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**Constructing the Feminine:  
The Creation of Female Identity in New Zealand Fantasy Fiction**

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## **Abstract**

Very little has been written about the construction of female identity in contemporary New Zealand fantasy fiction. Focussing on a select group of texts by Margaret Mahy, Elizabeth Knox, Nalini Singh, Juliet Marillier, Marama Salsano, and Miriam Hurst, this thesis seeks to explore some of the issues that heroines experience while seeking to create a complete, integrated identity in the face of social ostracism and oppression. The intention is to understand why identity is such a focal point of interest in fiction written by women for women.

Alienation and forced assimilation are highlighted as being key obstructions to a heroine's quest to understand her potential and place in the world. The ultimatum that her differences be physically and symbolically eradicated so that she can fit within the parameters of ideal femininity or else be crushed by patriarchal hegemony drives the need for a third option: to escape to a magical sanctuary.

Fantasy is special for its ability to offer training grounds for heroines, which are represented through magical spaces. However, each of the texts examined illustrate that these sanctuaries are just escapes and must be relinquished if a woman is to have any real place in the world. Hence, a metamorphosis of self must occur while she is within her training ground so that she can return to the real world with confidence.

Finally, the fantasy quest is critically examined in terms of its structure and how each stage or ordeal relates to the construction and eventual realisation of female identity. At heart, this thesis is about female empowerment, agency, and transformation.

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## Constructing the Feminine: An Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote in *The Second Sex*, ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.’<sup>1</sup> A person’s sex can be defined at birth, but the concept of ‘woman’ itself is a gendered construction pieced together through cultural ideals and taboos. While a girl’s options for the kind of woman she will become are endless, they are also culturally limited. Judith Butler explains that to become a woman is not ‘a matter of acquiescing to a fixed ontological status ... it is an active process of appropriating, interpreting, and reinterpreting received cultural possibilities.’<sup>2</sup> The newborn female has the potential to become whomever she wishes, but through the gendered rules encoded into everyday behaviour and dress—right from the pink outfit designated for baby girl—she is unwittingly guided into shaping herself into the embodiment of acceptable feminine identity.

In reverse, Nancy Armstrong turns the acquisition of feminine identity into a ‘negative progress.’<sup>3</sup> She argues that ‘regardless of one’s biological sex, a person begins as a mix of possibilities and acquires a gender as that individual sheds either feminine qualities (and becomes masculine) or masculine qualities (and becomes feminine).’<sup>4</sup> In other words, rather than choosing to embrace and appropriate certain gender ideals, Armstrong suggests a girl sheds her masculine

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<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 301.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, ‘Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*’, *Yale French Studies*, 72 (1986), 36, in *JSTOR* <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/29302257>> [accessed 7 January 2012].

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Armstrong, ‘What Feminism Did to Novel Studies’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. by Ellen Rooney (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> Armstrong, p. 106.

traits to become acceptably feminine as she grows older. What each theory has in common is that constructing identity is powered through female agency. Whether she is appropriating or shedding certain traits, the woman constructing her identity still has the power to choose which ideals of femininity she will keep for her use. Both theories also enforce the underlying message that society is as much a key player in constructing female identity as the individual.

Feminists have frequently argued that ‘socially defined maleness and femaleness severely constrict human behaviour. Subjective definitions imprison individuals in spheres of prescribed action and expectation.’<sup>5</sup> This thesis seeks to examine the interdependent and often problematic relationship between individual choice and societal pressure, as well as the impact such tension has on females searching for a complete, integrated and individualised identity. My focus is contemporary fantasy fiction written by female New Zealand authors. Given word constraints, I will focus more on the process of identity building, as represented through the different characters’ struggles to become whole, rather than analysing what it means to be a New Zealander and female at a national level. This is not to downplay the influence of nationhood on the construction of identity. Indeed, Sally R. Munt writes that nations are ‘imaginary constructs that depend on a range of cultural fictions to maintain their mythic existence ... nationhood implies the construction of a bounded space [with borders] ... to enclose and, of course, exclude.’<sup>6</sup> In other words, New Zealand has its own identity that has been formed through a collective navigation of social taboos and unspoken rules; it is the

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<sup>5</sup> Karen A. Cerulo, ‘Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23 (1997), 388, in *JSTOR* <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/2952557>> [accessed 11 September 2011]

<sup>6</sup> Sally R. Munt, ‘Sisters in Exile: The Lesbian Nation’, in *Exploring Bodies, Space, and Gender*, ed. by Rosa Ainley (London: Routledge, 1998), p.5- 6.

bordering framework of cultural ideals that either embraces or excludes a woman depending on how much she pushes the boundaries with her own identity.

The idea of New Zealand acting as a parameter to contain females both physically and culturally from overstepping agreed boundaries is important. Space, or the lack of, is one of the core foundations that can either assist or obstruct identity building. Susan Y. Najita explains:

Spaces are haunted by the everyday-ness of place, a palimpsest or layering of residual customs, rituals, and practices that indicate the histories of revolutions, economic and political changes, and shifts in territorial boundaries.<sup>7</sup>

Najita's argument is that space itself is a kaleidoscope of cultural values, each blurring and merging with the other as the next generation adds a new layer of thought, creating a web that holds fast to those who tread its landscape. The space itself can be physical, like a country, or metaphysical, like an imagined space depicted through words or envisioned within a person. The fictional heroine is thus forced to create her own sanctuary, free from the influence of society, so as not to be burdened by the 'residual customs' and 'practices' of her country. This need to create a sanctuary away from society is also why I have deliberately chosen to base my discussion within the fantasy genre.

Out of all of the genres, fantasy offers a unique perspective on society for its ability to cross social boundaries by adding a layer of imagined possibilities. Ann Swinfin writes that fantasy 'is not escapism but a method of approaching and evaluating the real world.'<sup>8</sup> Each text opens a door to a new vision of society, one that is both fantastical and yet grounded in twenty-first century New Zealand.

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<sup>7</sup> Susan Y. Najita, *Decolonizing Cultures in the Pacific: Reading History and Trauma in Contemporary Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Swinfin, *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 230.



This is a critical space for understanding identity construction and oppression. As Rosemary Jackson explains: ‘The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made “absent”.’<sup>9</sup> By breaking through the walls of reality, fantasy is able to give voice to those who are ‘silenced’ by the patriarchal hegemony. Fantasy gives expression to the alienated, the ignored, and the outcast. It also offers a unique opportunity for women to find a space of their own by granting access to magical sanctuaries.

It is clear, then, that identity is not a constant state of being. Instead, it is something that grows and develops just like any living organism. Dorinne Kendo alludes to this transformation when she describes identity as ‘a process rather than an object.’<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the concept of constructing an identity suggests two things: first, that identity is not defined by a single aspect; second, that the search for identity is a process that one must continuously work towards and reshape, rather than a single moment of understanding. This is illustrated in the word ‘construct’, which implies a sense of building or, as the Oxford English Dictionary explains, to ‘make or form by fitting the parts together’.<sup>11</sup>

This thesis, as stated, seeks to focus on the concept of ‘fitting the parts together’. To do this, I have split my discussion into three chapters. First is ‘The Suppressed Self: Society and the Female Other’, which examines alienation, oppression, and the effect of the patriarchal hegemony on female identity building. Secondly, ‘A Space of Her Own: Parallel Worlds and Magical Sanctuaries’ focusses on magic spaces and how each sanctuary functions as a metamorphic

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<sup>9</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Dorinne Kendo, quoted by Nick Perry, *Hyperreality and Global Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 165.

<sup>11</sup> Angus Stevenson, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), s.v. construct.

training ground for the heroine, preparing her for when she must re-enter the real world. Lastly, in ‘Quests and Journeys: The Search for the Female Self’, I will examine the theoretical structure of the quest itself and how the heroine’s journey is like an allegorical metaphor for the attainment of a complete, integrated identity. By analysing these core ideas of hegemonic oppression, magical escapism and the quest for inner peace and understanding, I hope to uncover why it is that identity is such a recurring theme not only in fantasy but also in stories written by women for women.

Just as I have limited my textual discussion to the fantasy genre, I have also chosen to focus on texts written by a select group of female New Zealand authors whose featured works have been published within the timeframe of 1990-2015 to ensure contemporary relevance, but also to allow room for more detailed analysis. The authors range from prolific writers such as Margaret Mahy, Elizabeth Knox, Nalini Singh and Juliet Marillier to the lesser-known but equally insightful Marama Salsano and Miriam Hurst. Each author brings a unique voice and insight into the question of how women can attain a sense of wholeness in their identity when so much of society seeks to dictate their behaviour and feelings.

It is to this tension between social pressure and individual need for expression and acceptance that I will now turn.

## Chapter One:

### The Suppressed Self: Society and the Female Other

The concept of what society believes a woman should be is a diverse and ever-changing ideal, for society itself is like a living organism that is constantly altering to adapt to the demands of a new age. Despite this flexibility, society has proven itself reluctant to embrace anyone or anything that is deemed different or breaches the established rules of acceptable behaviour. This situation becomes critical for the female seeking to create and understand her identity, as the canvas she has been offered on which to paint her self-portrait has already been limited by an outline of preconceived ideas that she must fulfil in order to be considered an acceptable member of society. Susan J. Hekman writes, ‘Race, class, sexual orientation, age, and a host of other factors impinge on the construction of the feminine in fundamental ways.’<sup>1</sup> A woman could start from scratch to create her identity, but because of society’s need to contain, categorise and label her according to her physical appearance and position in society, she can also find herself ostracised and even punished for failing to meet certain expectations.

Society’s ability to shape female identity through hegemonic ideals takes special precedence in fantasy and science fiction. Stuart Voytilla argues that ‘Science Fiction and Fantasy are our New Mythology, and provide an important

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<sup>1</sup> Susan J. Hekman, *The Future of Differences: Truth and Method in Feminist Theory* (Oxford, UK: Polity, 1999), p. 28.

canvas that allows us to explore society's issues.'<sup>2</sup> Worlds that break the boundaries of what is realistically possible, whether through science or magic, open the path to exploring new possibilities and concepts; however, at the heart of these imaginative stories, the issues that characters face in regards to understanding their identity are no different to what people experience in our own twenty-first century reality. It is therefore significant that the plight of the alienated and abused is such a focal point in contemporary fantasy and science fiction. As Rosemary Jackson explains, 'a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context.'<sup>3</sup> By examining the issues that characters face within these fictional worlds, the preoccupations of contemporary society are also revealed.

It is this interrelationship between fiction, society and identity that I will explore. Beginning with Miriam Hurst's 'Visitors to Thebes' (2010), I will examine the question of what it means to be human and how the need for categories and labels can both establish and exclude a person's sense of belonging in the world. I will then turn to Marama Salsano's 'The God Gene' (2010), which explores through an alien invasion the concept of cultural alienation and its effect on the construction of identity. Finally, I will discuss Nalini Singh's *Slave to Sensation* (2010), where the issue of the sexual female is brought to the foreground through the Psy's suppression of sexual desire and behaviour. By doing so, I hope to discover how hegemonic ideals can have an impact on the way female identity is constructed, but also what this preoccupation with perceived anomalies suggests about contemporary society.

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<sup>2</sup> John Perlich and David Whitt, 'Preface', in *Millennial Mythmaking: Essays on the Power of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, Films and Games*, edited by John Perlich and David Whitt (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2009), p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 3.

Miriam Hurst explores the concepts of alienation and difference in her short story 'Visitors to Thebes'. Set in a technologically advanced future, the New Zealand in which Josie and her father live is one where biotechnology has granted scientists the means to modify living organisms to create new species, particularly those found in mythical stories and legends. To keep a clear separation between the species, the Humanimal Laws have outlawed any crossbreeding between animals and humans, making creatures like harpies or centaurs illegal. Josie notes: 'They get people in costumes to play those in the park, and at the end of the day they get to go home and be human again.'<sup>4</sup> People can 'play' at being part-human, but it is not socially acceptable to be anything but human. Any deviances from the definitive, genetic characteristics that constitute the label of *Homo sapiens* are defined as 'other' and must be eradicated.

For Josie, the Humanimal Laws are not only discriminatory but are also the reason she has been kept in isolation for most of her life. It is never explicitly stated what has happened to her; instead, the reader has to fit the pieces of information together, as offered through the fragmented narrative style, to confirm that she was indeed the girl attacked by the Savage Beasts—an animal rights group—and so has been physically altered. The fact that Josie is made to appear as a female victim does raise thoughts of rape, but at the heart of the story it is clear that a focus on female victims is not the intention. Josie and her mother are attacked as a protest against genetic ambiguity laws involving humans. If anything, the correlating real world issue is closer to the way society viewed

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<sup>4</sup> Miriam Hurst, 'Visitors to Thebes', in *A Foreign Country: New Zealand Speculative Fiction*, ed. by Anna Caro and Juliet Buchanan (Wellington: Random Static, 2010), p, 54.

interracial relations or miscegenation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The concept of genetic purity mirrors the ‘notion of white supremacy and preserving “whiteness”’ at a time when many believed that ‘marriage between races producing “mixed” children would “muddle” the purity of the white race.’<sup>5</sup> In New Zealand, social disapproval of relationships between European women and Māori men was strong in the nineteenth century. Angela Wanhalla’s research on interracial families in New Zealand reveals that across ‘numerous frontiers, relationships between white men and indigenous women were tolerated because they “represented extensions and reinforcements of colonialism, conquest, and domination.” For white women, the rules were clearly different.’<sup>6</sup> She cites as one of her examples South Island Native Officer Alexander Mackay, who argued in 1881 that Māori men’s ‘habits and modes of life preclude the possibility of intermarrying with Europeans’.<sup>7</sup>

There were also set laws created to stop interracial relations. Just as Hurst’s fictional New Zealand has the Humanimal Laws, so did many of the states in the United States have ‘laws against interracial marriage until the Supreme Court declared them unconstitutional in 1967.’<sup>8</sup> As such, while it is interesting that Josie and her mother are specifically targeted as females, I would argue that focussing on a female victim theory paradigm is too narrow in scope and ignores

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<sup>5</sup> Stanley I. Kutler, ‘Miscegenation’, *Dictionary of American History*, 2003, Encyclopedia.com <<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Miscegenation.aspx#2>> [accessed 29 Sep. 2014]

<sup>6</sup> Angela Wanhalla, *In/visible Sight: The Mixed-Descent Families of Southern New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2009), pp. 64-5.

<sup>7</sup> Wanhalla, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Van Doren, ‘Miscegenation’, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/385165/miscegenation>> [accessed 30 September 2014].

the complexities of genetic modification and its impact on how society perceives what it means to be human.

The ambiguity surrounding Josie's condition is undoubtedly used to build tension in the short story, but it also emphasises just how alienated she has become because of the 'attack'.<sup>9</sup> The characters do not call her by name or openly acknowledge her existence. Even the language used to describe Josie's condition is purposely vague. She is labelled as 'sick' and has been told by her father, Doctor Owen Beresford, that she would 'get better, once they got the implant right'.<sup>10</sup> The implication is that Josie is not a normal person; there is something wrong with her and that something must be cured. Until then, she must stay in isolation.

In this sense, Josie is a Bertha figure in 'Visitor to Thebes': an unwanted mystery locked away in a tower of solitude, not for her own good, but for the good of those who take care of her. There are hints that she exists, but just as *Jane Eyre's* Mr Rochester strove 'long to avoid exposure', so does Doctor Beresford strive to keep his own female in the attic a contained secret.<sup>11</sup> He mentions in his lab notes that sometimes he thinks he 'should have let her out, let it all spread ... Brave new world.'<sup>12</sup> His choice of words is interesting, for there is no mention of the happiness Josie might gain through having her liberty restored; instead, he says he should have 'let her out, let it all spread', as if she were not a person with real emotions but, rather, a plague that he has been charged with containing. One can almost imagine him repeating Rochester's response concerning the

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<sup>9</sup> Hurst, p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> Hurst, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin, 2006; first published 1847), p. 247.

<sup>12</sup> Hurst, pp. 59-60.

safeguarding of Bertha Mason: 'I do my best; and have done it, and will do it.'<sup>13</sup> It is fear, not compassion, which keeps Josie in isolation. She could be free, but Doctor Beresford believes that she will also infect and irreparably change the rest of human society. The world he envisions upon her release is merely a cynical jab at his own disappointment towards what his daughter has become. To him, there is no 'brave new world'; only an unwanted, different one.

Doctor Beresford's incapability to accept Josie's condition is a reflection of the way society perceives those of mixed genetics. He keeps her a secret out of fear of what people might think or do to his daughter; however, it is clear that a part of him also feels that he has lost Josie forever, just as he did his wife who was similarly attacked by the Savage Beasts and died after an attempt to remove the foreign genes from her body. Doctor Beresford writes: 'I taped photos of the past to the outsides of their isolation suites and pretended they could be real again.'<sup>14</sup> His daughter is still alive, but because she no longer appears to be fully human, somehow she is no longer the Josie he knew and loved. This girl is different, and it is her differences that identify her to the human eye. It does not matter if her personality and mind are the same: in society's view, the Josie of the past is a fantasy that can never be 'real' again; the Josie of the present is just an anomaly that must be fixed.

Society's inability to accept Josie because of her appearance also has a negative impact on the way she perceives herself. Josie explains:

When I look at myself in the mirror now, I try to work out what I can see there that came from Mum. Most of what I see came from the attack. I used to think that one day all the bad skin would flake off, and there'd be new skin underneath, but it hasn't happened yet.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Brontë, p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> Hurst, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> Hurst, pp. 56-57.



Because her father has shut her away and insisted that she needs to be cured, she has also come to believe that there is something wrong with her. She describes her skin as ‘bad’ and dreams of one day waking up to discover the mirror showing her a reflection of the girl that existed before the attack. Instead, Josie wakes up to find ‘three blue scales on [her] back’ and notes that they ‘don’t hurt. They feel cool, and smooth.’<sup>16</sup> The unveiling of her ‘new skin’ is the final piece to the puzzle; just as Doctor Beresford realised he could never make the picture taped onto the isolation chamber be real, so does Josie come to recognise that she cannot stop the transformation that she is undergoing. The blue scales are a part of her, and they will not be cured.

Josie’s acceptance that she can never be fully human again opens her eyes to the full reality of what it means to be different, which is demonstrated through her interpretation of the tale of Oedipus and the Sphinx. She describes the Sphinx as being ‘definitely illegal: lion, eagle, snake, and woman all mixed together.’<sup>17</sup> The blend of animals that have been combined to form the Sphinx make it an indefinable creature but, more importantly, it is also a singular creature in that there is only ever one existing at a time. Josie feels an instant connection with the Sphinx, observing that the creature is ‘like the dragons, talking back to me when I was little. She doesn’t have to be real, she just has to be there. I can be someone else. Something else.’<sup>18</sup> Josie takes comfort in the fact that the Sphinx helps her to escape her cage of isolation to become ‘someone else. Something else.’ In the world of her imagination, it does not matter that she has blue scales growing on her back, because the Sphinx is not human and does not expect her to be so either.

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<sup>16</sup> Hurst, p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Hurst, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> Hurst, p. 58.

However, there is also a deeper sense of uncertainty brewing within Josie; an uncertainty that perhaps she, like the Sphinx, is indeed one of a kind, and that is why she has been kept in isolation.

That Josie does not, at first, understand the true significance of her situation is expressed in her reaction to the Sphinx committing suicide after Oedipus correctly answers the riddle. Josie observes:

I watched that story over and over. Every time the Sphinx jumped I wanted to cry. I don't understand why she didn't just fly away somewhere else, where nobody cared about her riddle. Or even go somewhere where there weren't any people. That long ago, all this country had was birds. They wouldn't have hated her.<sup>19</sup>

Josie wonders why the Sphinx allows her life to be determined by an answer to a riddle. She understands that the Sphinx is hated for being what she is and that it is humans who have somehow forced the creature to lose the will to live; however, Josie is confident that there is still a place for the Sphinx 'somewhere else'. She cannot comprehend that, because of the way society perceives those who are different, the answer in itself has meant that the Sphinx has been denied any true sense of belonging and identity in the world.

Sally R. Munt alludes to the Sphinx's predicament in her discussion of society's need to eradicate or fix those who do not fit within preconceived ideas of what is acceptable. She writes:

The configuration of bounded categories such as race, nation, sexuality and even identity, is an inheritance of nineteenth-century imperial obsessions with naming, containing and blaming. The scurry to secure ambiguity and fix contradiction can also be read as expressive of a fear of the unknown and different, which can conversely be banished to the non-discursive or extra-symbolic.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hurst, p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> Sally R. Munt, 'Sisters in Exile: The Lesbian Nation', in *Exploring Bodies, Space, and Gender*, edited by Rosa Ainley (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 12.

Munt's argument suggests that there is no need for labels or the creation of bound categories; it is simply society's method of controlling and containing the populace. This need to have 'bounded categories' also works as a defence mechanism to protect against those who would disrupt the carefully constructed order through supposed abnormalities, which is achieved by banishing the 'contradiction' to a space outside of language and meaning. Hence, the reason racial policies were made during the twentieth century: to avoid racial blurring so that 'mixed children' would not "muddle" the purity of the white race.<sup>21</sup> In 'Visitor to Thebes', this indefinable quality or 'contradiction' is not only undesirable, but has similarly been made illegal through the Humanimal Laws. Josie is not allowed to remain in her ambiguous state; instead, she is kept in isolation and is told that she must remain so until she is cured.

