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Locating Resistance/ Resisting Location:

A Feminist Literary Analysis of Supernatural Women

in Contemporary Fantastic Fiction

by

Deneka C. MacDonald

B.A., The University of Victoria, 1995
M.A., The University of Northern British Columbia, 1999

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the ways in which feminist and human geographies intersect with contemporary women-centered fantasy fiction. In particular, I consider space and place to be significant to female characters in their role as a physical presence as well as an intangible location. Thus I explore the forest, the body and the mind as territories occupied by the supernatural woman. These various spatial themes, I suggest, outline distinctive locations for supernatural female characters and enable them to engage in a position of resistance from patriarchal ideologies. Through a spatial analysis of selected fiction, I reflect on challenges to notions that construct identity, gender and sexuality as well as conflict among women.

I argue that the supernatural woman in fiction has been frozen in one-dimensional representation within traditional male-centered texts. This one-dimensionality, I suggest, hinges on the juxtaposition of the overly simplistic good/bad binary that has often illustrated female characters within fantasy fiction. As fantasy is a genre typically more concerned with worlds than characters, the women-centered fantasy text is unique in its exploration and pursuit of the literary character.

Given the contemporary and interdisciplinary nature of this thesis, I have drawn upon filmic adaptations of texts at times to illustrate a further level of cultural awareness. The main emphasis is, however, on literary texts and, thus, reference to film is meant to supplement my textual analysis.

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Preface

This research began with a particular curiosity about supernaturally inclined female characters who seemed to be central to many stories, but who had quiet voices and no character development within the fiction I was reading. Indeed, many of the myths and legends that include women as their subjects have very little to say about women themselves. Thus began my search for texts that sought to give attention to the women whom authors deemed interesting enough to weave a story around, but who had, in the past, been given very little consideration. While I did not intentionally seek out to investigate feminist texts exclusively, my search for women-centered fiction revealed that it was within the framework of feminist ideals and questions that these character developments lay. Perhaps not surprisingly, since it is a genre so apt to overturning social conventions and norms, many of the texts that considered women to be central to their plots were also fantasy texts. This is not to say that fantasy is the only genre that considers women at the forefront of its tales, but the limitations of a doctoral thesis forced me to be relatively narrow in focus. Thus, regrettably, many novels that did not have a female protagonist with supernatural abilities did not make it into the chapters of this work. Similarly, though I hope to have given an accurate and representative account of some major literary and other theories as well as the main themes found within women-centered fantastic fiction, I do not suggest that my selections of either theory or texts are exhaustive.

I am interested in the supernatural because of its relationship with difference and otherness. Moreover, the category of 'supernatural' necessarily raises the political question of what is 'natural'. Similarly, notions surrounding gender, sexuality, identity and self have come to be seen as an elaborate series of binary equations, all of which are questionable for the feminist critic. Additionally, more

women are writing and publishing fiction in the last three decades than ever before. More importantly, more women-centered texts are currently being produced, and this is in no doubt partially due to feminism.

My research, although interdisciplinary, has always centred on fiction. But my interest in fantasy is more specific. Traditionally, fantasy has often been aligned with pulp fiction, children's literature, or 'feminized' genres of fiction (in contrast to the more 'masculinized' genre of science fiction for example). In this perception, fantasy has been dismissed as less than serious literary fiction; indeed, fantasy deals with the marginal, the other and the varied elaboration of other worlds contradictory to the realist vision. But this does not mean that fantasy is not accessible to the theoretical tools of literary analysis. Yet, perhaps precisely because fantasy has been seen as less than fully legitimate in the past, feminism (and in particular, literary feminism), has neglected to engage critically with much fantasy fiction.

Since the 1970s, in its politics and in its literature, feminism has successfully carved a space for itself within western patriarchal discourse. Fantasy too has begun to carve such a space within academic criticism after a long period of relative neglect. In this development there are the seedlings for a relationship between two marginalized fields of study, but there are also further links between feminism and fantasy. Fantastic texts have come to greatly influence popular culture and this influence is increasingly intersected by feminist discourses. Further, while critical feminism seems often unconcerned with fantasy fiction, fantasy has the potential to make a significant contribution to feminist thought; as well as representing movements in popular culture, both feminism and fantasy provide a quality of estrangement that can allow for a fresh critical perspective. I have narrowed my

analysis to women-centered fantastic fiction because it is within the fantastic text that subversion and resistance find a very specific forum.

It is the nature of an interdisciplinary work to juxtapose texts and theories that may not initially appear to be related, but which nonetheless have a significant cultural or political relationship. At times, perhaps, the primary texts and theoretical frameworks found within this study do not fit together as smoothly as, for example, post-colonial fiction would fit with post-colonial theory. This is both the advantage and the disadvantage of an interdisciplinary approach. I have chosen to investigate space within the context of the women-centered fantastic text because feminism is currently making significant contributions to the field of geography as it charts new territories for women and questions the spaces associated with patriarchy. Feminist theoretical discourse on space has generated many themes integral to the understanding of identity, oppression, difference, otherness and hierarchical divisions of power. Intentionally or not, these same themes are present within women-centered fantastic texts. Thus, while feminist geography and fantastic fiction have never met in critical analysis before, they nonetheless have much to say to each other.

I make use of space and I understand space to be significant to women and to texts in a broad sense throughout this study. As we will see, the place of oppression can also be the place of resistance; reclaiming space is often as important as rejecting it. At different times, space is physical, metaphoric and abstract within the texts under study (and in my readings of them). Physical places are significant to the cultural understanding of women and to feminist inquiry, and their textual descriptions are significant to the understanding of female characters and identity. But there are many spaces that are not physical, that are intangible but still

oppressive or conversely, empowering. Space does not always have to be literal to be confining, just as it does not have to be literal to be liberating.

Throughout this thesis I maintain the view that while male-centered literature should be critiqued when it offers oppressive or problematic representations of women, this should not be confused with failing to provide 'true' representations of women. While I am not holding fantasy up to the mirror of realism, the distinction between the unreal and untrue is an important one. Unrealistic images of women include one-dimensional representations and are not to be equated with 'untrue' images-- a notion that connotes the possibility of truthful portrayals. Truth is a concept that is both problematic and unattainable. Clearly, there is no such standard by which to measure the true representation of woman from the untrue, nor should there be. Equally so, there is no such thing as a one-dimensional woman. Yet the former is often presupposed within male-centered literature, and the latter has become an acceptable means of portraying female characters. My own 'objections' to oppressive one-dimensional images of women in fiction are grounded in the implausibility of such characterization, not the untruth of it: as Toril Moi says "quite a few women are 'authentically' weak and unimpressive" (47). The reader should remember that this study deals with fiction that is *fantasy* by its nature.

The women in these texts are not meant to be real. Fictional women are, by necessity, not interchangeable with 'real', living women. Even the most 'realist' and documentary of texts abridge the lives of such characters and provide the reader with details that merely give the illusion of reality. However, that does not mean that fictional representations of women can not be seen to be taking part in quests that correspond with similar concerns found within theoretical feminist movements. Female characters in women-centered fantasy pose a unique challenge to criticism

because they are depicted both as 'super' natural and entirely 'natural'. Women-centered texts suggest that at the heart of the text is a character, not a world. The fantastic texts within this study also express an interest in geography and gender, and their narratives consider how space affects their characters. Finally, these texts allow for women-centered creations of images of 'femaleness' that attempt to challenge the patriarchal standards that have been imposed, previously, on images of femaleness by the male-centered text.

Acknowledgements

. . . .

For Halena, my friend and kindred spirit, who brought me

into this world and gave me the two most important things in life:

space and a voice

. . . .
. . . . .

Chapter One
The Star Wars of Literary Theory:
Theoretical Frameworks and Methodology

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. [1]

Discourse can be both an instrument and an effective power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. [2]

The (fictional) supernatural woman has had, and continues to have, a curious relationship with literary discourse. While the characterization of the supernatural woman has evolved in contemporary writing (specifically within women-centered writing), from simple one-dimensional binary representation to rounded characterization, she remains somewhat geographically frozen within specific domestic or 'feminine' spaces. Particularly in contemporary literary culture, 'the goddess' has come to be representative of 'feminine' images in nature, yet 'the goddess' is often confused or amalgamated with other supernatural female figures such as the witch or the priestess. Moreover, the term *goddess* has become an umbrella expression used to encompass all goddesses under nature; more often than not in literature, those goddesses who may have served individual purposes at one time have all come together to be known as a single supernatural presence. Thus linked

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[1] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken." *The Arts of the Possible* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001): 11.

[2] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality.* Trans. Robert Hurley. Vol.1. (London : Allen Lane, 1979): 101.

(as we will see), their strong associations with nature can often blur the boundaries that define witch, goddess or priestess in texts.

This intriguing merging is one that can be found in any number of examples throughout this thesis, which demonstrates the distinctions between women of supernatural power whilst noting the societal misinterpretation that has confused them. The goddess, priestess and the witch are compelling female figures with supernatural abilities, yet by virtue of proximity to the unknown, and in their magic or power, they are also fearful figures. But what is perhaps most intriguing about representations of supernatural women in the texts within this thesis is their resistance to location, place, space and labels associated with nature or the natural.

Witch, priestess and goddess are associated with the earth on a variety of levels. In traditional male-centered texts the goddesses (and the priestess who serve her) are seen as mother figures who are the caretakers of nature, while the witch is typically portrayed as a woman who uses her magical power, drawn from nature or natural settings, to manipulate culture. Specifically, it is the natural *spatial* surroundings that tie these figures together and have, as we will see, connected them in literature and popular culture. Indeed, it is in the relationship between the natural environment and human society, or between nature and culture, that 'place' becomes an important area of spatial exploration for feminists. Clearly, women with magical or uncanny abilities are seen as figures of the unknown making them un-natural, or more specifically, supernatural.[3] It is, therefore, with the image and representation of these supernatural women (goddess, priestess and witch

alike) and their association with specific spaces and places in contemporary texts, that this thesis begins its argument.

Popular literary culture embodies changes in contemporary attitudes; those of particular relevance to this study concern an evolving understanding of nature and the role that the feminine supernatural plays in both nature and culture.[4] Feminism, in its many threads, has provided the context for a renewed interest in studying both the feminine supernatural and the relationship between women and nature. Threads of feminist discourse including the historical, religious and ecological have explored these relationships and reference shall be made to many of them throughout this thesis. As this combination of nature and the feminine are explored further, we will see that this is a common theme found in both critical analyses[5] and literary representations.

In this thesis I choose to concentrate on texts that I term 'women-centered'. Although still incorporating themes of nature, culture, the natural and the supernatural within their narratives, women-centered fantastic texts

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[3] This distinction is made again in chapter two with a more lengthy discussion of the natural and supernatural.

[4] One need only glance quickly at the shelf of any Mind, Body and Spirit section of a book store to discover the renewed pseudo scholarly interest in the phenomenon of the Goddess. Popular titles include, but are not limited to: Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (New York: Penguin, 1986); Elinor Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess* (New York: Harper & Collins, 1989); Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995); Caitlin Mathews, *The Elements of the Goddess* (Massachusetts: Element, 1989). For scholarly discussions on the image of the goddess and her presence in discourse see Sandra Billington and Miranda Green, eds., *The Concept of the Goddess* (London: Routledge, 1996); Geoffrey Ashe, *The Virgin: Mary's Cult and the Re-emergence of the Goddess* (New York and London: Arkana, 1988); Marina Warner, *Alone of all Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Random House, 1985); Cherly Straffon, *The Earth Goddess: Celtic and Pagan Legacy of the Landscape* (New York: Blandford, 1997).

[5] Such critical analysis features most notably in the school of eco-feminism that holds that nature is feminized in its otherness and marginalization. Ecofeminist theories are addressed in further detail in chapter two.

also resist locating supernatural female characters within these rigid categories of place and space. As such 'place' and 'space', both within the texts and in my analysis of them, are not always physical or tangible locations; "a lock does not have to be literal to imprison" (Armitt, *Contemporary* 3). Therefore, throughout this study we will move between concrete and abstract spaces demonstrating how both are equally important in the process of resisting location whilst seeking it. I shall also make reference to traditional male-centered texts as a direct point of comparison for the contemporary women-centered texts used throughout this study.[6] As such, I will pause to define these terms for the reader.

Male-centered texts are texts that deal exclusively or predominantly with male characters interacting within worlds that are specifically patriarchal. In male-centered texts, female characters are often present, but serve as objects within the narrative. They do not have individual voices (ie. they are, most often, discussed in the third person and engage in little, if any, dialogue); they are regularly portrayed as one-dimensional, offering flat and lifeless characters amongst an otherwise fuller description of male characters. In contrast, women-centered texts are those that deal exclusively or predominantly with female characters interacting within masculine and patriarchal worlds, or which feature female characters who directly challenge masculine and patriarchal worlds. In addition, women-centered texts offer three-dimensional female characters and often explore women traditionally

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[6] As Toril Moi notes, "Feminist criticism actually began by examining the dominant male culture (Ellmann, Millett) and there is no reason for women today to reject this aspect of feminist work" (80).

'silenced' in the tradition of male-centered texts.[7] The distinction between male-centered and women-centered texts is further made by both the tone of the text and the focus upon characterization. Importantly, however, I maintain that one does not need to be a female to write women-centered texts, just as one does not need to be a male to write male-centered texts; rather, regardless of the 'gender' or sex of an author, a women-centered text is one that "reach[es] toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror/text and help[s] her climb out" (Gilbert and Gubar 16).[8]

Chapter Breakdown

Due to the limitations of a doctoral thesis I have chosen to focus closely on texts that fall into three specific categories. First, texts must be women-centered, as defined above. Second, texts must concentrate on supernatural female characters, with an essential element of the uncanny or magical.[9] Third, texts must fall into the category of the fantastic (as outlined later in this chapter), and have been published within the last 50 years. Arguably, it has been within this time frame that that feminism has had the most influence on fiction and within this period, the most substantial number of women-centered fantastic texts have been produced. Texts that meet all of the above criteria but which also predominantly illustrate physical spatial considerations within their narratives have been used in chapter two "Space Invaders: Location and Landscape." Texts that centrally examine lesbian motifs were selected for

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[7] For example, Marion Zimmer Bradley gives voice to the 'silenced' women of (traditionally male-centered) Arthurian Legend in: *The Mists of Avalon* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982).

[8] We come back to this distinction again in chapter five.

[9] A more explicit discussion of the uncanny is provided later in this chapter.

chapter three "Towards a Lesbian Location" in order to explore the possibility of a distinct spatial lesbian identity.[10] Similarly, texts that question and explore the abstract boundaries of space are highlighted in chapter four, "Telepathic Spaces, (Anti) Essentialism and the Difficulty with 'We'" as I seek to establish the existence of less tangible spaces and their effects on female characters. Texts that rewrite the experiences of traditionally famous but silenced supernatural women are the subject of chapter five, "Beyond Good and Evil: Resisting Simplistic Binary Labels." Chapter five also explores the problematic shadowy margins that language offers the supernatural female character. Finally, texts that convey feminist reinterpretations of popular fairy tales have been chosen for chapter six, "Women Against Women: the Fantastic Fairy Tale" as we explore the spatial relationships that exist between and among women.

I make no political preference between what are typically termed canonical or high cultural and low cultural texts throughout this thesis; fantasy as a genre has suffered within these rigid boundaries of categorization within academia. As the aim of this thesis is to explore representations of women in a cultural context within contemporary fiction, it is neither necessary nor appropriate to make such distinctions. As Toril Moi (1985) notes, "the category of 'greatness' has always been an extremely contentious one for feminists, given that the criteria for 'greatness' militate heavily against the inclusion of women in the literary canon" (55). While the reader will be aware that some authors have received more critical attention in literary discourse

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[10] While all of the texts within this thesis deal with the motif of a physical or psychological lesbian existence, there are some that explore the theme as a central aspect of the narrative.

than others, none of the texts within this study are canonical texts.[11]

Moreover, all of the texts are considered seriously and equally within the context of the theoretical questions investigated in individual chapters. As this thesis is also, to some extent, a study of popular culture, there are times when popular films are briefly used as further examples to illustrate specific points.[12] In order to maintain a sense of methodological balance, however, film is not a central focus of this thesis but rather an additional tool to be used to further illustrate literary examples. Finally, I consciously acknowledge that I am writing, in part, from a position of privilege, as are most of the authors of fiction found within this thesis. I write as a white heterosexual woman, educated within the mainstream of western discourse and therefore I am writing within a western context. This context has, to a certain extent, excluded or marginalized minorities whilst privileging other voices. White women write many western women-centered fantastic novels and the supernatural characters are often also white women. The spatial distinctions and explorations found within the fiction--the problematic issues that both author and character experience with space and the spatial experiences they confront--should therefore be understood within such a context. A doctoral thesis in the cultural context of Asia or Africa may embrace supernatural

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[11] The only exception to this is found in chapter four when I briefly refer to "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). However, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is invoked purely for a comparison to *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and is relevant because of its similar treatment of mental illness.

[12] The term 'text' has been continually challenged within literary discourse and is currently the acceptable term to be used within cultural and media studies when referring to all artistic representations of narrative.

women representative of those cultures and consequently make appropriate spatial distinctions of difference.[13]

This study takes its distinct shape in and around the theoretical ideas of human geography and in the common threads within the fiction that I have found to be consciously geographic in nature. The main questions surrounding this study, therefore, are spatial: is it coincidence that so many feminist authors, putting women at the forefront of their fiction, are so concerned with the physical, emotional and metaphorical geographies of women? If not coincidence, why is this a significant movement in fiction? And what does this exploration of personal space accomplish? Why does this seem to be more prominent among texts located in the realm of the fantastic? Since many of the texts explore female characters who have previously become infamous within male-centered texts, why have authors felt it necessary to re-envision these stories from new perspectives and explore a spatial motif along the way? What is it about space and place that attracts feminists and authors of fantasy alike?

In the following chapters I consider various gendered spaces including both physical and abstract geographies which have contributed to the diverse representations of supernatural images of women within western literature. Gendered and feminist critical responses to these forms of expression are used as part of my framework in order to explore how cultural ideas of space, body, gender and difference are shaped. Coming from a cultural feminist perspective, I examine selected works of fantastic fiction for their expressions of space, place and geography as they apply to supernatural characters and,

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[13] For more discussion on patriarchal and colonial discourses on difference, see: Sara

at times, both confine and contribute to the contrived myths of area and space maintained by social convention. Because there has so far been little feminist literary analysis of women-centered fantastic texts, I will make use of several theoretical frameworks, which may, at first, appear to be unrelated. However, as each chapter's key spatial motifs are explored the significance and interrelation of various frameworks and the complexity of the spatial issues under study will be elucidated. In order to introduce the relevant theoretical material this first chapter explores some of the diverse ways feminists working within or around issues of human geography have approached space. Further, this chapter outlines the more prominent work done in fantastic literature in order to convey clearly the origins of my own methodology.

Feminism and Human Geography

Since the beginning of the women's movement, feminists have concerned themselves with the physical, emotional and psychological spaces which women inhabit. These spaces, both literal and metaphorical, are created and maintained partly by patriarchal social conventions and have been further supported through male-centered discourse. The geography of women is an important area of scholarly pursuit that has been given substantial consideration in recent years by feminists in a variety of disciplines. In a relatively new area of discourse, much of the work done on women and geography has concentrated on human and post-colonial geographies, literatures and artistic expressions-- work done typically by feminist

Mills,"Discourse of Difference." *Cultural Studies.* 4. No. 2. (1990): 128-140.

geographers, anthropologists, historians, or sociologists. [14] Consequently,

there has been little exploration in terms of gendered space in specific genres

of literature or literary representations. [15] Moreover, leading opinions and

theories are continually challenged, and while there is much overlap, there is

little agreement among scholars. My intention in this overview of feminist

human geography is to make the reader aware of the theoretical frameworks

already put forth by academics in the field. However, as this thesis

progresses it will demonstrate that many of these models are insufficient,

incomplete or can be contradicted by the texts I explore.

