that is invented to cure natives and human beings from the deadly virus. There has been no movement on or off the planet since the discovery of the virus, or
rather, since the virus discovered them and killed all men and some of the women in Company’s team. The Company personnel who survived are now considered contaminated and exist in isolation at their working base, ‘Port Central’. The planetary team is in isolation from ‘their own’ people (off planet-Earth) by their own choice and also from the native population as well. Marghe is the first person to proceed to the planet since the virus was discovered. Marghe has decided to go to Jeep because she thought this was “the most fabulous opportunity for an anthropologist since…since the nineteenth century. The important thing to me is that I get six months on a closed world to research a unique culture” (11, *Ammonite*). Over and above, her decision of taking on the challenge of working at Jeep has come from her frustration with her parents. In this sense, Jeep for Marghe becomes a space to rescue but and get alienated from her actual reality. Marghe and Company find this work exciting but it is a dangerous assignment. There is a risk of getting frustrated as the new environment and social structure at Jeep can possibly destabilize their activities. They are completely clueless anything about the virus, F-27. They do not know its nature and ‘if the virus got loose out there’, it is clear to them that ‘death, for everyone here. For everyone’ is inevitable. Interestingly, Marghe thinks of her goal, when she sets out on her journey that is more than just an idea. She imagines the future which has yet to unfold in an environment she is yet to understand. Marghe’s interactions with Jeep’s communities challenge her definition of herself as a static ‘being’. As she makes connections with the people and the environment, she ‘becomes’ in ways that are intricately connected with those people and the environment.
The confrontation between the terran representative and the non-terran alien character is dominant form in *Ammonite* and *Slow River*. The ‘heroes’ (Marghe and Lore) in *Ammonite* and *Slow River* respectively, visit new world, ‘alien’ to them and confront the culture there. Invariably, they see these changes in new light, from alienated or estranged perspective. Marghe, the main character and anthropologist in *Ammonite*, experiences such an encounter. She spends a time with the people at Jeep, and then one day she becomes one among them. Griffith’s fiction undergoes what we have discussed in the first chapter, ‘defamiliarisation’ and ‘refamiliarisation’, the making strange of the familiar and remaking unfamiliar familiar. The defamiliarisation is an artistic technique which removes an object from habitualisation and presenting it in an estranged manner. *Ammonite* is set in the quasi-tribal context at Jeep. It is systematically and rigorously made unfamiliar to human world of Marghe. Prolonged exposure to such worlds bestows upon the reader an estranged perspective. It not just a perspective with creation of physical space but with a new set of eyes. Through creating the ‘alien’ mode of being at the planet of Jeep, the reader is distanced from everyday reality in order to heighten the awareness of conventions and codes which are usually taken for granted. While ostensibly located in the futuristic and technoworld, both the novels are inextricably bound to present in its extrapolations and analogies. In other words, the narrative world created at the imaginative territory of the novels draws on the reader’s recognition of the conditions of the world as they know it, transposed into a world which at first seems radically discontinuous from it in both time and place.
Slow Love is not, in strict sense, the ‘alien’ novel. However, we think it will help us looking at nuances of the ‘alien’ worlds created by Griffith not only in physical sense of alienity. In this novel, the main character, Lore and her associations with another women and colleagues at work place through technocratic interventions allow us look into role of the scientific and the technological innovations in construction of fictional world. The main reason in a sense of alienation in Griffith’s novel is that the characters are placed in unfamiliar territory through words and ethos the novelist creates. For example, as Griffith writers in Slow River:

Lore was alone. Alone in a room filled with shadows of furniture she had never seen before, things that belonged to a woman she did not know, in a city that was strange to her. Alone. A nobody with nothing, not even clothes. It was like being kidnapped again, but this time she had no escape to dream of, nowhere to run to. (87, Slow River)

Ammonite offers an interesting dynamic between terrestrials (from Earth) and extraterrestrials (from Jeep). An experience of being alien is reversed at Jeep. Marghe becomes alien as she has to accommodate herself with the world which is outside her domain. Therefore, Ammonite is not just a story of terrestrials. All of the characters are subjects in their own ways who form relationships with other equal subjects. Ammonite is also the story of extraterrestrials at Jeep, their (be) longing – to community and to the environment. In this way, Griffith creates a world that is ‘becoming’. Jeep is full of challenges to what ‘things’ traditionally mean. The novel explores how these challenges can be ’put to
work’ with ‘livingthinking multiplicities’ coming from Earth and living at Jeep. The story of Jeep enables to see a story of ‘becoming’ different. As Marghe journeys towards the north of Jeep, Commander Danner takes up narration of the story of Company at Port Central and their journey together enters into the unknown and unfamiliar zone. The change is the only possible option for those at Port Central. And change will prove harder for some than it is for others. This is one way of achieving sense of wonder in Griffith’s work.