Society's intolerance of anomalies also means that there is no room for any person who cannot be defined by the established labels and categories. It is no coincidence that Josie complains about the fact that no one 'ever answers [her] questions. Not properly.'<sup>22</sup> Like the Sphinx, her very existence rests on having the riddle of man answered, not because it is her sole purpose in life, but because it will confirm to her where she belongs in the world. Josie explains:

The stories never tell you everything, and sometimes they just guess. Like saying the Sphinx was telling a riddle. Maybe she was asking a question, and didn't know the answer. But when she heard the right one she knew . . . When he gets here I'm going to ask my question. The Sphinx's question. Not the same words . . . but the same question: what is human? Is it me? Is there a place for me somewhere?<sup>23</sup>

Josie's question is a culmination of the fear she feels because of the way society perceives her. If she is not human, the identity she thought she had as Josie

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<sup>21</sup> Kutler.

<sup>22</sup> Hurst, p. 53.

<sup>23</sup> Hurst, p. 60.

Beresford will be erased through the simple fact that there is no definite label for her. She would be like Frankenstein's monster: nameless and without meaning, and forever destined to be alone because of the way she is excluded both literally and symbolically for her differences.

The true extent of Josie's alienation is reflected in her attempt to create a space for herself outside of the human world. She states that she is 'trying to find a country with no people, but there aren't any left. Even Mars has biodomes, and they say in fifty years it'll be just like Earth'.<sup>24</sup> The allegorical connection with the tale of the Sphinx then comes full circle as she realises she cannot 'fly away somewhere else, where nobody [cares] about her riddle,' because such a place does not exist.<sup>25</sup> Society has shaped the world into its own image: a human image that allows no room for indefinable crossbreeds.

Similarly, the landscapes of language are just as overruled with human signifiers and meanings, pushing her further into the blurry depths of nonexistence. Josie has been banished in every sense of the word, and the destructive force of this intense alienation is illustrated in her final words: 'There's no rock inside the house, not even a balcony, I still don't have wings, and it'll all be over the vid anyway. It doesn't matter ... When I hear his answer, I'll know.'<sup>26</sup> For Josie, there can be no celebration of her differences; there is only a question and an answer, human or not human, life or death. If she cannot be human then she will commit suicide, for like the Sphinx she sees no other choice.

Fantasies and science fiction are 'frequently imbued with a profound moral purpose and, even when set in a different historical period or, more

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<sup>24</sup> Hurst, p. 57.

<sup>25</sup> Hurst, p. 54.

<sup>26</sup> Hurst, p. 60.

interestingly, in a complete otherworld, display a concern for contemporary problems and offer a critique of contemporary society.<sup>27</sup> The concept of humanimal crossbreeds might be difficult to comprehend for the twenty-first century New Zealand woman, but the feelings of alienation and exclusion are not. The significance of the Sphinx is not that it is a monster, but that it cannot quite be defined as any single creature. The same can be said for Josie. Her crime is not that she is a crossbreed; her crime is simply that she is different. In this sense, she speaks for all females who struggle to celebrate and create an identity in the face of being told that they are not normal. The ambiguity that causes this alienation does not have to be specified as race, class, sexuality or any other identity distinction; it just has to exist.

It is then clear that the Victorian obsession of ‘containing and blaming’ still exists in remnants of society and language. Twenty-first century word choice might not be so explicit as to classify people who cross ‘boundaries of race or sex ... as deviant and regressive’, but it can be argued that the fear of the other remains.<sup>28</sup> It is not a coincidence that eugenics was at its most popular during the 1890-1930s—a period that saw an increase in interracial contact and genetic studies. The concept behind eugenics was ‘human betterment’, but the reality saw people being classified as positive or negative, defective or desirable. Findings from the research had an alarming impact on social policy around the world, including ‘forbidding marriage, segregation in institutions, and sexual sterilization

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<sup>27</sup> Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Munt, p. 12.

of allegedly “unfit parents”<sup>29</sup> The resounding message is that difference is the core of division. Society seeks to make everyone uniform, but reality is not so tidy. Thus, alienation and symbolic exclusion occurs.

Marama Salsano explores the idea of cultural alienation and the effect it has on identity in ‘The God Gene’. The short story is set in the distant future in a world that has been overrun with aliens who are known as ‘wyndor’, completely restructuring the way human society functions. Lizzie, the protagonist of the story, explains:

Once, we were free ... Once, we pushed buttons and switches and had light and warmth and hot food in an instant. Once, our history was recorded in the pages of books or the inter-net and not just in our heads. Once, we didn’t have to live in a camp, guarded by the wyndor of the Circle to protect us from their wild cousins.<sup>30</sup>

Like a natural disaster obliterating all of the technological progress humankind has achieved, the wyndor transform New Zealand from a place of industry and wealth to a mockery of the land that existed before globalisation and the Industrial Revolution. The small camp, which is nicknamed ‘Camp Damned’ by its human inhabitants, is located in the ruins of Gisborne and is ‘home to the entire surviving human population of what used to be known as the North Island of New Zealand.’<sup>31</sup> Lizzie observes that the wyndor of the Circle guard the humans from their ‘wild cousins’, but the reality is that humans are no better than cattle and slaves, protected only for their use rather than any compassion on the wyndors’ part.

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<sup>29</sup> Nancy L. Gallagher, ‘What is Eugenics?: Past and Present Perspectives’, in *Vermont Eugenics: A Documentary History* <<http://www.uvm.edu/~eugenics/whatisf.html>> [accessed 30 September 2014]

<sup>30</sup> Marama Salsano, ‘The God Gene’, in *A Foreign Country*, p. 94.

<sup>31</sup> Salsano, p. 94.

The position of humans on the food chain is not the only thing that has been changed in this nightmarish future. Lizzie notes how racial categories have also been renamed for the convenience of the wyndor. Pakeha and those of non-Māori or Pacific Island descent have been reclassified as ‘wyndharm’, while Māori and Pacific Islanders are labelled as ‘wyndarg’. The distinction between the two is in the role each plays for the wyndor. ‘Wyndharm’ is said to mean ‘helpers of the wyndor’, which would make sense since the wyndharm are essentially kept as slaves to ‘work the food fields’, tend to the maintenance of the camp, and take care of the wyndarg.<sup>32</sup> However, a linguist that Lizzie’s grandmother knows suggests that “‘*provisions* of the wyndor” is a more accurate translation. In other words: food.’<sup>33</sup> It is therefore curious that it is the wyndarg who are prized as the premium food source.

No definition is offered for the meaning of ‘wyndarg’, but that the people have a special significance to the wyndor is made obvious in the way the wyndarg are treated. Lizzie observes that the wyndarg are ‘a strange, dark people who wore clean, fitted clothes ... and each wore a coloured, shimmering bracelet. They walked freely amongst the wyndor guards ... [and] talked and laughed amongst themselves as though night-culls never happened.’<sup>34</sup> Unlike the wyndharm, who are kept in servitude and left to scavenge a life from the scraps they are given, the wyndarg are well-cared for and are still able to have some semblance of freedom. The darker side of this favouritism is that, behind the closed doors of the Farm,

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<sup>32</sup> Salsano, p. 94, 97-98.

<sup>33</sup> Salsano, p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> Salsano, p. 98.

the wyndarg are bred like animals for the sole purpose of producing ‘offspring to feed the wyndor population.’<sup>35</sup> Lizzie observes:

The wyndor, in their clicking language, laughingly referred to the wyndarg as cattle; and the human workers . . . did the same. They reasoned that, “It makes *them* less human, and therefore, what *we* are doing, less wrong.”<sup>36</sup>

The wyndarg might be human, but they are certainly not treated as such. The only thing that matters is that they are fed, clothed, and that they keep breeding.

Everything else is superfluous.

That many wyndharm come to look upon or at least try to convince themselves that their dark-skinned charges are less than human is reflected in their approach to the breeding of the wyndarg. It is mentioned that wyndarg are scarce because they were ‘quickly consumed by rampaging wyndor at the beginning of the invasion’ for their unique taste and ‘drug-like’ effect.<sup>37</sup> Lizzie’s mother states, ‘We breed cattle because something in their DNA makes the wyndor react like that. *We* are only alive because we breed *them* – it’s as simple as that.’<sup>38</sup> The wyndharm are of little interest to the wyndor; their survival relies on their ability to ensure that there is a continuous supply of fresh wyndarg. There is no room for sentimentality and compassion. The wyndarg have to be seen as nothing more than farm animals, because it is their ability to reproduce that keeps the wyndharm alive.

Lizzie discovers the true horror of this situation when Wyn-Janice, one of the farm helpers, tells her about a young wyndarg who refused to cooperate with their efforts to get her pregnant. Lizzie explains:

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<sup>35</sup> Salsano, p. 97.

<sup>36</sup> Salsano, p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> Salsano, pp. 95-97.

<sup>38</sup> Salsano, pp. 102-103.



[W]hen the female wyndarg start to menstruate, they are ‘suitably’ paired to produce offspring of the required taste. Wyn-Janice laughed as she told me about a twelve year old wyndarg she had to restrain. ‘The stupid bitch wouldn’t comply, was scared of the stud we put her with; he was our prize bull, been impregnating for the past forty odd years ... She soon got the message and heaved out six healthy females before she hung herself from the rafters.’<sup>39</sup>

As with any farm animal used for mass feeding, the wyndarg females are impregnated as soon as it is physically possible, regardless of how old the ‘stud’ might be. Their ability to choose their sexual partner is removed entirely, reducing their lives to a machine-like routine of sex and breeding. This also calls to mind the concept of ‘Anti-Black misogyny’, which Trudy Hamilton explains ‘makes Black women’s bodies objects for breeding, sex or spectacle.’<sup>40</sup> The language used to describe the girl as a ‘stupid bitch’ combined with the fact that she is a victim of disguised rape illustrates the fact that female wyndarg have no power over their bodies. They can be abused even by their male counterparts, firmly planting the female wyndarg at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Wyn-Janice’s description of the male wyndarg as their ‘prize bull’ also emphasises just how much the wyndarg have lost their humanity in the eyes of those who watch over them. In ‘Visitors to Thebes’, Josie illustrates through her experiences how important language and labels are when it comes to shaping identity and uniting people as a species; in ‘The God Gene’, there is no hint of the wyndargs’ identity as humans in Wyn-Janice’s story of the girl. The males are treated like over-sexualised animals while the females’ bodies are treated as

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<sup>39</sup> Salsano, pp. 105-106.

<sup>40</sup> Trudy Hamilton, ‘Misogyny, In General vs. Anti-Black Misogyny (Misogynoir), Specifically’, in *Gradient Lair* (September 2013) < <http://www.gradientlair.com/post/60973580823/general-misogyny-versus-misogynoir> > [accessed 13 February 2015].

commodities to be used and abused for breeding. Māori and Pacific Islanders have become ‘cattle’ in every sense of the word.

The result of this inhumane treatment is that the wyndargs’ sense of identity, both as individuals and as a race of people, is blurred and subdued. The wyndarg have been stripped of everything that makes them a member of society, including any sense of family or support. Even their ‘younglings’ are taken at birth and given to wyndharm wet-nurses, where they are then swapped between homes as they get older so that ‘no real attachments’ can be formed.<sup>41</sup> The excuse for this behaviour is that it is more humane, but the effect is only to estrange and disconnect the wyndarg, particularly the females, even more from each other. Even the maternal instinct normally prescribed to women is not allowed to blossom, for the children are removed from their mothers at birth. There is a sense that the real purpose behind the wyndargs’ treatment is to have control, for the more difficult it is for the wyndarg to create strong ties of family and community, the easier it is for the wyndharm to contain and breed the ‘cattle’ without any unwanted problems.

It is apparent that it is difficult for the wyndarg to resist their oppressors. The camp and its human inhabitants are controlled through the ‘God Gene’: a substance that is excreted from the aliens and which has a pacifying effect upon its users. Lizzie’s mother discusses the impact of the God Gene on the wyndarg:

They try to retain their identity ... The fights between the Ngāti Porou and Ngā Puhi wyndarg are legendary ... It’s quite challenging keeping them apart, but give them a dose of the God Gene and they’re as docile as the rest ... Sometimes, when the Gene wears off a little, some of them form singing and dancing groups, or re-enact the old Foreshore and Seabed

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<sup>41</sup> Salsano, p. 102.

marches; the guards find it quite amusing. But many of the older Māori tribes are now extinct.<sup>42</sup>

The God Gene functions as a means of keeping the quarantined wyndarg ‘docile’ for breeding, but it also has a negative effect on the way they perceive and interact with each other. This is because it is not just the wyndargs’ identity as humans that is being slowly stripped away, but also their cultural identity. Old tribal rivalries, such as that between Ngāti Porou and Ngā Puhi, are undermined by a state of God Gene submissiveness. It is only when the Gene starts to wear off that the wyndarg recall their Māori heritage and try to revive their dying culture.

A correlation can be made between the plight of the wyndarg and that which the Māori faced when settlers first came to New Zealand. Susan Y. Najita explains that ‘colonial settlement in New Zealand occurred primarily through European settlers who gradually displaced Māori from their ancestral lands.’<sup>43</sup> There was no immediate takeover; instead, the colonisation of New Zealand was an ongoing process that took root from a seemingly innocent seed known as trade and which was later cemented through war and political treaties. By the time the Pakeha had gained social and political dominance, Māori had been ‘made dependent on wage employment and subjected to state efforts to suppress much of their culture.’<sup>44</sup> In order to survive in a world governed by hegemonic Pakeha ideals, Māori were pressured to assimilate, putting aside their traditional way of life to embrace European culture.

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<sup>42</sup> Salsano, pp. 102-103.

<sup>43</sup> Susan Y. Najita, *Decolonizing Cultures in the Pacific: Reading History and Trauma in Contemporary Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Norton, ‘Culture and Identity in the South Pacific: A Comparative Analysis’, *Man*, 28.4 (December 1993), 752, in *JSTOR* < <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/2803995> > [accessed 30 October 2012].

A similar process occurs when the wyndor eggs fall from the skies in the year 2020 during a meteor shower. Like the arrival of the Pakeha, the integration of wyndor into New Zealand society ‘didn’t feel like an invasion to start with ... Instead, it was hailed as the best thing to ever happen to New Zealand.’<sup>45</sup> Lizzie explains:

The experiments soon revealed that the wyndor could be prompted to exude a remarkable substance ... when ingested by humans, it possessed amazing healing properties. Old, deadly afflictions called HIV, cancer, and diabetes were gone within a few days. And through modification of what seemed to be their equivalent of genes, Grandma and her colleagues found that they could breed wyndor that got rid of wrinkles, excess body fat, and even induced limb regeneration!<sup>46</sup>

Because of the ‘amazing healing properties’ of the wyndor, the aliens are celebrated as ‘saviours of the human race.’<sup>47</sup> Diseases and conditions that previously would kill or cause a person to have a poorer quality of life are able to be cured with relative ease, while the vanity of the human race is also gratified through being able to use the God Gene to achieve the Western ideal of aesthetic beauty.

The technological benefits that the wyndor offer to New Zealanders is an echo of those which the Pakeha traded with Māori back in the Nineteenth Century, ‘notably new modes of transport’ ... and, of course, the musket.’<sup>48</sup> The arrival of the wyndor was a celebration of progress and novelty; however, as with what happened to Māori when the settlers grew in numbers, these frontiers of exchange also led to the wyndor gaining control over New Zealand through war and the pacifying effect of the God Gene. Salsano writes:

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<sup>45</sup> Salsano, p. 94.

<sup>46</sup> Salsano, p. 95.

<sup>47</sup> Salsano, pp. 95-96.

<sup>48</sup> Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, ‘Māori - The Arrival of Europeans’, *Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (updated 3 March 2009)

< <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/maori/3> > [accessed 30 October 2012], p. 3.

It wasn't that the wyndor couldn't be killed ... The problem was avoiding contamination ... the God Gene was actually the microscopic larval form of the wyndor, the rocky "eggs" being more like a pupal stage, and blowing up a wyndor scattered larvae into the air. Any soldiers that successfully fought the wyndor were likely to carry their doom back to base.<sup>49</sup>

The human inhabitants of New Zealand could destroy a wyndor's physical body with ease; however, it was the 'contamination' that came through being in contact with the aliens that truly subverted human independence and land ownership.

What had started as a 'miracle cure' had also spelled 'their doom'.<sup>50</sup>

In this sense, while it could be argued that the wyndor are a representation of New Zealand colonisers, there is a suggestion that the real force behind the destruction of the wyndarg is Westernisation, which is symbolised through the contaminating effect of the God Gene. Before his death at the hands of the wyndor, Lizzie's father smuggles into the camp a bottle that suggests the wyndor had reached Asia and possibly the rest of the world. Lizzie explains that 'the bottle was a warning; we had been left to fend for ourselves, and had to make the most of what we had because no one was coming to save us.'<sup>51</sup> The contaminating influence of the wyndor is not restricted to New Zealand because, like Westernisation, it is a process that keeps spreading as the world becomes more globally connected. The moment a culture comes into contact with the alien force, the inevitable struggle for dominance begins.

The method in which the wyndor feed also reinforces the idea of an alien force seeking to consume or assimilate other existing cultures. Lizzie observes:

Wyn-chrrr-click-click turned, and ... sliced the thin, jagged saber near his front legs into the top of Wyn-Penny's skull. Wyn-Penny's body

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<sup>49</sup> Salsano, p. 100.

<sup>50</sup> Salsano, p. 96.

<sup>51</sup> Salsano, p. 99.

immediately slackened ... and I watched as her insides were sucked out of her, leaving behind a shell of lumpy skin and bones.<sup>52</sup>

Wyn-Penny is not just eaten; her innards are absorbed into the wyndor, leaving nothing behind but a 'shell of lumpy skin and bones'. It as if the very essence that makes her human is being consumed, reducing her previous identity to a state of nonexistence. It does not matter if Wyn-Penny is old or young; what matters is that, underneath the layers of flesh and bone, there is something contained inside her body that is desirable to the wyndor.

It is significant that it is a special quality in the wyndargs' DNA that appeals to the wyndor. Wyn-Janice mentions that 'the coloured bracelets the wyndarg wear are assigned according to how pure their DNA is,' and that purity is calculated through whether the subject's blood has been diluted with non-Māori bloodlines.<sup>53</sup> Moana, a Māori girl whom Lizzie befriends, is noted for wearing 'the only purple bracelet in the Camp', which is used to indicate the purest of all bloodlines.<sup>54</sup> Moana states that she comes from the Tūhoe Nation, a tribe of people who resisted foreign cultural influence and were 'completely free of God Gene users'; the tribe are also noted for being the most appetising wyndarg to devour.<sup>55</sup> The connection between blood purity and taste, as demonstrated through Moana and her bracelet, suggests that it is the very richness of Māori culture that causes the wyndor to be obsessed with the 'chosen ones' known as wyndarg; however, because of this obsession, that same uniqueness is also being consumed and destroyed.<sup>56</sup> In turn, the wyndharm are of no dietary interest to the wyndor and are kept as slaves. In Salsano's analogy of colonisation, colonisers are

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<sup>52</sup> Salsano, pp. 93-94.

<sup>53</sup> Salsano, pp. 105-106.

<sup>54</sup> Salsano, p. 106.

<sup>55</sup> Salsano, p. 101.

<sup>56</sup> Salsano, pp. 96-97.

essentially servants of Westernisation. Pakeha, both intentionally and inadvertently, helped to suppress indigenous culture through the creation of a society that subscribed to the Western ideal of what it means to be civilised, and thus lack the cultural savour of the more individuated Māori culture.

In this sense, Salsano's short story is an allegorical reflection of the struggle to retain cultural female identity in a society that seeks to homogenise all through the plague-like influence of Western ideologies. The fact that the Tūhoe Nation is described as being New Zealand's 'last refuge' and is explicitly stated as being 'free of God Gene users' is no coincidence.<sup>57</sup> Stephen Turner writes that the Tūhoe 'are not the only Māori tribe—though perhaps they have the strongest case—to argue that historically and legally they have never been incorporated within the nation-state of New Zealand.'<sup>58</sup> In 'The God Gene', this resistance to Westernisation takes expression through the Tūhoe Nation's rejection of the 'miracle cure', as well as in the way the tribe isolates itself from the rest of the human populace. Moana states, 'My kaumātua, my elders, say that we were once surface warriors, but now we must grow strong from underground.'<sup>59</sup> No matter what the cost, the tribe refuses to be assimilated into the oppressive society that the wyndor have created. Their determination to retain their traditions has allowed them to avoid contamination, and in that they are indeed New Zealand's 'last refuge'.

Trinh T. Minh-ha observes that the search for identity 'is usually a search for that lost, pure ... original, authentic self, often situated within a process of

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<sup>57</sup> Salsano, p. 101.