When Adrienne Rich coined the term 'the politics of location' in her

essay "Notes toward a Politics of Location" (1984; 2001) she highlighted

spatial concerns within feminist discourse and noted that theorizing begins

with claiming the personal territories of women as well as questioning those

places and spaces that have been politically inaccessible. Rich argues that

the goal of theory is to "reconnect our thinking and speaking with the body of

this particular living human individual, a woman" (*Arts* 65). Thus, as the

personal and the political have become intimately linked aspects within

feminisms, consequently, so too have location and politics. Currently, many

feminist academics take location seriously and have dedicated much of their

scholarly work towards exploring how women interact in/with our varied

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[14] See Catherine Nash's scholarly account of nature as a feminized entity: "Remapping the Body/Land: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender and Landscape in Ireland." In *Writing Women and Space.* Eds. Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose. (New York: Guilford Press, 1994): 227-250.

[15] See: Gretchen T. Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism." In *Ecofeminism: Women Culture Nature* Ed. Karen J. Warren. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997): 227-237. Legler notes that ecofeminist literary criticism has predominately focused on nature writing. See also: Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991). Clearly Mills explore issues of space within textual discourse, but she does so within the genre of travel writing.

environments. Because feminists in the fields of geography, anthropology and sociology have tended to focus on specific topics, including public/private space, the sexual politics of space and intangible spaces, I will outline the more prominent of these frameworks in order to establish a base from which to move forward.

In 1969, Kate Millett published her extremely influential paper *The Sexual Revolution*, one of the earliest discussions of gender issues and public/private distinctions in spatial discourse.[16] In it she criticizes the work of John Ruskin, who, in 1864, gave his (now famous) lecture entitled "Of Queen's Gardens". Ruskin's lecture argues that the proper place for women is in the domestic home and invokes the metaphor of 'flowers' (women) and the 'garden' (home). Millet retorts that "having through mere assertion "proven" that the sexes are complete opposites, Ruskin then proceeds to map out their worlds, reserving the entire scope of human endeavor for the one, and a little hothouse for the other" (93). Clearly, Millet sees Ruskin's private domain as nothing more than an ideological prison. She takes issue not just with Ruskin's metaphors, but with his ideology:

> [t]he obsession with Nature is very strong in conjunction with statements on women: boys must be "chiseled" into shape, but females are "Nature" [....] they grow effortlessly like flowers. Even classical libraries have no effect on them as blossoms do not give themselves to the contamination of learning. Together, with the graceful studies of music, art, and literature, Nature

itself constitutes the fourth branch of female education in

Ruskin's pedagogy. Through Nature she will grow in piety,

which is well; piety is less dangerous than theology. (97)

Millett confronts the dualistic nature of the 'rules' for men and women, and

sees Ruskin's premise that "social responsibility is a female province" (104) as

both humiliating and highly problematic.[17] Her work here is an early feminist

account addressing private and public boundaries within gender issues in

human geography as well as a challenge to the notion that women are

'naturally' closer to 'nature'.[18] Since Millett, feminist scholars continue to

discuss female existence in terms of the public and private spaces that they

inhabit or from which they are excluded.

In their introductory chapter in *Writing Women and Space*, Alison Blunt

and Gillian Rose (1994) suggest that gendered spaces should be understood

not as geographically imposed patriarchy, but, rather, as a social process in

which the encoding and decoding of symbols takes place. They maintain that

[t]he social construction of gender difference establishes some

spaces as women's and others as men's; those meanings then

serve to reconstitute the power relations of gendered identity.

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[16]Millet's work has since been published in book form. See Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago Press, 1997).

[17] Carol Pateman also discredits Ruskin in her chapter "Feminists Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy." See: *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and the Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989): 118-140.

[18] A discussion of natural as opposed to un-natural or supernatural takes place in the following chapter when we explore and question the usefulness of ecofeminist theoretical frameworks.

However, since the outcome of the decoding process can never

be guaranteed, contestation and re-negotiation of the meaning

of spaces is also always possible. (3)

While making room for the possibility of social change in such a decoding

process, Blunt and Rose also concede that "[w]estern feminists have always

been concerned with the spatial politics of difference," (1) as they tend to see

space as masculine power and feminine resistance. And thus, it is fair to say

that at the heart of the feminist struggle with gendered geography and the

varied landscapes of gender territories is the ultimate binary relationship

between the masculine and the feminine spaces we inhabit, the public and

private spheres as they may exist in 'reality'. In *The Disorder of Women*

(1989), Carol Pateman has taken this notion to the extreme, stating that "the

dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two

centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, what the

feminist movement is about" (118).

Like many feminists, Pateman sees the notion of private and public

boundaries as integral to the study of human geography, arguing that spaces

are constituted through struggles over power and knowledge, and that it is the

dichotomy between these realms that has been central to the feminist

movement. Similarly, anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo examines the

hierarchy between the gendered spaces of the public and the private, noting

that the domestic is defined as the place of woman/domesticity, nature and

nurture, while public is the realm of man/politics, culture and economy. She

sees space in terms of the social culture it implies and constructs around it. In

Woman, Culture and Society (1974), Rosaldo argues that, unlike boys, girls

are never forced to distinguish themselves from their mothers and thus their

social reality and their spatial reality privileges them to continually define

themselves in terms of their relationships with others (43-48). In other words,

since girls often become mothers they grow to define themselves in terms of

the cyclical mother-daughter relationship. Yet, Gillian Rose points out, in

Feminism and Geography (1993) that,

> [t]he everyday routines traced by women are never unimportant,
>
> because the seemingly banal and trivial events of the everyday
>
> are bound into the power structures which limit and confine
>
> women. The limits on women's everyday activities are
>
> structured by what society expects women to be and therefore
>
> do. The everyday is the arena through which patriarchy is (re)
>
> created and contested. (17)

Moreover, as Jalna Hanmer and Sheila Saunders (1984) have noted,

"women's sense of security in public spaces is profoundly shaped by [their]

inability to secure an undisputed right to occupy that space" (39). Thus, while

the private space of home can be seen to be a confined female space on the

one hand, the activities within the home are very far from unimportant; within

the private sphere, women can also locate a position of power.

Rose makes no secret of the fact that she is disappointed in

geography's lack of feminist representation thus far. In particular, Rose

refers to the work of Stoddart (1986), Keller and Grontkowski (1983),

criticizing them for omitting questions of gender and sexuality in their work on landscape geographies.[19] Rose notes that this is a serious deficiency in the field, maintaining that the discipline itself is "masculinist" (4).[20] As we will see throughout the chapters of this thesis, not only are the intricate boundaries surrounding private and public space important to identity, politics and power, but the notion of "masculinist work", or what I have termed male-centered texts, is fundamental in the maintenance of one-dimensional female characterization. These one-dimensional representations are, I argue later, detrimental to images of women. Moreover, the contrast between male-centered and women-centered fiction highlights the former's lack of concern with geographical space and identity and its importance and consequent exploration to the latter.

Yet the gendered distinctions within public and private spaces are not straightforward ones, nor are they met without debate among feminist scholarship. Thus, the concept of dividing space into public and private and male and female realms has been critiqued. Some feminists call for an erasure of this divide,[21] while others insist on a clearer distinction: " the geography of the public/private division should be seen as mostly relevant to white, middle-class feminism" because, with its "neat distinctions" such a

[19]See: E.F. Keller and C.R. Grontkowski, "The Mind's Eye." In *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy and Science.* Eds. S. Harding and M.B. Hintakka. (London : D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1983); D.R. Stodart, *On Geography and its History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[20] Rose adopts the term 'masculinist' from Michelle Le Doeuff, who says "a masculinist work [is one] which, while claiming to be exhaustive, forgets about women's existence and concerns itself only with the position of men" (qtd. in *Feminism and Geography* 4).

[21] For further discussion of this view see: Rickie Sanders, "Integrating Race and Ethnicity into Geographic Gender Studies." *Professional Geographer.* 42. no.2: (1990): 228-231.

division can be seen to disregard issues of race and class" (Blunt and Rose 4). Moreover, S. M. Okin (1979; 1990) argues that,

> the existence of a distinct sphere of private, family life,
> separated off from the realm of public life, leads to the
> exaggeration of women's biological differences from men, to the
> perception of women as primarily suited to fulfill special "female"
> functions within the home, and consequently to the justification
> of the monopoly by men of the whole outside world. (274-275)

Thus, some feminists maintain that the division of public/private is an unproductive analytical model that encourages exclusivity and neglects difference. Indeed, as Okin points out, the existence of this division *does* encourage 'social behavior'--in other words, in making the divide we are in danger of reinforcing the stereotypes and encouraging the expected social behaviors associated with it to continue. In contrast, feminist theorist Judith Butler (1997) notes,

> As a form of power, subjection is paradoxical. To be dominated
> by power external to oneself is a familiar and agonizing form
> power takes. To find, however, that what "one" is, one's very
> formation as a subject, is in some sense dependent upon that
> very power is quite another. We are used to thinking of power
> as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what
> subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order.

This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But

if, following, Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the

subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence

and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we

oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our

existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that

we are. The customary model for understanding this process

goes as follows: power imposes itself on us, and, weakened by

its force, we come to internalize or accept its terms. What such

an account fails to note, however, is that the "we" who accept

such terms are fundamentally dependent on those terms for

"our" existence. Are there not discursive conditions for the

articulation of any "we"? Subjection consists precisely in this

fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but

that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency. (*Psychic*

Life 1-2)

Arguably these divisions in gender and political boundaries are also

paradoxically empowering—they are places where a resistance can begin.

The power structures of society and culture construct men and women as

much as they construct the masculine and feminine. Butler suggests that

both genders are contingent upon society and each other to maintain these

constructions. More importantly, neither gender can fully afford to renounce

its constructed identities, often built within the system of public or private

spaces, because while such identities disempower individuals, they also constitute them.[22]

Regardless of whether one agrees with the finer points of argument about division along private and public lines, the fact remains that various social divisions exist-- among gender, identity, race, politics, power and sexuality. Our social geographies are divided by the boundaries of spaces, whether we should choose to acknowledge the label of 'public and private' or not. To deny this fact is to deny the struggle which feminists continue to wage. It would seem, then, that it is still useful to pursue investigations of boundaries (and equally useful to make use of the terms 'public' and 'private' spaces), as long as one does not approach them from an essentialist perspective and disregard difference.

Intangible Spaces

Besides issues of public and private spheres, the study of gender and space has been extended, in recent years, to include less tangible spaces such as those that surround the dynamics of language. Shirley Ardener explores patriarchal spaces in "Ground Rules for Social Maps for Women" (1981) and posits that all physical areas have sets of rules that determine how they will be crossed and who will occupy the particular space (11). Further, Ardener argues that "the extended use of such spatial terms is firmly embedded in the language in which this is written" (11). Thus, she sees language itself as existing within a significant marginal space in which society plays a part in defining its gendered boundaries. Citing terms such as 'high society' and

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[22] My reliance on the post-structural challenge to binary oppositions becomes clearer with

'narrow-mindedness', Ardener argues that the 'real world' and the 'social

reality' of that world intersect and are therefore inter or co-dependent:

> Societies have generated their own rules, culturally determined,
>
> for making boundaries on the ground, and have divided the
>
> social into spheres, levels and territories with invisible fences
>
> and platforms to be scaled by abstract ladders and crossed by
>
> intangible bridges with as much trepidation or exultation as on a
>
> plank over a raging torrent. (11-12)

With this string of metaphors Ardener emphasizes not only the difficulty one

has in crossing social spheres, but the intangibility of their very nature.

Similarly, in *Defining Females: The Nature of Women and Society* (1993)

Ardener suggests that there is a need to pay more attention to the sphere of

communication and modes of expression in culture (8). Indeed, "[t]he right to

be addressed, and the way you are addressed, are important determinants of

a person's place in the structure of any society" (9).[23] The notion that a co-

dependent relationship exists between the real world and the social world, or

the masculine and the feminine can also be seen in the earlier work of Robin

Lakoff.[24] In *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), Lakoff argues that,

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each chapter and is most fully discussed in Chapter Five.

[23] This issue is also addressed by Caroline Humphrey, in relation to Mongolian women and language taboos. For further reading see "Women, Taboo and the Suppression of Attention." *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society.* Ed. Shirley Ardener. (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993): 73-92.

[24] This is also, of course, a major premise in all theoretical (gender) frameworks and the 'backbone' of dualistic and binary theories, which are discussed further in chapter five.

women experience linguistic discrimination in two ways: in the

way they are taught to use language, and in the way general

language use treats them [. . . .] certain lexical items mean one

thing [when] applied to men, [and] another to women, a

difference that cannot be predicted except with reference to the

different roles the sexes play in society. (4)

Lakoff goes on to discuss the ways in which women's speech differs from

men's speech and how this phenomenon reflects a deep bias in western

culture, connecting lexical disparity to social inequality (10). While Lakoff

does not make use of explicit spatial terms, her research nonetheless reflects

the dualistic approach to space (masculine/feminine, public/private) that

seems to be a pattern in contemporary discussions of the subject. Thus

acknowledging the marginal position of women within language, she argues

that the difference that the politics of language depends upon is parallel to the

interacting and continual politics between men and women: "[w]e should be

attempting to single out those linguistic uses that, by implication and

innuendo, demean the members of one group or another" (43). Similarly,

Edwin Ardener (1975) argues that language has "shadows" that affect the

meanings and values of words.[25] This notion is related to Shirley Ardener's

theorizing of language when she notes, "[o]ne element in a cosmology can

only be fully understood in relation to all the other constituents" (*Women and*

Space 27). It is within these (and similar) theoretical frameworks of spatial

difference, dualism and binary opposition (between men and women) that the

investigation of physical and metaphorical place and space take shape within this study.

Feminist scholar Marilyn Frye (1983) explores another interesting aspect of gendered space, looking closely at how women interact with spaces and emotions. She maintains that, in women, behaviors such as anger are dependent on the meanings given to femininity, which are, in turn, grounded in physical space. She explains, stating: "I imagine phallocentric reality to be the space and figures and motion which constitute the foreground, and the constant repetitive uneventful activities of women to constitute and maintain the background against which the foreground plays" (*Politics of Reality* 167). She further notes, not unlike Shirley Ardener (1981), that these two spaces are co-dependent, whilst focusing on the way in which a masculine "same" depends on a feminized "other"; in other words, masculinity depends on femininity (and vice versa) for its very existence or definition.

Frye's findings are particularly interesting in terms of domesticity and the binary oppositions she proposes. She argues that there is a patriarchal division amongst domestic labor that ultimately finds the woman 'placed' most often in the kitchen. She acknowledges this division, stating that while no two women live in identical spaces: "[f]or better or for worse [. . .] in each of our lives, others' concepts of us are revealed by the limits of the intelligibility of our anger" (94).

One woman took this thought home with her and tried it out.

She walked about the apartment she shares, not unhappily, with

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[25] See Edwin Ardener, "Some Outstanding Problems in the Analysis of Events." *Yearbook of*

her young husband, testing in imagination for the viability of her

anger-- in what situations would it "work", would get uptake.

She discovered that the pattern was very simple and clear. It

went with the floor plan. She could get angry quite freely in the

kitchen and somewhat less freely and about a more limited

range of things in the living room. She could not get angry in the

bedroom.

Anger. Domain. Respect. (93-94)

Frye's illustration is a fascinating one. She sees anger as an instrument of

cartography, explaining that one can map others' concepts of who and what

one is, by determining where is it socially acceptable to become and feel

angry. I return to this notion in chapters three and four when I explore how

emotion can be seen as an intangible space and how this, in turn, can be

seen to affect the identity of supernatural female characters.

Other areas of interest related to human geography take us toward

essentialist feminism with theorists arguing that women have breached

invisible boundaries and have already remapped their territories. In *Woman

and Nature: Roaring Inside Her,* Susan Griffin (1978) believes, like Mary Daly,

that we can simply "be as we really are and we will enter a new, pure space

free of the distorting mediations of power" (194). Griffin elaborates, stating

that

Symbolic Anthropology. Ed. E. Schwimmer. (London: Hurst, 1975).

we are no longer pleading for the right to speak: we have

spoken; space has changed; we are living in a matrix of our own

sounds; our words resonate, by our echoes we chart a new

geography; we recognize this new landscape as our birthplace,

where we invented names for ourselves; here language does

not contradict what we know. (195)

While Griffin makes a valid point (indeed feminism had by 1978 made

substantial progress), and her notion of transparent space is a bold one, her

somewhat utopian ideology is nonetheless flawed on two fundamental levels.

First, as women we continue to exist within patriarchal boundaries, because

our western reality remains patriarchal. Second, her claim depends heavily

on a commonality or universality among women, which is, in itself,

problematic; how can one claim to understand the oppression of all women?

Transparent space, then, according to Lefebvre, is an illusion because it

views space as innocent, "as free of traps or secret places. Anything hidden

or dissimulated--and hence dangerous-- is antagonistic to transparency,

under whose reign everything can be taken in by a single glance from that

mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates" (28). Lefebvre

contends that transparent space is homogenous and denies difference

because it assumes that 'truth' is a notion that can be known. Following

Lefebvre, Blunt and Rose concede that parallels can be drawn between

spaces that are constituted through struggles over power and knowledge and

therefore "different epistemological claims about women's identity produce

different interpretations of space itself" (5). Thus, "in its claim to know for

absolute certain the true nature of all women, [essentialist feminism] depends on and produces a space in which the essence of femininity is immediately accessible and transparently obvious" (6). Griffin's ideology, can be seen then to make little room for difference, and thus negate and marginalize difference in its structure.[26] However, the concept of transparent space or what I later term (more accurately) intangible space, can still be a useful analytical tool particularly as it is represented within and applied to literature; it is therefore addressed in chapter four: Telepathic Spaces, (Anti)Essentialism and the Difficulty with 'We'.

While it is true that many theoretical frameworks in both feminist and human geography rely heavily on research involving issues of violence in the home, pornography, and unpaid domestic labor (none of which are necessarily directly applicable to the fiction in this thesis), I am using some of these frameworks here, and indeed throughout my research, as a general 'map' to the territories women occupy.[27] Again, let me emphasize that I am concerned, mainly, with the geography of the fictional supernatural woman, and how she (and her image) is (dis)placed, structured, trapped, and maintained through the written word and throughout the physical and abstract spaces that fiction creates within its narratives. More specifically, I am interested in the space granted to or imposed upon, the supernatural woman,

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[26] Essentialist feminist arguments have been accused of negating difference and perpetuating the marginalization of women. While I do not wish to appear 'essentialist' there are times when this position is a valid one, and moreover, is not as simple as a 'universal claim'. See Griffin's arguments in chapter two of this thesis.

[27] For example: Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* (London : Women's Press, 1981); Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (New York: Crossing Press, 1983). In the former, Griffin's research revolves primarily around pornography and prostitution and in the latter, Frye's work highlights domestic labor, violence and emotions.

as she is consistently stereotyped and trapped within specific boundaries of space and place in fantastic fiction.

Thus far, from the existing body of theoretical work done in feminist and human geography, I acknowledge that distinguishing between public and private space can be a valuable theoretical tool because it acknowledges difference and individual experience. I therefore continue throughout this thesis to explore space in these terms, whilst being cautious of the disempowerment it can, at times, create. In addition, I concede that intangible spaces, including emotional spaces, are important areas of exploration and seek to investigate how representations of such spaces affect individual identity within fiction. Finally, from the theory outlined thus far, I perceive difference, otherness, gender and space to be highly related and interconnected notions; intriguingly, these same interwoven notions are significant motifs within women-centered fantasy. Because the literature that represents the supernatural woman falls typically within the genre of fantasy, and further because fantastic literatures are so often transgressive in their representations of space, sexuality, power and gender, it is also integral to this study to outline the theoretical frameworks of this literary genre.