Travelling through the landscape of Jeep, Marghe encounters the fierceness of Jeep’s environment and its effects on the body. The storm is electromagnetic and Marghe describes it as:

like being lowered slowly into water, feet first: the hairs on her ankles lifted, then on her legs, her stomach, her arms, the back of her neck…The static grew, crawling through her hair until she thought her scalp would creep right off her skull. An ache started behind her eyes and in the hinge of her jaw…she felt deaf and blind and exposed to the core. Electricity and exhilaration surged and hissed over her bones (48-49, Ammonite).

Marghe is not the only one who feels the storm intensely, although she manages her (body’s) reaction to it better because she has had extensive biofeedback training. This training involved exercise, music, self-hypnosis and sensitising herself to magnetic and electrical fields. The biofeedback assists Marghe’s awareness of her physical, mental and emotional responses to the external conditions. She can regulate her breathing and control blood flow in the specific areas of her body. Marghe ‘knows’ she is a ‘living-
thinking-multiplicity’: ‘an intricate mechanism made of interconnecting parts, a homeostatic system: change this, and this alters, which changes.’ (65, Ammonite.) She is also aware that the habit of biofeedback, which she engages in, is a knowledge that resides in her flesh. There is no separation between what Marghe’s ‘body’ ‘does’ and what her ‘mind’ ‘thinks’. Marghe’s knowledge is embodied – she ‘thinks’ within her body. Marghe’s biofeedback training provides her with an awareness and understanding of her body that other Company personnel do not possess. The intensity of Jeep’s storms is so affective that Letitia Dogias, an engineer in their party, literally passes out from the exhilaration of the storm. Griffith describes it as, “Marghe looked at Letitia; the engineer’s grin had stiffened to a muscle spasm and her eyes were rolled back in her head…The technician was stiff and unresponsive but still fizzing with silent laughter.” (50, Ammonite) A response to the world outside which is unknown is interactive. Marghe and other characters in Ammonite are given enough spaces to negotiate with the unknown spaces at Jeep. The process estranges the terrestrials from where they are. Though it constitutes predilection for conflicts, it leads to a world of discovery within the fictional universe. In this background, either Marghe’s or Lore’s responsibilities are not limited. They have responsibilities to the new family and ‘community’ to which they (be) long, as well as to the old associations to which they once, even momentarily, (be) longed. These are social as well as individual responsibilities. Marghe’s experience of ‘knowing’ is embodied within multiple landscapes. The communities at Port Central and the combined
tribes of Echraidhe and Briogannon are those forced to make the biggest changes for Marghe.

Both Lore and Marghe in *Slow River* and *Ammonite* respectively have existed in isolation from other communities. Both attempt to ‘be’ tough warriors that embrace stubborn, unchanging and unforgiving traditions that are hostile to outsiders. Griffith orchestrates her characters in such ways that those who remain within that structure but negate others with the fear of the unknown, of the future amidst the ambition of dominating will continue to be sad. Similarly, Lore has grown up with her wealthy family and then, with Spanner that she has chose to live with. But, in the end, within the multiverse, she had to face isolation.

Rain fell on her lip and she licked it off automatically, feeling confused. Why should she hide? Surely there were people who would love her and care for her, tend her gently and clean her wounds, if she just let them know where she was. But Hide, said the voice from her crocodile brain, Hide!, and her muscles jumped and sweat started on her Ranks, and the slick gray memory like a balloon in her head swelled and threatened to burst. (5, *Slow River*)

Clearly, *Ammonite* and *Slow River* are located within the universe that is plural and as we have seen, it has multiple landscapes. Consistently, the characters in these novels have to derive strength for their living from the conditions that are not favourable to their living.