<sup>58</sup> Stephen Turner, 'Sovereignty, or the Art of Being Native', *Cultural Critique*, 51 (Spring 2002), 98, in JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/1354637>> [accessed 31 October 2012].

<sup>59</sup> Salsano, p. 106.

elimination of all that is considered other, superfluous, fake, corrupted or Westernised.’<sup>60</sup> In ‘The God Gene’, it is clear that cultural identity can only be retained through a return to one’s ethnic roots. The wyndarg who have been captured by the wyndor are shown to have a faint connection with their cultural heritage, which can only be expressed when the drug that keeps them submissive—or, rather, the illusory benefits of Western living—wears off and reawakens their minds to their true identity. In contrast, Moana has a clear sense of her identity as a member of the Tūhoe Nation, because she is from a tribe who resisted cultural assimilation. The ‘cultural, emotional, and psychic links’ that connect her to previous generations of Māori, which the God Gene subverts, have not been weakened through enforced uniformity. She is allowed to express herself through her native language and traditions; however, she is still vulnerable to the effects of Westernisation.<sup>61</sup> In particular, her status as a Māori female subjects her to anti-Black misogyny, which can only occur in the presence of whiteness and prescribed ideals of uniformity, as illustrated in the young girl who is mocked for trying to resist the rape of her body.

Despite the short story’s celebration of cultural identity, which is seen as something that can be retained and even created through adhering to tradition, the end of ‘The God Gene’ is unsettling. Salsano has Lizzie and Moana wading in the ocean, waiting for the Tūhoe to come to their rescue, and completely surrounded by wyndor. There is no guarantee that either of them will survive or that the Tūhoe will come, for the story leaves the future as one to be imagined. Like the bottle that was smuggled into the camp, the ending of ‘The God Gene’ can be

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<sup>60</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, quoted by Rashmi Varma, ‘On Common Ground?: Feminist Theory and Critical Race Studies’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. by Ellen Rooney (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 248.

<sup>61</sup> Najita, p. 11.



seen as a warning to people, both Māori and Pakeha, that one cannot simply escape from or ignore the all-consuming force of Westernisation. The wyndor have spread their influence throughout the world like a plague, and it is suggested that this disease will only keep spreading.

It is significant, then, that Lizzie and Moana are depicted as wading in the ocean and being surrounded by wyndor. There is a sense that those pockets of safety that can be found within the land are slowly being stripped away, and that soon everyone will be overwhelmed. The Tūhoe might come, but the world that would be left would still be irrevocably changed. There can be no resolution, for there is no victory in such a world. The hegemonic ideal of Western society is to be uniform, and in that sense an uncontaminated or authentic construction of cultural identity cannot exist.

Society seeks to suppress an individual into conforming to a hegemonic ideal of identity through two methods. The first is through alienation, as seen with ‘Visitors to Thebes’, and the second is through enforced uniformity and oppression, which is expressed in the struggle for retaining one’s cultural identity in ‘The God Gene’. Nalini Singh combines both of these methods to explore the issue of the sexual female in *Slave to Sensation*. The futuristic world of the novel is divided between the Psy, human and changeling societies, but it is the Psy who are unique for the way in which they follow a code of behaviour known as ‘Silence’. Singh writes that Silence was first established in 1969 to stop the ‘overwhelming incidence of insanity and serial killing in the Psy population’, and that the mission of Silence was to ‘condition young Psy to feel nothing. Not rage,

not jealousy, not envy, not happiness, and certainly not love.<sup>62</sup> The result is a society in which people are not allowed to feel; instead, they are supposed to navigate their lives through detached pragmatism.

Sascha, the female protagonist, is established at the beginning of the novel as being different from her society because she is a Psy who can still feel, despite having undergone the process of Silence. Unfortunately, her ability to express emotion is also illegal and punishable. She explains:

The result of exposure would be incarceration at the Center. Of course no one called it a prison. Termed a “rehabilitation facility,” it provided a brutally efficient way for the Psy to cull the weak from the herd.<sup>63</sup>

The ‘weak’ she refers to are Psy who can feel, like herself. The punishment for expression of emotion is to be stripped down of all cognitive capability so that one is either reduced to nothing or a mere ‘drone’ that can do what he or she is told.<sup>64</sup>

The Psy would never consider allowing Sascha to exist as she is because, as she observes, ‘I’m broken ... And the Psy don’t allow broken creatures to live.’<sup>65</sup>

The fact that Sascha perceives herself as ‘broken’ is significant. As with Josie, Sascha is made to feel as if there is something intrinsically wrong with her. When she looks into the mirror, she notes that it ‘showed too clearly what she didn’t want to see. The tangle of darkness that was her hair spoke of animal passions and desire, things no Psy should know about.’<sup>66</sup> Sascha cannot view her reflection with the detached gaze of a Psy; her inability to uphold the protocol of Silence forces her to confront her barely contained passions and desires through the mirror, encapsulated in ‘the tangle of darkness’ that is her hair. The

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<sup>62</sup> Nalini Singh, *Slave to Sensation* (London: Gollancz, 2010), p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Singh, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> Singh, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Singh, p. 99.

<sup>66</sup> Singh, p. 13.

sensuousness of her femininity cannot be repressed and, in turn, Sascha is consciously aware that she is not 'like the others'.<sup>67</sup> Instead of accepting and appreciating her ability to feel, however, she assumes that she is 'flawed' because her emotions and, in particular, her sexual desires are categorised in Psy law as evil and unlawful.<sup>68</sup>

It is ironic that the Psy created Silence to put an end to the insanity and sadism that poisoned the nature of the population, yet that inborn tendency to violence is never truly suppressed. Santano Enrique reveals himself to be a serial killer who takes detached pleasure in torturing young women, and it is hinted that there are others like him who are known to the members of the Psy Council. Instead of taking action to bring an end to the murders, the council choose to 'leash' the psychopathic Psys by providing victims 'who won't be missed' for those whom they consider too important to incarcerate.<sup>69</sup> It does not matter if innocent people are being murdered; Silence cannot be broken, for underneath the veil of lies that the council broadcasts, the programme is actually used to keep control of the population. If one cannot feel, one will not consider questioning the ruling authority's verdicts and laws. It is not violence that Silence seeks to suppress, but society itself, and this is especially true for the independent, sexually aware female.

The serial killer, Enrique, is noted for only choosing female victims who encompass the traits of being rebellious, 'headstrong, loyal, independent, and sensual'.<sup>70</sup> The method by which he attacks the young women is violating and brutal, invading both their minds and bodies to strip them of the same traits that

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<sup>67</sup> Singh, p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> Singh, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> Singh, p. 201.

<sup>70</sup> Singh, p. 301.

first appealed to his mind, before he ultimately kills them through seventy-nine precise cuts to the body. Brenna, the only one of his victims to survive, is described as having had her hair ‘cut brutally short, as if someone had tried to rob her of her femininity.’<sup>71</sup> One cannot help but recall that Sascha first perceived the true depth of her sensuality through the ‘tangle of darkness’ that crowned her head; there is a sense that Enrique is purposely trying to destroy the sexual female, placing himself as judge and executioner as he punishes his victims for daring to be openly feminine and different.

It is no coincidence that the Psy have such an obsession with the sexually aware female. Rosemary Jackson observes:

The concept of evil, which is usually attached to the other, is relative, transforming with shifts in cultural fears and values. Any social structure tends to exclude as “evil” anything radically different from itself or which threatens it with destruction, and this conceptualisation, this naming of difference as evil, is a significant ideological gesture.<sup>72</sup>

For the Psy, it is the sexual female who is considered evil. She is the one who is punished, suppressed, and viewed as destructive for her ability to feel, but also the pleasure she takes in her emotions. This is because the social structure of the Psy is one that is ruled by an extreme version of the stereotypical patriarchal hegemony. Robyn Longhurst explains that ‘the mind (reason and rationality) has long been associated with masculinity while the body (emotion and irrationality) has long been associated with femininity.’<sup>73</sup> The Psy centre their lives on the powers of the mind, not only because of their superhuman abilities, such as telekinesis, but also through the way in which they navigate the world through a code of emotionless logic. Those who indulge in the feminine realm of the body

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<sup>71</sup> Singh, p. 321.

<sup>72</sup> Jackson, p. 52.

<sup>73</sup> Robyn Longhurst, ‘Shopping Centres and Bodies’, in *Exploring Bodies, Space, and Gender*, p. 20.

and emotions, such as ‘flawed’ Psy and changelings, are viewed as flirting with danger and are a threat that the Psy cannot afford to take lightly.

The victims that Enrique chooses to target highlight that the Psy are threatened by the sexually aware female. The dominant traits characterised by the girls suggest a sense of hedonistic freedom and vitality. Mimi Schippers further explains that these ‘are characteristics that, when embodied by women, constitute a refusal to complement hegemonic masculinity in a relation of subordination and therefore are threatening to male dominance. For this reason they must be contained.’<sup>74</sup> Enrique seeks to ‘contain’ these women by mutilating their femininity and ending their lives. He is a symbolic representation of patriarchal fear and the need to destroy anything that is different or potentially dangerous to the absolute authority that he, through hegemonic ideals, wields.

In this sense, the Psy are similar to Victorian extremists in the way Victorian society viewed and tried to contain those labelled as fallen women. The literature of the time is rife with portrayals of sexual women. Thomas Hardy painted the image of tragic Tess D’Urbeville, who is raped, ostracised by her society, and eventually becomes a murderess because of the intense shame and bitterness that she feels after becoming Alec’s mistress. Similarly, Charles Dickens writes about Emily and Martha in *David Copperfield*, who are both seduced into having sexual relations outside of marriage and stumble into a variety of difficult situations, including poverty and social exclusion, because of the way society views their sexual misdemeanours. Jennifer Hedgecock explains:

[The] fallen woman trope is really meant to keep women subordinated to patriarchal power, and at the same time, to create a convenient scapegoat

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<sup>74</sup> Mimi Schippers, ‘Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony’, *Theory and Society*, 36.1 (February 2007), 95, in JSTOR, <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/4501776>> [accessed 13 January 2012].

for the existing moral turpitude in Victorian society ... Popular literature warns readers of the consequences suffered by exiled fallen women forced into alienation, poverty, slum dwelling, and suicide.<sup>75</sup>

The suffering and often tragic endings of these fictional women is a representation of society's censorship for the sexually aware female. Her desire is seen as a crime and any pain she endures because of her choice therefore must be justified.

The word 'fallen' in itself suggests that the woman has done something damningly wrong, like Adam and Eve partaking of the fruit in the Garden of Eden and so bringing about the fall of humanity. In the book of Genesis, Eve confesses that she was 'beguiled' by the serpent and 'did eat' of the forbidden fruit.<sup>76</sup> She freely admits she was tricked, yet the inference, and the cause of her punishment, is that it was still her choice to partake and encourage Adam to do the same. For this choice, Eve is told by God that he will 'greatly multiply' her sorrow and conception, placing Eve as the first female to be punished for choosing, as well as tempting a male, to commit wrong.<sup>77</sup> Her crime is the same as Adam's, yet she is punished in a very specific way for stepping outside the patriarchal boundaries she has been permitted as a woman. This is a common double-standard featured in fiction as well as in society.

It is not a coincidence that the mutilation of Brenna's hair should call to mind the image of the shamed adulteress, who has been stripped of her crown of femininity as punishment for indulging in forbidden sexual relations. Antony Beever explains:

In Europe, the practice [of shaving a woman's head] dated back to the dark ages, with the Visigoths. During the middle ages, this mark of shame,

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<sup>75</sup> Jennifer Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008), p. 49.

<sup>76</sup> Genesis, 3: 13, *The Holy Bible*, King James Version (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1989), p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Genesis, pp. 5-6.

denuding a woman of what was supposed to be her most seductive feature, was commonly a punishment for adultery.’<sup>78</sup>

The ‘mark of shame’ is a visible indication of the adulteress’s crime.

Significantly, it is not her body that is attacked but her long, flowing hair—an accepted symbol of her femininity and the ‘most seductive feature’ she has to offer. Beever goes on to state that shaving women’s heads as a ‘mark of retribution and humiliation’ was reintroduced in the twentieth century after French troops occupied the Rhineland in 1923. German women who had relations with the French were ‘publicly shorn’, and during World War II the Nazi state issued orders that ‘German women accused of sleeping with non-Aryans or foreign prisoners employed on farms’ should be similarly punished.<sup>79</sup> After the ‘humiliation of a public head-shaving, the [shorn women] ... were often paraded through the streets on the back of a lorry ... [some] were daubed with tar, some stripped half naked, some marked with swastikas in paint or lipstick.’<sup>80</sup> The humiliation these women endured is intense, and the double-standard an explicit indication of how those society viewed sexually aware females. It does not matter that male soldiers also had sexual relations with the ‘enemy’ in order for there to be an issue; society chose only to punish the females, for it is women who are bound by a higher code of moral behaviour. It is no different for Sascha in the fictional world of *Slave to Sensation*.

Rosalind Coward notes that the ‘equation of female sexuality with the illicit and disgusting is no longer a dominant representation’ in romance novels,

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<sup>78</sup> Antony Beever, ‘An Ugly Carnival’, *The Guardian*, Friday 5 June 2009  
<<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/jun/05/women-victims-d-day-landings-second-world-war>> [accessed 29 September 2014].

<sup>79</sup> Beever.

<sup>80</sup> Beever.

yet this is exactly how the Psy perceive female sexuality.<sup>81</sup> A woman must be subdued and demure or she will be punished. That is why Sascha knows that she must resist Lucas Hunter and all the ‘raw and wild things’ he makes her feel, for it is only by wearing a ‘mask of Psy coldness’ that she can survive in her society.<sup>82</sup> If she succumbs to her desires, she is threatened with not only social alienation but also the physical threat of being murdered by Enrique.

Despite conforming to the rules of Silence, Sascha cannot ignore the sense of separation that she feels from the rest of the Psy because of her inability to suppress her emotions. There are two forces at war within her: the need to embrace her identity as a woman who can feel passion and the conflicting part of herself determined to crush her emotions so that she no longer has to see herself as having no true identity or sense of belonging in the world. Sascha says to Lucas, ‘I need to be something, even if that means I’m part of a race of killers. If I’m not Psy then what am I?’<sup>83</sup> The question is reminiscent of Josie’s question of what it means to be human in ‘Visitors to Thebes’, and is a reflection of the belief that a person can only be part of one category or nothing. Like Josie, Sascha is also forced to recognise that if she cannot find a space for herself as a Psy, her only alternative will be to forfeit her life. Because of the way the Psy are created, however, Sascha would not even have a choice in the matter.

One of the defining features of the Psy is their reliance on the PsyNet: a mental link that works in the same way as the Internet and connects the Psy to each other in a constant flow of energy. This allows the Psy to share information

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<sup>81</sup> Rosalind Coward, ‘This Novel Changes Lives: Are Women’s Novels Feminist Novels? A Response to Rebecca O’Rourke’s Article “Summer Reading”’, *Feminist Review*, in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Mary Eagleton (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1986), p. 158.

<sup>82</sup> Singh, p. 30.

<sup>83</sup> Singh, p. 145.



but also communally work together through a psychic web to keep their population functional and alive. Sascha observes that no one ‘had ever withstood the might of PsyNet—the only way to leave it was death.’<sup>84</sup> The structure of the Psy is like a hive of insects, but instead of a queen there is the PsyNet. Remove the PsyNet and the rest falls apart. Sascha would effectively be folding up her wings and jumping off a cliff à la Sphinx if she were to disconnect herself from the PsyNet. Her death would not only be symbolic, in the sense that she cannot be labelled as a Psy because of her ability to feel, but also physical since her body will not be able to survive being severed from the rest of the Psy population.

Sascha is trapped within a society of categories, labels and expectations. However, these same categories that would bind her into a choice of denying her true self or accepting death are just constructions of hegemonic ideals. There is no doubt that she is a Psy in terms of her physical composition, regardless of her ability to feel; the real problem is that she does not fit the preconceived archetype of her race. It is this clash of the ideal and reality that causes her to feel alienated. However, unlike Josie who chose suicide rather than to accept having no place in the human world, it is also this same collision of ideologies which forces Sascha to seek out a third option: to create a new identity for herself that will circumnavigate the ultimatum the Psy have given her of choosing death or to have her emotions continuously suppressed.

It is significant that it is Sascha’s love for Lucas Hunter that allows her to achieve a new sense of self. As a changeling, Lucas has the ability to transform into a panther. He is neither fully human nor animal, which places him in a special position to view society as one who does not belong to either category and so can

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<sup>84</sup> Singh, p. 38.

make unbiased judgements. Swinfen explains this unique perspective further, stating that animal tales can be ‘used to explore the whole range of human character and relationships by examining human society from the point of view of the animal; or animal metamorphosis may provide an enhanced vision of primary world reality’.<sup>85</sup> *Slave to Sensation* is not an ‘animal tale’ in the traditional sense that it is narrated from an animal’s point of view, such as Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty*, but Lucas is still special for the perspective he can bring as an outsider to Psy and human society. He exists in a distinctive space of language and social ideals that is designed just for changelings. In turn, he is able to see that the Psy’s method of dealing with emotion is destructive and suffocating.

Lucas says to Sascha: ‘Our laws might seem harsh but we’re not inhuman. We treasure every unique individual. We make room for difference.’<sup>86</sup> This statement is a complete contrast to the Psy, who seek to eradicate all sign of individuality through the suppression of emotion. Changelings follow a social code that adheres to the laws of obeying an alpha, which can mean that an individual’s desire is denied if it will negatively impact the Pack; however, changelings also exhibit a deep sense of loyalty and love for each other and are noted for having no separation between their ‘human and animal forms. They’re completely happy and whole in themselves.’<sup>87</sup> Sascha recognises these positive attributes when she visits the DarkRiver lands, but she is especially intrigued by the way the changelings do not suppress female desire. Sascha observes about Rina, a changeling, that sensuality ‘poured from every molecule of the female,

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<sup>85</sup> Swinfen, p. 12.

<sup>86</sup> Singh, p. 183.

<sup>87</sup> Nalini Singh, quoted by Stephen Jewell, in ‘Romance Meets Sci-Fi’, in *New Zealand Herald*, 11 July 2011, p. 27.

rich and heady and almost tangible.’<sup>88</sup> There is no shame in Rina’s identity as a sexually aware female; rather, she is allowed to embrace and even promote her sensuality.

The more Sascha associates with DarkRiver, the more her eyes are opened to a different way of life that is not ‘cold or practical’.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, her experiences only further emphasise to her that she is a ‘broken’ Psy trapped in her own inability to stop feeling. Her insecurity leads her to question Lucas’s attraction to her. She ponders how ‘was it possible that the rest of her race repelled him, but she didn’t? It wasn’t. Only her pitiful need to be accepted, to be valued, had let her believe something so improbable.’<sup>90</sup> The alienation that she feels draws her to Lucas, yet she also cannot understand why he should care for her when he sees the rest of her society as ‘unfeeling machines’.<sup>91</sup> Her vulnerability and fear is palpable; it is clear she yearns to feel like she truly belongs somewhere, but her doubt holds her back from embracing the sense of validation as a woman she could receive from Lucas.

That Lucas recognises her hesitancy is evident. Singh writes that he ‘wanted to shatter the shell [Sascha] lived inside and discover the real woman.’<sup>92</sup> He does not want the fake mask she wears as a Psy, but to discover the ‘real woman’ that is Sascha Duncan. As the two characters become entangled in a tension-filled dance of doubt, frustration and passion, Lucas reveals to Sascha how he views her as a person. He says: ‘You’re as much animal as me ... As

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<sup>88</sup> Singh, p. 158.

<sup>89</sup> Singh, p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> Singh, p. 142.

<sup>91</sup> Singh, p. 11.

<sup>92</sup> Singh, p. 65.

sexual, as hungry, as needy.’<sup>93</sup> To him, it does not matter that she is Psy; what matters is that her ‘body was alive’ and the physical cravings she is so determined to hide should not be suppressed for Silence.<sup>94</sup>

Lucas’s determination to ‘shatter the shell’ in which Sascha hides is ultimately what awakens her to the epiphany that she can embrace her feelings without having to surrender a sense of belonging. After their first kiss, Sascha observes that ‘for the first time in her life she wanted something else even more than she wanted to belong. If only for a moment ... she wanted to be loved.’<sup>95</sup> This yearning to be loved culminates in a desire to be closer to him, which leads her to embrace her sexuality as a woman and, in effect, translates to a deeper sense of connection with Lucas. Her first sexual experience is described as being ‘the most intimate, most dangerous, most wonderful dance of her life.’<sup>96</sup> It is interesting that the words used are ‘wild’ and ‘dangerous’, two adjectives that conjure animalistic imagery and unrestrained emotion. There is a suggestion that her relationship with Lucas is like a channel that lets her experience the changeling way of life and also take upon her their animal characteristics.