The Fantastic

In order to limit the potential for controversial uses in terminology, it is essential to define for the reader how I understand the terms surrounding fantasy. Within this study, and in keeping with Tzvetan Todorov's usage of the word, 'fantastic' is employed to distinguish texts that produce a disruptive presence fluctuating around a narrative that blurs boundaries between the

real and the imaginary.[28] In this sense, all of the texts within this thesis are fantastic as they offer "a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence" (Le Guin 79). 'Fantasy' is used specifically to connote the labeling of the genre as a formulaic structure, and is not to be confused with psychoanalytic fantasy; psychoanalytic fantasy, or 'phantasy' signals an engagement with unconscious fears or desires.[29]

As the individual chapters of this thesis make clear, it is my contention that varied aspects which make up the foreign, the othered, the marginal and the unreal are significant to the formulation of fantastic topographies in women-centered texts. Further, I argue that labeling is a problematic and often disruptive way of offering representations (of women) in fiction. As we will see in the remainder of this chapter, however, theories of the fantastic are largely beset with contradictory (and often rigid) definitions of what this genre constitutes and what labels are acceptably or unacceptably attached to individual texts. I do not wish to choose a definitive side in this problematic discussion, first because labels in themselves are problematic and second because, like Lucie Armitt (2000), I contend that

> carving up fantasy and the fantastic and jamming its literature
>
> into a series of discrete, neatly labelled boxes kills literature

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[28] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre.* Trans. Richard Howard. (New York: Cornell UP, 1975): 24-25.

[29] While I go on to discuss the patriarchal alliance of Freudian discourses including psychoanalysis and the unconscious extensively in Chapter Four and Six of this thesis, 'phantasy' is rarely employed as a term. I mention it here purely to make the reader aware of the important distinction between literary fantasy and fantasy within psychoanalytic discourse; this distinction will become clearer in Chapter Four in relation to Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time.* For a more fuller theoretical discussion of the 'phantasy' and its relationship with fantasy and the fantastic see Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic.* (London: Arnold, 1996).

dead. So much ground has been lost in comparison with other

fields of literary criticism while critics of fantasy have been

futilely squabbling over whether a text is marvellous or fabulous

[....] (13)

Thus, my purpose here is to offer the reader the dominant theories within the

genre whilst engaging with their ideas and questioning their relevance.

Clearly, this thesis intersects with a variety of theoretical frameworks in its

analysis and to this end, an introductory theoretical discussion of fantasy and

the fantastic is essential to its understanding.[30]

In *Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales and Stories* (1979), Eric Rabkin

maintains that all art is fantastic (in some sense) because it offers us a space

where not only is there order, but where order prevails (3). Rabkin's work

within the genre is important to this study because he addresses the notion of

language and 'codes' within literary discourse, a concept we return to in

chapter five of this thesis in terms of binary oppositions and again in chapter

six in terms of fantasy itself. Offering a rather bleak view of reality and

quoting simple (but often contested), notions such as "indifference" and

"meaning" as elements of fantasy, Rabkin notes that some art is more

fantastic than others. Not a supporter of rigid structuralist approaches to the

genre, Rabkin finds that categorizing fantasy invites dispute. Thus, he sees it

as a continual process of development envisioning reality at one end of a

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[30] This introductory discussion of fantasy concentrates on the seminal, influential and all encompassing theoretical frameworks found within the genre. For a collection of varied definitions of 'fantasy' see C.W. Sullivan, "Fantasy." *Stories and Society. Children's Literature and its Social Context.* Ed. D. Butts. (London: MacMillan, 1992) 97-100. Also, Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction.* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001): 1-35.

metaphorical spectrum and fantasy at the other. While acknowledging that there are many levels of fantasy (including science fiction/fantasy, essay/fantasy, horror/fantasy and fairy tale/fantasy), Rabkin finds that there is one true form of the genre. This true form hinges on a number of criteria, culminating in the reversal of alternative worlds.

Maintaining that fantasy supplies alternative worlds with alternative answers (19), Rabkin notes that these answers are either the myths that cultures live by, folktales to entertain cultures, or fairy tales which act as educational aids for the young. Moreover, these different kinds of fantasy operate successfully through the aid of certain signifiers and the activation of specific literary codes. Thus, phrases such as "Once upon a time" and "a golden haired princess" alert us to the fact that a handsome prince will soon arrive, not a plumber named Sid (8, 21). Moreover, through the wider public knowledge of established conventions within the fantastic, fantastic worlds begin to take on a life of their own whereby newer worlds can be constructed as alternatives to older ones. The alternative world offered through fantasy is key to determining how 'fantastic' a text is for Rabkin:

> [i]t is important to recognize that the fantastic comes not from
> mere violation of the "real world," but from offering an alternative
> to the real world; not from an alternative to some real world of
> immutable and universal law, but to a real world which our life
> and education have trained us to project as expectable as the
> context for a given text; and not to the projected real world in the
> fullness of its infinite and often conflicting elements, but to the

particular real world which conforms to the needs of the world

inside of the text itself. Because we believe that wizards

"obviously" do not exist, we naively suppose that their

occurrence in a story is fantastic. But if that story cries out to be

read as the life of a saint who performed miracles, then for

believing readers the text is clearly not fantastic. (19-20)

As such, it is not just the notion of alternative worlds that Rabkin pinpoints as

the crux of the fantastic, but the continual reversal of operating ground rules

within the framework of the alternative world. Thus, while talking dragons,

flying carpets, or magical witches cannot occur in the real world, they can

exist in fantasy and we accept this. What makes fantasy 'extremely fantastic'

for Rabkin, however, is when these alternative worlds continually challenge

the rules of their own fantasy. For example, in a fictional world where witches

can exist, the witch is expected to adhere to the literary codes assigned to

her. We can reasonably expect that she will be old and ugly, or deviously

young and beautiful; we can assume that she will live deep within a forest or

wood, in an abandoned shack of some sort, or a variant of such. If we deviate

from these codes, or if we intrude upon these codes with elements that do not

belong we are reversing the ground rules. Therefore, stories about witches

who live in condos or drive BMW's or who are fundamentally good, would

constitute a fantastic role reversal at a basic level for Rabkin. But what

happens when our understanding of what is fantastic is continually

challenged? What happens when the ground rules are established at the

beginning of a text, but then change within the very framework of the text?

What happens when both the characters *in* a text and the readers *of* the text grow increasingly unsure of the fantasy itself? An example extraneous to my main argument will best illustrate my challenge.[31]

In Eduardo Sanchez and Dan Myrick's film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) a 'real problem' is first presented— several children disappear— and a 'fantastical solution' is then given: the Blair Witch took them.[32] The characters within the film do not initially believe in the Blair Witch and the audience accepts their skepticism as the first basic ground rule of the film. But as the narrative progresses, both the characters within the film and the viewers of the film begin to question the "alternative world" from which the plot is operating. Reality quickly invades *The Blair Witch Project* and is just as easily dispensed with. Our suspended disbelief in the existence of ghosts in stories— essential for the understanding of the film— continually diminishes and is restored as each character dies, but a probable explanation is offered. However, further on in the film, when the ground rules shift once more and the characters begin to believe in the witch, we begin to wonder what is 'real' and what is 'fantasy'. In addition, because of the structure of the film itself — the documentary nature of it, the real time shots, the fact that the film was released under the hoax of a true story, and the surprise ending— we are never entirely sure if this is fact or fiction. The alternative world presented in

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[31] As already noted, while this thesis is primarily concerned with written discourse it does allude to both film and television at times. Thus, the application of Rabkin's theory to *The Blair Witch Project* here serves as a contemporary popular example. Like Disney's *Snow White* in chapter five, it is a popular example that lends itself to a large readership.

[32] For a further description of the film and its contents see: Deneka C. MacDonald, "The Power of the Imagination in the Blair Witch Project," *Scope.* August 2001. <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/journal/>. For specific spatial discussion in the film see: --., "Trespassing into Tempation: Gendered Imagination and The Blair Witch Project." *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-Present).* Spring. Volume 1. Issue 1: 2002 <http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/>.

the film perpetually shifts its own ground rules through the development of characterization, plot and tone. The audience is left struggling to distinguish between fact and fiction, real world and fantasy.

For Rabkin this continual role reversal is the heart of fantasy and the defining feature of a true fantastic work. Many texts make a host of reversals all at one moment, opening up a world alternative to our own. But once in the world, fundamental reversals almost never occur (as in most fairy tales). If however, ordinary experience (i.e. everyday experience close to one's own 'real' world experience) is provided in a fantastic world and both reader and character are surprised, the ground rules have been reversed and further fantasy has been created. The true fantasy then, for Rabkin, is that class of works that uses the fantastic exhaustively by recognizing our sensitivity to reversals at the following levels: plot, thematic development, character development and style (22). As we will see throughout the chapters of this thesis, sensitivity to role reversal and challenges to existing roles are textual elements that the women-centered fantastic text implicitly accomplishes.

In *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov (1975) takes a strict structural approach to the fantastic, comparing his theory to a scientific methodology (4). He proceeds by deduction, selecting a few representative texts and producing a hypothesis, claiming that it is not the quantity, but the "logical coherence of a theory that finally matters" (2). Further, he defines what he considers to be the "heart" of the fantastic as the moment of hesitation found within the structure of the text.

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world

without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event

which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar

world. The person who experiences the events must opt for one

of two possible solutions: wither he is the victim of an illusion of

the senses, of a product of the imagination— and laws of the

world then remain what they are; or else reality— but then this

reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an

illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely

like other living beings— with this reservation, that we encounter

him frequently. The fantastic occupies the duration of this

uncertainty. (25)

For Todorov, hesitation experienced by the reader and embedded within the

text by an ambiguous narrative is the 'absolute' defining feature of the

fantastic text; the very concept of the fantastic is characterized by confusion

about what is real and what is imaginary (25). From that moment on we either

enter into the realm of the marvelous or the uncanny, the two neighboring

genres on which Todorov bases his theory:[33]

Pure Uncanny	Fantastic Uncanny	Fantastic Marvelous	Pure Marvelous
(curious ghostly tales)	(strange events have some subjective origin)	(inexplicable events eventually resolved through supernatural	(fairy tales, romance, science fiction)

[33] Todorov uses the diagram below, duplicated here for convenience, to illustrate the divisions within fantastic texts.

		origin)	

Todorov sees the fantastic text as one being caught between the marvelous and the uncanny, and in fact places them as transitory sub-genres within the fantastic (44). Ultimately, we always find ourselves within the uncanny, the fantastic-uncanny, the fantastic-marvelous, or the marvelous. The key is the questioning experienced by the implicit reader. Fantastic texts are then obliged to meet three criteria: hesitation on the part of the reader between the natural and the supernatural; the ability of the reader to identify with a main character of the text; a rejection of allegorical and poetic interpretations within the text (33). For Todorov, it is the first and third of these which constitute markers of the genre. If the reader hesitates and discredits allegory, then s/he is within the fantastic literary realm.

Yet the fantastic and fantasy remain equally problematic terms, applied to a great variety of texts that are both diverse and defiant. Not unlike Armit (2000), Peter Hunt (2001) observes that "oceans of ingenious ink has been used to classify fantasy: an activity which goes against the general spirit [of the genre]" (11). Since much fantastic literature rests on the relationship between the real or the imaginary as well as a rejection of normative real-life 'rules' it seems not only impossible, but also impractical, to categorize these texts so scrupulously. Todorov may come close to an acceptable compromise at times, as does Rosemary Jackson (1981) when she suggests that we discuss these texts in terms of literary *modes* rather than literary genre. Jackson argues that fantasy should be thought of as a mode of writing rather a genre because the emphasis on desire has made many of its themes

and subjects taboo and therefore subversive.[34] Yet, because the body of

texts, which could conceivably be termed 'fantasy' are greatly diverse,

individual texts can be included or excluded from the genre depending on

which theoretical model one applies. For example, Dostoevsky dismisses

tales which are 'too incredible' to be introduced as 'real' stating that they

break the convention of uncertainty. The Tin Man without a heart, then, is just

nonsense because the concept breaks the limits of possibility and the

agreement between reader and author. Thus, for Dostoevsky, true fantastic

texts should be "[s]o close to the real that you almost have to believe it" (qtd.

In Jackson 27).

The intersecting point on which most theoretical models meet hinges

on the experience of the reader: Todorov and Dostoevsky call for absolute

hesitation on the part of the reader, while Rabkin insists that true fantasy

reverses its own alternative world. Rosemary Jackson points out that "[a]s a

literature of 'unreality,' fantasy has altered in character over the years in

accordance with changing notions of what exactly constitutes 'reality'" (4).

Thus, Jackson rightly addresses issues of perception whilst acknowledging

that individual realities differ. Rabkin goes further than that, devoting a

significant portion of his theoretical model to reader response. He makes the

point that a reader's reaction to a text depends on several things, among them

their own associations with their individual reality: "[f]or any given reader,

these associations might seem to be either impersonal and somehow outside

him or personal and inside him" (16). Thus, experience, on the part of the

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[34]Jackson contends that "it is possible [...] to modify Todorov's scheme slightly and to suggest a definition of the fantastic as a *mode*, which then assumes different generic forms"(35). Fantasy only seems to be its own genre because of its close association to the novel which it undermines (35).

reader, is a vital component of the fantastic: "fantastic worlds— perhaps paradoxically— are defined for us and are of interest to us by virtue of their relationship to the real world we *imagine* to have been thought normal when the story was composed" [italics mine] (4). These various models demand that "surprise" be the essential element of the fantastic text (despite the terms they choose to use), thus embedding reader-response in the structure of the text to ensure some degree of hesitation, surprise or reversal. Yet this is a concept that potentially invites dispute.

In *Image, Music, Text* (1977), Roland Barthes contends that "[a]s soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins [emphasis in original]" (142). Barthes controversially puts the emphasis on the reader at the expense of the author, thus evacuating the author from the text entirely and arguing for meaning to be found only in a reader's response to a text. However, while it is true that "a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning [...] but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes 146), it is equally true that "no logical necessity compels a critic to banish an author in order to analyze [a text]" (Hirsch 2). Moreover, presuming to know what is 'real' or 'unreal' for any given reader of a text is problematic; to be sure, "one person's fantasy is another person's norm-- who would care to draw their own line between fantasy and reality?" (Hunt 10). Thus we are lead to further questions such as: how can one know what one reader will find *close enough*

to reality while another will not? How is a ghost any more *real* than the Tin Man? What kind of heart does a ghost have?

Indeed, because our own reality is crucial to our experience of fantasy so too are the social and cultural influences working around us at a particular time. Rabkin coins the useful terms 'inside reality' and 'outside reality' (16). For Rabkin, 'inside reality' constitutes personal perceptions of the world and implications that affect one *individually*, while 'outside reality' is made up of exterior influences (cultural, political, social) and events occurring during one's life and more exactly, during specific periods of one's life when they encounter the given literature. An individual reaction to text can differ greatly from one particular moment to another. A student can receive a text as an undergraduate in one way and then return to the same text as a graduate student and receive it an entirely different way. Similarly, we receive texts differently as adults from how we did as children or adolescents-- re-visioned or adult fairy tales are a case in point. Thus, in addition to the experience a reader brings to a text, his/her contextual environment also determines how one interprets fantasy.

Rabkin uses the example of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to explain his point. While the concept of bringing a person back to life after the experience of death was entirely fantastic at the time of *Frankenstein's* publication (1818), it is currently possible to restart a heart with a defibrillator. For a contemporary audience, the extension of life and the capability of restarting life once someone is technically dead, is a medical possibility and no longer a fantastic notion. However, the historical *context* of the Shelley's novel makes it fantastic: "[t]he degree to which an art work seems fantastic depends upon a

reader's projection of the outside reality as it must conform to his assumptions about the culture of the text, the culture of the reader, and the life experience of the reader" (Rabkin 18).

Rabkin also contends that fantasy takes on further significance when it is read as a response to the real world (4-5). He uses the example of a wandering dragons that destroy farms, arguing that such dragons are in fact dramatizations of real world problems and that the simple solution of a prince killing a dragon poses a satisfying alternative to the complexities of the real world. It is empowering for the reader who identifies with this as an analogy of a real world experience. Thus, adventure and quests in which good prevails over evil is a dramatic interest for us in fantasy only because it is also such in the real world. Therefore, the dramatization of such problems through artistic representation can be exciting, satisfying or terrifying. In contrast, Rabkin notes: "one never reads a story motivated by a cure for hangnails" (5). Fantasy, then, eases our questions, if only for a time, by offering possible answers to real life problems.

In *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, (1981) Rosemary Jackson begins her discussion of the fantastic with a critique of Tzvetan Todorov's structural analysis. She notes that Todorov does not move beyond the text to the culture it came from (5), whilst giving credit to Todorov for providing one of the most useful, although highly rigid, theoretical models of fantasy. Her goal in examining the 'genre' seems to be reformation: "[d]e-mystifying the process of reading fantasies will, hopefully, point to the possibility of undoing many texts which work, unconsciously, upon us. In the end this may lead to real social transformation"(10). Here Jackson touches on the most profound

aspect of fantasy, yet, as we shall see, she implies a promise that she does not fulfill. Her theoretical model works to transform the literary structures of this genre, not necessarily to inform us of social and cultural influences within literature that may lead to a new consciousness.

Using Kafka's *Metamorphosis* as her paradigm, Jackson moves to the heart of her analysis of vision within the fantastic text:

> The confusion between the "I" and a "he" through the narrative
> voice has as its cause and effect an uncertainty of vision, a
> reluctance or inability to fix things as explicable and known. The
> fantastic problematizes vision (is it possible to trust the seeing
> eye?) and language (is it possible to trust the recording,
> speaking, I?). Interestingly, in the translation of a 'fantastic'
> genre into cinema, these problems are refocused around the
> vision of the camera 'eye' which can produce similar conflation
> of 'objective' or documentary recording and an implication of
> 'subjective' vision through a character in the narrative. (30-31)

While noting that "in this sense, the cinematic process itself could be called 'fantastic'" (31), she states that further study of the relations and difference between literary and filmic representations of fantasy are needed. This is perhaps one of the more interesting points in Jackson's analysis.[35] However, she abandons this point, noting only that Todorov does not consider perception on this level, and goes on to discuss alterations to his theory.

When she returns to the concept of vision later on, she is concerned with that which is literally unseen, including phenomena such as ghosts:

> An emphasis upon visibility points to one of the central thematic concerns of the fantastic: problems with vision. In a culture which equates the 'real' with the 'visible' and gives the eye dominance over other sense organs, the un-real is that which is in-visible. That which is not seen, or which threatens to be un-seeable, can only have a subversive function [....] Knowledge, comprehension, reason, are established through the power of the *look*, through the *'eye'*, and of the *'I'* of the human subject whose relation to objects is structured through this field of vision. (45)

'Otherness', Jackson says, "is all that threatens 'this' world, this 'real' world, with dissolution: and it is this opposition which lies behind the several myths which have developed in the modern fantastic" (57-58).