8. What is ‘really’ alien?

As said in the beginning, Nicola Griffith’s novels are not the alien novels in strict sense of the term. Then, the question we
would like to raise is: What makes the novels ‘alien novels’? We have to look for the answer in Griffith’s creative conjunction with feminist ideology. Griffith’s work is qualified as the ‘alien fiction’ as it proposes the world that is drastically different from what is considered in traditional ways. *Ammonite* and *Slow River* is Griffith’s response to patriarchy and we have to understand her response in the light of the feminist concerns of the 1960s when the genre was shifting from an orientation of ‘male values’ addressing scientific changes to include explorations of social change. Griffith takes the ‘female only world’ theme to create imaginary world alternative social realities based on ‘a contemporary apprehension of the biosphere as an ecosystem and the universe as a cosmo system’ as she states,

A women-only world, it seems to me, would shine with the entire spectrum of human behavior [sic]: there would be capitalists, and collectivists, hermits and clan members, sailors and cooks, idealists and tyrants; they would be generous and mean, smart and stupid, strong and weak; they would approach life bravely, fearfully and thoughtlessly. Some might still engage in fights, wars and territorial squabbles; individuals and cultures would still display insanity and greed and indifference. And they would change and grow, just like anyone else. Because women *are* anyone else. (376, *Ammonite*)

Science Fiction, for Griffith is a mode of writing in exploring feminist arguments and ideas, and in imagining social realities that might be familiar for the feminist understanding but ‘unfamiliar’ for patriarchy. Not only that it is a response to
patriarchy but also to negative representations of women that has existed in conventional society. With this newer understanding, Griffith’s ‘alien fiction’ introduces role-reversal through alien formation to imagine positive representations of women challenging existing social roles and broadening what women potentially as well as actually could do. The characters like Marghe and Lore are directly in opposition to the simplified understanding of gender roles that are based on the existing system of dichotomous thought. The representational alignment of ‘man’ with mind and ‘woman’ with the ‘body’ that has existed in traditional philosophy is contested by Griffith towards establishing new worlds at Marghe’s Jeep and Spanner’s underworld. Griffith, like Ursula Le Guin responds to, fixed idea of gender. In one of her articles, she maps the western perception of body seen through philosophical discourses beginning with Plato and Aristotle and while reiterating the biased approach within these discourses towards human bodies, especially female, she makes the point that

The body, with its needs and functions, is evil, something from which we should seek to distance ourselves. The more physical and messy the body, it seemed, the more evil the person. This means, of course, that as women bleed on a regular basis, and give birth, we were seen to be more closely anchored than men to the less desirable physical realm. (Funny how the exudations of men are never seen as unclean.) This, of course, strengthened the already prevalent view that women are lesser beings: less evolved, less close to the divine.”

Griffith’s response to the conventional understanding of the human body comes from her personal experiences of not working within
‘professional biases’. She writes,

I have always enjoyed my body. I grew up using and pleasuring it hard. I played tennis, did gymnastics, competed on the track. I worked as a laborer with pick axe, shovel and wheelbarrow at an archaeological dig...The fiction I wrote was physical: explosions, travel through space and time, fantasy figures rescuing fairy tale characters, and so on."72

The characters in *Ammonite* and *Slow River*, through science and technology, find the ways of circumventing the dominant systems of communication which might marginalise their own speech. They do not depend on what appears before them. On the contrary, they persist in communicating with each other and their environment in ways which a ‘normal’ character with usual human being might not find possibility of comprehension, and so has often been interpreted as alien.

At another level, Griffith’s literature exists is that of subversion of notion of body that typically reduces differences to appearance. ‘Appearance’ is an important concept in conventional understanding of a body. It privileges the static appearance of human bodies. In her essay *Throwing like a Girl*, Iris Marion Young claims that women are aware that their bodies are constructed as ‘objects’ gazed upon by men.73 For women, this awareness creates self-consciousness about their bodies that is entirely based on appearance. Similarly, Silvers claims that as a feminist motif, “embodiment represents the fact that in patriarchal Western culture women’s bodies have functioned as objects that are possessed and controlled by men.”74 At the deeper level, this
problematises an understanding of human body in dichotomy of male and female. In *Gender Studies*, Cranny-Francis, Kirby, Stravropoulos and Waring define gender as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ attributes that are socially fixed to their ‘appropriate’ biological sex in opposition to each other.75 These attributes are socially fixed to the point that they appear to occur ‘naturally’. Thus, ‘masculine’ gender is the result of male sex and ‘feminine’ gender is the result of female sex. Griffith suggests that sexual differences: masculinity and femininity cannot be understood outside the field of representations/significations in which they are constructed. Being ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ is a particular kind of social production or ‘performance’. For Griffith, “Science Fiction has changed the discourse on what it means to be human. It introduced us to the notion that the nature of body and mind are mutable through tall tales of human cloning, prosthetics, genetic engineering.”76