Sascha’s experiences with Lucas also help her to learn that she is an E-Psy or ‘healer of souls’.<sup>97</sup> The E-Psys were destroyed with the introduction of Silence, for their psychic power is tied completely to empathy and their ability to feel emotion. Thus, she realises that she is not ‘broken’ but simply an unwanted part of this new Psy society that lives by the protocol of Silence. More importantly, Lucas’s own physical composition as an alpha changeling allows Sascha to

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<sup>93</sup> Singh, p. 242.

<sup>94</sup> Singh, p. 130.

<sup>95</sup> Singh, p. 146.

<sup>96</sup> Singh, p. 91.

<sup>97</sup> Singh, p. 257.

disconnect from the PsyNet and create a new psychic connection with the DarkRiver Pack when she ‘mates’ with her lover. Singh writes:

Her shoulders fell. She shot back along that bond, dropping the barriers she’d erected in an effort to prevent their mating. Suddenly, she was a rainbow inside him, a sparkling fountain of such beauty that he felt blessed to have been allowed to see her.<sup>98</sup>

It is significant that Sascha is aware she had been erecting barriers in ‘an effort to prevent their mating’. Her fear of being punished by the Psy had stunted any growth she could have made as a woman, yet once she accepts her bond with Lucas, she is not only able to enjoy the wholeness of her emotions for the first time but also discover the means to survive without the PsyNet.

It becomes clear that Lucas’s love is a transformative power that is able to cross boundaries to create a space for Sascha where she can construct a new, more complete identity for herself. Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce explain the transformative power of love as featured in romance fiction:

[The] possibility of becoming “someone else” through a romantic relationship is most certainly one of the most interesting and positive aspects of the process, and a powerful ingredient in its appeal. The transformative promise holds out possibilities of change, progress and escape, which the romance facilitates through its power to make anything seem possible.<sup>99</sup>

The very nature of popular romance fiction is that it should have a happy ending. Any obstacles must be overcome, and it is clear that Sascha’s relationship with Lucas has indeed allowed her to ‘change, progress and escape’ from the oppressed Psy she started out as at the beginning of the novel. Sascha is able to celebrate her transformation, acknowledging that she ‘was no longer a woman who belonged nowhere, no longer part of a race that would’ve punished her for her gift ... she’d

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<sup>98</sup> Singh, pp. 316-317.

<sup>99</sup> Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce, ‘The Heart of the Matter: Feminists Revisit Romance’, in *Romance Revisited*, ed. by Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), p. 18.

never mourn who she'd once been.'<sup>100</sup> By the end of the novel, Sascha has completely embraced her new identity as a healer of DarkRiver and the mate of Lucas Hunter. Her physical composition might still be that of a Psy, but she has shed the oppressive ideology of Silence that kept her desires contained and taken upon her the changeling way of life.

While it is interesting that Sascha is able to create a new identity for herself by utilising the psychic space that her bond with Lucas created, that does not change the fact that at her core she is still a Psy. Sara Ruddick comments that we 'have learned from confronting racism and sexual bigotry that we cannot make our differences disappear.'<sup>101</sup> Josie tries to imagine herself as 'someone else', just as her father tries to convince himself that she can be cured and so become the daughter he sees in the photo once again; however, both are aware that something has been irreparably changed. Similarly, Moana and Lizzie are left wading in the ocean, desperate to try piece back together a population that has been, or at least appears to be, irreversibly blurred through cultural assimilation and absorption via an alien invasion. The common theme is that what makes people different or alienated cannot be erased; only hegemonic ideals have the power to subdue a person into being uniform. Indeed, the only character to achieve any semblance of freedom from an oppressive hegemony is Sascha, who is forced to construct this identity in a space outside of the Psy society.

There is a suggestion that the only way to escape alienation and oppression is through a space that is not ruled by hegemonic ideals. Josie tries to find this space, only to discover that there is nothing—not even on Mars—that exists for

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<sup>100</sup> Singh, p. 323.

<sup>101</sup> Sara Ruddick, quoted by Hekman, p. 15.

her. Lizzie and Moana also seek an untainted space by trying to seek refuge with the Tūhoe Nation, but again the final imagery of the short story hints that such a space does not or, at the very least, will soon no longer exist. Sascha is fortunate that the DarkRiver changelings accept her into their Pack and grant her a space to discover herself, but the question still remains of how a female is supposed to find a sense of wholeness in her identity when there is no existing space within her society. It is to this predicament which I would now like to turn in Chapter Two.

## Chapter Two:

### A Space of Her Own: Parallel Worlds and Magical Sanctuaries

If a woman is to write fiction, observed Virginia Woolf, she must have ‘a room of her own’.<sup>1</sup> At first glance, such a statement appears redundant in its simplicity and has all the air of an Oscar Wilde witticism: clever but of no real worth. One could argue that it would be more useful to say that a woman needs an education or natural talent to write, yet Woolf insists that it is a room the female author needs, and not just any room, but a ‘room of her own’. Taken literally, Woolf’s room can offer neither literacy skills nor the innate creativity needed to shape a story; however, the room can provide something far more precious, and that is space: the space to think and the space to breathe, untainted by the outside world. Woolf’s stipulation that the room must be the woman’s own and must include a lock therefore becomes all the more pertinent, for it ensures the space remains free from outside influence, guarded as it is by the woman who holds the key. By shutting and locking herself away from the influence of her society, the female author is empowered with the ability ‘to think for oneself’.<sup>2</sup> She is, in effect, gifted with the potential to discover her own ideas and dreams.

Woolf’s dictum may have been aimed at writers of her own society, but the need for women to find a room of their own is one that continues to prevail in the twenty-first century and is a recurring motif in fantasy novels written by contemporary female authors. This is unsurprising given the recent critical interest in space and place and their multiple meanings. In a 1967 lecture, Michel

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Hogarth, 1959), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Woolf, p. 160.



Foucault stated that the ‘present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space’. He argues that ‘we do not live in homogeneous and empty space, but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly phantasmatic as well.’<sup>3</sup> Feminist theorists have emphasised the implications of this relationship between space and power, with bell hooks writing about the need to establish and maintain what she terms ‘women-centred space’: ‘Once woman-centred space exists it can be maintained only if women remain convinced that it is the only space where they can be self-realised and free.’<sup>4</sup>

Fantasy heroines, in particular, are continuously preoccupied with a sense of being overwhelmed by the pressures and expectations of the people around them, which then culminates in a deep yearning to escape from their surroundings into a space that is specifically their own. This is a space, as John Di Stefano writes about home, ‘around which we construct a narrative of belonging’.<sup>5</sup> For the fantasy heroine, these imagined spaces act as both training ground and sanctuary, often providing a retreat from the real world yet also containing hidden dangers that she must overcome.

It is this tension between escapism and the utilisation of space to discover individual potential that I will explore. Beginning with Margaret Mahy’s *Dangerous Spaces* (1991), I will examine the way in which space is first sought and coveted, before turning to Juliet Marillier’s *Heart’s Blood* (2009), which explores otherworldly space as a place of learning and growth to prepare for re-entry into the real world. Finally, I will discuss Elizabeth Knox’s *The Invisible*

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces,’ *Diacritics*, 16 (1), (1986) 23–27, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory From Margin to Centre*, 1984 (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> John Di Stefano, ‘Moving Images of Home’, *Art Journal*, 61.4 (2002), 38-51, p. 38.

*Road* (2008), where the struggle for space becomes less about a physical escape than it is a search for personal enlightenment. By doing so, I hope to discover what it is about fantasy that makes the search for an imagined space so popular, and what this preoccupation with space suggests about the construction of female identity.

Margaret Mahy brings the issue of space to the forefront of her novel *Dangerous Spaces*. From the house that is haunted with the presence of its previous owner to the individual concerns of the novel's female protagonist, space—and the question of there being enough space—is a recurring theme, and one that turns the seemingly normal Wakefield farm into a battleground for ownership. For the orphan Anthea, her new home is suffocating and debilitating, making her feel that she must 'somehow find a space where she could relax and breathe, or else remain a paper doll for the rest of her life.'<sup>6</sup> The image of the paper doll is a poignant and revealing insight into Anthea's state of mind. Paper dolls, though a child's plaything, are fragile and easily crushed. That her relatives should make her feel like one suggests the fragility of her sense of identity; if she is not given room to breathe, she will be flattened by her cousins' vibrancy and boisterousness, becoming no more than a flimsy doll, more for decoration than real living.

Anthea's search for space also reveals an urge to escape not just from her relatives' home but from reality itself. She likens herself to the honey pot she inherited from her dead parents: an expensive item that Molly, her aunt, decides to put away for when it has a use so it will not get spoiled. Mahy writes:

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret Mahy, *Dangerous Spaces* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), p. 8.

If Anthea could have wrapped herself in tissue paper and packed herself away with the honey-pot, she would have done so happily. Then, when things became better, when there was a true space for her, she would rise up out of the tissue paper (while people exclaimed at her beauty and value) and move gracefully into that space, where she would sit, looking serenely at the world.<sup>7</sup>

In this passage the question of space moves beyond the purely physical. Anthea's desire is to find a 'true space' to inhabit, implying that what she wants is a deeper and more personal sense of belonging than having an actual room of her own. She does not feel that she belongs or even should be part of her reality; rather, she prefers the thought of hiding away like the honey pot into a cocoon of nonexistence, from which she can then emerge in full butterfly beauty when all that troubles her has passed. The space of the cocoon is the sanctuary or escape, but the 'true space'—the space she will later move into and achieve serenity—is the one she is seeking.

The otherworldly space of her granduncle Henry's stereoscope becomes Anthea's cocoon. The stereoscope is described as an object where 'scenes filled out with a space that did not really exist—space that could be folded up into a box that looked like a book . . . [and] become as flat as a bookmark and as easily hidden away.'<sup>8</sup> Anthea finds the stereoscope attractive because it is small enough to be concealed and kept as a secret, yet it is the stereoscope's ability to create scenes from absent space that she finds truly appealing. There is something in the liminal nature of the stereoscope—that point between nonexistence and reality—that calls to her, promising a sanctuary untainted by the real world. This sanctuary is the hidden land of Viridian: a magical world that Henry created while he was still alive, and which mirrors the images of the stereoscope.

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<sup>7</sup> Mahy, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Mahy, p. 20.

The world of Viridian is a reflection of Anthea's desires. In the real world she feels smothered by her relatives and society's expectation for her to move on from her grief. In Viridian she discovers a 'space without limits', a vast landscape of sloping mountain and narrow road, which leads to an island glittering 'like a tiny jewel' at 'the very edge of sight'.<sup>9</sup> These images convey a sense that this space is both free and precious. There is no one to pressure her or steal her space, for the world is empty save the black arrows etched onto the landscape. She has achieved what she always wanted: a space of her own. However, as Anthea tires of the isolation and endless snowy roads, Viridian also adjusts to her wishes and transforms itself into a 'gushing flowing countryside'.<sup>10</sup> In addition, she meets 'dead Henry', who has previously been guiding her with his arrows and is now willing to take her to the island.<sup>11</sup> Without realising it, Anthea has decided that empty space, however magical, is not enough for her. She desires to find her 'true space'—a space she senses might be found at the island, and which Henry and the geography of the land suggest will be her journey's end.

It is no coincidence that it is Henry, a boy whose life was cut short, who acts as Anthea's guide to Viridian. A strong undercurrent of Anthea's motives is her wish to find her dead parents. She has been told that her parents were 'lost at sea', yet Anthea continues to dream that 'her mother and father might be found again, shipwrecked on an island so small that no one had ever discovered it before.'<sup>12</sup> The island at the edge of Viridian is not only a direct correlation of Anthea's dream but is also hinted to be the final resting place for human souls. Henry explains that 'everyone has to go there in the end ... Leo was supposed to

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<sup>9</sup> Mahy, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Mahy, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Mahy, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Mahy, p. 13.

come with me, but I ran on ahead and he's never caught up with me ... That's why I sent for you.'<sup>13</sup> Henry understands that he must reach the island if he is to move on from his ghost-like life. Anthea, however, only sees the island as an opportunity to find her parents and dwell in a spacious paradise.

In this sense, the land of the stereoscope becomes a form of Underworld, with the island at the edge being the Isle of the Blessed and Henry acting as both Charon and a dead soul seeking rest. Yet there is no place for the living in such a world. Hence, the further Anthea travels into Viridian, the more disconnected she becomes with her life outside the stereoscope. Like the shades of the dead in ancient Greek mythology, she is forced to metaphorically drink from the river Lethe and forget her previous existence in order to stay in Viridian.<sup>14</sup> The 'crowded life' of Flora and the farm grows 'faint and unreal', while it is only as she is walking along the dream-like roads of Viridian that she feels 'completely alive, and certain she [is] going in the right direction.'<sup>15</sup> In reality, Anthea is walking to her death. Although a part of her—the part that cannot face the loss of her parents—does desire to enter this state of oblivion, the rest of her continues to cling to the Wakefield farm and the world of the living.

Anthea's first experience with the stereoscope hints at the danger of her decision to live in both worlds. She is disturbed by the way the distorted view emphasises the merging of the two images, which become almost indistinguishable from each other at the point of connection.<sup>16</sup> Her alarm is a presentiment of her own future, where her choice to embrace Viridian places her

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<sup>13</sup> Mahy, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Micha F. Lindemans, 'Lethe', in *Encyclopedia Mythica* <<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/l/lethe.html>> [accessed 7 September 2011].

<sup>15</sup> Mahy, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Mahy, p. 15.

as a link, or the blurred line, between the real and the imaginary. Through her, the real world and the land of the stereoscope are placed in a dangerous state of alignment. The more fervently she tries to cling to Viridian and the farm, the larger the ‘crack’ between them becomes, allowing the real and the imaginary to collide and create a single, distorted image.<sup>17</sup>

The effect of Anthea’s influence is clearest when the infant trees she plants with Flora and Molly on the farm appear in Viridian as a forest of ‘ghostly intruders’ destroying the stone coliseum.<sup>18</sup> When Henry says that the trees should not be there and are ‘breaking everything up’, Anthea responds with, ‘They’re alive ... I like live things.’<sup>19</sup> A curious distortion then occurs and, for a moment, the parallel worlds of Viridian and the Wakefield farm are united in a blurry image of stone, trees and the ‘naked walls of her bedroom’, much like the original two images seen through the unfocussed view of the stereoscope.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the same adult trees Anthea perceives destroying the coliseum also enter the real world to merge with those that have been newly planted, creating a forest of illusions that is at once old and young, fake and real.

Ann Swinfen explains this phenomenon in her discussion of parallel worlds. She writes:

[Parallel worlds] belong ... to an intermediate area of imaginative experience, where an often precarious balance must be maintained between two distinct worlds and where the awareness of one world is constantly coloured by awareness of the other.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mahy, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Mahy, p. 68.

<sup>19</sup> Mahy, p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Mahy, p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 44.

By entering Viridian and claiming its space, Anthea has disturbed the balance between the two worlds, allowing them to influence and be influenced by each other. Life cannot exist in a land of stillness and death, yet it is precisely the creation of life that Anthea is trying to cultivate in order to feel more comfortable in her secret space. However, by doing so she is also allowing Viridian to enter her reality—a fact that is far more dangerous, as she realises when dead Henry tries to force himself into her world, ‘just as she had forced her way from everyday life into his non-existent space against all rules.’<sup>22</sup>

The morphing and distortion of the two worlds is a mirror of Anthea’s own warped sense of identity. In a rare moment of clarity she wonders ‘what she might be turning into’, shocked out of her dreamy contentment as she perceives the rocks and grasses of Viridian ‘straining back from her in case she touched them.’<sup>23</sup> Her fear is justified, for by allowing herself to be tainted by the lifeless world of Viridian, Anthea has become neither fully alive nor dead, but something in between: a being forced to straddle two worlds with no real place in either. Like the unfocussed image trying to merge out of stereoscope space, her identity is blurred and struggling to define itself. The only way for her to be whole is to choose one or the other: the island and its limitless space, which will inevitably result in her death, or the real world, including all its sorrow and suffocating relatives.

In this sense, what Anthea is being asked to decide is what she will become when she leaves her cocoon. The idea of a ‘true space’ is merely a synonym for a true identity, but neither can be achieved without Anthea first

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<sup>22</sup> Mahy, pp. 95-96.

<sup>23</sup> Mahy, p. 42.

deciding who she is and where she belongs. Even before she entered Viridian, she was torn between two worlds: the glamorous, ornamental world of her dead parents, and the loud, often messy world of her relatives at the Wakefield farm. Her escape into Viridian and the merging of the two realms is simply a physical representation of this struggle to understand her place and identity in the world; hence, why the landscape and inhabitants of the stereoscope land change as her own desires undergo a transformation. The stereoscope space responds to her needs: the need for isolation so she can learn to understand herself as an individual, and the need for company so she can determine where she fits amongst a wider society.

Kate Bornstein explains the significance of utilising space to shape one's identity. She observes that most 'of the behavioural clues [to gender] boil down to how we occupy space, both alone and with others.'<sup>24</sup> Anthea's confusion is not limited to gender and where she fits on that spectrum as a girl, but the principle of constructing identity through the navigation of space still applies. Viridian is a fluid, shape-shifting space that exists in a liminal zone between the living and the dead, as well as the real and the imaginary. It can offer both solitude and company, while also acting as a foil to real world experiences. It is the perfect cocoon for a girl to shelter inside and discover her true potential, but it is only one bridge on the path to securing a true identity. It is no coincidence that the image of the girl rising up from the tissue paper echoes a caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly. A metamorphosis of self must occur before Anthea can make any progress and reach her 'true space'. She must decide which form she will take:

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<sup>24</sup> Kate Bornstein, quoted by Rosa Ainley, 'Introduction', in *Exploring Bodies, Space and Gender*, edited by Rosa Ainley (London: Routledge, 1998), p. xvi.



whether she will choose the ornamental life of her dead parents and go to the island, or whether she will embrace a new life with her relatives.

This decision is made clearer for Anthea when she finally accepts the death of her parents. Mahy writes:

For months Anthea obstinately struggled to force two pieces of a puzzle together when they didn't want to go ... [Now] they slipped effortlessly together and made a pattern, sad but peaceful.<sup>25</sup>

As the two puzzle pieces come together, Anthea realises that she no longer needs or even wishes to reach the island. In turn, Viridian, which had once offered her a sanctuary of limitless space, begins to close in on itself, shutting her out, so that there is 'almost no space left for her' in the magical land.<sup>26</sup> To stay in Viridian is to wither and die inside her cocoon. As such, Anthea leaves her sanctuary and accepts the home she has been offered with her relatives, where she discovers that there is 'plenty of space around her ... not the non-existent space of the stereoscope ... This space was real, and it was all her own.'<sup>27</sup>

The distorted image of Anthea's identity is also able to come into focus as she accepts her place in the real world, creating a girl who is whole yet still different from the grief-stricken child who first dreamed herself into Viridian. This transformation is captured in the redefining of the honey pot, which Anthea unearths from its hiding place for the family picnic:

'Put the plum jam in it,' [Flora] said quickly. 'I'll eat plum jam if it comes from that pot.'  
'It's a *honey* pot,' Molly said. 'Look at the bee.'  
'Suppose it's really a wasp,' Flora cried. 'Wasps like jam.'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mahy, p. 98.

<sup>26</sup> Mahy, p. 106.

<sup>27</sup> Mahy, p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> Mahy, p. 129.

In order for the honey pot to have a true place at the Wakefield farm, the bee is turned into a wasp and the pot itself used for jam. It is tempting to consider the transformation from bee to wasp a transition in Anthea's thoughts that reality does not always have to be orderly, productive and filled with sweet moments, as represented in the image of the bee that produces honey with its pollen. Rather, the shift to wasp argues that reality can be messy, frustrating and sometimes sting, but Anthea can still find jam, or worthwhile aspects, if she cares to look closer. Either way, the honey pot being put to use is a symbol of Anthea choosing to let go of her old life and her dead parents in order to find a 'true place' for herself in the real world. It is not her relatives that have changed, only herself. The butterfly has indeed emerged from its cocoon, but the space she so desperately sought was, in fact, a space she had at her fingertips all along; she just had to believe in herself enough to perceive it.

It is ironic but not surprising that Anthea's 'true space' should be found in the real world with her relatives and not in Viridian. Part of the lure of the magical sanctuary is its ability to offer an escape from the hardships and pressures of reality. Rosemary Jackson explains that when 'the unreal is introduced, spatial, temporal, and philosophical ordering systems all dissolve'.<sup>29</sup> What is set in stone can be undone and influenced through the introduction of the marvellous. This is why the search for space is so common within the fantasy genre. Unlike the realist novel, the realm of the marvellous is not governed by the laws of the real world, allowing for new ideas and possibilities to be explored. However, there are still limitations to cocooning oneself in a magical sanctuary, as Anthea discovers when

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<sup>29</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 15.

trying to establish her true space in Viridian. The heroine must emerge from her cocoon if she is to progress.