> 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 conceptualization, this naming of difference as evil, is a significant ideological gesture [....] Strangeness precedes the

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[35]The issue of *difference* and *perspective* in texts dealing with the fantastic is one I return to in

naming of it as evil: the other is defined as evil precisely

because of his/her difference and a possible power to disturb

the familiar and known. (52-53)

Here Jackson is interested in 'other' as it relates to 'self' and further to

religious and secular society. However, this idea can be used in a broader

cultural sense to explore its position from a feminist perspective. If we apply

Jackson's literal analysis of vision to a more global or metaphorical vision of

the literature we can begin to see the promise of "social transformation" which

she refers to at the beginning of her work. On this thread, we can then

contend that in literature of a fantastic nature we encounter significant

challenges to established social and political boundaries— not just the

technical structures of the written text confined by our literal perceptions, as

Jackson suggests, but rather, underlying boundaries (often represented by

metaphor) within literary texts which marginalize characters. The *in-visible*

then becomes those who have been *unseen* by cultural, social, political and

patriarchal institutions. In this sense, fantastic literature can truly be seen as

subversive. Fantasy *does have* a cultural edge to it, as Jackson suggests, but

perhaps the more (culturally and indeed politically) significant factor can be

seen in that branch of the fantastic which centers on those who have been

unseen and unheard— the voices of the *periphery* of literature. The subtitle of

Jackson's text, 'The Literature of Subversion,' implies a promise to investigate

such social and cultural concerns within fantastic literature. Unfortunately,

Jackson is more concerned with literal subversions— subversions of

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chapter five as well as chapter six.

structure. However, while she does not pursue the more cultural aspect of subversion, her work is not irrelevant or unimportant to this study. On the contrary, her investigations can here serve as a starting point for what can be seen as the *gap* in theories of the fantastic— the investigation of social, cultural and political subversions within the 'genre'.

Rabkin begins to touch on this notion when he defends fantasy against the common charge that it is "just entertainment" or "escapism".[36] He contends, on the one hand, that there is nothing wrong with art's providing simple entertainment, but also notes that "[i]f the real world oppresses a reader by the fact of morality or the ambiguities of sex, a fantastic world that handles his fear for him, or at least for a time of reading, clarifies his confusion, is a world that offers not escape, but *liberation*" [emphasis mine] (23). This is perhaps Rabkin's most profound point for my purpose because, as we shall see in the following chapters, women-centered fantastic fiction almost invariably does this. It offers a liberating freedom from the masculine world in which many women exist. More accurately, feminist fiction that deals with women-centered issues provide a forum in which liberation can be further explored. The daughters of power in Diana River's *Daughters of the Great Star* (1992), escape their dominating and patriarchal structures to fight back against their persecutors; Viviane and Morgan are able to break free from the

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[36]Peter Hunt (2001) notes, "[f]antasy literature is either taken seriously (and enthusiastically) or seriously rejected. It is the root of all literature, an area of advanced literary experimentation, and essential to our mental health; *or* it is regressive, and associated with self-indulgent catharsis on the part of the writers; *or* it is linked to a ritualistic, epic, dehumanized world of predetermination and out of tune with post-romantic sensitivity: *or* it symbolizes the random world of the postmodern [emphasis in original]" (2). Similarly, Lucy Armitt (1996) defends fantasy against such charges arguing that, unfairly, when we place the fantastic in a literary context we "[s]uddenly it is something dubious, embarrassing [....] Suddenly we need to justify our interest in it [.... it] inevitably attracts two negative[s]: escapism and pulp fiction" (1).

masculine space of Camelot in order to function on the liberated island of Avalon in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* (1982); a team of intelligent women travel to the masculinized world of Arth in order to save Earth from Arth's devious intentions in Diana Wynne-Jones' *A Sudden Wild Magic* (1992).[37]

While the fantastic can consist of various bodies of literature, depending on how one categorizes it, a common link found within all fantastic stories is the defiance of the structured reality of rules and norms. This defiance, while arguably evident in the way that Jackson and Todorov describe it, is also developed at further levels in contemporary feminist fantasy. This is particularly the case in women-centered texts which explore the marginalization of women and further seek to reverse or de-marginalize women . These 'further levels' of subversion— culturally, spatially, socially and politically significant— are those that this thesis seeks to explore. Moreover, the transgressive nature of the fantastic text, particularly in relation to discussions of feminist geography, is integral to understanding the image of the supernatural woman in literary discourse. In this way the fantastic text can "play an increasingly powerful metaphorical role in the development of feminist criticism and theory in general, quite aside from its interpretation of the motifs of fiction" (Armitt, *Contemporary* 6). It is towards such an understanding that the following chapters work in the hope of freeing the image of the supernatural woman from her somewhat 'frozen' place/space within literary discourse.

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[37] These texts serve as but a few examples of forums for liberation in the fantastic text. Arguably, all the texts within this thesis do the same.

Chapter Two
Space Invaders:
Location and Landscape[1]

[she] walked nightly without fear in the bandit-haunted forests of the mountains all her life in the certain knowledge that the darkness held nothing more terrible than she was.[2]

Changing perceptions of the supernatural in western society have led to a growing interest in the figures of the goddess and witch in contemporary culture and literature. These two icons of powerful and potentially dangerous femininity have frequently been depicted as manifestations of an equally powerful and potentially dangerous 'feminine' nature, which stands in contrast and conflict with 'masculine' civilization.[3] As we will see throughout this thesis, western texts frequently feminize nature.

We are here, as always, concerned with the physical geographies of fictional supernatural women. Indeed, fictional (as well as real) women must not only contend with socially constructed spaces and territories, but additionally, must address and concern themselves with the internal hierarchies and power structures associated with those spaces. More often than not, these hierarchical divisions are contested within a natural setting (i.e. forests, wooded areas or natural products) or within a private feminized space such as the home. For example, both Anne Rice's *The Witching Hour* (1990) and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) invoke the image of home to emphasize an intermingled sense of power and

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[1] A large part of this chapter has been published. See: Deneka C. MacDonald: "Fascination, Skepticism and Intrigue: the Goddess Question". In *Mythen, Riten, Simulakra. Semiotische Perspektiven / Myths, Rites, Simulacra. Semiotic Viewpoints* (Angewandte Semiotik). Eds. Jeff Bernard and Gloria Withalm. (Wien: OeGS/ISSS, vol. 1 and 2: 2002): 262-281.

[2] Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad.* (London: Corgi, 1991): 23.

[3] The association of femininity (and Goddess worship) with nature is, of course, evoked even today in the common personalizing term "Mother Nature".

seclusion experienced by supernatural women. Similarly, Diana Rivers'

Daughters of the Great Star (1992) sets up a dichotomy between young

women born with significant powers of the "Great Goddess", and the highly

trained and older witches within the surrounding communities; the various

power struggles that ensue between these women occur in wooded areas and

forests. Rivers continues this motif with her companion text *Journey to*

Zelindar (1987) which finds these supernatural women fighting to protect their

home in the forest.[4] Similarly, in *The Mists of Avalon* (1982) Marion Zimmer

Bradley creates an Arthurian Britain that teeters on the brink of disaster whilst

changing from a Pagan to a Christian, or women-centered to male-centered

landscape. Geography and individual space play specific roles in these texts,

defining the characters, the territories they inhabit, and the landscapes they

explore whilst illustrating various forms of power, and hierarchical divisions in

power in which nature is consistently at the forefront.

As we have seen in chapter one, the division between masculine and

feminine space, or between public and private space, is not always a clear

one. However, if we can agree that it is true that nature is a dominating

physical presence in the world, it is equally true that humanity continually

seeks to control it. The relationship between nature and culture, or more

specifically between the natural environment and marginalized groups is the

predominant concern for ecological feminists or ecofeminism. Implicit in any

feminist devotion to nature is a critique of masculine civilization; twentieth and

twenty-first-century feminists have highlighted the relationship between nature

and women through the development of the critical school of ecofeminism.

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[4] While *Journey to Zelindar* was published before *Daughters of the Great Star*, its narrative

This school of thought suggests that the only way to escape patriarchal inequality is by returning to "mother nature" and the mythological time before gendered hierarchies. Whereas feminism explores the relationship between gender and identity among women, ecofeminism sees a relationship between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature (i.e. the natural environment and non-human creatures), because understanding environmental issues offers a place from which a greater understanding of the status and plight of women across cultures is accessible.

While there is no single ecofeminism or ecofeminist philosophy, the school of thought is distinct in its agreement that nonhuman nature and the domination of nature are feminist issues: "[e]cofeminist philosophy extends familiar feminist critiques of social isms of domination (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, anti-Semitism) to nature (i.e., naturism) [...] nature is a feminist issue" (Warren 4). Karen Warren (1997) contends that if feminism "is a movement committed to the elimination of male-gender power and privilege or sexism" (3) then it follows that "something is a feminist issue if an understanding of it helps one understand the oppression and subordination of women" (4). However, the important distinction between feminism and ecofeminism is the necessary presence of nature in the latter. Thus, Ynestra King (1989) argues that "social domination extends beyond sex to social domination of all kinds, because the domination of sex, race, and class and the domination of nature are mutually reinforcing" (20). Andy Smith (1997) agrees, noting that "with colonization begins the domination of women and the domination of nature" (22). Smith goes further, suggesting that "our

takes place chronologically after *Daughters.*

individualist, capitalist society tends to destroy our sense of meaningful connectedness with nature, with all creatures and all people and to replace these relationships with commodities" (31).

Most ecofeminist discourse articulates a feminist politics that challenges the domination of both women and nature from a variety of particular (often empirical) concerns including the relationship between women and forest deprivation and depletion, unsanitary water and contamination, gender divisions among farm labour, environmental racism, and sexist and naturist language (Warren 5-12). More generally, ecofeminism maintains that there are important connections between "how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on the one hand and how one treats the non-human natural environment on the other" (Warren xi). Ecofeminism is both a political movement and a theoretical position that seeks to establish the "nature of these connections [....] and determin[e] which are potentially liberating for both women and non-human nature"(Warren 3). Consequently, ecofeminists are concerned with the power that 'public' man seeks to use against the natural world (to control nature and reap its resources), affiliating the domination of women with the domination of nature (Smith 22). Further, while the public masculine world works to control nature, the private feminized world relates to it differently; since nature is imagined as a feminine entity, one often finds the female living, appreciating, celebrating and communicating with nature (Kelly 114-115).

Unsurprisingly, ecofeminism has often been accused of essentialist arguments and indeed it is, at times, difficult to separate many of its generalized claims regarding nature from its claims regarding women. Still,

Susan Griffin (1997) convincingly defends ecofeminism against claims of essentialism stating that

> [j]ust as poststructural feminism has criticized the dominant culture's use of the words *woman* and *nature*, so ecofeminism criticizes those uses from another perspective. And like poststructuralism, ecofeminism sees both words as belonging to a system of thought in which hidden significance makes the meaning of the word *woman* dependent on a certain idea of nature. Like poststructuralists, ecofeminists argue that neither the word *woman* nor the word *nature* can be read apart from each other and both are shaped by, marked by, and contain traces of a larger system, a philosophy that is also a submerged psychology. ("Ecofeminism and Meaning" 215-216)

Griffin's method of critiquing language and its 'meanings' is an interesting one and the idea of such a critique is one that I will return to in chapter five. My immediate concern, however, is whether or not ecofeminist notions can be applied to literary texts without over-essentializing the relationship between nature and woman. This seems feasible in light of recent work. In "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism" (1997), Gretchen T. Legler suggests that ecofeminist literary criticism is most useful in investigating "what ways and to what degrees a work challenges previous constructions of nature and human relationships with nature" (230). While the ecofeminist lens has been turned toward much 'nature writing,' other genres of fiction have less often been the target of its analysis; women-centered fantasy texts in particular have

received little, if any, attention.[5] This does not, however, mean that that there

is no connection between literary discourse and ecofeminist theoretical

explorations. Like ecofeminism, women-centered fantasy fiction also sees an

affiliation between women and nature, but this affiliation goes beyond

marginalization and oppression to extend to the spatial boundaries in which

women as representatives of nature can seek a place of resistance within the

natural environment. For example, *Daughters of the Great Star* treats nature

and women as common marginalized groups who, together, can explore new

boundaries of communication and safety from patriarchal oppressions. *The

Mists of Avalon* takes a similar approach, but treats the relationship between

women and nature as one that is pre-established-- both women and nature

are representative of a Mother Goddess who gives life and death. Both

women and nature are in danger of losing this representative status due to a

patriarchal threat; it is this process that the narrative explores. *A Sudden Wild

Magic* is a more environmentally concerned and aware text. Wynne-Jones

uses the relationship between nature and women to highlight real world

concerns about ecology and damage to the world's environment. As we shall

see in this chapter, all three texts see women as the probably saviors of and

communicators with nature. All three texts also see the relationship between

women and nature as a pre-established connection and each text explores

this theme implicitly through distinctive spatial motifs. Thus, this chapter

begins by focusing on the contemporary academic (and non academic)

interest in nature, feminist/human geography and their association with

questions surrounding supernatural women. I intend to investigate popular

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[5] Legler notes that it is most often the canon of traditional American nature literature (i.e. the

literary representations that reflect a growing interest in the supernatural female character as they correspond with environmental changes and concerns. More importantly, I would like to investigate the spatial relationship that binds nature and supernatural women. Indeed, as we will see, women are portrayed as 'closer to nature' than men in these texts. However, like Griffin, I would suggest that this theme should be understood "as a result of the social construction of gender and of the socialization and division of labor which precede from those constructions" (Griffin 215); my use of ecofeminism to inform my textual analysis is thus used accordingly.

This chapter presents five contemporary women-centered texts that have been the subject of little, if any, literary criticism and no spatial criticism. Each text illustrates a clear masculine/feminine spatial divide and explores how this divide affects female characters. As we will see, it is clear that these divisions are expressed chiefly, but not exclusively, through natural settings which can be deemed private spaces. Let us, therefore, turn to textual examples of the relationship with woman/nature/space to explore how these are shaped, maintained and challenged.

Women, Nature, Environment

Diana Wynne Jones is a popular female British author of fantasy. She is intriguing primarily for my purposes in her use of masculine and feminine spaces as represented in a variety of creative ways throughout her work. *A Sudden Wild Magic* (1992) incorporates powerful images of space and place

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work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and others) which has been explored thus far by ecofeminist literary critics (228).

that are central to the development of the plot. The novel begins by making a

persuasive introduction to the role that location will serve in the novel:

> [t]he magical activities of Britain have always been highly
>
> organized. Anyone who doubts this should consider the Spanish
>
> Armada and the winds that so conveniently dissipated it - and
>
> perhaps further consider why even the most skeptical of
>
> historians accepts this convenient hurricane so calmly, as a
>
> perfectly natural occurrence. Or the doubter might also consider
>
> why Hitler, or Napoleon before him, never got around to
>
> invading Britain, and why we accept these facts, too, so easily.
>
> (7)

With this dramatic claim to nature's physical presence and power, Wynne

Jones makes it clear that place as well as time will dominate the narrative of

this text. And so it does. We learn that Britain has a long history of magic and

this presence is situated in the larger context of the world. The reference to

landscape and power is an important one— Napoleon and Hitler, the narrator

suggests, did not make a physical journey to Britain because they would have

failed in their attempt to conquer it due to an overwhelming protective magic.

Moreover, the entire novel revolves around a specific conflict between two

fictional and arguably masculine worlds. Central themes include trespassing

into worlds, crossing physical, metaphorical and moral boundaries, and

witchcraft, all within the ultimate context of the Goddess who protects nature.

Indeed, nature's physical presence (and existence) is the central cause of

conflict within the text. The fictional world of Arth instigates global warming on Earth in order to find a solution to their own ecology problems; consequently, Earth invades Arth because they have trespassed and interfered with nature and the environment. Importantly, Arth is unstable in the first place due to its disrespect of ecology; Arth has displeased the Goddess within the text by disrespecting the power of nature, and Her retaliation is ecological danger for the planet. Arth must make peace and recompense nature in order to save itself. We can see an illustration of the relationship between nature and women. As we will see later in this chapter when we turn to discussing homes as space, Arth is a male-centered community that disregards women just as much as it disregards nature.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's treatment of women and nature also provides an example of spatial and gendered divisions within natural settings. In *The Mists of Avalon* (1982), Avalon is imagined as an island for women. It is self contained and self sustained by women for women who are priestess-trained and devoted to the Goddess.[6] It exists apart from the rest of Britain and apart from the rest of the world. Drifting further into the world of 'other' over time and because of decreasing acceptance of paganism and matriarchy, Avalon becomes both metaphorically and physically othered from the outside world of masculine spaces, the most powerful of which is Camelot. Avalon drifts further into the mists that cover it like a protective veil when Christianity begins to sweep through Britain with force. Thoughts and notions of the Goddess fade; paganism becomes unfashionable and heretical; female-centered religion is on the decline.

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[6] The Goddess is capitalized here because she is portrayed in Bradley's text as a deity in

Avalon exists in opposition to Camelot in the text. While Avalon is women-centered, Camelot is equally male-centered; Avalon is a sphere of nature and nurture, Camelot is one of material and war.[7] The boundaries surrounding each space are clearly defined, and when either male or female tries to transgress them, they are unsuccessful. Thus, Lancelot and Arthur cannot thrive in Avalon any more than Morgaine or even Gwenhwyfar can prosper in Camelot.[8] The physical spaces of each are undeniably rigid: undeniably masculine and feminine.

In maintaining traditional boundaries between spheres within *The Mists of Avalon*, Bradley creates further conflicting spatial and gendered divisions within the text. In juxtaposing Avalon with Camelot, freedom with confinement and goddess worship with Christian worship, Bradley sets the two female characters (Gwenhwyfar and Morgaine) against each other, each character embodying these binaries. Morgaine is a 'supernatural' priestess whereas Gwenhwyfar is a 'natural' woman.[9] Morgaine is devoted to the Goddess, but Gwenhwyfar is faithful to the Christian religion. Morgaine chooses to exist (primarily) within the private space of Avalon, and Gwenhwyfar is forced to exist in the public space of Camelot. However, while Morgaine enjoys the

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direct contrast to the Christian God.

[7] While Camelot exists in a lengthy period of peace within the text, it can certainly be argued that it is consistently dominated with preparation for war as seen through the existence of the Knights of the Round Table.

[8] Bradley uses this spelling of Gwenivere and Morgan le Fey in *The Mists of Avalon*. I, therefore, adopt her spelling when discussing her novel.

[9] It should be noted that ecofeminism consistently maintains that there is a set of "natural processes which precede and yet also include human consciousness" (Griffin, "Ecofeminism" 215), which in turn lead to patriarchal oppression and marginalization. The word *natural* therefore is often critiqued within this school of thought which, like Derrida, contends that neither meaning nor definition resides in the word alone. Natural, therefore, brings with it connotations of what it is be natural within western culture. I invoke 'natural' here to further problematize the term when it is contrasted with what is perceived to be 'supernatural'.

freedom of movement between private and public spheres, she encounters

conflict when she attempts to claim the right to use her supernatural power

outside Avalon. Similarly, Gwenhwyfar's life, first in her father's house and

then in Arthur's, is spatially limited.

> How strange, Gwenhwyfar thought, to remember that there had
>
> been a time when she had liked to go abroad under the wide,
>
> high sky, not even caring whether there was a wall or the safety
>
> of an enclosure; and now she grew sick and dizzy if she went
>
> out from the walls; where she could not see or touch them.
>
> Sometimes now she felt the lump of fear in her belly even when
>
> she walked across the courtyard, and had to hurry to touch the
>
> safety of the wall again. (314)

Gwenhwyfar's agoraphobia is one of the elements that define her as a

'natural' woman (in contrast to Morgaine's apparent unnatural behavior). This

fear can be seen as a metaphor for her fear of freedom and self-rule.