Lore is an amalgamation of biological and technological material containing a human soul or ‘ghost’. Her cyborg nature and her body of a “female model cyborg” become critical themes throughout the text, as well as her authority and the abilities granted her by her human makers. Mary Catherine Harper says of the cyborg in context of the interpretations of gender politics: “Especially important… is the figure of the cyborg, part technology and part biology, for this figure stands at the center of a feminist biology, a feminist Alien Other.”77 The ‘female’ cyborg of Lore, like the alien, can be seen as either less than or more than human, because it is not controlled by entirely human matter. Whether inferior or superior to humans it is, along with the entirely
technological robot, the Other. Cadora argues in *Feminist Cyberpunk* that: “Cyborgs are made possible… by a blurring of three boundaries: between human and machine, between human and animal, and between the real and the unreal.”

*Ammonite* and *Slow River* disrespect dichotomies that have mainly formulated the traditional narratives. Griffith rejects relying on gender division connected and its connection with the human behaviour. She excludes the male sex from her novel to emphasise on tight assumptions about behaviour and the fixed gender roles in the contemporary western society. *Ammonite* and *Slow River* in discussions explore what bodies can do when genitalia become irrelevant and this is the foundation for her construction of aliens. Acting Commander Danner in *Ammonite* is not ‘masculine’ in her approach towards the issues of command nor is she ‘feminine’ in her uncertainty about whether she does a good job. Aoife is not ‘masculine’ when she beats Marghe into obedience, nor ‘feminine’ when she patiently teaches Marghe the ways of the tribe, the ways that will ensure her survival. Nor is Leifin ‘masculine’ because she feels no compassion for the animals she hunts and has the capitalistic tendencies but ‘feminine’ when she rocks and feeds her children. Similarly, Marghe is not ‘masculine’ when she stands as strong as a ‘mirrored glass ball’ in front of Danner at their first meeting, nor is she ‘feminine’ when she cries because her snow encrusted glove cracks open her mouth and makes it bleed. Rather, these characters are human in their differences and commonalities and display attributes – desires, emotions, skills and so on – that are available to them all, within their unique capacity to do. These attributes are not hierarchical oppositions but simultaneously
physical, mental and emotional responses specific to the context of the events they are engaged in. In this regard, while commenting on Griffith’s ‘female only world’, Gwyneth Jones explains that the way Griffith is able to make the lack of men such a non-issue is by populating the world (Jeep) with women who are ‘whole people’.

8.1 Reproduction

Science and technology has appealed the contemporary feminist movements. Especially, the feminist Science Fiction utopias of the 1970s were particularly concerned with how technology affected women’s bodies. In her essay, ‘Our Bodies, Ourselves, Technology, and Questions of Ethics: Cyberfeminism and the Lived Body’, Rhonda Shaw has claimed that the reproductive technologies are continued to be perceived as the “fragmentation, objectification, and hence oppression of women’s bodies.”79 Thus, women writers turned to Science Fiction with focusing the biological and medical sciences. They appropriated technology to free women from being confined to their (sexed) bodies by imagining societies in which the practice of motherhood had changed and/or childbearing had been erased through technology. The radical Science Fiction text that explores the ‘maternal focus’ is Marge Piercy’s *Woman of the Edge of Time* (1983). In this novel, Piercy imagines the utopian society of Mattapoisett where bisexuality is the preferred sexuality to the point that it is so normal. It has no name and the ‘parents’ include three adults (combinations of women and men) and all having the ability to breast-feed. The Mattapoisett society provides a technological alternative to uterine gestation. In Mattapoisett,
women’s bodies are freed from reproduction and childrearing and the ‘mothering’ has been a social choice and the responsibility of male and female. In this way, parenting becomes a career or lifestyle choice that the women and men of Mattapoisett make, like studying science, art or agriculture.