Juliet Marillier further explores the limitations of the magical escape in her novel *Heart's Blood*. Whistling Tor is not set up as a parallel world, yet Caitrin instinctively recognises there is something different about Anluan's fortress. She observes that 'it looked set apart, lonely somehow' and that it is frequently shrouded in mist.<sup>30</sup> The words conjure a sense of isolation, as if Whistling Tor exists in a space beyond the realm of the ordinary. Indeed, the surrounding land and constant veil of mist acts as a pseudo-portal to the fortress, testing those who would seek to enter. One cannot simply walk up the hill and pass through the chieftain's walls. Caitrin is hindered by misleading voices, the woodland appears as a 'waiting army', and the forest itself seems to shift and play tricks, trying to make her lose her way.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the mysterious Olcan and his dog Fianchu appear to assess her worthiness of being granted access; if she is a 'kindly soul', Olcan observes, Fianchu will warm to her.<sup>32</sup>

The obstacles Caitrin must overcome to enter Whistling Tor not only assert her right to cross into the realm of the marvellous, but also reassure her that she will be protected while within its walls. Caitrin seeks shelter at Whistling Tor because she has fled her abusive relatives and hopes to establish herself as a scribe. As a female, and a poor one at that, attaining any level of self-sufficiency is no easy feat. Juliet Marillier explains in her author notes that Caitrin is not simply 'someone's daughter but a skilled craftswoman seeking to earn her own

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<sup>30</sup> Juliet Marillier, *Heart's Blood* (New York: Roc, 2009), p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 20.

living in a time and culture when independence for women was rare'.<sup>33</sup> The segregated and mystical nature of the fortress allows Caitrin to achieve 'both hiding place and paid work', as the gender codes that govern twelfth-century Ireland—and which would limit a woman's vocational prospects—do not apply to Whistling Tor.<sup>34</sup> Only those who are worthy may pass into Anluan's territory, whatever their sex or background.

In this sense, Whistling Tor becomes a place of sanctuary for Caitrin, much in the same way the stereoscope world acts as refuge for Anthea. The fortress whispers of danger and the supernatural, yet Caitrin believes that 'nothing could be as terrifying as what [she] had left behind'.<sup>35</sup> She is haunted by the memories of her home in Market Cross—a home that was once a 'place of warmth and light', but which is twisted into a nightmare after her father's death.<sup>36</sup>

Caitrin explains to Anluan:

I know it must seem odd that I am so afraid of [Ita and Cillian] ... Just thinking about that time, before I came here, turns me into ... a different person. A person I hate to be, a person I'm ashamed to be. That other Caitrin is powerless. She's always afraid. She has no words.<sup>37</sup>

The Caitrin of Market Cross is silenced by fear. She meekly allows her relatives to abuse her and accepts Ita's criticism that she cannot 'earn a living at men's crafts'.<sup>38</sup> Anluan's fortress, however, grants her the space she needs to find her voice, forming a cocoon of security around her and encouraging her to cultivate her profession as a scribe.

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<sup>33</sup> Juliet Marillier, 'Heart's Blood: Author's Note', *Juliet Marillier: The Website* <<http://www.julietmarillier.com/books/hbauthorsnote.html>> [accessed 6 August 2011].

<sup>34</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 33.

<sup>36</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 122.

<sup>38</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 12.

Whistling Tor is therefore not just a convenient means of escape for Caitrin, such as Viridian was for Anthea; it is also a training ground, designed to prepare Caitrin for the day she re-enters the real world. Jackson notes that the ‘introduction of the “unreal” is set against the category of the “real” ... a category which the fantastic interrogates by its difference.’<sup>39</sup> Thus, the otherworldly ‘host’ of Whistling Tor is juxtaposed with the ‘human monster’ of Caitrin’s society.<sup>40</sup> The monk Eichri might appear as a ‘skeletal’ warrior on a horse of bones, leading a host of ‘gaping mouths and clutching hands’, but it is Cillian and his mother who are portrayed as the real forces of terror and suppression in the novel.<sup>41</sup> Only the human monster has the ability to steal Caitrin’s voice and reduce her to a ‘helpless child, full of self-loathing and timidity’; the host can merely physically repulse.<sup>42</sup>

In this sense, the ‘evil’ that pervades the fortress serves to illuminate and subvert the ‘evil’ of the real world. The host’s outward ugliness acts as an inverted image to the inwardly destructive nature of Cillian, just as the bodiless ‘voice’ that haunts Whistling Tor parallels Ita’s cruel remarks. Market Cross and Anluan’s fortress are two sides of the same coin, and this oscillation between the real and the unreal works to negate the debilitating powers of both. Caitrin is able to dismiss the host because she senses her relatives are her true threat. Similarly, her acceptance of the monstrous host weakens Ita and Cillian’s lingering control over her. Infused with a new sense of hope, Caitrin is able to refute Anluan’s belief that people are ‘trapped in a net of consequences, condemned to paths

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<sup>39</sup> Jackson, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Marillier, *Heart’s Blood*, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Marillier, *Heart’s Blood*, p. 117.

<sup>42</sup> Marillier, *Heart’s Blood*, p. 35.

outside [their] control'.<sup>43</sup> Through her experiences at the fortress, she has come to understand that patterns 'could be broken . . . All it took was courage.'<sup>44</sup>

It is not just courage that Caitrin gains during her stay at Whistling Tor. She is also granted wisdom. One of the defining features of Anluan's fortress is his collection of magical mirrors. The use of magic mirrors is not new to fantasy. In the different versions of Snow White, the evil queen uses a mirror that has the power to speak the truth in order to discover who her rivals are in beauty. Cristina Bacchilega adds that the queen's mirror, by deciding who is fairest, also has the power to define 'the very identity of Snow White' but also the queen's own identity.<sup>45</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott' also features the use of a mirror which 'hangs before her all the year' and where 'Shadows of the world appear'.<sup>46</sup> The Lady of Shalott's mirror shows her 'shadows' of the world outside, taunting her with images of a reality to which she has no access. In each text, and in many other depictions of magic mirrors, the act of looking upon the mirror is a symbol for seeking knowledge and truth. This is no different for Anluan's collection.

Each mirror kept in Whistling Tor holds a different power, but all wield the ability to bestow knowledge upon the viewer. These artefacts act as powerful tools to help Caitrin discern the truth and piece together her fractured identity, particularly in relation to her sense of worth. The Caitrin who initially flees Market Cross has no concept of her value as a woman. Ita has manipulated her

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<sup>43</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 91.

<sup>44</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 91.

<sup>45</sup> Cristina Bacchilega, 'Cracking the Mirror Three Re-Visions of "Snow White"', *boundary 2* 15.3, 16.1 (Spring - Autumn, 1988), 1-25, in *JSTOR* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/303243>> [accessed 13 February 2015], p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Lord Alfred Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott* (1842), *Poetry Foundation* <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174627>> [accessed 13 February 2015].

into believing she is ‘nothing’ and has a ‘whore’s body’—poisonous words that make Caitrin ashamed of her womanhood and sexuality.<sup>47</sup> The ‘voice’ seizes upon this subconscious shame, twisting Caitrin’s feelings for Anluan into crude ‘animal lust’, just like the ugly desire she witnesses Nechtan display in the obsidian mirror.<sup>48</sup> Ironically, it is also because of this vision that Caitrin is able to perceive the truth.

The obsidian mirror works as a link between the viewer and the subject, allowing the user to experience what the person reflected on the surface is thinking and feeling. Caitrin’s vision of Nechtan leaves her feeling ‘filthy’ and ‘wretched’, as if the sorcerer’s lust for his apprentice is a direct violation to her innocence.<sup>49</sup> By comparing the feelings Nechtan arouses within her to her relationship with Anluan, Caitrin is able to separate the truth from the lies and discern that hers is not a ‘selfish desire’.<sup>50</sup> A double-mirror effect has occurred, where the opposing images of sexual desire are reflected back upon each other to collide and form a union of clarity, much in the same way Anthea’s stereoscope joins two photographs to create a single picture. For Caitrin, the image she perceives at the point of fusion is her own love for Anluan, assuring her that she does not need to be ashamed of her desires. She has learnt to accept her sexuality, but only by first mastering the knowledge offered to her through the obsidian mirror.

The mirrors also teach her to trust in her own strength. When Caitrin finds herself locked in the tower with what appears to be no means of escape, it is the mirror hanging on the wall that speaks to her, encouraging her to be resourceful

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<sup>47</sup> Marillier, *Heart’s Blood*, p. 12, 56.

<sup>48</sup> Marillier, *Heart’s Blood*, p. 234.

<sup>49</sup> Marillier, *Heart’s Blood*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>50</sup> Marillier, *Heart’s Blood*, p. 235.

and not rely on others to save her. ‘Use me, Caitrin,’ the mirror whispers in her mind. ‘You got yourself into this silly predicament. Use me and escape. Stay there staring at the floor and you may stay there forever.’<sup>51</sup> The words are a challenge to Caitrin to stop cowering behind her perceived helplessness and to take action. All the knowledge she needs is contained within the mirror; she just needs to look.

In this sense, Caitrin is in much the same predicament as the poisoned Hebrews who follow Moses during their time in the wilderness. God tells Moses, ‘Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole ... [and] every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.’<sup>52</sup> The act of looking upon the serpent is a test of faith to see who is worthy to be healed. Instead of showing her faith in God, however, Caitrin is asked to show faith in herself. If she would but look into the mirror, she would find the means to escape the tower. By passing the mirror’s test, Caitrin has taken the first step to proving that she is no longer the oppressed girl of Market Cross. She has broken out of her shell of helplessness.

It is notable that the concept of mirrors—both physical and metaphorical—should be so prevalent in *Heart’s Blood*. Cristina Bacchilega argues that ‘the tale of magic’s controlling metaphor is the *magic mirror*, because it conflates mimesis (reflection), refraction (varying desires), and framing (artifice).’<sup>53</sup> In a single object the real and ideal is allowed to combine; however, because the image displayed on the surface is only ever a projection and not a true reflection of the subject, the mirror also opens itself to interrogation. Indeed, the very nature of the magic mirror demands one to ask what is trick from truth. It is

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<sup>51</sup> Marillier, *Heart’s Blood*, p. 83.

<sup>52</sup> Numbers 21:8, *The Holy Bible, King James Version* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1989), p. 227.

<sup>53</sup> Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 10.



no surprise, then, that Caitrin is haunted by mirrors and echoes. In many ways the space of Anluan's fortress is one large mirror, reflecting back to Caitrin an image of the real world coloured by magic. What is figurative in Market Cross becomes reality at Whistling Tor, teaching her through the use of supernatural doubles how to 'defeat her demons'.<sup>54</sup>

The motifs of mirror and space also call to mind Henri Wallon's hypothesis of how identity is constructed. According to Wallon's *épreuve du mirior* theory, a child placed in front of a mirror will gradually come to distinguish his or her body from the reflected image 'because of the subject's symbolic comprehension of the imaginary space in which his [or her] unity is created.'<sup>55</sup> By navigating the otherworldly space of Anluan's fortress, Caitrin is likewise able to distinguish her true self from false representations. She is torn between wondering if 'brave Caitrin was only a fantasy' or if the 'cringing, whimpering girl' of Market Cross is her real self.<sup>56</sup> Whistling Tor allows her to bridge the divide between the two, showing her a mirror of what she could be; however, the images she has created of herself are still just that: images. In order for Caitrin to truly discover her identity, she must separate the imitation from the reality and reassert her place in the real world.

It is significant that Caitrin is forced to leave Whistling Tor rather than willingly choosing to re-enter the real world. Rioghan hints that it is Caitrin's duty to 'try to see justice done' for the wrongs Ita and Cillian have committed; however, Caitrin has no wish to confront her past, believing it to be unnecessary

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<sup>54</sup> Marillier, 'Author's Note'.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Roudinesco, 'The Mirror Stage: An Obliterated Archive', in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 29.

<sup>56</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 93.

now that she has found a place where she can be happy.<sup>57</sup> She has become dependent on her sanctuary and is satisfied to remain hidden in the fortress, safe and beyond the reach of her relatives. Marillier makes it clear that Caitrin's desire is neither productive nor justifiable. Whistling Tor may be a place of healing and learning for Caitrin, but it is also just an escape.

Anluan tells Caitrin after she protests at being forced to leave, 'You ask much of me ... [yet] you are afraid to face your own greatest challenge, the one that sent you running up Whistling Tor into my garden.'<sup>58</sup> Anluan exposes Caitrin's hypocrisy, pointing out that although she can be brave when it comes to fighting against the curses and supernatural forces that beset Whistling Tor, she is still running from her own demons. By desiring to stay at the fortress, Caitrin is effectively keeping herself in a cage of her own making and stunting her growth as an individual. She is back to being the woman locked in the tower, too afraid to realise that she already has the key within reach and does not need to remain trapped. The fortress has given her all the knowledge and skills she needs to re-enter the real world; she simply has to trust in herself and take action.

In this sense, Caitrin acts as a complex inversion of the princess figure, as depicted in many fairy tales. Sleeping Beauty and Rapunzel are both trapped in towers or fortresses in which they cannot escape and so are in need of rescue. Caitrin, however, willingly locks herself inside the tower, finding sanctuary and healing within the magical realm. She does not need a prince to rescue her; rather, she functions as the saviour to Anluan, similar to what Beauty, the character that Caitrin is based on, does for the Beast. Unlike Beauty, however, Caitrin has no

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<sup>57</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 265.

<sup>58</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 269.

desire to return to the outside world, knowing that is where her monsters exist. Elizabeth Wanning Harries alludes to the reason for this inversion in her discussion of fairy tale retellings, explaining that ‘contemporary writers fill in gaps, reverse traditional situations, and imagine ways the stories could have been otherwise ... they see what needs to be seen again, and seen afresh—and show it to us.’<sup>59</sup> By inverting the traditional image of the sleeping princess locked in a tower to one who locks herself in a tower, Marillier is demonstrating the power of female autonomy. Rather than being a victim of circumstance, Caitrin has chosen to act, but it is an action that can only go so far in saving her from her demons.

Caitrin’s forcible ejection from Whistling Tor illustrates the limitations of the magical sanctuary. Anluan and his people recognise what Caitrin is too blinded by contentment to perceive: that although the fortress can keep her safe in a physical sense, it is ultimately a dead end for her. If she stays at the fortress, she will remain frozen in time, never moving forward or acquiring any sense of meaning in life. The request for her to leave is then a test to see if she has learnt anything since her departure from Market Cross; it is a test to see if she is truly the strong woman who blossomed within the walls of Anluan’s fortress or if, in the face of adversity, she will simply revert to being ‘the lost soul of last winter again.’<sup>60</sup>

Despite the limitations of the magical sanctuary, the fact that it is Whistling Tor that allows Caitrin to develop the skills to confront her past also reinforces the necessity for such spaces. Caitrin observes after seeking help from a lawman:

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<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 163.

<sup>60</sup> Marillier, *Heart’s Blood*, p. 278.

If I had thought to ask for a lawman's help as soon as Ita and Cillian began to take control ... But no. My flight to the west had led me to Anluan and the household at Whistling Tor ... This summer had healed me, freed me, opened me up.<sup>61</sup>

It is her experiences at Whistling Tor—the acquisition of security, love, courage and knowledge—that heals the wounds Ita and Cillian created and allow Caitrin to discover the power that is within her. Armed with a newfound sense of self-respect and determination, Caitrin not only takes her relatives to court to correct the wrongs that have been committed against her, but is also able to move on and embrace a new future. She states, 'I faced them across the court without flinching ... [then I] came home with my family and closed the door on the past.'<sup>62</sup>

Caitrin's acceptance and eventual dismissal of her past removes the final link between herself and the imaginary. It is as if by closing the door on the past she is also closing the door to the marvellous, stationing herself firmly in the real world. This act is represented in the transformation of Whistling Tor. When Caitrin returns it is to discover that Anluan's fortress is no longer isolated: 'there were people everywhere, not just the fighting men of the host, but men from the settlement, ordinary men who were working alongside the uncanny inhabitants of Whistling Tor.'<sup>63</sup> The fortress has merged with the outside world, suggesting that Caitrin no longer has need of a space separated from reality. She has become whole and assured of her place in the world.

It becomes clear that there is a trend in the way heroines search for and utilise otherworldly spaces. Anthea and Caitrin's experiences illustrate that there are three essential elements inherent in the search for a magical sanctuary: first, that the heroine feels a need to escape from the real world; second, that she gains

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<sup>61</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, pp. 286-287.

<sup>62</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, pp. 312-313.

<sup>63</sup> Marillier, *Heart's Blood*, p. 330.

access to an otherworldly space that appears to fulfil her needs; and third, that she is forced to a crisis point and must relinquish her sanctuary if she is to have a place in the real world. Elizabeth Knox's *The Invisible Road*—an omnibus of the acclaimed *Dreamhunter* (2005) and *Dreamquake* (2007) novels—also follows this template, but with a difference. Where *Heart's Blood* and *Dangerous Spaces* limit access to the realm of the marvellous, Knox's otherworldly 'Place' is open to an entire nation. Anyone with the potential to be a 'dreamhunter' can enter the Place, and even those who cannot pass through the borders are able to have access to the inherent magic of the space via the dreamhunters.

In this sense, *The Invisible Road* distances itself from a focus on the individual search for a 'room of one's own'; instead, it explores the way in which an otherworldly space can shape a nation and so impact upon individuals. Laura Hame does not walk into the Place with the thought of escaping from her reality; the Place is already a firmly entrenched part of her society. However, the nature of the Place does position it as a space existing within the realm of the marvellous—not quite a parallel world, but certainly different. People who enter the Place 'cross an invisible border. They ... walk out of the world of longitude and latitude', and into a land where the laws of time and continuum do not exist.<sup>64</sup> The Place is bleak and 'full of vegetation that wasn't dead, but wouldn't revive. It seemed to continue right at the point of death, year after year, as if time had simply stopped.'<sup>65</sup> It is also a landscape brimming with dreams that are 'as coherent, full and physical as lived experiences—but in which no one was ever themselves'.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Elizabeth Knox, *The Invisible Road* (Sydney: HarperVoyager, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 168.

<sup>66</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 79.

The dreams are later revealed to be human ‘memories from a time in the future’, which the Place uses ‘to try to talk’ to the people of the present.<sup>67</sup> However, for the inhabitants of Knox’s alternative New Zealand, the dreams are merely a natural resource to be used by dreamhunters and their sponsors for economic gain. Jolisa Gracewood explains: ‘The “dreamhunters” are gifted individuals who harvest dreams – visions that seduce, amuse, relax or threaten – for commercial broadcast to eager audiences in glamorous theatres, and curative performances in hospitals and prisons.’<sup>68</sup> Only a select few are born with the power to enter the Place, and even fewer have the ability to extract dreams, making dreamhunters and their dreams a rare commodity. Knox observes that dreamhunters are people whose work means they do not ‘quite live in the world’, and this exempts them from the rules that govern other members of their society.<sup>69</sup>

To become a dreamhunter is a much-desired vocation. Knox writes, ‘It wasn’t compulsory to Try, but many did as soon as they were allowed, because dreams represented a guarantee of work, and the possibility of wealth and *fame*.’<sup>70</sup> The opportunity to become a dreamhunter is especially significant for females. *The Invisible Road* is set in 1906, a time in which the daughters of the rich and fashionable are taught from birth to become ornamental ladies ready to be handed to the most eligible gentleman. Those who are unfortunate enough to be born into a poorer household are left to scrounge a living from whatever work they can find.

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<sup>67</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 614.

<sup>68</sup> Jolisa Gracewood, ‘Book of Revelations’, *Listener*, February 10, 2007, 3483 <<http://www.listener.co.nz/uncategorized/book-of-revelations/>> [accessed 22 July 2011].

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Knox, ‘Interview with Wendy Noble’, *Elizabeth Knox* <[http://www.knoxon.threehats.co.nz/?page\\_id=98](http://www.knoxon.threehats.co.nz/?page_id=98)> [accessed 22 July 2011].

<sup>70</sup> To ‘Try’ is the name used by Knox to describe the event where people gather to test to see if they can enter the Place. The legal age to Try is fifteen, and it is noted that more boys than girls Try because parents are more ‘permissive of boys’. – Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 12.

The Place, however, grants a new opportunity for these young women, offering them a life of freedom, glamour and wealth, should they become a dreamhunter.

Laura Hame, as the daughter of a famous dreamhunter, recognises that her Try will ultimately decide her future:

[A]fter her Try, she would either be in her father's world, or would remain at her school ... to continue her education ... [and] "come out" when she was sixteen and appear at every ball in that season.'<sup>71</sup>

There is no middle ground. Either she will become a dreamhunter and take up her father's legacy or she will join the rest of the debutantes and 'spend the rest of her life dragging about in all [the] cloth' society has deemed befitting a lady.<sup>72</sup> The pressure for her to become a dreamhunter is considerable, and her apprehension is heightened by the fact that she believes her cousin Rose—a person she 'was in the habit of following'—would be able to cross through the invisible border while she would not.<sup>73</sup> However, it is Laura and not Rose who becomes the dreamhunter.