Gwenhwyfar has never had the opportunity to seize her own freedom, since

she is a 'natural' woman, raised in 'normal conditions' within society. In "Why

Change the Arthur Story?" (1993) Lee-Ann Tobin argues that Gwenhwyfar's

agoraphobia is a direct function of her (normal) 'female training'. Tobin finds

that the text implies Gwenhwyfar's Christian upbringing and the time spent

behind convent walls serve to magnify her fear (151). In addition to the

'proper' Christian training Gwenhwyfar receives from the convent, she has

also been highly influenced by her father who raised her alone. She

intentionally speaks in a shy timid voice so that she will not upset her father

(*Mists* 254) and knows better than to speak out of turn even when the

business being discussed is her own marriage (*Mists* 260):

> [n]one of this treatment is unusual for the Middle Ages, nor
>
> particularly cruel; it is only the contrast Bradley has created that
>
> makes it apparent why Gwenhwyfar turns out differently--
>
> weaker, shyer, and more at the mercy of men and priests--than
>
> Morgaine or other women raised on images of female strength.
> (Tobin 151)

Morgaine, raised on the holy isle of Avalon and taught to embrace the natural

environment, feels she can freely communicate with nature and as a result

Morgaine is representative of female strength grounded within nature.

Gwenhwyfar, on the other hand, is continually frightened of nature and is

cowardly toward those who have the ability to control it. Thus, both

Gwenhwyfar and Morgaine are 'products of thier environment', adhering to

what is seen as the two binaries of 'feminine' behavior: the naturally passive

and the wildly untamed. Gwenhwyfar's domination by the various men in her

life is related to nature's domination over her; Gwenhwyfar is as afraid of

nature as she is of mankind.

Published in the same year as Wynne Jones' *A Sudden Wild Magic*,

Diana Rivers' *Daughters of the Great Star* (1992) provides another example in

which gendered divisions of private and public space play a dominant role.

Existing in the very heart of nature, the dense wooded area works as a

protective shield for the star-born (a group of women born under the same star who have consequently been granted supernatural powers by the Goddess) and witches within the text. Physically, these women make their home among the animals and trees found within the natural forest setting. Not unlike the juxtaposition found in *Mists of Avalon*, *Daughters of the Great Star* sets up its own dichotomy of binary spaces: while the feminized forest is a haven of sorts for the women in the text, the masculinized city is a deadly threat. The forest is home to the women-- they build their shelters from its trees, drink and wash in its rivers, and plan their escape under its protection. In contrast, the populated areas of cities and towns are a serious threat. The masculine spaces defined by these cities create an underlying fear within the text. While some of the women must venture back into the public sphere of man for various reasons (to get supplies for the camp, to search for women in need of shelter, or to rescue women in danger), an excursion to the city, and an encounter with a man, is unequivocally their greatest fear.

The first geographical division in *Daughters of the Great Star* is signaled by clear markings of masculine and feminine space. As the novel opens, an edict is posted, making the star-borns' existence a dangerous one, as political forces vow to kill all women born on this day. The young women are literally thrown out of masculine space--out of the dominant space controlled by both social and political forces (towns, cities and villages)--and they flee for their lives from their homes, families and friends. Early on in the novel Rivers makes it clear that the star-born girls are noticeably different from 'normal' women. They are shunned by those around them and approached with skepticism at best, even by their own families: "[w]hen I was

younger, it saddened me that my own father hated and feared me, or perhaps hated me because he feared me [. . . .] "Out of my way, Witch-child!"" (15-16). Rivers explores the motif of otherness, developing it as a primary theme early on in the text. More specifically, she explores 'otherness' as it directly relates to, and is a product of, fear. It is established that the 'daughters' are othered because these specifically female (Goddess-granted) powers separate them so far from the ordinary. Later, the theme is extended to include more specific and horrifying experiences marked by both physical violence and violation.

The star-born have unexplained powers that automatically separate them, literally dividing them physically, from regular society. People are afraid of them precisely because their powers are abnormal, different, mysterious, and unknown. John Widdowson (1973) discusses this phenomenon, within the context of witchcraft, arguing that intangible fear of the unknown was the leading factor in much of the witch-hunts in the past. He notes that,

> as fear seems to be a universal phenomenon and a constant aspect of human life, it is not surprising that certain frightening concepts are embodied in broadly similar ways in many different parts of the world [....] without entering into the controversial problems of nomenclature and definition which surround such terms as 'witchcraft', 'wizardry' and 'sorcery' one might perhaps point out that witch-figures of various types, whatever their sex or function, share characteristics which mark them as not only abnormal but also frightening. (200-201)

Similarly, Patricia Waugh (1989) contends that "[i]n order to connect 'the

buried', the 'disqualified', and the 'yet-to-come' one must come to terms with

the repressed, the feared, and the desired with that which is *unknown*

because outside the dominant signifying order" (34). It is this everlasting

quality of fear associated with the supernatural, in particular with the figure of

the witch, that has kept such an image alive throughout the centuries as she

shifts from real woman in time and place, to historical figure, to fictional

menace. However, in *Daughters of the Great Star*, there is a further layer to

this otherness because the star-born are *not* witches, and the witches

themselves are fearful of this new breed of female power. Significantly,

however, the 'ignorant' social fabric of this fictional culture credits the star-

born with witchcraft— amalgamating the two kinds of supernatural women—

when, indeed, nothing could be further from the truth. Within the novel, there

exists a division between the older, wiser witches and the newer *unknown*

star-born. It is here that the female hierarchies begin to take shape in the

text. As we will see, the witches are 'dominant' in relation to the star-born, yet

they are still muted by the patriarchal society that shunned them to the forest

in the first place. As Ardener reminds us, individuals occupy "many pairs,

groups or sets, each of which may be thought of as occupying its own 'space'"

(*Women and Space* 13).

While the supernatural female character is clearly associated with

nature as a presence in these texts, she is equally entangled with specific

spatial domains. These associations between woman and nature become

more complicated when the concept of supernatural power is introduced.

Supernatural power sets the women apart from society and culture, but also

from other women. These supernatural women must learn to reclaim their

otherness and it is within the environment of nature that they choose to do so.

Yet, first, they are othered and marginalized, not just because of their

associations with nature, but because of their associations with power.

Otherness

Although fear continues to permeate the supernatural woman's reputation, it is

perhaps in twentieth century literature that we see her most widely embracing

and claiming her otherness, rather than participating in its rejection. The work

of Inez Baranay can serve here as a further example of reclaiming

otherness.[10] Baranay's short fiction *Pagan* (1990) relays the experiences of a

contemporary witch in Australia.[11] We are, as readers, aware from the initial

line of the text "[w]hen she was born she caused a thunderstorm" (1) that

Eveleen Warden is going to be both different and supernatural. And indeed

she is. Eveleen is othered from those around her from an early age. She is

different, witch-like and immediately aligned with the power of nature:

> [t]here were floods in the town. She would have known she was
>
> born in a storm, even if they had not told her. She must be born

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[10] The motif of 'otherness' is explored by many authors in relation to the image of the witch or the supernatural women. For further examples see also: Marion Zimmer Bradley, *Firebrand* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987); Margaret Atwood, *Good Bones* (London: Virago Press, 1990); Sheri Tepper, *Beauty* (London: Orion Publishing, 1991); Philipa Gregory, *The Wise Woman* (London: Penguin Books, 1992); Gregory Maguire, *Wicked* (New York: Harper & Collins, 1995); Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (London: Virago Press, 1997); Juliette Marillier, *Daughter of the Forest* (London: Harper & Collins, 1999); Rosalind Miles, *Gwenivere: Queen of the Summer Country* (Syndey: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

[11] Australia itself is a significant other in that it is far removed from 'old Europe' and even from the 'new world" of America. It is also other in that it exists as both as an island and as a sub-continent.

portentously, she must be announced. She, who loved the night

and the darkness, determined very early that thunderbolts and

lightning would storm again at her command. (1)

If the powerful natural metaphors work diligently to convey the notion of

otherness, so too do her experiences of dejection and difference from an early

age:

[a]nd then the teacher. At drawing she walked round the room

and looked over the shoulders and stopped behind Evie. 'That's

not how a cat goes,' she said. 'Here,' and she took the crayon

from Eveleen who had already been drawing forever. 'It's not a

cat!' said Evie. 'Oh, it looks a bit like a cat. What is it? And is this

one an octopus?' 'It's a nothing.' 'Oh, everything has a name,'

said the teacher. 'What is its name?' 'Nothing, it's a nothing,'

said little Evie, angry now. 'Do you want to draw a real cat?' said

the teacher. 'NO!' screamed Eveleen, her face hot and red, her

eyes wet. 'No!' she screamed, and she threw all her crayons

onto the floor. The teacher couldn't speak--she had lost her

voice for the rest of the day. (3)

The teacher's urgency and Eveleen's reluctance to label her work illustrates

the young girl's early rejection of categorization as early as primary school.

While the teacher insists that "everything has a name", Eveleen is equally

persistent in her claim of nothingness. Eveleen's difference is emphasized

here, not just in her persistent response to her teacher, but also in the suggestion that Eveleen has 'witched' the woman's voice thereafter. The information provided within the narrative of *Pagan* about the circumstances surrounding Eveleen's birth, coupled by her later choice to live in a ruinous shack where she is able to practice her magic in seclusion, makes the reader entirely conscious of the strong associations of supernatural women with nature and domestic settings throughout the novel.

Consistently othered from those around her, the young Evvi is barely a teenager when she is first labelled 'witch'. At first struggling against the negative connotation of the label, Eveleen eventually learns to embrace the term and use its powerful significance to her advantage:

> [f]irst it was no, no don't call me a witch, then suddenly it was
> yes, I am a witch. No one listened when she tried to tell them the
> truth about witches and demons, that it'd all been made up by
> the Christians, or whatever. But if she said 'all right, have it your
> way, I'm a witch', and blackened out her teeth just for fun— then
> she was treated a bit more seriously, and was used to frighten
> children.
>
> People who didn't live in the Cross, or who didn't really know
> her, used to think she was really creepy. Out at Bondi, mothers
> told their naughty kids to 'behave, or the witch'll get you!
> Eveleen Warden will get you! (38)

The people of Kings Cross fear Eveleen because she is different from them. She shaves her eyebrows and draws high pointy ones in their place (38), she

wears fringe and keeps her hair short to show off her pointy ears. She refuses

to conform to any of the standards set for her or around her during her time.

Consequently, she is set aside from society and used to frighten small

children. Moreover, the narrator is quick to point out the real dangers of

Eveleen's preference for difference: "in Evvi's time things were more hidden,

and she had a harder time [....] You know the Witchcraft Act was only

repealed in 1951 in England— much later in Australia, the seventies— and

that's why everything had to be so disguised" (126).

While Eveleen is widely perceived by other characters as a witch, the

narrator provides a rational balance against the irrational accusations of the

public. Thus, while Eveleen's home is said to be the lair of a witch, we are told

early on that this was

> [s]heer nonsense, of course. Evvi had a picture of a demon
>
> painted over her fireplace. A lot of people had seen it: everyone
>
> got down to Evv's place some time or other. What was all the
>
> fuss about? It was just a filthy place with strange mess
>
> everywhere. But a lot of people would go there and think: this is
>
> the life, bohemians and witches! And they'd have a think about
>
> what might go on in there after they'd left: never knew what a
>
> good imagination they had till they thought of all the wicked
>
> things other people must be getting up to. (39)

Eveleen Warden experiences difficulties precisely because she does not

disguise her work in Kings Cross. She embraces the cultural stereotypes that

mark her a witch, conforming to these standards and purposely setting herself apart from her social space within the city. She flaunts her difference, inviting others to share in it; yet in her chosen lifestyle she perpetuates difference on her own terms and she creates her own spaces.

Elsewhere in *Pagan*, the narrative shows an obvious sympathy for neo-pagan lifestyles, for the notion of the Goddess and for harmony among humankind and nature. There is also an overt hostility toward patriarchal religions which "made virginity the ideal in women rather than fertility; you see the sentimental stuff, the passive helpmate; she's there only to be patient, suffering mother, a sexless second fiddle" (125). But more importantly, there is a distinct affiliation between witch and Goddess as well as sympathy with the Goddess's contemporary 'return' to mainstream belief: "[t]he Goddess must be part of our lives again. This awareness is growing now. It's allowed to be more out in the open [....]" (126). However, as the narrator reflects on Eveleen's life and the "false impressions that had grown around this much-maligned woman" (123), she insists that Eveleen was *not a witch*, but rather, a woman who practiced some magic and studied many things; a talented artist who was misunderstood; Eveleen is "a nature person trapped in a human body [....] a faerie person" (123). But in her insistence to protect Eveleen from that age-old stereotype of witch, is she confirming her own bias toward such a figure? "[A]s time went on, though, I became very cross with her. She let herself go, she lived in filth" (124). To be sure, Eveleen outwardly conforms to the stereotypical appearance of 'witch', embracing this stereotype of gross exaggeration and ensuring rejection from a society she neither wants nor expects acceptance from.

Baranay's *Pagan* emphasizes the relationship between otherness, the supernatural and nature. As the text implies, Eveleen Warden chooses to live outside society because she also chooses difference. She is associated with both witch and goddess by both social and self-perception. *Pagan*, like many of the women-centered texts in this study, is about the unknown and the juxtaposition of the natural with the supernatural. Supernatural power is an intangible, but often physical, experience; in its 'unknownness' it suggests both something beyond the natural (it is unnatural) and difference. Such a power arguably knows no boundaries (in itself a frightening concept), or if boundaries exist, they are not firmly determined. Moreover, as we have seen, this power seems to be fused with dark and feared spaces such the secluded home or the forest. There is something fundamentally fearsome about the deep vast forest.[12] Perhaps it is the uncharted territory or wilderness itself, or the forest's deep connection with nature as a volatile and uncontrollable space that frightens us. Regardless, texts whose plots center in and around forests work to illustrate a profound sense of fear. They tend to play upon our reluctance to venture into dark spaces, our apprehension of the unknown, and our perverse notion that these two things combined are both thrilling (because we are fundamentally invading something taboo) and petrifying (because we do not know what we will find). Clearly the forest, and the homes found in these forests, are the witch's domains. They are not to be invaded, and if so, one should be prepared to pay the consequences. Forests are 'inside' or 'private' spaces associated with nature and the feminine, whilst cities and

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[12] See: Deneka C. MacDonald, "Trespassing into Temptation: Gendered Imagination and *The Blair Witch Project.*" In *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-Present).* Spring 2002. Vol. 1. Issue 1. <http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/>

towns are 'outside' or 'public' spaces associated with culture and the masculine.

When faced with unknown phenomena or supernatural occurrences that are in direct opposition to normative natural experience, the response is often toward fear. Fear of the unknown is also associated with an inclination toward panic. Interestingly, the word 'panic' carries with it connotations of space and nature:

> F. *panique* adj. (15th c. in Littré) = It. *panico* (Florio); ad. Gr. πανι κός adj. of or for Pan, groundless (fear), whence πανικόν neut. n. panic terror, a panic. 'Sounds heard by night on mountains and in valleys were attributed to Pan, and hence he was reputed to be the cause of any sudden and groundless fear. (OED)

In searching for a private space away from culture and patriarchy, *Pagan's* Eveleen Warden eventually chooses to remain in her secluded home and practice the craft in her attempt to reach (and be spiritually closer to) Pan, whose portrait stands as a shrine above her altar: "I think Evvi was *in love* with Pan, in love" (128). Pan, of course, was considered to be "an impersonation of Nature, of which his attributes were taken as mysterious symbols" (OED). And it is within nature that we see othered characters searching for private spaces away from culture and patriarchy: in *Daughters of the Great Star*, women seek out the forest and in *Journey to Zelindar* they work to protect it. In *Daughters of the Great Star*, the women have abandoned their homes, their loved ones, and all that has been familiar to them in the male-ruled territories of this fictional country. They take to the hills, and distant

forest areas beyond gathered communities, or established societies, mapping out a new geography for their unnatural and othered existence. And, of course, the priestesses of Avalon fight to save their private island from being 'colonized' by Christian rule in *The Mists of Avalon.*

Hierarchies of Power

While women can create their own space within women-centered fantasy, they are also often seen to develop their own hierarchies or sub-layers of power. The reader is not left to forget that these characters were raised in patriarchal environments, and as such, they bring patriarchal notions of power and division with them to their new space. In *Women and Space* (1981) Shirley Ardener contends that the structural relationships that exist within political and patriarchal hierarchies can be treated as social maps. She argues that there are spaces within spaces or overlapping universes, stating that

> [i]ndividuals (and things) belong, then, to many pairs, groups or
> sets, each of which may be thought of as occupying its own
> 'space', or sharing a particular 'universe'. Members of one group
> may be 'dominant' relative to members of another group in one
> 'universe', while in turn being 'muted' in relation to members of a
> third group sharing with them a universe differently defined. (13)

Ardener's point about subcategories of space and consequently, sub-geographies within particular settings is an important one and evidence for it

can be seen in popular women-centered fantastic fiction. Thus, in *Daughters of the Great Star* we see a series of complex power divisions forming among the women in the forest. Intrigued by the star-born, the witches in *Daughters of the Great Star* agree to allow them to gather in their clearings, in their private space. By this invitation is not extended without tension and it is clear that there will be power struggles among the supernatural women.

> "Well," she said tartly, "I know I said to come with all your women, but I had not expected such an army". "And that is not the half of them, either," Pell answered with amusement. "We left twice this many or more at home [....]" (170-171)

> The rest of us shifted awkwardly from foot to foot till Alyeeta said in a loud, commanding voice, "Sit down, all of you. You are crowding my *space* like so many circling wolves". She swept the gathering with her eyes. All of us obeyed, even the other Witches. Somehow we all found *space* on her cushions. Her shelter seemed to *stretch* and *reshape* around us. [emphasis mine] (172)[13]

It is characteristic of her style that the reader cannot help but be acutely aware of Rivers' choice of language at all times. Rivers' recurring mention of space reminds the reader that geography plays an integral role in this text and is directly associated with the women's fight for freedom. Thus, while there is

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[13] It is arguably no coincidence that Alyeeta's shelter "stretches" and "reshapes" around them

an obvious commanding presence in Alyeeta, the notion of Pell's 'army' of

women is closely followed by a reassertion of her control and position within

this growing hierarchy of female power:

> [n]ow the real talk began in earnest. It went on for most of that
>
> night. Much was decided there among us, all of it to Pell's great
>
> satisfaction. It was agreed that we would move our camp to
>
> Alyeeta's clearing, since the space both in her shelter and
>
> around it could accommodate many more. For the moment, at
>
> least, the other Witches would stay there also. From there the
>
> Star-Born would begin gathering and assembling, as well as
>
> training. (174)

Clearly, Pell is the leader at this point of the novel and she regards the star-

born as "her women". She takes possession in a sense, asserts physical

ownership, as she assumes her leadership of her army and delivers them to

the clearing in the forest. Rivers sets up a very powerful dichotomy here

between old and new powers of the unknown. Further, the physical

geography of space is a dominant issue, as the witches make it clear that

their "homes" and their specific parts of the forest are only on loan to these

women. Thus, power struggles ensue between old and new; they make it

very clear that they are guests, trespassers with permission to stay for a

limited time.

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like a Pentangle—like the pentangle's associated with witches throughout literary history.

Pell's leadership is an undisputed position of power initially; several of the women are content to allow Pell to make the decisions until the group grows significantly in numbers and the time comes to choose a leader:

> [a]fter a while all the women in the clearing were sitting in a
> circle around Hamiuri. It seemed as if she had drawn us
> together by intention. Suddenly she stood up and turned to look
> at us all, this small brown woman who was like a mountain of
> power. "This is your first council meeting, take note of that," she
> said in a loud, commanding voice. "And now, you must choose a
> leader to see you through these hard times that are still to
> come." (181)

Even in her metaphors, Rivers is highly attuned to feminine space and makes use of geographical language. Thus Pell is "a mountain of power" and later she stands on a great stump which is described as "the width of a small table and the height of a woman's knees" (182), invoking both the image of the phallus and a woman engaged with domestic (household) labor.