Of particular interest to the utopian texts was the issue of biological reproduction without men. The explorations in this regard ranged from the ‘mystical’ (The Wanderground) to the more “scientific” techniques of reproduction described in Suzy McKee Charnas’s Motherlines (1978) and Russ’s The Female Man. In The Wanderground, the hill women perform a ritualistic spiritual ceremony of ‘egg-merging and implantation’ as a part of impregnation. Similarly, in Russ’ world of Whileaway, the process of reproduction involves the merging of ova but under more scientific and medically engineered circumstances. For women and children on Whileaway, pregnancy and the first five years of early childcare are a vacation. The Riding Women’s method of reproduction is the most unusual that their ancestors scientifically engineer them to reproduce gynogenetically. The women understand gynogenesis having ‘a double set of traits’ or diploid ova which allow them to reproduce identical daughters. In her essay ‘Women, Utopia and Narrative: Toward a Postmodern Feminist Citizenship’, Robin Silbergleid writes that the creation of alternative methods of reproduction actually removes reproduction from sex, that is, sexual relations with others. In female only worlds, there are no divisions based on genitalia. Similarly, group parenting allows all women to be mothers without every woman having to bear a child. Charnas’ Motherlines, Gearhart’s The
*Wanderground*, Russ’ *Whileaway* and Piercy’s *Mattapoissett* all envisage alternative social realities in which group parenting and co-parenting, chosen family groups and early independence for children disrupt the traditional social roles of women (and men). Following the separatist utopian tradition of the 1970s, Griffith imagines a method of reproduction for her all-female world. On Jeep, lovers do not necessarily have children. Accidental pregnancies are not a possibility. Motherhood is a choice not an imposition. Marghe experiences firsthand how the women of Jeep conceive through deep meditation or trance. When she joins in trance with Thenike, Marghe undergoes conceiving ‘soestre’. Soestre means ‘two or more children are conceived simultaneously by mothers who bond in deepsearch’. It has a special social, as well as biological significance. As described in *Ammonite*, the soestre family is a unique family unit that ‘usually lived together as family; as tent sisters, if not lovers’ (110, *Slow River*). Marghe describes it as:

> She saw how she could change the chromosomes, how she could rearrange the pairs of alleles on each one. If she reached in and touched this, enfolded that, the cell would begin to divide. And she could control it – she and Thenike could control it. She reached out again, and the thrumming electrum strand that was the virus coiled and flexed and the cell divided...mitosis. But altered, tightly controlled and compressed by the snaking virus until it resembled a truncated meiosis...the chromatids...replicated. This daughter would be diploid, able to have her own daughter. (249, *Slow River*)

On Jeep, a woman can give birth to a child on her own. Although a work of fiction that is indeed fantastic, *Ammonite* is a decidedly
realist and non-technotopian novel. Griffith does not use Science Fictional technology or purely fantastic methods to achieve reproduction on Jeep. Griffith modifies an existing scientific fact for the realistic biological possibilities. Parthenogenesis is scientifically possible, although it does not yet occur successfully in humans. It is a particular form of asexual reproduction in which females produce ovum that develops without fertilization. A consequence of this type of asexual reproduction, as noted in The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia published in 2006, is that offspring are genetically identical or nearly identical to their parent. Like the ‘Motherlines’ of the Riding Women, Aoife and her daughter Marac in Ammonte “were identical twins, separated in looks only by time and circumstance”. (107, Ammonte) The virus enables the women of Jeep to ‘become’ pregnant together. These are choices that the characters make in the context of their circumstances. The contemporary science has proved that gene-recombination is a possibility. The gene-recombination involves a process of genetic shuffling of parental alleles. This idea is being suggested by Griffith while explaining the soestre. She writes, “Marac was none’s soestre. But…Kaitlin looked nothing like a twin to her mother, and Kaitlin was soestre…Being soestre must have something, somehow to do with the alteration of genetic information passed from mother to daughter.” (107, Ammonte) The female characters in Griffith’s novels are portrayed as rebels. However, they do not follow rebellion of the third wave feminism that focuses on public or professional self of feminity. While differing from this particular aspect, Griffith’s women try to locate themselves within their personal selves. Marghe wonders how she
will ‘become’ a mother and continue ‘becoming’ a viajera with a child. Marghe’s question is a consequence of her personal story of her mother being perpetually absent from her childhood. Three years before Marghe accepted the Jeep assignment, her mother died of a new strain of viral pneumonia. It reads interesting when we read that children do not disrupt life, are not excluded from life and, when together, families share the care of them. As they age, children become active participants in the lives of their families and communities. This is how they learn. Their knowledge is an embodied experience. Thenike shares the family life on Jeep as, “We’d travel together. While they’re young, we’ll travel smaller distances at a time, and less often. And when we get there, we’ll stay longer. We’d be safe, together (250, Ammonite). On Jeep, families involve more than just biological relations. They also include friends and lovers. Sometimes, biological relations are not involved in primary family groups at all. For example, Thenike’s family consists of Hilt, young Gerrel, Kenisi, Wenn and Leifin, Huellis her lover and their children. The only biological relations that exist are between Thenike and Hilt who are sisters and Gerrel who is Leifin’s niece. The fact that Jeep’s cultural understanding of family includes non-biological relations enables them to perceive Company employees as a family group. Leifin is particularly interested that Marghe join the family for these trata reasons and Marghe feels like “a pawn in a greater game of trata”. (209, Ammonite) Yet, she also feels she (be) longs. On Jeep, relations are predominantly structured by (voluntary) affection and not enforced by ‘power over’ situations but rather favour ‘power of’ relations, which create potential. In Ollfoss, Marghe has the capacity to act,
to make choices, which were not available or possible for her with
the Echraidhe. Marghe’s memory of the past does not limit her
imagination even though she still feels the fear: “these women were
not Echraidhe. No one was going to pull a knife or hit her for no
reason.” (207, *Ammonite*)