The Place's decision to not allow Rose through the border effectively separates the cousins, and so forces Laura to confront her own identity. Knox writes that Rose and Laura 'were two pips in the core of an apple. But someone had cut the apple.'<sup>74</sup> Divided from her leader, Laura is left adrift, for in the Place there is no Rose to show her where to go or how to move. It is as if Laura is the moon to Rose's sun, but now there is no light to shine on her, leaving her as stripped as a blank canvas. Becoming a dreamhunter offers Laura a chance to create her own sun away from the blinding presence of her cousin; it grants her the space to discover her own thoughts and dreams. Laura explains, 'When I go to the Place I feel that I might be able to catch a dream that will make sense of my

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<sup>71</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>72</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 105.

<sup>73</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 50.

<sup>74</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 109.

whole life.<sup>75</sup> She does not enter the Place to escape her world, but she does sense that it can teach her something. The Place is then not exactly a sanctuary to Laura—as Whistling Tor and Viridian were for Caitrin and Anthea—but it is a space designed to help her grow as an individual.

The Place also acts as a source of power. By calling upon the magic within the song of the ‘Measures’, Laura is able to raise ‘*a person* out of river sand in the Place and the rock she’d kept.’<sup>76</sup> Laura calls her creation ‘Nown’, and though he is able to speak and think for himself, he exists only to serve her as an obedient servant. This sense of control is new and thrilling to Laura, who has always been the follower and not the leader; however, it is a power tempered with weakness. Nown is ‘big and strong, and *wise*’ but he is also ‘*waiting*’ for her to make decisions.<sup>77</sup> Laura’s dependent nature lessens the authority she can wield as Nown’s creator, for in her heart she does not wish to have a servant but someone to ‘look after her’.<sup>78</sup> Knox writes that Laura ‘had made [her sandman] as though she were making her own father, rather than a replacement for her father’s servant.’<sup>79</sup> It is not power Laura wants, but love and guidance.

In this sense, Laura is able to use Nown to fill the absence created by the loss of her father; however, just as Caitrin and Anthea were made aware of the limitations of their sanctuaries, so is Laura forced to recognise that Nown cannot fulfil her needs for a paternal figure. After she catches the ‘dreadful dream’, she seeks comfort from Nown and demands him to be ‘human’.<sup>80</sup> But Nown is not human. His inability to comprehend human emotion stunts his ability to care for

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<sup>75</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 356.

<sup>76</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 257.

<sup>77</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 257.

<sup>78</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 257.

<sup>79</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 257.

<sup>80</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 270.



Laura in the way she desires; hence, instead of returning her embrace, he dandles her ‘like a baby’, acting on an image he has seen of people coaxing ‘their small children out of crying.’<sup>81</sup> Laura’s disappointment is acute, but it also teaches her that a sandman is no substitute for a real father. As Rose concludes, ‘Laura needed people rather than her monster.’<sup>82</sup>

The Place fails to provide Laura with the human love she requires, but it does help her to understand herself by acting as a reference point for her relationship with other humans. Ali Grant explains that one ‘of the factors involved in identity formation, in the process through which we come to see the world differently and act on it, is our interactions with others.’<sup>83</sup> A woman can look in a mirror and see her outward reflection, but she has to compare herself and respond to others in order to understand what is underneath. This becomes clear to Laura when she has sex for the first time with Sandy. Knox writes:

Inside Laura’s great excitement, there was a kind of peaceful expectation. She had felt big and powerful before, and she had felt small and lost. Being like this with Sandy seemed the best way to discover what size she *really* was, and where she belonged, both in her body, and in time and space.<sup>84</sup>

Laura uses her intimacy with Sandy to close the gap between the powerful Laura of the Place and the small, unremarkable Laura who had yet to become a dreamhunter. In doing so, she is able to perceive that she belongs in the human world, and that Sandy, not Nown, is her ‘true future.’<sup>85</sup>

Laura’s acceptance of her home in the real world allows her to relinquish her hold on Nown and, ultimately, the Place itself. She surrenders her right to

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<sup>81</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 270.

<sup>82</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 445.

<sup>83</sup> Ali Grant, ‘UnWomanly Acts: Struggling Over Sites of Resistance’, in *Exploring Bodies, Space, and Gender*, p. 53.

<sup>84</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, pp. 526-527.

<sup>85</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 598.

have access to the otherworldly space in order to protect her loved ones, and it, in turn, denies itself to her, as well as the nation. Knox writes of the disintegration of the Place that greenery ‘burst like fireworks ... Fireworks that froze into permanence, startled trees above gouged wet earth.’<sup>86</sup> The timeless, dead quality of the Place is replaced with life, forcing the otherworldly space into nonexistence. It is an echo of the transformation of Viridian and Whistling Tor, which become merely a stereoscope and an old fortress as the heroines of each story accept their place in the real world. There is a general consensus that magical spaces are only available as long as they are necessary to a heroine’s personal development. The moment she finds her ‘true space’, the realm of the marvellous ceases to exist.

Michelle Fine observes: ‘Rare are the spaces in which girls and women gather as girls and women ... In today’s new gender regime, you must qualify with a badge of (dis)honour to enter a space explicitly for girls and women: battered, teen and pregnant, or anorexic.’<sup>87</sup> Given the limitations and negative connotations associated with Fine’s list, it is not surprising that the imagined space of fantasy has become the most accessible to women, fictional or otherwise. As George Paizis explains, the ‘very idea of [escapist literature] gives an idea of what is being escaped from, that gives rise to its need.’<sup>88</sup> Fantasy opens a window to a world of endless possibilities, allowing readers and heroines alike to explore a space designed to fulfil the needs of its occupants. In these spaces, a woman is able to grow and examine herself away from the influence and expectations of the

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<sup>86</sup> Knox, *The Invisible Road*, p. 633.

<sup>87</sup> Michelle Fine, ‘Foreword’, in *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, edited by Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. xi-xii.

<sup>88</sup> George Paizis, *The Contemporary Romantic Novel in France* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1986), pp. 51-52.

patriarchal hegemony. She is given the room to blossom into her own person; however, as Anthea, Caitrin and Laura discover, a magical escape can only provide so much.

Magical sanctuaries are often temporary purely because they can offer no real future for the heroine. This limitation creates a tension between the need to escape and the need to progress; however, at the heart of this struggle is the simple need to feel whole and to know where one belongs. Anthea, Caitrin and Laura's experiences reveal it is only by breaking free of the sanctuary that this state of completion can be achieved. Like the butterfly, a woman must emerge from her cocoon to discover her true self and the physical and emotional space in which she can truly thrive. It is good to have a 'room of one's own', but eventually the door must open.

## Chapter Three:

### Quests and Journeys: The Search for the Female Self

The quest or journey is a standard theme in fantasy. Heroes and heroines are thrust from their ordinary lives onto a path where they must achieve the impossible: save the world, rescue the princess, stop a great evil. The quests depicted in fantasy are not like the mundane challenges of everyday life, yet in many ways the process of the journey is an allegorical metaphor for an individual's search for identity. Much like the mirror effect that is featured in parallel world fiction, the quest for each hero and heroine is a mirror of the individual's journey in life. Christopher Vogler explains that the 'Hero archetype represents the ego's search for identity and wholeness. In the process of becoming complete, integrated human beings, we are all Heroes facing internal guardians, monsters, and helpers.'<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is not so much the grand tasks, physical prowess, or Machiavellian villains of fantasy that are interesting, but the steps that each character must take to pass the tests placed before them and attain the label of hero or heroine.

For the female heroine, the quest is a critical time of self-discovery. Stereotypes and gender expectations are like an inescapable whisper that runs through everyday life, crafting human behaviour with marionette strings: with each new generation, a woman is reshaped by ideals. She must be quiet, virginal and meek or, in contrast, bold, sexual and independent. A woman must be able to

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters* (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1992), p. 39.

succeed on the arm of a man or need no man at all; she must be traditional or progressive. No matter the time period, the search for a sense of wholeness as a woman is like navigating a minefield of expectations. Voices shout at her from every direction, demanding that she be this or that in order to be considered, 'desirable', 'strong' or 'feminine', and this is a struggle that is captured in fantasy. Her demons are not the grand dragons of ancient tales to illustrate how physically powerful she is, but the patriarchal society that tells her she is too masculine, too soft, too unique. In the end, her task is to simply embrace herself for all that she is, both vulnerable and independent. She must learn to own her identity as a woman.

It is this link between journeys, quests and creating a complete, integrated identity that I will focus on in this chapter. First, I will look at the way Juliet Marillier uses tests and magic in *Wildwood Dancing* (2007) to illustrate the different steps a heroine must take to claim her whole or integrated self, before turning to Marillier's *Daughter of the Forest* (2000), which explores concepts of femininity and strength. By doing so, I hope to uncover the connection between imagined quests, what it means to be feminine, and the struggle of New Zealand women to understand and assert female identity in the twenty-first century.

Before turning to an analytical engagement of the connection between imagined quests and female identity, it is vital to have a theoretical understanding of journeys and the way these quests are constructed in the fantasy genre. Christopher Booker frames the quest as a collection of three ordeals that the hero or heroine must overcome: the first being the monster, the second temptation, and

the third known simply as the ‘final ordeals’.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Booker narrows his focus to specifically three ordeals is significant. He writes:

Three in stories is the number of growth and transformation ... It conveys to us a sense that the miraculous developments which take place in stories do not just happen instantly and effortlessly; they require a steady accumulation of experience, concentration and effort, until everything is ready to allow the transformation to take place.<sup>3</sup>

The three ordeals reflect that there can be no instant or effortless ‘transformation’; instead, the heroine’s path is a ‘steady accumulation’ of challenges and experiences that shape her into becoming whole. By overcoming her monsters and temptations, she is able to prove herself as being worthy of the title of ‘hero’ and, thus, a master of her own identity.

Christopher Vogler takes his analysis of quests further by breaking down the three ordeals that make up a journey into twelve stages:

- 1) Ordinary World
- 2) Call to Adventure
- 3) Refusal of the Call
- 4) Meeting with the Mentor
- 5) Crossing the First Threshold
- 6) Tests, Allies, Enemies
- 7) Approach
- 8) Supreme Ordeal
- 9) Reward
- 10) The Road Back
- 11) Resurrection
- 12) Return with Elixir.<sup>4</sup>

As with Booker, each stage reflects a process of growth and change from the protagonist’s ‘Ordinary’ life to a ‘Resurrection’ of self. The old identity that was weak and limited must die to be replaced with a new, incorruptible version. By doing so, the heroine is able to secure her reward and return to the ‘Ordinary

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Booker, p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> Vogler, p. 18.

World’; however, as Vogler explains, ‘the journey is meaningless unless she brings back some Elixir, treasure, or lesson from the Special World. The Elixir is a magic potion with the power to heal ...but it may be love, freedom, wisdom’.<sup>5</sup>

In short, the quest and its rewards are neither stagnant nor set in stone; each journey is personalised for each heroine, encompassing trials that must be faced along the way. However, the overall theme is that there must be purpose to the journey. As Vogler comments: ‘The values of the Hero’s Journey are what’s important. The images of the basic version ... young heroes seeking magic swords from old wizards, maidens risking death to save loved ones, knights riding off to fight evil dragons ... are just symbols of universal life experiences.’<sup>6</sup> What matters is not that these swords or dragons exist but that lessons can be learned from completing the required tasks. In life and fiction, wisdom is the greatest reward to be earned.

*Wildwood Dancing* is one of Juliet Marillier’s few Young Adult novels and is designed as a template for heroines undertaking a quest of identity. Written as a retelling of the Brothers Grimm story ‘The Frog King’, Juliet Marillier plays with concepts of illusions, tests, and the need to uncover the true identity of a person. The heroine, Jenica, is the second eldest of five daughters; however, instead of being a spoilt princess, as depicted in the Grimm version, she is described as the ‘sensible one’ of her sisters.<sup>7</sup> Jenica explains: ‘I didn’t make a big effort with my appearance. When people commented on our family of sisters, Tati was always the beautiful one, and if they noticed me at all they called me sensible

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<sup>5</sup> Vogler, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Vogler, pp. 30-31.

<sup>7</sup> Juliet Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing* (London: Tor, 2007; first published 2006), p. 99.

or practical.’<sup>8</sup> Jenica takes little interest in being seen as physically appealing, preferring to focus her attention on spending time with her pet frog Gogu, helping her father with his business, and keeping her sisters grounded. Her ambition is not to win a man but to be independent and successful.

Jenica’s dream to shape her own life is the core that lies within her ‘Call to Adventure’ or, rather, the beginning of her journey. Vogler explains that the ‘Call’ is where the heroine is presented with a ‘problem or adventure to undertake ... [it] establishes the stakes of the game, and makes clear the hero’s goal: to win the treasure or lover, to get revenge or right a wrong, to achieve a dream, confront a challenge, or change a life.’<sup>9</sup> There is no secret about what the heroine desires. From the beginning, it is hinted as to what form the reward or Elixir might take shape. In order to take up the ‘Call’, the heroine must leave the ‘Ordinary World’ and accept her journey. For Jenica, leaving the ‘Ordinary World’ takes shape in an interesting way, for she has had access to the Other Kingdom—a place filled with magic—for several years. As such, her ‘Call’ is not so much a separation from a world that is ordinary, but from a life that has become commonplace to her. Indeed, for Jenica it means putting aside her comforts as the daughter of an open-minded merchant to prove to the world that she can be female and independent.

While living under the protection of her father at Piscul Dracului, Jenica exists in the ‘Ordinary World’, free from any threats or major challenges. She explains:

Tati and I had scarcely given a thought to such weighty matters as what might happen to Piscul Dracului with no son to inherit our father’s

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<sup>8</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> Vogler, pp. 19-20.



property. My elder sister was a dreamer, and I had a different kind of future in mind for myself, one in which I would work along-side my father, travelling and trading and seeing the world. Marriage and children were secondary in my scheme of things.<sup>10</sup>

Jenica does not consider that she might be pushed into marriage simply because she is female; instead, she considers the union between a man and a woman as something ‘secondary’ and far away. When her father falls ill and is unable to return home from a business trip overseas, her aunt makes it clear that marriage for a female with no brothers is anything but secondary. Indeed, marriage becomes a ‘frightening reality’ for Jenica, who is told by Aunt Bogdana that she is ‘the ideal age for a young woman to wed’.<sup>11</sup>

The unexpected pressure of finding a marriage companion also raises questions of what is appropriate behaviour for Jenica. She is unable to accept that a union with a man can be the only path for her future, explaining to her aunt how she has heard of ‘women in Venice and other foreign parts who wield great influence in merchant ventures; women who manage business enterprises in their own right.’<sup>12</sup> Bogdana’s response captures society’s opinion of such cases of female entrepreneurs:

That is not a path you can seriously contemplate ... Only a certain kind of female seeks to enter the masculine realm of commerce ... Our strengths lie in the domestic sphere; a truly wise woman is the one who knows her place. You need suitable husbands.<sup>13</sup>

Bogdana states clearly that there is no room for dreams of independence when one is a woman. Society has already decided where her ‘place’ lies: on the arm of a ‘suitable husband’, completing her domestic duties. To break this code of conduct is to be seen as unacceptable, as is hinted in the words that only a ‘certain kind of

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<sup>10</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 75.

female' would choose to enter the 'masculine realm' of commerce and scholarship.

Bogdana also hints at the way society pressures women into objectifying themselves for the male gaze. She tells Jenica that a 'young man needs to view a girl at her best.'<sup>14</sup> By 'best', she means that a woman should make herself as physically appealing as possible so as to attract a husband. This tension between individual choice and societal pressure is illustrated when Bogdana chooses Jenica's dress for an evening ball. Jenica explains:

Aunt Bogdana had decided to put me in dark crimson. The fabric was sumptuous and the cut flattering, though it put more of me on show than I was comfortable with. It was a suitable choice for attracting men, but it was wrong for me. I knew Gogu didn't like it.<sup>15</sup>

The flattering cut of the dress is designed to put her on 'show' for the sole purpose of 'attracting men'. It does not matter that Jenica feels uncomfortable being under such physical scrutiny; only that she can use her body to appeal to a man and, thus, gain a husband. In this society, a woman's feelings or individuality are irrelevant; she will be told what is an appropriate dress, appropriate hobby, and who is an appropriate man. These values are so engrained that it is other women, like Bogdana, who uphold and enable this hegemonic code of expectations and gender behaviours. Whether they realise it or not, Bogdana and those like her are mere servants to the patriarchal ideals.

If Bogdana is the female voice of reason reminding her fellow women not to cross those invisible boundaries that divide the feminine and masculine realm, then Cezar, Jenica's cousin, is the voice that represents patriarchal control. He disapproves of Jenica helping with the business accounts and says that the special

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<sup>14</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 160.

classes her younger sister Paula has been receiving ‘should be brought to an end ... before any more damage is done ... This teaching, these visits by the priest. History, philosophy, Greek ... Most men get by well enough without that kind of knowledge, and a woman can have no hope of understanding it.’<sup>16</sup> His words are blunt and derogatory, claiming that women have no need for education and, if given the chance, have no ‘hope of understanding’ the point of such lessons. Indeed, the very thought of women learning beyond the domestic sphere is seen as damaging to the female mind, as if she is glass that would slowly chip and shatter the more she learns.

Cezar also has firm views about Jenica’s choice of companion. He does not understand why she chooses to have a frog as a friend. ‘As for the frog,’ he says, ‘you should get rid of it, Jena. You’re a young woman now. If you must have a little companion, and I know ladies are fond of such things, a cat or a terrier would be far more suitable.’<sup>17</sup> Not only does he shame her for desiring to become a merchant, but he also seeks to dictate ‘suitable’ friends for her. Frogs might have been worshipped as the symbol of life by ancient Egyptians, but within myth and folklore the pond-dwelling amphibians have been mostly associated with witchcraft and viewed as slimy, repugnant creatures.<sup>18</sup> Gogu, therefore, is not seen as a ‘suitable’ pet for Jenica. Instead, Cezar tells her she should find a nice cat or terrier—something feminine and unthreatening, that does not shake the foundations of convention.

Jenica is trapped in a society that does not allow her to reach her dreams or even to embrace the things that she loves. Her ability to assert herself as an

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<sup>16</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> J.C. Cooper, *Symbolic and Mythological Animals* (London: Aquarian Press, 1992), pp. 106–108.

individual, let alone safeguard her future, is stunted at every turn. Females cannot inherit property; thus, should Jenica and her sisters remain unmarried, they would eventually have to surrender control of Piscul Dracului to Cezar, who is their eldest male relative. Jenica muses about this prospect: 'If Father died, everything would belong to Cezar and our future would be in his hands. Cezar, who did not believe women deserved lives of their own.'<sup>19</sup> She recognises the threat that he presents to her and her sisters. He would not just be running the land; he would be running their lives, dictating every little part of it because, as Jena comments, 'he thinks girls are an inferior breed, not suited to anything except cooking and cleaning.'<sup>20</sup>

In this sense, Cezar becomes the 'Monster' or the first ordeal of Jenica's journey. While her father is ill overseas, Cezar slowly begins to assume more control of Piscul Dracului. His first step is to take over the accounts, which Jenica has previously been maintaining. Cezar justifies his actions by telling her that he has the family's 'best interests at heart' and that it is better if the girls are given 'a little' for their expenses each week so that he can be 'in a position to approve each item.'<sup>21</sup> This arrangement, he argues, will ensure that the girls stick within their budget. His words are full of concern and would appear to be wise, but Jenica is not fooled by his mask of benevolence. She perceives that what he has actually done is to make the girls dependent. Having been forced to relinquish control of the accounts, Jenica and her sisters are now completely reliant on Cezar's permission for any purchases they might need to make. If he does not approve of their activities, he can withhold funding.

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<sup>19</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>20</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 88.

Cezar also moves the wares from Piscul Dracului to his own home, cutting Jenica off from being able to access any merchandise for her father's business. She notes: 'He was behaving as if Father were already dead; he was acting like some kind of patriarch and I wasn't going to put up with it.'<sup>22</sup> Her frustration at the usurpation of her power is acute. She can sense that, if not stopped, Cezar would take control of everything that she is and loves, becoming the true 'patriarch' of not just Piscul Dracului but also her life. He confirms her suspicions when he discloses that he wishes to make her his wife. Instead of courting her romantically, however, he is all dominance and force. Jenica describes the imprint of his hand on her waist as feeling like 'a brand of ownership', as if she were an object rather than a woman with emotions.<sup>23</sup>

The kiss that he forces upon her is also fraught with ugliness and dominance. Jenica explains that his 'kiss was not about love or tenderness. It was a kiss of possession, and it bruised my lips and wounded my heart.'<sup>24</sup> With one kiss he has destroyed her dreams about romance and made her feel 'wounded'.<sup>25</sup> Cezar cannot view women as anything but a possession to be controlled, and in that he has also stolen Jenica's agency. He ignores her pleas to let her and her sisters have a chance to prove they are capable of handling their own affairs and mocks her when she stands up to him.<sup>26</sup> He says: 'You said all I want is control. That sounds more like you, Jena. A woman who seeks to have her hands on the reins day and night has a lonely future ahead of her.'<sup>27</sup> His words are designed to make her feel ugly and unlovable for even daring to stand up for her rights as a

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<sup>22</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 162.

<sup>23</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 217.

<sup>24</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 225.

<sup>25</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 225.

<sup>26</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 134.