When Pell is the democratically chosen leader, she addresses the women with a powerful speech which outlines some of the main key points of the novel itself:

> "I am a poor farm girl with nothing but my wits and these strange
> gifts [....] As to those gifts, none of us asked for them. They are
> gifts of our birth. Wonderous as they are, they must sometimes

seem to you as much a curse as a blessing. It is these gifts that

have brought down the wrath of the Zarns on our heads and

driven us from our homes. The high and mighty who rule this

land see us as some kind of threat to their power. And so we

must be, or they would not have posted their edict. Yet what we

are or what we might become is still unknown to us. As to the

powers, even we ourselves do not know the full extent of them.

That is what we hope to discover here, sharing with each other

and helped by the Witches. We have different powers and they

seem to come on us at different ages, though some, I believe,

like mind-speech and speech with creatures, are common to us

all". (182-183)

Several elements of this passage are crucial to the development of the text. It

is interesting to note that without the knowledge, on the part of the reader, of

'supernatural powers' in this passage, one might assume that Pell is 'simply'

discussing issues of gender. Pell calls their gifts "strange", drawing further

attention to the very abnormality of the star-born's existence and internalizing

the judgements of the society she has left. Not only are they different, but

they themselves are fearful of their own difference: in the first place, because

these powers are seemingly unnatural and in the second, because these

powers have ultimately caused the break and division between their previous

existence. Once daughters, sisters, active members of an established

community, these women are now outlaws, othered and separated from

'normal' society. Thus, Pell points out that their *gift* is also a *curse.* Moreover,

the remark "the high and mighty" when referring to the masculine power structure, suggests both sarcasm and cliché. Through her choice of language, Rivers re-emphasizes both the obvious division in the power structure and the repression of the women who face it. Pell makes it clear that their enemy is the established politically elite male government who seeks to destroy them. This is a point that is re-emphasized throughout the novel. Indeed, the star-born's supernatural power threatens the existing patriarchal power structure, and it threatens the established gender divisions within the novel. Pell addresses the notion of the unknown and the fear it instills, stating that with the help of the witches, they hope to discover their gift. The undiscovered nature of their inner powers is metaphoric of the feminist vision of inner power within the female experience. It speaks to the power struggles within social divides of public and private space among/between men and women-- and it speaks to the untapped, unused, and undiscovered powers of women, especially the collective power of women, to which many essentialist academic (and indeed eco) feminists have called attention.

Although there is an obvious bonding experience between witch and star-born, there is also a constant reminder that they are not the same. Otherness, or rather, a lifetime of otherness (as Alyeeta makes clear to Tazzia earlier) separates the two kinds of women, just as it brings them together:

> "[y]ou are a Witch", she said contemptuously. "I had not thought
> to find Witches here among the star-cursed". "Indeed I am",
> Alyeeta answered, staring with open hostility at this newcomer.

"I am a Witch, and this is my shelter and my clearing. The very
ground you stand on has been spelled by me, so have a care
[....]" (189)

Quite clearly, space is a resource to be competed for between supernatural
women with very different 'power'. Here we do not just have woman and
nature; rather, we are presented with woman and difference, woman and the
uncanny, woman and other, as well as the interplay between and among
these experiences. The star-born compete for a location of their own, whilst
the witches resist sharing a place already located as their own.

Most intriguingly, the star-born in *Daughters of the Great Star* are
uneducated in the power they possess. They need help and so turn to the
experience of the older women within their grasp-- the witches. These
witches, powerful in their own right, are wise women who are educated in the
ways of schooling power. They agree to be the teachers to these young
inexperienced girls, and thus decide to entrust them with their knowledge and
power in the hopes that it, their history may live through them. Alyeeta tells
Tazzia:

> "[b]efore the time of the Witch-kills, when Witches still had some
> power in this land, there were Witch convents. I was mistress of
> one such. Before the time of the Witch-kills, Witches were all
> educated women. We learned in the convents, and we taught
> there. It was the only place a young woman could get some
> schooling, poor as well as rich, Witch and non-Witch alike.

Along with Witchcraft, which we taught only to those with the

gift, and healing, which we shared, we had knowledge of all the

herbs, a knowledge of plants and animals and of all the natural

world, even a knowledge of the stars and the heavenly bodies

and the paths on which they moved. We Witches are all

scattered now. Who are we to leave it to, this great store of

knowledge? Young women in the Zarn's cities have no place

left to learn, but I will pass on to you as much as I am able, and

you, in turn, will pass it on to others. In that way not everything

will be lost." (132)

Alyeeta speaks affectionately here about an older society and culture which

was semi matriarchal—a culture which saw not only witches, but all women,

as educated and valued members of society. In her description, the witches

of this lifetime were truly *wise women*, perhaps reminiscent to the reader of

early Celtic or Native American societies that regarded women with respect.

Similarly, this is a dominant theme in Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* which

illustrates Vivian's (and later Morgaine's) struggle to both understand and

save a matriarchal Pagan Britain from a growing patriarchal Christian Britain.

Like Alyeeta in *Daughters of the Great Star*, Viviane in *The Mists of Avalon*

remembers a time when Avalon, the Great Goddess, the High Priestess and

the 'sight-gifted' females were regarded with respect and value. And just as

Alyeeta passes her store of knowledge and power to Tazzia in *Daughters of*

the Great Star, Viviane does so to Morgaine in *The Mists of Avalon*. Yet

importantly, while these final exchanges of information among women occur

privately in both texts, there was a time when education among supernatural

women did not have to be hidden. Both Alyeeta and Viviane make it clear to

their protegees that there was a period when supernatural women existed

freely in the public sphere of knowledge, communication and education.

Equally clear within the narrative is the fact that such freedom no longer exists

for supernatural women; the place in which one learns has shifted from a

public to private place.

Home and Hearth

The figure of the supernatural woman and her spatial location are major

elements both in the literary tradition and in contemporary fantasy stories.

Unsurprisingly, the predominant spatial domain that ties supernatural female

characters is the natural setting of the forest. As we have seen, their forest

retreat simultaneously marginalizes them, in that it prevents them from

interacting with civilization, and liberates them as it locates them outside the

law. While nature presents one space in which women can exercise control,

paradoxically, the home, with its associations of domesticity and women-

centredness offers another sphere for female empowerment within literature.[14]

Further, as the traditional sphere/domain of *woman*, houses, homes and

hearths play an integral role in stories that feature the supernatural woman.

The home can be seen as a monument to women's domesticity as well

as a confined and restrictive feminine space that has been met with much

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[14] The 'house', of course, also exists in the genres of horror and fantasy as an entity or personified object in countless texts, among them the *Amityville* (1979-2000) film series, stories featuring Baba Yaga, *Hansel and Gretel* etc.. We will return to this concept later in this chapter.

hostility by contemporary feminists.[15] While positioned in the home, woman

can be seen as minimized, sheltered, and enclosed. She becomes othered

once more, this time from the world of open spaces, set aside from the world

of economy, trade, and public life. As a space (domestically) unknown to

man, the home is therefore simultaneously mysterious, dangerous and

threatening. Yet as we will see in the following textual analysis, the

supernatural woman is nowhere else as masterful as she is when mistress of

her private sphere.

　　　While ecofeminism has claimed nature as a female domain and

feminist geographers have claimed the home as a private female realm, the

allocation of women to the home or to nature remains confused.[16] For

instance, Legler argues that nature "has been inscribed in the same way that

women's bodies and sexual pleasure have been inscribed in patriarchal

discourse, as passive, interceptive, docile" (233), yet nature can be wild,

fearful and unknown. Patriarchy wishes to impose itself upon nature as a

means of controlling nature's unpredictable acts and willful disposition.

Nature is other because we do not understand all there is to understand.

Moreover, we treat nature as an object. If we can argue for a passivity in

nature it is only in this objectification; we assume nature has no language of

its own because we cannot communicate with it and we are, therefore, deaf to

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[15] See: Shirley Ardener, "Ground Rules for Social Maps for Women." In *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps.* (London: Croom Helm, 1981); Allison Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism* (New York: Guildord Press, 1994); R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subject: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994); Mary Eagleton, "Adrienne Rich, Location and Body." *Journal of Gender Studies.* Vol. 9. No. 3 (2000); Adrienne Rich, "Notes Toward a Politics of Location." In *Arts of the Possible* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).

[16] A distinction must be made here between ecofeminists as critics of the relationship between nature and culture and feminists who engage in pagan centered nature practices. I am, of course, primarily discussing the former.

it. Yet, significantly, the supernatural woman in literature is often seen to communicate with nature. So what are we to make of this unique communication between supernatural woman and nature? And why is the supernatural woman so often seen in literature to be located in a secluded home, outside civilization?

On the one hand, the home is uniquely located within society/civilization, and is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of world of trade, economy and public life. Yet the home can also be 'invisible' to civilization, placed within natural surroundings, outwith culture. The woman in the home, whether within culture or nature, can represent a patriarchal exile. Placed in these private settings is the fearsome other—women (and especially supernatural women). If patriarchy can only rule under the public gaze, then privately—either in the house or in the forest—patriarchy cannot rely on the aid of society to enforce and validate its privileged position. Perhaps this is an acceptable explanation for the supernatural woman's strong association with both nature and homes. Perhaps supernatural women are viewed as 'supernatural', in part, because they have the ability to live outside (as well as beyond) masculine worlds. A supernatural woman has magical abilities or has learned abilities that are perceived as apart from the 'normal' human sphere of experience and education (as we have seen in *Mists of Avalon* and *Daughters of the Great Star*). The supernatural woman is, therefore, associated with nature in her otherness-- she, like nature, is beyond what is 'known' thus she becomes fearsome; she, like nature, has not yet been entirely 'civilized'. By placing the supernatural woman within this

context, one accepts both her ability to be confined, and her ability to be mysterious and foreboding. She is at once controlled, yet uncontrollable.

Striking intermingled images of private or domestic spaces can be found, then, within many women-centered fantastic texts. In *A Sudden Wild Magic*, Wynne Jones offers interesting descriptions of kitchens:

> [t]he sisters were sitting in Amanda's kitchen, a comfortable, light, spacious room in which every detail was planned for convenience and beauty together, and in which every detail was also slightly battered from having been used by children. To Zillah's mind, this added to the comfort. Without the battering, she was sure the place would have been as soulless as a magazine advertisement for a kitchen. (69)

This private domestic setting of the kitchen becomes even more marked as feminine, motherly, protecting and comforting by the 'normal' activity of children who make the space appear 'lived in'. The feeling of comfort and safety that is embodied in Amanda's kitchen is extended to other spaces as well. When Zillah first enters the capsule built to take women to Arth for invasion she notes that, "[i]mmense safety had been built into the thick walls of the thing— strong Amanda safety, which reminded Zillah of Amanda's house, particularly of her beautiful, battered kitchen" (76). Moreover, when the women arrive on Arth and begin to formulate a plan of attack, it is in the kitchen that they have the greatest success (154). Because they alter the

experience of eating from one of necessity to one of enjoyment, the women

from Earth begin to win over the men from Arth:

> [...] although he wished the other one whose name he always
>
> forgot— Helen, that was it— had not decided to work closely
>
> with Kitchen. Mealtimes were steadily becoming a distinctly
>
> sensual experience. The High Head, who preferred to eat in the
>
> same way that one stoked an engine, and then forget the
>
> matter, found this distracting. It surprised him that so few
>
> Brothers agreed with him. Even Brother Milo raised no objection.
>
> He said, rather obscurely, that Helen was a challenge to himself
>
> and to his Oath. (174)

Because Arth is a community of men, all sworn to celibacy, the experience of

flavorful food as a sensual experience is a threat to the community. Appetite

becomes an important issue associated, of course, with the kitchen, but it

implies much more. On the one hand, this preoccupation with the kitchen and

with food begins to uphold the stereotype that the way to a man's heart is

through his stomach. On the other hand, Wynne Jones is clearly making

reference to notions of temptation and pleasures of the flesh. Arth itself is a

"clinical place" with "monastic cells" (124). The community of Arth, known as

the 'Brotherhood' (55) has adopted the view that food should be plain and not

pleasurable (58), corresponding to their vow of celibacy. The women from

earth change this, making the food enjoyable, and ultimately corrupting the

men to the point that they renounce their vows (156).

Just as kitchens are a significant space within the text, so too is the home. The most powerful and interesting female character in this text is undoubtedly Gladys and much of the magical activity of the novel takes place in Glady's home. As the 'senior' witch in the circle, Gladys conforms to several physical and spatial stereotypes; she is characteristically represented in the text-- she is a woman living near a powerful wooded area and she has several cats. She is plump, old, unattractive and unassuming, although very powerful:

[h]e stood and surveyed her, a fat and freckled old woman

wearing a red dress and pink ankle socks, squashily embedded

in a plastic garden chair and busy shelling peas or something.

Her hair had been dyed a faded orange and fussily curled. Her

cheeks hung around her lax mouth, white where they were not

freckled, and her garden was strewn with objects and swarming

with cats. As usual. He had forgotten all those cats. The place

reeked of cat[....] it was hard to believe she was any good. (14)

Mark followed her anxiously as she lumbered into the house,

dutifully carrying the tray with him. It was dark and redolent

indoors, of herbs, pine, cats, and bread. Plants-some of them

tree size-grew everywhere in pots, as if the garden had moved

in there in the same way that the house had spread on to the

grass [. . .] He was forced to enhance the space in order to

make room for the tray. (18-19)

Wynne Jones' choice of detail here is important. First, the task of shelling peas is a domestic (and an archaic) one; it implies that she is a woman with time on her hands. The description also implies that domestic chores are actually important labour, even for the supernaturally powerful. Second, the physical description of her character is interesting; she appears to be an unfashionable old woman with hair 'cheaply' colored and too many cats. She is a hag (54). Yet she is the most powerful and beneficent witch in Britain. Moreover, although Mark (the second most powerful supernatural presence in the novel) hates it, he knows that he needs this woman's help. He must go to Gladys for assistance, and he is forced to endure the physical surroundings of her home despite his dislike. Finally, amid this stereotypical description of an old woman/witch, we see an intriguing development of spatial surroundings. The house appears to change shape to accommodate additional human presence. Equally, the plant life within and around the home is also personified to some extent. It would appear that Gladys has a relationship with nature; a close personal bond of which Mark has no grasp, and is not a part. The close relationship between nature and power is a motif that continues to play throughout the text. It is Gladys' home that is chosen for the purposes of important magical matters, just as it is Gladys that Mark approaches initially:

> [i]t was a muddled old farmhouse with a veranda on the front of
> it that somehow melted into a porch with a green door. A garden
> spread from it in successive waves of overgrowth-grass first,

then longer grass containing leaves of long-dead daffodils, then

bushes, then higher bushes, several waves of those, including

laurels-and finally a row of trees that generally flowered in

spring, but were liable to be untidily in bloom most of the year.

The house was quite hidden from the road. On the other hand, if

you knew where to position yourself in the garden, you could

have an excellent view of the road without anyone knowing you

were actually there.

The old woman knew exactly where. She had been sitting

there all morning [...] and the cats stalking hither and yon in her

orbit. Around her, the muddled house seemed to have spread

into the grass, manifesting as flowerpots, tipped-over mugs of

coffee, cane chairs, a basket [....] (13)

Again the choice of language is crucial here: Gladys' veranda "melts" into the

porch; the house is hidden from the road, but it is possible to position yourself

in the garden and have a clear view of the road whilst remaining hidden or

mysterious. The concept of material objects such as a building, a home, or

parts of a home shifting and altering its position in space and location is

intriguing. It is a theme that runs throughout the novel, and is even more

profound in Arth, where material objects actually have the ability to move and

feel, especially once the energetic women from earth arrive: "[the fortress]

was itching to spring up and do a mad dance, because it was full of health

and delighting in that health, but it seemed to have been too well trained or

severely brought up to do anything so frivolous" (124). The personification of

material objects is a recurring motif: it would appear that where supernatural

power can exist, so too can personified objects. Objects, then, take on

human characteristics and adapt themselves for others, becoming subjects--

supernatural women communicate with these subjects (whether they are

natural settings or homes) or shadow these subjects as each reflects the

presence of the other.[17] The notion that objects can also be subjects, or that

a physical location can adapt itself to those who inhabit it, can be seen

elsewhere in fantastic literature, notably in the work of Anne Rice.

Contemporary fantasy writer Anne Rice uses the motif of home and

hearth dramatically in *The Witching Hour* (1990). Based primarily in the city of

New Orleans in the twentieth century, the novel takes the form of a series of

flashback occurrences wherein a family of female witches of the surname

Mayfair is traced for several generations. The first Mayfair witch originates in

Donnelaith, Scotland. Both she and her daughter Deborah are burned at the

stake for crimes of witchcraft. An organization devoted to the discovery of

true witchcraft, the Talamasca, records the history of the family beginning with

Deborah's untimely death in 1689. However, before Deborah suffers the

same fate as her mother, she is able to send her daughter Charlotte safely to

America, and thus secures the line of the Mayfair witches. The women who

follow are careful with their powers, wary to hide the true nature of their

success from the fearful eyes of a society who would strike them down. The

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[17] We will see this in the case of Anne Rice, but other examples include Baba Yaga's house (depicting as an entity with chicken legs for motor assistance), that greets visitors with a variety of faces, indicative of the witch's mood. The house will turn upon its legs to personify the woman who inhabits it as home. If one is lucky, they will approach both witch and house on a friendly day. See: Patricia Monaghan, *The New Book of Goddesses & Heroines* (New York: Llewellyn, 1997). Yet another example can be seen in film version of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), when Dorothy, the Tin man, the Scare Crow and the Lion approach the Wicked Witch of the West's forest. The trees themselves are 'alive', with outstretched branches (now arms)

primary figure in the text is androgynous spirit, called Lasher, who is inherited by each succeeding Mayfair witch. With vigor and enthusiasm, the witches embrace the spirit who comes to them each in turn. It is with the aid of this spirit that the family is able to obtain all of its wealth, as the spirit grows stronger with each succession.

What is perhaps most intriguing about Rice's text is the so-called Mayfair legacy (both money and power) handed down to each woman (witch) in turn. Although the legacy is of unimaginable wealth, it is the home located in New Orleans that figures the most prominently, and is most valuable, for the witches. Here, the home is the center of power for the witch and her consort Lasher. Before the final witch in the family, Rowan, inherits the home, it exists for several years in a state of disarray. Deirdre, Rowan's predecessor, is a comatose invalid confined to the home and as a result the house becomes rundown. Lasher does not allow any repairs to be done to it in the absence of Deirdre's consent. The house, in its decayed form, metaphorically becomes the body of its owner. As Deirdre's body degenerates, so too does the house. When Deirdre ceases to interact with the public sphere and increasingly disappears into her private sphere, so too the house ceases to be a place of public interaction (in spite of its location in the public sphere of New Orleans) and instead becomes a private, marginalized space. Ultimately, this home on First Street becomes a timeless shrine to its previous owners:

---

and ill intentions. This forest, of course, embodies the witch's own ill intentions toward the travelers.

[...] the old house really did have white fluted columns on the

front, though the paint was peeling away [...] gray town house on

a dark shady corner in the Garden District, its front gate guarded

it seemed by two enormous oaks. The iron lace railings were

made in a rose pattern and much festooned with vines-- purple

wisteria, the yellow Virginia creeper, and bougainvillea of a dark,

incandescent pink [....] The sun came in thin dusty shafts

through the twisting branches [...] tangle of brilliant green leaves

beneath the peeling cornices. Never mind that it was so sombre

here, so damp. (5-6)

As the gardens continue to grow wild and out of control, the overall effect is

that the house appears to exist in a deep forest, its life and memory forgotten,

giving it an eerie aura and becoming a topic of discussion for the town.

People begin to refer to it as haunted. Rice establishes a firm spatial motif

within the text culminating in and around an enchanted forest-like home. The

home is enshrined with vines and leaves. Like a thick forest space, the inside

of the home only sees natural light as glimpses, while the outside is trapped

by the natural materials of "festooned vines" that embrace it; both witch and

consort are trapped within this confined space.