### 8.2 New Social System

As in the standard utopian narratives, Nicola Griffith puts
forward a harmonious society as a reaction to the patriarch to
establish the ideal female only society. However, as total harmony
and agreement seem impossible in a diverse society, in order to
achieve the, she makes up individual freedom and social order.
This may involve regulating or restraining of human nature into
social or political conformity, rather than mere modifications in the
social order to accommodate the individual. A basic assumption in
creating social systems at Jeep, with the utopian perspective, is to
better the system at Earth. Griffith portrays nature of her
characters in flux, neither wholly good nor completely
untrustworthy suggesting that if human fulfillment is the aim,
society has to accept instability. The narratives include description
and a discussion of the different social, technological, political and
economic ‘improvements’ achieved by the female only world
population. Some of the ways in which Griffith achieves this is by
creating the alternative ‘Trata’ ways of dealing with each other
within the community, new ways of reproduction or, soestra
communication.
8.2.1. Trata

In the beginning, Marghe is vulnerable and does not belong to the extraterrestrial world of Jeep. Cassil, a native of Holme Valley and a representative of a wealthy ‘kith’ (family) sympathises with her and both of them reach at mutually beneficial agreement. In addition, Marghe’s connection with Cassil enables her to enter into social relations at Jeep. Marghe, as a representative of Port Central, establishes ‘Trata’ with Cassil. Trata is agreed upon between the communities of Holme Valley, the tribes and Port Central. It is a system of trade and alliance that involves individuals, families and sometimes several communities. Marghe describes Trata as “the first step in a journey whose outcome is uncertain – the opening gambit in a game that might continue for generations”. (55, Ammonite) It is the key to enter into social relations with the communities of Jeep and the connection of the Port Central to the communities at Jeep. It is an attempt at establishing relations for the benefit of communities at Jeep, regardless of the personal tensions held between them. The change in physical spaces has affected Company and tribes at Jeep but the new social connections through Trata generate a support system and ‘aliens’ at Jeep get familiar with each other. The Trata negotiations give all the communities opportunity to learn different ways of ‘becoming’ so that all are beneficiaries in different ways. The different cultural groups interact, overlap and negotiate among themselves allowing a space for the stability amidst tensions. Marghe reports to Danner what Trata means for those at Port Central as, “we are
no longer alone on the planet. We have allies...We’ve become part of the social network, here, like...oh, part of the cultural food chain” (83, *Ammonite*). Trata is a mode of ‘becoming’ just as the Riding Women in Charanas’ novel avoid the problems of hierarchy because ‘power over’ relations are not going to be beneficial for their social and physical environment and as a result, the communities of Jeep create a strong sociability through Trata.

The characters in Ammonite are unique ‘living-thinking-multiplicities’. Griffith’s characters are not female characters embodying male narrative space, doing ‘masculine’ tasks and exhibiting ‘masculine’ attributes or qualities, although that is a (traditional) perspective from which a reader could view Griffith’s novel. However, Griffith’s point is equally more subtle and complicated. She is attempting to go ‘beyond’ the sex/gender, masculine/feminine divide and suggesting “we are all different. We are all people.” Rejecting the oppositional framework that divides the sexes, Griffith finds that there exist a variety of attributes inversing established gender dichotomy. Understandably, for Nicola Griffith, identifying and establishing new attributes is an act of creating aliens to reflect on the contemporary concerns of gender constructions.