<sup>27</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 133.

woman, telling her that she will have a 'lonely future' if she continues along this path. Though she wishes to dismiss him and his comments, she cannot because, even though she accepts that he is 'full of ideas and theories that clashed utterly with' her own, she owed Cezar her life and 'had never forgotten that'.<sup>28</sup>

Jenica's journey has now shifted through several quest stages: she has heard the Call, and though she has no clear mentor, she has expressed reluctance in accepting the task she has been given because of past ties to Cezar. A refusal of the Call is important because it emphasises the difficulty of the journey ahead. As Vogler explains: 'After all, she is facing the greatest of all fears, terror of the unknown.'<sup>29</sup> It is fear that holds Jenica back from truly fighting against her cousin, yet the more she tries to reason with Cezar in a non-confrontational way, the more dominating he becomes, seeking to control every facet of her life—even to the point where he desires to destroy the Other Kingdom and all of its inhabitants. In that moment she understands that, no matter the good deeds that he has done in the past, he must be stopped if she is to save her home and her own future. This seals her acceptance to take up the mantle of hero and, thus, cross the 'First Threshold' into the Special World. It also leads her to the second ordeal of her journey.

Booker describes the second ordeal as being a stage of 'temptation'. It is a continuous, 'deceptive' battle to test the heroine's commitment to her quest.<sup>30</sup> Jenica has at last recognised the Monster for what he is and begun the process of preparing herself to defeat her cousin. The stakes have been made clear: to defeat Cezar is to win her autonomy and be 'able to choose properly' whom she will

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<sup>28</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> Vogler, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Booker, p. 74.

marry; to give up is to watch the Other Kingdom be destroyed and become a silent trophy on the arm of a man.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, she has reached the stage of ‘Approach’, which covers all the preparations for ‘entering the Inmost Cave and confronting death or supreme danger.’<sup>32</sup> Here, she must pass tests, discover who her allies and enemies are, and learn the extent of her own strength. However, because of the nature of the second ordeal, each test or step that she takes closer to the Inmost Cave is fraught with temptations to blind her sense of purpose.

The temptations that Jenica faces are all initiated by Tadeusz, one of the Night People from the Other Kingdom. He first appeals to her desires as a woman, tempting her with promises of excitement and adventure. Tadeusz tells her:

“You are young and not unattractive ... Why not abandon the rules with which you hedge yourself ... and seek enjoyment, adventure, fulfilment? I would take some pleasure in teaching you ...” He ran a chilly finger down my neck and across the part of my chest exposed by the green gown, a gesture of shocking intimacy.<sup>33</sup>

Tadeusz’s intention is made clear in his ‘gesture of shocking intimacy’: he could give her the physical pleasure for which she secretly yearns. He encourages her to ‘abandon the rules’ she has placed on herself and her sisters—rules that Jenica explains helped ‘us to remember who we were and where we belonged.’<sup>34</sup> If she ignores the rules of the Other Kingdom—which are to not eat the food, leave the safety of the glade, or stay too long—she risks losing her ability to return to the real world. If she cannot return to Piscul Dracului, she also cannot protect her home from Cezar.

It is significant that desire should be the first temptation. Lacanian psychoanalysis describes desire as being ‘founded on lack or absence’; it is the

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<sup>31</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>32</sup> Vogler, p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 22.

‘neverending search for completion, unity, or wholeness’.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the object of desire—whether that object be human or otherwise—is a false representation of completeness because it promises to satisfy what one lacks. For Jenica, the absence she yearns to fill is to know what it is like to be admired as a woman and to feel the thrill of living without rules or responsibilities. Tadeusz claims that he can offer this to her; however, the core of desire is that it is also just an illusory moment of wholeness, designed to distract rather than to truly fulfil. This struggle to discern between illusions and distractions is especially critical for the questing heroine. Booker explains:

The essence of the Temptation is that it holds out the promise of some physical gratification ... But often the danger the hero runs is simply that he will be seduced and lulled into forgetting the great task he has undertaken.<sup>36</sup>

Just as Odysseus was trapped for years under Circe’s spell, not even aware that time was slipping by like sand in his cupped hands, so is Jenica threatened with losing herself to the Other Kingdom and, thus, any chance she has to stop Cezar. By resisting Tadeusz, she not only demonstrates her worthiness as a heroine, but also illustrates her determination to not settle for illusions of wholeness.

The second temptation uses her fear of the quest and what it entails against her. When Jenica realises that she must stop Cezar, the first thing she does is go to Dancing Glade and ask the forest queen, Ileana, for help. Ileana responds by saying that Jenica must solve her own puzzles.<sup>37</sup> Though the fairy folk have been gracious enough to invite the sisters into their glade to dance and be happy, the queen warns that it is not the fairy folks’ place to act as a *deus ex machina* for

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Klages, ‘Desire’, in *Key Terms in Literary Theory* (London: Continuum, 2012), *Credo Reference*, <<http://search.credoreference.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/content/entry/contlt/desire/0>> [accessed 2 February 2015].

<sup>36</sup> Booker, p. 74.

<sup>37</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 109.



humans. If Jenica wishes to stop her cousin, she must learn to trust her instincts and figure out how to do it herself. Tadeusz once again offers a tempting solution by suggesting that the Night People could take care of Cezar for her. He says: ‘This cousin is nothing ... He can be stopped from interfering in your affairs ... He could simply be [removed].’<sup>38</sup> Here, she is given an easy option to complete her quest, and all without lifting a finger. Cezar and his controlling ways could simply be ‘removed’, leaving her and her sisters free once more.

The final test is designed to cater to her pride. Having refused Tadeusz’s offer to have the night people murder Cezar, she is left with finding her own way to stop her cousin and save the Other Kingdom. Once more, Tadeusz is there to whisper in her ear the tempting words that would lead her astray. He explains to her that at the ‘Dark of the Moon’ there is another portal she can use to enter the Other Kingdom, and that it will ‘unveil a world of knowledge’ to her through a special mirror.<sup>39</sup> Jenica refuses at first, fearing it will be too dangerous, but Tadeusz plays on her pride by saying that she is ‘not brave enough’ to use the other portal.<sup>40</sup> He taunts her to give proof that she is not just a weak female; however, the need to prove him wrong is to gratify her own pride rather than because the mirror is necessary to her quest.

Jenica succumbs to the final temptation, and is forced to pay the price. She enters the Other Kingdom during the Dark of the Moon and discovers it to be a dark, twisted place that is nothing like the joyful glade in which she and sisters dance under the patronage of Ileana. As if to rub salt into the wound, she finds the mirror and is gifted visions that are more disturbing than illuminating. In

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<sup>38</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 110.

<sup>39</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 111.

<sup>40</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 112.

particular, she is shown the image of a man who seems perfect for her in every way until he turns into a monster and hurts her sisters.<sup>41</sup> Anastasia, Tadeusz's sister, highlights the cause for Jenica's downfall: 'You are thirsty for knowledge; you must have it whatever the cost, because knowledge allows control.'<sup>42</sup> The struggle has come full circle, reminding Jenica that what she really yearns for is to be independent and in control of her life. In that, she also understands that she cannot trust the Night People.

It becomes clear that the monsters of the second ordeal are not physical; they are the inner demons of her heart: desire, fear, pride. For Jenica, the second ordeal is a critical test of her own strength and worthiness. Though she succumbed to the final temptation, this moment of weakness is also an important part of the quest and aids her in preparation for overcoming the Supreme Ordeal. Vogler explains that, at this point in the hero's journey, 'the fortunes of the hero hit bottom in a direct confrontation with his greatest fear. He faces the possibility of death and is brought to the brink in a battle with a hostile force.'<sup>43</sup> It is important for the heroine to feel completely helpless in order to understand the depth of her strength. By facing the insurmountable, she is forced to do the impossible in order to complete her quest.

Jenica's descent into the Supreme Ordeal begins when she crosses the deadwash—a wasteland of frozen water—to find the witch Drăguța to request her assistance in stopping Cezar from destroying the Other Kingdom. Jenica is aware of the danger, noting that 'if the ice broke and I fell through, I would freeze so fast

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<sup>41</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 192.

<sup>42</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 190.

<sup>43</sup> Vogler, p. 25.

I wouldn't have time to drown.'<sup>44</sup> She is scared, but she has also learnt to put pragmatism aside and trust her instincts. Jenica says to Gogu, 'I think what we need to show is ... well, blind faith.'<sup>45</sup> Her decision to trust, or at least hope, that Drăguța will not let the ice crack is a statement of her newfound humility. Jenica has relinquished the pride that saw her use the portal at Dark of the Moon, allowing her to be receptive enough to honest advice to have an audience with the powerful witch of the deadwash. As a reward for passing the test of faith, Drăguța offers a sleeping potion to use on Cezar's guards, who patrol Piscul Dracului, and tells Jenica to trust her instincts; however, the witch also warns that 'nothing comes without a cost', not even her own assistance.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, in return for helping Jenica, Drăguța demands that she be given Gogu as payment. This is a price that Jenica cannot pay, and though Drăguța accepts an alternative offering of food with good grace, a price is still taken when Jenica kisses Gogu on the head and sees her dear friend transform into a man—specifically, the man clothed in rags whom she envisioned attacking her sisters in the mirror.

Gogu's transformation from frog to man signifies two key ideas: the first that Jenica is afraid of her sexual desires, as reflected in her musing that she 'felt his touch all through' her body when their hands brush, and that she needed all of her 'strength to fight' the compelling feelings he arouses within her.<sup>47</sup> The twisted image of him turning into a monster haunts her mind and stops her from embracing the mutual attraction which they both feel for each other. Secondly, the transformation tests her sense of loyalty. As an amphibian, Gogu has never been given reason to doubt his bond with Jenica, but she is overwhelmed by her

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<sup>44</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 257.

<sup>45</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 256.

<sup>46</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 261.

<sup>47</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 266.

confused emotions now that he is human and turns away, leaving him alone on the deadwash.

The experience on the deadwash is a metaphor for Jenica's death: 'a critical moment in any story ... in which the hero must die or appear to die so that she can be born again.'<sup>48</sup> Losing Gogu is, in essence, the same as losing her life. She can no longer see what she is fighting for or why—only that her dearest friend has been lost to a 'creature from the mirror' who has the power to inspire the sweetest of feelings inside her body.<sup>49</sup> However, the period of death is also one of rebirth and discovery, and this is no different for Jenica. After being told to 'trust her instincts' so many times, she decides to uncover the truth behind Gogu's mysterious transformation. What she learns is that Gogu is actually Costi, Cezar's older brother, and that he is the same boy whom she thought had drowned while she, Cezar and Costi played 'King of the Lake' back when they were all children.<sup>50</sup>

The truth regarding Gogu's true identity is the sword or 'Reward' that allows Jenica to defeat the real monster of the novel. Vogler explains: 'Sometimes the "sword" is knowledge and experience that leads to greater understanding and a reconciliation with hostile forces.'<sup>51</sup> Learning that Gogu is actually her lost cousin helps her to bridge the chasm of distrust between herself and Costi; it also serves as the final weapon to defeat Cezar. Drăguța reveals that their childhood game was the catalyst for each of their lives becoming intertwined with magic. She reminds Costi, 'You can't claim the title of king without giving something in return. King of the Lake, King of the Land, Queen of the Fairies – such titles are

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<sup>48</sup> Vogler, p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 282.

<sup>50</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 42

<sup>51</sup> Vogler, p. 26.

not idly bestowed or easily won.’<sup>52</sup> Cezar, who wished to be ‘King of the Land’, is granted his wish by allowing Costi to drown in the lake, thus making him the eldest son and heir to Vârful cu Negură, as well as Piscul Dracului should none of the sisters marry. Costi’s return leaves Cezar with nothing: no power, no land, and no Jenica. Because of Jenica’s determination, he has been defeated and her freedom won.

Booker describes the last phase of the quest as being the ‘Final Ordeals’. He writes that the ‘hero has to undergo a last series of tests (often three in number) to prove that he is truly worthy of the prize.’<sup>53</sup> Jenica’s ‘prize’ is Costi’s love, just like the heroes of old who earned the hand of the fairest maiden in the land. However, just helping to break the frog spell and restore him as heir to Vârful cu Negură is not enough to win his love. Jenica betrayed Costi when she abandoned him at the deadwash and so must also pass three tests to regain his trust. Her sisters tell her that ‘if it was a story’ she would have ‘to grovel to get him back’, as depicted in the tale of the young woman who gives ‘mysterious gifts’ to win the attention of her lover.<sup>54</sup> Jenica admits that she is ‘not the grovelling type’, but she does want to prove to Costi that she loves him.<sup>55</sup> Inspired by her courage, her sisters each give her a personal item to act as ‘magical objects’ for her quest. Paula comments, ‘We’ve each chosen something special; imagine you’re taking us all with you to help.’<sup>56</sup> Armed with her sister’s love, Jenica is ready to face her final ordeal and win her reward.

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<sup>52</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup> Booker, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, pp. 333-334.

<sup>55</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 334.

<sup>56</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 338.

The gifts that Jenica chooses to give to Costi each have their own significance and meaning. The first gift is a homemade pancake she cooks over a fire, using the familiar scent of their past memories to summon him and remind ‘him how things were.’<sup>57</sup> The second gift is a carapace shaped as a heart, which symbolises the act of offering him her love. Finally, she offers a kiss as her third gift, sealing their futures together as a couple. His choice to accept her gifts signals the end of her quest. The monster has been defeated, the temptations overcome, the final ordeals completed, and the reward claimed. Though it could be argued that Jenica’s engagement to Costi subverts her original goal to not marry, the nature of the events that lead to the engagement reinforces that Jenica has not lost her independence by choosing a husband. Indeed, when placed in contrast to her sister Tatiana’s engagement to Sorrow, it is apparent that Jenica is anything but a passive heroine who will allow herself to be ruled by the patriarchy.

While Jenica chooses to battle, struggle and earn Costi’s love, Tatiana acts as if she has no choice but to love Sorrow. She explains to Jenica that it is like a tide pulling her along and that it is ‘too strong to swim against.’<sup>58</sup> When Sorrow is taken away from her, she does not act but allows herself to wither away in solitude until she is nothing more than ‘an enchanted princess in some dark tale ... [lying] immobile against her pillow.’<sup>59</sup> As a woman, Tatiana might be renowned for being the most beautiful of all her sisters, but her ‘femininity alone is not enough to save her from imprisonment.’<sup>60</sup> Sorrow is the one who has to save Tatiana. As with Jenica’s quest to win Costi, he completes three trials in order to

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<sup>57</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 334.

<sup>58</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 99.

<sup>59</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 356.

<sup>60</sup> Booker, p. 263.

earn Tatiana's hand in marriage and bring her back from the brink of death, like a prince who has come to awake his Sleeping Beauty.

The endings of each couple also illustrates the difference between an active and passive heroine. Jenica notes:

In my heart I knew that, for me and for Costi, the visits to Dancing Glade were over. We had moved on to a new adventure, one that belonged wholly in our own world ... [but] my lovely sister [was] destined to fade from human memory and become a princess in a fairytale, captured by a dark suitor from a realm beyond.<sup>61</sup>

Though Tatiana was saved by Sorrow, her ending remains a mystery. She is 'destined to fade from human memory', and even the wording in which Jenica uses to describe her sister's love—the idea of being 'captured by a dark suitor'—hints of submission. The message is clear: to truly achieve a complete, integrated identity one must take action and not be a victim of circumstance. As such, Jenica is able to choose to love without fear of losing her independence. Instead, she is able to reach for her dreams with Costi at her side, having attained the wisdom or the 'Elixir' she needed to achieve a perfect state of wholeness.

Juliet Marillier further explores the concepts of active versus passive heroines and what it means to be a 'strong' female in *Daughter of the Forest*. Contemporary view of femininity versus strength is often contradictory. On the one hand, the modern girl can be sexy, intelligent, and a master of combat; however, as Susanna Barlow argues, rather than 'highlighting the feminine powers the female heroes are relegated to copycat versions of male heroes.'<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Barlow further goes on to explain that what society ends up with in its

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<sup>61</sup> Marillier, *Wildwood Dancing*, p. 365.

<sup>62</sup> Susanna Barlow, 'Understanding the Hero Archetype', in *On Archetypes* (May 13, 2013) <<http://susannabarlow.com/on-archetypes/understanding-the-hero-archetype/>> [accessed 13 February 2015].

attempt to break away from traditionally passive heroines ‘is a stereotype of the tough female that can go toe to toe with any man and who is also highly sexual. This stereotype is unrealistic and denies women their innate strengths.’<sup>63</sup>

More troubling is that it is difficult for women to assert their previously accepted feminine characteristics, let alone criticise this new toughened version of womanhood, without committing a social faux pas. Angela McRobbie explains that the ‘new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique in order to count as a modern, sophisticated girl.’<sup>64</sup> Yet Marillier does exactly the opposite by portraying Sorcha, the main protagonist, in a specifically feminine way that fits traditional views of a woman being self-sacrificing and submissive, thus interrogating what it means to be a strong female.

Sorcha is the only girl in her family and has six older brothers. She is privileged compared to many of her female peers because of her father’s status as Chieftan of Sevenwaters, but she is also unique for the skills she can boast. Sorcha does not spend her days learning ‘fine embroidery’ or how to plait ‘hair into intricate coronets’; however, she can read—a rare thing for females of that time.<sup>65</sup> She also teaches herself the ‘healer’s art’, for she senses in her heart that this would be her ‘true work’.<sup>66</sup> Because of this special skill set, Sorcha does not understand why she should have to worry about marriage: ‘Why should I be polished and improved like goods for sale?’ she demands. ‘I might not even want to marry! And besides, I have many skills ... Why should I change to please some

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<sup>63</sup> Barlow.

<sup>64</sup> Angela McRobbie, ‘Notes on Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime’, in *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, edited by Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2004), (p. 9).

<sup>65</sup> Juliet Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest* (New York: Tor, 2000) p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 6.



man?’<sup>67</sup> Her words are an echo of Jenica’s, stating quite clearly that this is not a heroine who cares for romance or being the object of the male gaze. Sorcha yearns to follow her own path.

The ‘Call to Adventure’ disrupts Sorcha’s fantasy of being an independent healer when her step mother, the Lady Oonagh, seeks to destroy Sorcha’s family and rule Sevenwaters. Oonagh transforms Sorcha’s brothers into swans and promises to hunt down Sorcha, who was the sole escapee from the curse. Desperate and afraid, Sorcha flees into the forest of Sevenwaters and meets Lady Deirdre. This woman acts as Sorcha’s Mentor, offering key advice and issuing the Call. Lady Deirdre tells Sorcha that she does have a choice to undertake the quest: she could ‘flee and hide, and wait to be found’, living out her ‘days in terror, without meaning’ or she ‘can take the harder choice’ and save her brothers.’<sup>68</sup>

In order to break the curse, Sorcha will have to ‘fashion a shirt’ for each of her brothers. Lady Deirdre explains:

[Every] stitch of these garments will be your own work ... But there is more. From the moment you leave this place till the moment of your brothers’ final return to humankind, no word must pass your lips, no cry, no song, no whisper must you utter. Nor will you tell your story in pictures ... or in any other way ... You will be silent, mute as the swans themselves. Break this silence, and the curse remains forever.<sup>69</sup>

Sorcha’s task is to sew and to be silent—the epitome of traditional femininity. She cannot seek assistance nor can she express frustration. She simply has to be as ‘mute as the swans themselves’ and complete the six shirts.

Sorcha is conscious of the magnitude of the task she has been given, yet just stitching the shirts out of any old cloth will not suffice. Lady Deirdre tells her that the garments must be crafted from starwort: a plant that appears ‘soft like a

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<sup>67</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 107.

<sup>68</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 152.

<sup>69</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 153.

pigeon's feathers' but is actually filled with tiny needles that bury 'deep in the flesh, to burn and burrow and torture like fire.'<sup>70</sup> Sorcha realises that if she is to make these garments and save her brothers, she would have to 'suffer as they were suffering.'<sup>71</sup> This is especially true since she has no tools to help make weaving the plant stems into thread easier, short of what she can fashion herself in the forest, let alone the skill to actually stitch the garments.<sup>72</sup> Her attempts are painful and frustrating as 'strand by creeping strand of brittle thread ... broke and unravelled and would not twist' until she has to give up out of sheer agony and plunge her hands 'in the stream to soothe them.'<sup>73</sup>

Having taken up the Call, the nature of the quest also demands that her determination be tested with temptations and tests to see if she can indeed complete her task. The first temptation she faces is to escape her pain. The poison of the starwort is a constant companion to her in the forest, swelling her hands until she cannot bear to look at them and embedding her heart with emotional wounds as if the tiny needles were piercing through flesh and bone to the life-giving organ itself. Sorcha finds herself wondering if she was 'stupid to believe ... [she] could lift the spell.'<sup>74</sup> The pain of weaving the thread is so intense, and with every day that passes she is forced to watch her hands become more grotesque.

It is apparent that Sorcha is troubled by the transformation of her hands. She begins to compare herself to the women featured in myths and legend, mourning how different their lives are because of her quest. She comments:

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<sup>70</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 160.