Lasher's goal throughout the novel is to become human. Lasher is

trapped within the female space of the home until he is able to cross

'spheres', become fully human, and embrace the public world. The spirit

bides its time, waiting for the thirteenth witch, the 'doorway', to use her power

to bring it into the physical world. When Rowan inherits the home, she

renovates it, making it as beautiful and powerful as it once was. Once more, the house mirrors the body of its owner. Her vitality, power and beauty are reflected in its restoration. With Lasher's full cooperation the house is restored without incident; a home that has been private and protected from the outside world, is now made public.

Lasher's crossing over to the physical world takes place in front of the hearth in this ancient home of the Mayfair witches as the novel comes to an end. Neither the Mayfair home nor Rowan can be free from Lasher until she allows the spirit to move from the private space of the home to the public world by becoming (hu)man.

The Body as Home

Deeply rooted within the construction of identity women-centered fantastic texts explore the body in terms of 'other' and in terms of home. The body often represents a physical home or place within the women-centered text, but it is also used as a metaphor to exploit preconceived notions of the supernatural woman's image. While these themes are prevalent in most of the texts included in this study, I will use two texts here to briefly illustrate my argument. First, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Mistress of Spices* (1997) and second Diana Rivers' *Daughters of the Great Star* (1987), with which the reader is already familiar.

Divakaruni's novel chronicles the life of Tilo, a woman "placed" in Oakland, America in an Indian community by the "Old One" or "First Mother," to be the "architect of the immigrant dream" (28) in the "cauldron of America" (83). Tilo is a young woman when she takes the 'post' of Mistress of Spices.

However, upon awakening in her new store, she discovers that her physical body has changed significantly: "[i]t tires me at moments, this old body which *I put on when I came to America*, along with an old body's pains" [emphasis mine] (25). Note the control Tilo emphasizes when she says "this old body [...] I put on". She wasn't born with it, she didn't have it imposed upon her, instead she put it on, as one might a dress, choosing it for reasons of her own. Juxtaposing her shift in geographical location with a shift in bodily transformation, Divakaruni illustrates how landscape, gender and the body are constructed. Moreover, she emphasizes the experience of feeling othered from one's own body. This approach to transformation and the body as home can also be seen in *Daughters of the Great Star:*

> I burst out angrily, "Alyeeta, why do you make fun of old women in that way? Someday we shall all become old women" [....]
>
> "Make fun of old women?" Alyeeta continued with amusement. "No, that is not possible, my dear. That is not my way. Just think, more than half the wisdom of the world resides in old women. What I make fun of is the world. The world see old women as ugly and quarrelsome or witless, useless, and harmless, and above all, sexless-- remember that dry as the riverbed in the summer drought. That is what I play with, not old women but the way the world sees us. It is the best disguise, the best cover under which to move safely.
>
> "Ugh," she said suddenly. Hunching up one shoulder and dropping the other, she instantly turned herself into an old hag.

One side of her face was drawn up in a grimace, her eyes

crossed, her body bent and twisted sideways. "Even looking like

this I could have more wisdom in my head than ten pretty young

men, but who would ever guess"? she asked, leering and

squinting up at me. (139-140)

The power of transformation and transgression are key concepts in women-

centered fantastic texts that often seek to emphasize looking and the

marginalization of the body. While the *experience* of the body is (meant to be)

an entirely private space, the body itself is, in fact, a very public space at

times (constructed and displayed for social agendas). The body can be

dressed up or undressed; it is subjected to ones' own (and others') perception

(and distortions) and one must allow for the physical and spiritual limitations

that accompany it.

In *Tongue First: Adventures in Physical Culture*, Emily Jenkins (1998)

discusses the physical body in terms of personal perception from a cultural

perspective. Using determined spatial metaphors and similes Jenkins

contends:

[s]ome days my body is matronly, shelter to housewife in slacks

who spends her afternoons making Jell-O molds in Far

Rockaway. My belly rounds out in expectation of childbirth and

my shoulders curve forward with years of scrubbing. Other days

it is frail: I can see the bones in my hands and feet; my shins are

sharp; my back aches; blue veins ooze across my skin like a

grandmother's. Still other find me feeling like a superhero:

thighs bulging with muscles, shoulders spread broad, the

swollen veins becoming part of my athlete's physique. My body

is not the same from day to day. Not even from minute to

minute. I look at myself in the mirror and think, "This lump of

flesh and fluids, this is where I live." Sometimes it seems like

home, sometimes more like a cheap motel near Pittsburgh. The

body is the single place no one can ever leave. It is permanent,

yet fragile and mercurial. Its distortions, anxieties, ecstasies,

and discomforts all influence a person's interaction with the

people who service it. (7)

Jenkins points out that we can reshape, remold and recreate our body in

whatever image we choose and, more importantly, that this can happen

independent of our wills. But the prevailing concept is that one can never

entirely escape one's body, because our body is ultimately our home.

For Divakaruni, the body as a physical space is also juxtaposed with

the dominant themes of racism, loneliness, power and pain. Using her

telepathic abilities, Tilo 'listens' to the following inner dialogue of a rich woman

who enters her shop:

[t]he rich Indians crane their necks and lift their chins high

because they have to be more always than other people, taller,

handsomer, better dressed. Or at least richer. They heave their

bodies like money bags out the door and into their satin cars,

leaving the crumbly odour of old banknotes behind [....] Rich

woman I thank you for reminding me. Beneath the shiniest

armour, gold-plated or diamond, the beat of the vulnerable flesh

[....] Into a corner of her matching Gucci purse I place *haruki*,

shrivelled seed in the shape of a woman, which has no

American name. *Haruki* to help mothers bear the pain that

starts with the birthing and continues for ever, the pain and joy

both, tangled dark and blue as an umbilical cord around an

infant's throat. (76-78)

Divakaruni's language is specifically spatial and determined. The metaphors

are striking: "heaving bodies like money bags" invokes the image of manual

labor among the rich; the woman's makeup is shiny like "armour", as are her

Gucci clothes and matching hand bag. This armored shell, her home, covers

her and protects her; it allows her to hide from the reality of racism that she

experiences each day. In discussing the landscape of the human body,

Jenkins makes several useful observations. The body, she suggests,

particularly the female body, is an outer shell that may seen permanent but

can also be volatile (59). We can control the mobility and volatility of our

bodies; physically we can reshape the space that we inhabit—we can change

the shape, feel and scent of our bodies.

Like the witches and star-born in *Daughters of the Great Star* who are

confined spatially within the safety of the forest, Tilo is restricted spatially to

the relatively private and women-centred space of the spice store.   Eventually

she breaks these confines and ventures into 'outside' America in order to help

one of her customers who is not able to come to her. Thus, she breaks the oath that she took when she first she became Mistress:

> [f]or as you know, when I woke in this land the store was already
> around me, its hard, protective shell. The spices too surround
> me, a shell of smells and voices. And that other shell, my aged
> body pressing its wrinkles into me. Shell within shell [....]
> outside, America is flinging itself against the walls of my store,
> calling in its many tongued voice. (125)

Again we see a powerful juxtaposition of location, body and other. Just as the spice store is a protective shell that surrounds her, it is also a restrictive space that is overwhelmingly smothering at times. Dakravuni advances the dichotomy of person and the body in *Mistress of Spices* when Tilo is saddened by her own shell of a body given to her by the Great Mother. Indeed, "the body is intensely 'I', 'me', and, 'mine' while also being 'we' in and of the world. It 'is', and yet, hovers independently" (Eagleton 302). Thus, Tilo is both cautious of the woman playing dress-up with her Gucci purse and made up face and able to acknowledge her experience as a shared one; "[r]ich woman I thank you for reminding me" (77). Tilo continues to struggle with the pain that is both hers but also the pain of others, both 'I' and 'we'.

Concerned with the poetic image, Gaston Bachelard seeks to tease out the phenomenological determination of images in *The Poetics of Space* (1958; 1994). Seeking to discover the essence of the image, Bachelard turns

to 'primal images' that "bring out the primitiveness in us" (91). Among these

primal images are nests and shells:

> [a] creature that hides and "withdraws into its shell," is preparing
>
> a "way out." This is true of the entire scale of metaphors, from
>
> the resurrection of a man in his grave, to the sudden outburst of
>
> one who has long been silent. If we remain at the heart of the
>
> image under consideration [the shell] we have the impression
>
> that, by staying in the motionlessness of its shell, the creature is
>
> preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being.
>
> The most dynamic escapes take place in cases of repressed
>
> being, and not in the flabby laziness of the lazy creature whose
>
> only desire is to go and be lazy elsewhere. (111)

The various 'shells' Tilo notes are multi-faceted: the shells both conceal and

reveal; they both protect her from society and shun her from society; and

finally, the shells protect corporate America *from her*-- a supernaturally

powerful and unknown entity. Yet, the social, political and cultural America

that exists outside its doors, teases her, reminds her that she is different from

her Indian customers who have embraced the strange land and come to see

her with enticing particles of America dangling off them. Although Tilo has

never left the confines of her "motionless" spice store she clearly understands

the demarcations of beauty and the cruelty of the labels of ugliness and age.

Thus, describing her body as a *disguise* that she *wears* she fantasizes about

using her powers to betray her Mistress oath and "escape" the disguise:

"[o]nce a Mistress has taken on her magic Mistress-body she is never to look on her reflection again. It is a rule that causes me no grief, for I know without looking how old I am and how far from beautiful" (59). The body then, for Divakaruni, Rivers and others, is both a volatile and an in-volatile space. It is both home and decoration.

When Tilo does go out doors, her first 'stop' is the Sears Department Store, a commentary on corporate capital America: "[r]esolute, I step down the deserted street, pushing through rain like sheets of frosted glass until I see the sign SEARS, until a door slides open all on its own like the mouth to some magical cave, inviting me in" (129). Although Tilo's spice shop and Sears are both stores, and thus similar, their functions and the experiences they generate are different. The doorway into Sears is both mouth-like, an appropriate image for the consumption that goes on within, and cave-like and womb-like; both images suggest hostility, the antithesis of Tilo's smaller, more intimate store. While Tilo is initially timid about leaving her store and entering this consumer market akin to a "cave" ready to swallow her whole, she quickly adjusts and does not even notice "when the automatic door open their glass jaws to let her out" (131) less than thirty minutes later. Sadly, despite her supernaturally 'wise' status, Tilo is unable to resist the pressure to join 'society', blend in and be modern. Afraid of being forever portrayed as the hag to those she loves, Tilo succumbs to the pressures of consumer America. Her existence in the private space of the spice-store is shattered forever; she has risked her supernatural power and her appointment as Mistress of Spices for the adventure of the public world.

In a world increasingly materialist and consumerist, literary

representations of nature are linked with unindustrialized, uncolonized,

uninhabited (by humankind) and untouched (by social and political forces)

spaces. Indeed, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries mark an increasing

anxiety about the destructive relationship between nature and culture, caused

no doubt by ecological conflicts between earth and humankind.[18] Further,

ecofeminism clearly contends that while the public masculine world works to

control nature, the private feminized world can be seen more commonly to

embrace it. As we have demonstrated, this can be seen within literary

discourse. It seems no coincidence that authors such as Diana Wynne

Jones, Diana Rivers and Marion Zimmer Bradley (among many others)

choose to place their supernatural female characters within natural settings

and further that they illustrate the importance of place and nature using

explicitly spatial language and metaphor. However, the natural world in the

women-centered text is not always untouched by culture. Women in these

texts are still raised within culture and they therefore bring notions of

patriarchy with them to their natural settings. Moreover, the relationship

between women and nature is not uncomplicated. As I have argued, this

relationship, in the women-centered fantastic text also incorporates issues of

otherness and of power (supernatural power, patriarchal power and

hierarchical divisions of power). On the one hand, both nature and woman

have been depicted as passive (recall Legler's arguments earlier in the

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[18] Examples of popular culture texts which play on these themes are: Christina Biaggi, *Habitations of the Great Goddess* (Manchester: Knowledge, Ideas and Trends, 1994); Daphne Brooke, *Saints and Goddesses: The Interface With Celtic Paganism* (Whitburn: Friends of the Whitburn Trust, 1999); Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Gayle Greene, *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991).

chapter), but as we have seen, both nature and woman can also be depicted as threatening. Supernatural women are positioned within this complicated terrain of dangerous geography; supernatural women are both marginalized and empowered in this sphere. But, as we will go on to see in subsequent chapters, spatial divisions within women-centered fantastic fiction can become increasingly complex and (even) less tangible.

The concept of the body as a 'home' and a 'space'—a 'location' that we inhabit and endure is crucial to the idea that the 'personal is political'. Moreover, the contrast between body as home (as we see in both *Daughters of the Great Star* and *Mistress of Spices*) and home as body (as reflected in *The Witching Hour*) reconceptualizes the position of otherness. The identity of the individual is not necessarily confined to the small space of the body-- it is also conveyed onto the home and, at times, to the physical location surrounding the home. Homes can personify the body, just as the body can personify the home; we live in our bodies, but we also live in our homes. Our space can stretch. As Adrienne Rich illustrates in "Notes toward a Politics of Location" (1984; 2001):

> [w]hen I was ten or eleven, early in World War II, a girlfriend and
> I used to write each other letters that we addressed like this:
>
> > Adrienne Rich
> >
> > 14 Edgevale Road
> >
> > Baltimore, Maryland
> >
> > The United States of America
> >
> > The Continent of North America
> >
> > The Western Hemisphere

The Earth

The Solar System

The Universe

You could see your own house as a tiny fleck on an ever

widening landscape, or as the center of it all from which the

circles expanded into the infinite unknown (*Arts* 63-64).

Rich's confession, here, illustrates both a wish and a need to fill the empty

spaces surrounding individual experiences of bodies and homes. Her identity

expands into the empty margins of space, through body, home and universe.

This is a place of resistance, a claim for a territory that is outwith the body.

Rich, like the characters in the texts of this chapter, lays claim to other

territories that surround them.

As we have seen, while creating powerful women-centered spaces, the

women-centered fantastic novel still maintains hierarchies of sexual politics.

We will now go on to explore the emphasis in women-centered fantasy on the

female body as it is held in opposition to the male body. The reader will also

notice a consistent fear associated with bodies in women-centered texts as

we go on to investigate the representations of bodily trespass and the lack of

control over one's own body.

Chapter Three
Towards a Lesbian Location

Lesbians have historically been deprived of a political existence through "inclusion" as female versions of male homosexuality. To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to erase female reality once again.

I perceive the lesbian experience as being, like motherhood, a profoundly female experience, with particular oppressions, meanings, and potentialities we cannot comprehend as long as we simply bracket it with other sexually stigmatized existences.[1]

While physical spaces and places play a critical role in fiction, so too do metaphorical and emotional ones. Therefore, this chapter and the next will explore two fundamentally linked spaces within the women-centered fantastic text. First, I wish to look at what I will term 'lesbian' space within that is both physically and emotionally constructed as a vehicle capable of transcending patriarchal structures. I wish to investigate spaces that women seek to create themselves--spaces which are seemingly lesbian territories and highly dependent upon physical places. I am interested in physical lesbian places as well as the emotional attachments or detachments that are created as a result of those places. As we will see, both such physical and emotional spaces within women-centered fantastic fiction are capable of creating and defying marginalization. While I do not wish to claim that a lesbian identity is exclusively present in all women-centered texts, a lesbian identity is certainly sufficiently predominant in such texts to propel this textual investigation. Second, I wish to look at telepathic or mental spaces as they are represented in fiction; telepathic or mental spaces are in many ways

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[1] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose.* Eds. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993): 217.

contingent upon the creation of the lesbian identity within which they communicate, but they can also be viewed as spaces separate and independent from lesbian identities. Telepathy as a motif is touched upon in this chapter simply because it is, at times, impossible to separate it from the lesbian spaces I argue for; telepathic and lesbian spaces are often thematically dependent upon one another. Telepathy and its consequent ability to act as an internalized private space is explored in more significant detail in the following chapter.

Lesbian Feminist Criticism

The exploration of lesbianism within feminist discourse and fiction has been beset by contradictions and arguments. It includes sharply competitive debates between essentialist and anti-essentialist concepts of lesbian identities. On the one hand essentialist feminist theory argues for solidarity among women beyond individual experience and for the existence of a lesbian continuum among women. In contrast, anti-essentialist feminists maintain that no such notion of commonality can exist among women. Anti-essentialists also argue that within distinctive groups of women, individual experience is paramount. Neither of these critical quests immediately concerns this study; my primary interest, rather, lies in the notion of women-centered relationships that create new spaces within fiction. This debate does become rather more significant later in the chapter and I return to it when it is relevant.

Just as there are tensions within lesbian and feminist criticism, there are distinct threads or tensions in lesbianism that exist within the

contemporary women-centered fantastic text-- these are, broadly, emotional and physical. Both threads are presented as wholly female spaces, holding no male presence within them but often relying upon a (threatening) male presence for their creation and location. Moreover, all women-centered texts choosing to engage with a lesbian identity do so with active political agendas and broad notions of sexuality.[2]

In *Sexual Politics* (1972), second-wave feminist Kate Millet challenges sexist ideologies at work in literature, paving the way for contemporary feminist literary criticism.   Millet argues that the narrative structures of male-centered texts are representative of masculine culture in their distortion of male and female characters and their misrepresentation of sexuality. Consequently, same sex relationships, whether they actually cross the 'border' to physical sexual activity or not, challenge the norms in both social and political arenas. But challenges to sexual boundaries have also taken place in the margins themselves; the language we have adopted to 'signal' homosexuality and the notion that homosexuality is *the other*, are no longer unchallenged demarcations within feminist discourse.[3] Lesbian philosopher Claudia Card (1984), looks specifically at the notion of language and labeling:

> [the ...] lesbian experience, embrac[es] many forms of erotic
>
> interaction between women, [and] is an often subversive part of
>
> most women's lives. How pervasive it is in a given life and how

[2] Like Kate Millet, I see "political" as the power structured spaces and arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another (23).

[3] See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (H.M. Parshley, trans and ed). (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). De Beauvoir argues that "homosexual or not, [women] will have the complex relations I have described with women in general; she needs them as critical judges and spectators, as confidantes, and accomplices, in order to create that counter universe which all

it is manifested in individual lives are parameters that can vary

greatly with the circumstances and commitments of the

individual [...] (nearly) any woman reflecting truthfully upon

lesbian possibilities can expect to confront some that are hers,

whether or not she chooses to actualize them, and some that

she probably has chosen to actualize, whether or not she ever

labeled them "lesbian". (xii)

Card makes two useful points here: first, that the term 'lesbian' is incapable of

reflecting the variety and breadth of relationships among women, and second,

that 'lesbian' has no fixed space.   Thus, while lesbian experiences can be

found in any number of interactions, the fact that a lesbian/non-lesbian or

gay/straight binary is enforced on all relationships among women

marginalizes the spaces *in between* these overpowering binaries.

More recently, authors and theorists have begun to challenge these

binaries in a different way by rejecting the labels of homosexual and

heterosexual in favor of 'queer' sexuality. 'Queer' in this case, has been

reclaimed and redefined.[4] Thus, it is a term of identification that refuses

labels. To be 'queer' in this theoretical sense then means not to posit one's

sexuality in terms of heterosexuality or homosexuality, but rather to see one's

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women oppressed by man require" (602).