<sup>71</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 160.

<sup>72</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 160.

<sup>73</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 162.

<sup>74</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 159.

The noble ladies of the ancient tales, Etain ... and Niamh of the golden hair ... they cannot have been spinners and weavers, for their hands are described as white and fair ... hands for a brave warrior to kiss when he returns victorious from battle. Hands suited to fine embroidery, or playing the harp ... The ladies in the old tales had never heard of starwort.<sup>75</sup>

Sorcha is all too conscious that no man would kiss her ruined hands, nor would she be able to play a delicate instrument like the harp with such swollen, tortured fingers. The starwort is destroying her beauty, and in her darker moments she admits to hearing 'an inner voice' that says, 'this task is impossible. Why not give up now?'<sup>76</sup> There is no guarantee that she will ever be able to complete her quest. One word, one small sound, and the curse will become permanent. Yet Sorcha does not give up; instead, she tells herself stories, though not aloud, as a distraction. Eventually, she notes that her body 'accepted the inevitable, and my hands grew scarred and hard in defence at their ill treatment. The pain still remained, but I could go on.'<sup>77</sup>

Sorcha's decision to 'go on' sets in motion the second test, which challenges her oath of silence. Having spent almost two years alone in the forest with only her brother Cormack's dog for company, she is taken by surprise when the two men come for her, led by the 'simpleton' who had caught sight of her once.<sup>78</sup> One of the men slaughters the dog for attacking him, and then the two take turns raping her while the simpleton whimpers in fear. Sorcha describes her experience:

It hurt; it hurt so much, and I had no voice to curse him. I tried our old trick, tell a story to block out the pain ... I tried and tried, as it went on and on, and one shuddered and pulled away, and the other took his place ... The story slipped from my grasp, and there was only the awful, endless

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<sup>75</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>76</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 162.

<sup>77</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 163.

<sup>78</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 199.

pounding, and the ugly voices, and the rising scream that threatened to burst out of me, however hard I clenched my teeth shut.<sup>79</sup>

The pain and the horror of the rape test her in the most excruciating way to see if she can keep her silence. She tries to use stories to distract herself, as she did with learning to weave the starwort, but the story keeps slipping from her grasp. In the end, Sorcha is able to hold in her screams, yet her spirit is left ‘full of fear and hatred and shame.’<sup>80</sup>

Sorcha’s grief for the loss of her innocence, so forcibly taken from her, is matched only by her despair that she is now utterly alone. She explains: ‘I had been there to help Simon, and others before him. But who was there to help me?’<sup>81</sup> There is no one in whom she can turn to for aid. Her quest is one of suffering, solitude and silence. Even when her brothers visit her on the one night they are able to briefly become human, she feels no sense of relief. Instead, she notes that they discussed her as if she were a ‘piece in their game of strategy; a prized one, but still just an object to be manoeuvred.’<sup>82</sup> Angered but also saddened by what has happened to their younger sister, the brothers believe it is their right to decide that she must not be allowed to continue the quest; however, though Sorcha has been damaged in both body and spirit, she refuses to stray from the path she has taken. It was her choice to accept the quest, and it will be her choice to end it.

Despite having recommitted herself to the quest, Sorcha is aware that her soul and the forest have been tainted by the ‘evil that had happened there.’<sup>83</sup> She spends months half-heartedly weaving the garments, even as her spirit continues

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<sup>79</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 199.

<sup>80</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 202.

<sup>81</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 204.

<sup>82</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 205.

<sup>83</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 213.

to sicken and wither, crushing her motivation. Finally, the Lady Deirdre appears and tells Sorcha that she must leave on the boat: ‘You are not the first woman of your race to be abused thus by men, nor will you be the last ... Now you must go from here ... [the boat] will carry you where you need to go.’<sup>84</sup> It is a testament of Sorcha’s character that she obeys, throwing herself into the unknown for the sake of being able to complete her quest. Creatures in the water try to tempt her into drowning and giving up the shirts, to say ‘farewell’ to her pain, but Sorcha ignores their coaxing whispers.<sup>85</sup> She has taken up the hero’s mantle, and in that she knows she must carry the burden of her ordeals, making whatever sacrifice is needed.

Her commitment to carry the hero’s mantle is put to the test several times when she is rescued from drowning by a Briton named Red and taken to his homeland. Trapped in a strange land with people who are meant to be her enemies, she nevertheless continues to weave her shirts out of starwort in silence. As time passes, she finds herself falling in love with Red, which only makes her task that much harder to bear. She believes that the only reason Red continues to grant her sanctuary is because the fair folk have somehow manipulated him into being her protector. She certainly does not believe that he could actually care for her in return. Sorcha explains:

I was damaged goods; spoiled goods ... [My father] would wish me to marry to advantage ... But he’d have a hard time finding any takers ... [Instead] I would become an old woman, muttering and mumbling over herbs, mixing possets for what ails you. Wasn’t that what I had always wanted? Somehow, now, it no longer seemed enough.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 215.

<sup>85</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 218.

<sup>86</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 355.

Her dream to become a healer seems childish and empty now that her heart has been touched by the adult emotions of love. Red's patience and kindness has taught her to trust men again; however, she still has no sense of self-worth, believing herself to be 'damaged goods', not just because of the rape but also her 'ugly hands.'<sup>87</sup> The realisation is another wound to add to her battered heart, yet she does not falter in her task, making her hands even uglier with each woven thread.

Sorcha's life is also threatened because of her association with Red. The Britons believe she has 'ensnared their Lord' with some kind of witch power that she wields through her strange weavings.<sup>88</sup> Eventually, she is imprisoned and ordered to be executed under the suspicion of treachery by Richard, Red's uncle, and Lord of a neighbouring land. Richard taunts her in her cell as she continues to weave the last of her starwort shirts, asking her why she does not try to save herself. 'Any other girl would be on her knees pleading by now,' he comments, and hints that she could use her body to change his mind.<sup>89</sup> Sorcha does not take the bait and instead focusses on finishing the shirt, sensing that her time in this world is closing. She explains:

I worked on, and the half-made shirt, which was the last of the six, was stained with blood from my hands, and filth from the room, and it was wet with my tears. He who wore this garment would wear my love, my pain, and my terror. These things would set him free.<sup>90</sup>

No matter the circumstances, Sorcha refuses to give up her task. She has withstood everything that the quest has placed before her: passed every test,

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<sup>87</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 241.

<sup>88</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 351.

<sup>89</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 422.

<sup>90</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, pp. 426-427.

suffered every ignominy, and, like a lamb to slaughter, has accepted that she will die for her cause in silence.

Richard's response to Sorcha's unwavering determination is an echo of how society views females. He observes that, for a time, he thought that she was just pretending to be mute and had some cunning plan to insert herself into Harrowfield and take over the land, just as Oonagh had done to Sevenwaters, but 'after a while, I began to change my mind,' he continues. 'You'll never talk. The boy's fooling himself if he thinks so. You're a girl; girls scream when they're hurt. They cry when they're upset. Girls don't hold out for days and moons and years with never a squeak out of them. You'll burn without uttering a sound.'<sup>91</sup> He cannot believe that Sorcha, as a female, has the strength to withstand so much 'without uttering a sound'. Girls are meant to be weak; they are meant to cry and complain and rely on men to be their strength. Sorcha has broken the mould, and she has done it all in what appears to be passive silence, a traditionally feminine trait.

In this sense, Sorcha's behaviour calls into question what it means to be a 'strong' female. Although Richard cannot believe that Sorcha is as capable as she appears, there are others who do see her suffering for what it is. Red recognises her worth when he states:

This is a girl who puts herself through hell every day, who will walk over rocks barefoot until her feet bleed, who puts her own needs last always. But she will not be last in my household.<sup>92</sup>

He does not know why she chooses to weave her garments in silence, but he recognises her selflessness as being the qualities of someone extraordinary and

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<sup>91</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, pp. 434-435.

<sup>92</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 373.

worthy of loving. Conner, one of Sorcha's brothers, confirms Red's belief with his explanation as to why it had to be Sorcha to undertake the quest. He explains to the other brothers that Sorcha was chosen because 'she is the strongest ... Because she can bend with the wind, and not break.'<sup>93</sup> Her strength lies not in her ability to fight but in her ability to withstand. She is a true version of Vogler's hero: a person willing to sacrifice her 'own needs on behalf of others, like a shepherd who will sacrifice to protect and serve' her flock.<sup>94</sup>

Sorcha is willing to sacrifice all to save her brothers, even if it means being burnt at the stake. She admits that she 'was not ready to die', yet she does not falter as the fire looms closer.'<sup>95</sup> Instead, as she clutches the basket of six shirts in her hands, she summons her brothers to her in their swan forms and puts the pain-crafted garments on each of them, ignoring the heat that licks at her skin in threatening waves and the exclamations of the watching crowd. Indeed, it is only as she is waiting for the last brother to draw closer, the heat of the rising flames burning her feet, that she breaks her silence—not for her own pain, but because she sees that Red has returned and is about to be assassinated.

The despair that Sorcha feels upon breaking her oath is acute. She describes the enormity of what she had done as being 'a blow straight to the heart.'<sup>96</sup> It does not matter that the wind snatched the garment out of her hands or that her body is soon to glow with flames; in that moment, she truly believes that she has lost her brothers, having succumb to the temptation of her own selfish need to save the man she loves.'<sup>97</sup> It is later revealed that the same wind that

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<sup>93</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 180.

<sup>94</sup> Vogler, p. 39.

<sup>95</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 437.

<sup>96</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 463.

<sup>97</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 464.



snatched the garment from her hands also allowed Finbar, the final brother, to slip on the garment, thus breaking the curse. As such, Sorcha's moment of weakness is forgiven, but the cost is that she has been forced to realise that her heart has shifted its loyalties. The love she feels for her brothers, which has been her driving motivation all this time, has become secondary to that which she feels for Red.

Sorcha's realisation that she can no longer be satisfied with simply existing as her brothers' younger sister sets her on the path for her final ordeal. This time, however, her quest is not about suffering physical pain but learning to see her own worth and become whole again. She allows herself to be taken back to Sevenwaters, still holding to the belief that Red has never truly loved her and it would be wrong to accept his proposal. Lady Deirdre dispels this idea:

Is it so hard for you to comprehend, that such a man could love you, without the aid of magical arts? Have you looked in your mirror? Have you seen your own strength of spirit, and your loyalty, and your sweetness? It took him but the space of a heartbeat to see these things. If you had not been so strong, perhaps you would not have let him go. Perhaps your tale might have had a different ending.<sup>98</sup>

Lady Deirdre does not call Sorcha weak for letting Red go; instead, she accuses Sorcha of being too strong—strong enough to keep on sacrificing her happiness when no sacrifice was needed.

Again, Sorcha's behaviour raises the question of what it means to be 'strong'. Throughout the novel she has shown predominantly passive traits: silence, submissiveness, and a willingness to exchange her own happiness to safeguard another's. Yet she is frequently described as being strong, if not the strongest, of all the characters featured in *Daughter of the Forest*. It is as if

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<sup>98</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 520.

Marillier is purposely subverting the ideals of the bold, outspoken woman so frequently placed on twenty-first century pedestals: a woman who has abandoned the role of serving others for the sake of shining in a pillar of her own success and individuality. Indeed, it could be argued that Marillier, unconsciously or not, is reminding the twenty-first century female that not all traditionally feminine traits are evil.

Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards explain that ‘Second-wave feminists fought so hard for all women not to be *reduced* to a “girl”—they didn’t lay claim to the good in being a girl.’<sup>99</sup> Women are still learning how to piece their identities together from the shattered ideals of femininity that are scattered around them. *Daughter of the Forest* simply seeks to bridge some of those gaps, quietly suggesting that it is acceptable for a woman to be silent, to submit when required, and to make sacrifices. These are, after all, the qualities of a true hero, and it is these acts of courage and selflessness that earn the heroine her reward. Sorcha is told by her father that it is her choice whether she will marry Red. ‘You are a woman now,’ he explains, ‘and the sacrifice you made for your brothers has earned you the right to determine your own path.’<sup>100</sup>

Sorcha is also able to heal from the emotional wounds that were inflicted upon her during the quest, as symbolised in the healing of her hands. One day, she looks at her hands and realises ‘that the swelling was at last completely gone, the fingers small and fine as they had once been ... Almost as if they had never held distaff or needle, almost as if they had never heard of starwort.’<sup>101</sup> She senses that forest magic had to have been at work, for in all her time as a healer she ‘had

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<sup>99</sup> Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, ‘Feminism and Femininity: Or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong’, in *All About the Girl*, p. 61.

<sup>100</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 531.

<sup>101</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, pp. 518-519.

never seen such damage mend so fast.<sup>102</sup> The healing of her hands also allows her to fit Red's engagement ring, which she was previously unable to wear because her fingers were so swollen and ruined. The simple act of putting on the ring is a direct symbolisation that she is at last ready to embrace her love for Red, heart and body. She notes that she still 'remembered how those men had hurt and shamed' her and that it 'would never go away', but another, stronger part of her has come to 'give almost anything' to have Red's arm around her once more and his lips against her hair.<sup>103</sup> Emboldened by her renewed sense of desire, Sorcha offers her heart to Red through the act of a kiss, ignoring his protests that he is not worthy. Instead, she reminds him that it is her choice and that she would give her heart to him 'and no other.'<sup>104</sup>

It is clear that there are common themes featured in the female quest, particularly when it comes to the way each journey ends. Booker explains this commonality:

What we see endlessly recurring is that same equation: how, to reach the fully happy ending, hero and heroine must represent the perfect coming together of those four values: strength, order, feeling and understanding. But, in the end, all these values represent simply two halves, masculine and feminine, which make up a whole.<sup>105</sup>

Booker does not agree with feminist discourse that fiction ending in a couple's romantic union subverts any progress the heroine has made towards independence. Matrimony is not just another set of chains, however nicely disguised, to be placed around a heroine's ankles and wrists; rather, Booker argues that the 'coming together' of the masculine and the feminine is how a state of perfect wholeness is attained.

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<sup>102</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, pp. 518-519.

<sup>103</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, p. 502.

<sup>104</sup> Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest*, pp. 531-532.

<sup>105</sup> Booker, p. 268.

Stevi Jackson explains this concept of wholeness further in her discussion on romance and endings. She writes that romantic love assumes a ‘coming together’ of two unique subjects, ‘each of whom should be the “only one” for the other ... [thus] ideal love is often thought of as a merging of selves.’<sup>106</sup> By the end of the heterosexual romance, the hero and heroine have found their ‘only one’ and become transformed from being two separated individuals into a united couple. This transformation functions the same for the male and the female, allowing a blend of masculinity and femininity to create balance. One party should not have more control than the other; rather, the ‘happy ending’ should be about harmony, understanding and equality.

Marillier’s decision to end both novels with a promise of matrimony, despite Jenica and Sorcha initially expressing a lack of interest in marriage, reaffirms the argument that love, whether it be solidified through marriage or a simple acceptance to become a couple, is not synonymous with submission to patriarchal order. Instead, it is a physical representation that the female heroine has at last achieved a complete, integrated identity. It is only when the heroine feels like she is walking on shaky ground that she balks at the thought of uniting with a man, afraid that she will be swallowed up like a shade next to a flame. Once she is comfortable in her own skin, the female heroine has no need for such fear, knowing that her identity has been cemented through her experiences and cannot be shattered by the influence of her male counterpart. Her decision to marry at the end of her journey is then as much a celebration of her newfound autonomy and freedom as it is an expression of love.

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<sup>106</sup> Stevi Jackson, ‘Women and Heterosexual Love: Complicity, Resistance and Change’, in *Romance Revisited*, ed. by Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995) p. 51.

Janice Radway observes that heroes are ‘symbols of the soul in transformation, and of the journey each person takes in life.’<sup>107</sup> The quest for an understanding of the female self is no different. Each point of the journey, from the Call to Adventure, to the Supreme Ordeal, to the Return to the Ordinary World, reflects a state of understanding and transformation. Heroines are given a chance to view their identity through metaphorical mirrors of experience, gradually taking upon themselves or shedding those ideals of femininity that do not fit with what they instinctively feel is right for them. Radway explains: ‘what the heroine successfully establishes at the end of the ideal narrative is the now familiar female self, the self-in-relation.’<sup>108</sup> Through her battles, tests, and temptations, the heroine has learnt what it means to be a woman—not as the patriarchy would have her believe she must be, but as she has learnt to perceive herself. No journey is the same because no woman is the same, and that, I would argue, is the point. The search for the female self is a personal journey of discovery. In the end, the truth that sets her free is one that she has known all along: that she cannot change the world, but she can change herself.

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<sup>107</sup> Vogler, p. 48.

<sup>108</sup> Janice Radway, quoted by Lynne Pearce in ‘Popular Romance and its Readers’, in *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary*, ed. by Corine Saunders (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2004), p. 526.

## Conclusion

Nancy J. Burgess writes that storytellers ‘offer readers imaginative, heuristic possibilities of determining truth for themselves.’<sup>1</sup> Fiction is the expression of life in all its joy, pain and aspirations. That women’s stories have become more prevalent within the fictional world, particularly fantasy, is therefore significant.

Director Hayao Miyazaki comments:

The reason I present the hero as a girl is probably because society traditionally accords control to man ... We’ve reached a time when this male-oriented way of thinking is reaching a limit. The girl or woman has more flexibility.<sup>2</sup>

Miyazaki hints that the female journey is something that fascinates twenty-first century audiences mostly because the girl or woman has more ‘flexibility’ since her story has not been repeated verbatim. I would argue that the cause behind a stronger presence of women’s voices in fiction goes deeper than public boredom. Instead, it lies in the lingering effects of feminist wave triumphs.

Angela McRobbie observes that feminism has ‘furnished young women with choices about sexuality, chances for education and employment, and new ways of asserting autonomy and rights.’<sup>3</sup> After spending so many years without a voice, females like Juliet Marillier and Nalini Singh are at last speaking up, sharing with each other, through the written word, stories of loss and love, of

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy J. Burgess, *Looking into the Depths: Dimensions of Spirituality in New Zealand Short Story* (Orewa: ColCom, 1996), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Hayao Miyazaki, ‘Interview’, 2008, quoted by Dee Goertz, ‘New Champions: The Hero with a Thousand-and-First Face: Miyazaki’s Girl Quester in Spirited Away and Campbell’s Monomyth’, in *Millennial Mythmaking*, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Angela McRobbie, ‘Notes on Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime’, in *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, ed. by Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. xvii.

alienation and acceptance, and of death and rebirth. It is a communal quest for female identity; however, as this thesis has demonstrated, the journey to wholeness is not without difficulty.

Throughout this thesis, I have examined the concept that fantasy fiction is a space where female experience and identity can be explored in safety to help navigate a world that has become overwhelming in the options offered to women, even as the patriarchy continues to surreptitiously, and sometimes outwardly, subvert their autonomy. In Chapter One, it was illustrated that difference is the root of all alienation, and that society's tendency to exclude, destroy or use forced assimilation to erase these differences can have detrimental effect on the female seeking to understand her identity as a woman. The troubling nature of the endings of each text emphasise the need for women to have a space of their own—a room, as Virginia Woolf put it, that allows for self-discovery and a sense of acceptance and wholeness. Without such a space at hand, the consuming force of the patriarchal hegemony crushes any efforts to assert independence.

In Chapter Two, this need for space was explored in more depth. Magical sanctuaries were shown to act as a place of learning or training ground for the female heroine, helping her to overcome her own insecurities so that she can reinsert herself as an established, accepted part of the real world. Margaret Mahy highlighted that space is a battleground that is often fought over by both males and females, which is why the magical sanctuary is so crucial. Free from society's influence, the sanctuary is like a blank canvas of possibilities; the heroine just has to decide what image she will paint before showing her self-portrait to the world.

Finally, in Chapter Three, I analysed the way fantasy quests are structured as a journey of self-discovery and as a means of understanding the true meaning

of femininity. The three ordeals reflect the different stages of transformation that the female must undergo to become whole in her identity, but also the types of monsters that exist to drag her back to a state of passiveness and pretty decoration. Christopher Booker explains: ‘One may sum up by saying that, physically, morally and psychologically, the monster in storytelling thus represents everything in human nature which is somehow twisted and less than perfect.’<sup>4</sup> In the female quest, that monster is symbolised by patriarchal hegemony: the belief that women are mere objects to be won or a weaker form of humanity to be dismissed, abused and used. By conquering these monsters, the female heroine demonstrates her worthiness of being considered an individual in her own right, free to make her own decisions and build her future.

While critical analysis of female identity is not new, there is scope to expand the field within New Zealand literary scholarship, particularly in regards to fantasy fiction. This thesis has sought to uncover some of the issues surrounding identity construction and how prescribed gender codes of behaviour can obstruct a sense of wholeness within oneself. There are many more voices to be explored, but the underlying message is the same. Women do not need to be victims of circumstance, dependent on the arrival of a prince for ‘any animation and for entry into a real life’.<sup>5</sup> The female heroine has the power to shape her own identity, defeat her own monsters, and wake herself up from her own passive slumber. She just has to choose to act.

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 137.



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