[4] The presence of queer theory within this chapter is purposefully brief; it is employed to illustrate that sexual interaction, regardless of gender, is both possible and probable. Further, the appearance of this critical stance is meant to balance the women-identified-women suggestions that precede it. For further discussion see Sarah Cooper, *Relating to Queer Theory: Rereading Sexual Self-definition with Irigaray, Kristeva, Wittig, and Cixous* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000); Peter Lang, *Feminism Meets Queer Theory.* Eds. Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Schor. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1997).

self as potentially interacting sexually with everyone. This term also, to a certain extent, denies the category of bisexuality (or even transexuality) since, again, it posits the ideas of sexual interaction regardless of gender. In short, queer theory promotes ambiguity and acknowledges the sexual changes that occur for everyone over the period of their lives. This problematizes Card's position, because while it tends to support her contention that every woman has (an emotional) lesbian experience, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, it also suggests that every lesbian woman has similar heterosexual experiences. The same, of course, applies to men. Nonetheless, the concept of women-identified-women is by no means exclusive to Card, and is, moreover, the prevailing motif within women-centered fantasy fiction.

Earlier work by feminist scholar Barbara Ponse (1978) also outlines an emotional lesbianism. As a sociologist who has extensively researched lesbian communities, Ponse identifies, through the process of her field work, a concept which she terms "women-related-women." Ponse describes women-related-women as "those who call themselves lesbian (or would probably be called lesbians by others), as well as women who call themselves bisexual, "sexual", "straight", or celibate but who have sexual or *emotional* relationships with other women" [emphasis mine] (3). Like the lesbian relationships we will see portrayed in women-centered fantasy fiction within this chapter, Ponse sees lesbian identities as a moral essence conceived by women-related-women and often experienced as "true self" (9). It is through such emotional attachment that female characters within given novels find themselves drawn toward trusting, loving, and identifying with other women; a

further, and equally relevant, dimension to this emotional attachment is the telepathic connections that exist among female characters in the women-centered text.[5]

Influencing western feminism throughout her career, feminist poet and essayist Adrienne Rich coined the term 'lesbian continuum' in her persuasive essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980; 1993). Rich borrows the term 'compulsory heterosexuality' from Kathleen Barry's early work, in which Barry identifies the idea of a compulsory heterosexual existence as the main problem in naming and conceptualizing female sexual 'slavery'.[6] Moreover, Barry (1984) suggests elsewhere that, "until we name the practice, give conceptual definition and form to it, illustrate its life over time and in space, those who are its most obvious victims will also not be able to name it or define their experience," (*International Feminism* 100). French feminist Monique Wittig (1992) would agree. Wittig sees heterosexuality as a political regime "which rests on the submission and appropriation of women" (*The Straight Mind* preface).[7] Wittig further submits that sex itself is a category that is concerned not with selfhood, but rather with relationships: "the compulsory reproduction of the "species" by women is the system of exploitation on which heterosexuality is economically based" (6).

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[5] While this motif is discussed in much more detail in the following chapter, it is also touched upon within this analysis because lesbianism and telepathy are often associated with one another within the texts.

[6] See: *Female Sexual Slavery* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1979).

[7] While *A Straight Mind* was published in 1992, it includes a collection of earlier essays by Wittig ranging from 1979-1992.

Following the ideas of Barry, Wittig and others,[8] Adrienne Rich attacks the notion of a mandatory heterosexual lifestyle and offers instead, a vision of a unique relationship among women that is not unlike the relationships explored in women-centered fantasy fiction:

> *Lesbian existence* suggests both the fact of the historical
> presence of lesbians and our continuing creation of the meaning
> of that existence. I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include
> a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of
> woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman
> has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with
> another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms
> of primary intensity between and among women, including the
> sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the
> giving and receiving of practical and political support [....] we
> begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which
> have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly
> clinical, definitions of *lesbianism*. ("Compulsory" *Poetry and*
> *Prose* 217)

The differences Rich notes between a lesbian existence and a lesbian continuum are precisely those that exist within women-centered fiction-- that is to say, a physical lesbianism as well as an emotional one; moreover,

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[8] For further examples of radical feminist theoretical models similar to Wittig and Barry see also: Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978).

physical lesbianism is often dependent upon emotional lesbianism in women-centered fantasy texts. As we will see, there is a fundamental difference between a physical lesbian experience on the one hand (*Daughters of the Great Star, Journey to Zeldar, Ruins of Isis*) and both a physical experience accompanied by an emotional one on the other (*Mists of Avalon* and the *Darkover* novels). As Rich suggests, while there is an obvious difference between physical lesbian experiences and emotional lesbian connections, the concept of the lesbian continuum is one that includes all women regardless of sexual/genital preference. It is worth noting too that Rich's concept of the lesbian continuum makes room for a collective understanding of women through a unique bonding experience in female/female relationships.

The apparently essentialist conception of 'Woman' offered by Rich and other scholars, however, has been met with both support[9] and contention within feminist discourse.[10] In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Judith Butler challenges universalistic claims of Woman stating that feminists must "remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism" (13). Butler sees contemporary feminist debates over essentialism as raising further questions surrounding female identity and asks "is "unity" necessary for effective political action?" (15). Butler problematizes gender in her work, noting that while the unity of Woman is often invoked within feminist discourse, the constructed status of gender itself is a "free-floating artifice" when theorized

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[9] Susan Griffin (1997) argues that essentialism is a "reductive opposition" claiming that "to accuse early feminists of *essentialism* is oddly ahistorical, since the work of feminist thinkers in this century created the very ground on which gender is visible as a social construct" (*Ecofeminism* 214).
[10] Refer back to chapter one for further discussion and reference to essentialism within feminist discourse.

as independent of sex or sexuality (6). If sex itself is a gendered category, Butler asks, then "how and where does the construction of gender take place?" (8). Moreover, *Gender Trouble* offers much criticism of Wittig's idea that "the lesbian is the only concept [...] which is beyond the category of sex" (*The Straight Mind* 14), because, as Butler states, such a utopian notion of sexuality assumes a freedom from heterosexual constructs: "a sexuality beyond "sex," fail[s] to acknowledge the ways in which power relations continue to construct sexuality for women even within the terms of a "liberated" heterosexuality or lesbianism" (29). Butler's observations are credible and her contribution to feminist discourse is significant because she further theorizes and problematizes the assumptions made by both materialist and essentialist feminism in regards to gender and identity.

Judith Butler is right to interrogate the wisdom or feasibility of attempting to impose an essentialist view of Woman on women. Yet the view of a lesbian continuum (Rich), woman-identified-woman (Card), or woman-related-woman (Ponse) is also more nuanced than Butler credits. While Rich argues for a vision that seems essentialist in "Compulsory Heterosexuality", she is also significantly cautious of generalizing statements about the position of women, particularly in her locational politics. As contemporary feminist Mary Eagleton (2000) rightly notes, Rich is aware that it is not possible to speak "'for' other women as if their positions are identical to one's own [....] Rich's understanding of location brings together geography, history, several identities, memory and process" (299-300). Eagleton also points out that "to talk of Rich's and feminism's history of the problem of pronouns is not to suggest a trajectory of steady improvement leading to some happy ending.

We are still very much in the midst of this debate" (301). Thus, for Eagleton, Rich and others, it is the impossibility of location, the inadequacy of subjectivity and the danger of privileging one location over (an) other that continually problematizes "a sensitively gauged aspiration for a new relation between 'I' and 'we'" (Eagleton 301). The lesbian continuum begins and ends with the concept of 'body', our most intimate physical space. As such, the intimate politics of location cannot be separated from the politics of sexuality or identity.

Many feminists see the limited clinical definition of lesbian as narrow and problematic. As we have seen, Rich and Ponse view lesbian relationships as an obvious development amongst women who share relationships with other women, regardless of sexual/genital preference. Rich says, in a foreward to "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence" (1983), that her essay was written "not to widen divisions but to encourage heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women-- and to change it [....] and to sketch, at least, some bridge over the gap between *lesbian* and *feminist*" (*Poetry and Prose* 203). She goes on to note that key assumptions about lesbians and keys words such as "alternative lifestyle" and "sexual preference" are token allusions to the lesbian experience and a highly inadequate means of characterization (205-206). Relationships between women, the experiences of women, and the way in which we make use of language to characterize both, exist within social spaces that in turn convey social meaning. These spaces can be resisted or relocated; for Ponse and others, such a resistance seems possible within the safety of a lesbian community, while for Rich

resisting the inadequacy of language is political; intriguingly, these and related concepts are thematically developed in women-centered fantasy fiction.

It is clear that many feminist academics see lesbianism as a collective quality existing within all women, to varying degrees, which does not rely on sexual experience or even sexual preference. How writers choose to explore issues of identity within fantasy fiction is integral to this study; a movement toward an erasure of distinctive sexual boundaries within women-centered fantasy fiction creates new spaces, new social contexts and new identities. The women-centered text attacks sexual boundaries, taboos and linguistic marginalizations, challenging them and legitimizing alternatives. It is not surprising that many women-centered or lesbian texts fall under the category of fantasy fiction. The appeal would seem obvious—the 'rules' of narrative are pulled apart somewhat in fantasy as we saw in chapter one; the structure of the fantasy text can be shaped and defined to suit the needs of the fiction itself. By creating strong women heroines "who are as accomplished as any male in terms of physical competence and hard-headed cunning," women-centered fiction is able to "unsettle, rather than maintain the status quo" (Moran 42).[11] In part then, by the very nature of the fantasy novel, boundaries have been, and continue to be, crossed and undermined.

From this point on, unless otherwise stated, lesbianism will be used as a broad term to include women-centered relationships regardless of sexual preference. With this in mind, and for the purposes of this research, it would then seem that the following question must be posed: how and why do

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[11] While Moran deals with Sword and Sorcery fiction, the genre is suitably similar to invoke her argument in this analysis.

women-centered texts create a lesbian space? While we will return to answer

this query in more detail later in the chapter, examples from women-centered

fiction here will help us to explore this line of critical thinking.

Feminine-centric

While lesbianism is approached in many different ways in women-centered

fantastic fiction it is almost always essential to the plot of such texts,

regardless of the form it ultimately takes. In Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Ruins*

of Isis (1978), her *Darkover* novels (1972-1983), and *The Mists of Avalon*

(1982), sexuality is a spiritual concept which is independent of gender; that is

to say that lesbianism and homoeroticism exist within the texts as moments of

transgression between couples or groups who find spiritual and emotional

connections together. In Bradley's novels, lesbianism is never reliant on

genital sex or biological determinants; rather, it is primarily emotional or

spiritual. However, in Diana Rivers' *Daughters of the Great Star* (1992) and

Journey to Zelindar (1987), a genital or physical lesbianism is presupposed.

As part of the supernatural influence of having been born 'under the Great

Star' (star born), the women in Rivers' text all have physical sexual

relationships with other women. On the one hand this is a stunning claim;

Rivers is able to do away with compulsory heterosexuality and offers instead

an inclination toward lesbian homosexuality. While there do exist warnings

that this is a taboo lifestyle that can be dangerous in the male dominated

spaces of both novels, nonetheless, these warnings are not the central focus.

Instead, they remain an underlying presence that is never brought fully to

light: "[i]n the anarchic spaces of the [fantasy] narrative traditional female

gender models are paradoxically and simultaneously deconstructed, revised and affirmed" (Moran 45). On the other hand, a presupposed lesbianism seems absurd and one wonders what Rivers hopes to accomplish. If she is attempting to align herself with critical thought similar to that found in the work that we have seen from Barry, Rich, Ponse and others, can the reader overlook the problematic compulsory homosexuality of the novel and applaud its collective vision? Or should one criticize the notion for its obvious reinforcement of sexual and gender stereotyping? Indeed as we have already seen this has been a debate in and around feminist critical thought for some time, and one that we will return to later in this chapter when a clearer explanation of River's work and lesbian identity within the text has been established. For now, it is enough to notice that a unique women-centered environment is unequivocally present in the text; the creation of this environment is directly attributed to the lesbianism itself and to this end it works as a distinct bond between the women in the text.

The fundamental differences in the conceptualized lesbian cultures within the texts are striking and deserve attention. While both Rivers and Bradley produce women-centered texts, *Daughters of the Great Star* and *Journey to Zelindar* are overtly lesbian texts in the sense that they center around physical relationships between women, whereas *The Mists of Avalon*, the *Darkover* novels and *Ruins of Isis* are not.[12] Additionally, while all the texts create very solid collective social identities for the female characters,

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[12] Many of Bradley's novels have similar women centered themes, including: *The Shattered Chain* (1976), *The Mists of Avalon* (1982), *City of Sorcery* (1984), *Warrior Woman* (1985), *Firebrand* (1987), *Witch hill* (1990), *The Forest House* (1993), *The Lady of Avalon* (1997), *The Priestess of Avalon* (2001).

Daughters of the Great Star and *Journey to Zelindar* spend much less time

explaining or justifying lesbian sexual experiences than Bradley does. For

example, Bradley spends the first quarter of *Mists of Avalon* making the

reader sympathetic to a pagan society that accepts all forms of lesbianism

and incest. However, Bradley is re-writing the story of King Arthur in *Mists of*

Avalon and within that circle, her story is radical; Bradley puts the individual

stories of the women of Camelot and Avalon in the forefront of the novel. She

rewrites the famous legend from the perspective of active and crucial women

characters, attributing, among other important factors, the holy regalia of

Christ which are so fundamental to Arthurian Grail Quests, to the Goddess.

Moreover, Bradley is working within a cluster of religious motifs within this

particular text, and therefore the narrative must work doubly hard to justify a

matriarchal paganism to a largely Christianized readership[13] as she makes

the traditionally evil Morgan le Fay the heroine of the narrative. Similarly,

Bradley is both radical but explanatory of her lesbian culture among the group

of Amazon women in her *Darkover* novels and in her women-centered planet

in *Ruins of Isis*. In contrast, Diana Rivers presents an unfamiliar world where

women born with supernatural power engage automatically in physical lesbian

relationships.[14] There is no explanation offered for the life decision, nor any

inner struggle or debate. There are, in fact, no sexual relationships between

men and women in *Daughters of the Great Star* and *Journey to Zelindar* with

the exception of violent, brutal or destructive ones which have in turn, led to

lesbian relationships. Rivers creates a world where lesbian sexuality is both

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[13] *The Mists of Avalon* was on the New York Best Seller list from 1982-1984. It was marketed
to a heavily Judeo Christian influenced North American culture.

acceptable and expected among her unique community of women. While Rivers chooses to explore a more explicit physical lesbianism and Bradley highlights an emotional identity, they both take important steps toward establishing and legitimizing lesbian identity and culture within their fiction. But the most intriguing aspect of these novels can be found not in their differences, but in their similarities. Let us now, therefore, explore the similarities shared by women-centered works with lesbian motifs.

The Physical Geography of Lesbianism

One of the most distinctive results of the creation of lesbian identities within the women-centered fantastic text is the physical or geographical location which their communities inevitably inhabit and on which they are unequivocally dependent. These fictional lesbian cultures separate themselves from the world of men and seek out impenetrable spaces, spaces secure from the sexual, cultural and political intrusion of men, in which to create a sense of safety. Often the drive to seek out such a distinct women-centered space is born of the fear, or the experience, of being harmed, violated or penetrated by men. Thus, in Bradley's *Mists of Avalon,* Avalon is an *island* for women, its boundaries impenetrable by men, open only to those women with supernatural power. It is a safe haven set apart from a male-centered world. Similarly, Bradley's planet of Isis in *Ruins of Isis* is one ruled by women who refuse to join the misogynist galactic empire of the Unity, having knowledge of violence against their ancestors. Isis is isolated and

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[14] Refer back to chapter two for further details of this novel.

protected from the world of patriarchy, a place of solace for the women who make it their home.

For Diana Rivers, the forest is the space of safety for the star-born and witches who seek its shelter in *Daughters of the Great Star.* After experiencing hatred from the masculine world ruled by the Zarn, these women take refuge in the wild spaces of nature, removing themselves from the world of men. In the sequel to the novel, *Yarmald* is claimed as the exclusive space for star-born, becoming the place of healing for the heroine of *Journey to Zeldar.*[15] Yarmald is literally impenetrable by masculine forces (the army, ill intending men etc.) due to the Redline[16] which divides the territories and is upheld by the women with the Goddess granted mind power of the kersh.[17]

All of these novels illustrate the importance of having, and the fear of losing, particular spaces. Such preoccupation with physical location propels the narrative and advances the subplots of each text. Thus, as we shall see, it is in search for space, the protection of space and the defense of space that *preserves* this lesbian identity and profoundly links the novels.

Ruins of Isis (1978) was written during the time when Bradley was also writing her Darkover novels which chronicle the various activities of a group of

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[15] Yarmald is where the Hadra women (the star-born) have settled. It is a peninsula by the Sea, set apart from the rest of the world by a physical Redline in the earth which represents force and power. It separates the Yarmald Peninsula from the Zarn's lands.

[16] We return to the Redline at the end of this chapter for further discussion and clarification.

[17] Kersh is the name given to the powerful mind communication or telepathy found uniquely in the Hadra (star-born) women. It is also a tool of protection whereby anyone with 'kersh' cannot be harmed by another.

Amazon women who have chosen to reject male-dominated society. [18]

However, where the Darkover novels depict a sense of alienation for women

from already established patriarchal societies, *Ruins of Isis* outlines a world in

which matriarchal rule is the norm. Part of a futuristic world, and importantly

(by choice) set apart from the galactic empire called the Unity, Isis is a planet

inhabited by both men and women, but on which women rule exclusively.

Strict gender laws and norms are firmly embedded in Isis's culture. These

gender laws and norms are precisely the inverse of patriarchal societies,

proclaiming males as less intelligent and less fit to take part in society or

culture. Indeed, the women of Isis believe that men "really don't feel things

the way [women] do" (5). The novel begins with a biting introduction to these

accepted norms, when Cendri (female) and Dal (male) embark on an invited

visit to the matriarchal planet of Isis. Ironically, Cendri and Dal are scholars

from the planet University, where male and female relationships are regarded

as equal (in so far as our own western reality is 'equal'). Crucial to the

narrative, the reader discovers that no one has ever visited Isis before,

because Isis's rulers believe strongly that outside influence will destroy their

carefully constructed women-centered lesbian culture. The ruling

matriarchate of Isis has, therefore, refused to join the Unity and rejected the

free exchange of goods and cultural study.

At the novel's onset we learn that discovery and curiosity are

dangerous notions for Isis, a planet that wants to preserve its culture as much

as its privacy. But for the sake of education, Dal and Cendri are given special

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[18] Bradley wrote dozens of novels under the loose umbrella term "Darkover novels" between 1975 and 1985. Among them are: *Landfall, Exile's Song, Two to Conquer, Traitor's Sun, The Bloody Sun, Free Amazons of Darkover*

invitation to visit Isis and study the archeological ruins of the planet. Because

no male humans are regarded as worthy of scholarly aptitude on Isis, Cendri

must pose as the archaeologist, while her husband Dal pretends to be her

assistant (he is, in fact, the Master Scholar). While both characters have

'studied' the customs of Isis, they are clearly unprepared for what seems a

shocking reversal of gender rules and norms:

> "The Scholar Dame is aware that the import of offworld males is
>
> technically an infringement of the laws of the Matriarchate.
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> Concessions have, as the Scholar Dame knows, been made to
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> the respected status of the Scholar from University;[19] but certain
>
> formalities may not be waived. I am required to fill out a
>
> declaration in the name of the Scholar Dame [...] A property
>
> tattoo or brand, an unremovable mark signifying permanent
>
> ownership and responsibility [must be arranged] It [Dal] can be
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> marked—" she very faintly emphasized *it*—"with an earclamp or
>
> collar tag, but the most effective method is for a subcutaneous
>
> electronic implant in one testicle. This is an excellent training
>
> and disciplinary device for a male not accustomed to civilized
>
> restraints, as it can be located and controlled at any moment."
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> (4-5)

Bradley's choice of language here is deliberately aggressive, invasive and

sexual. First, men are "imported" like material goods and a "declaration form"

is required to bring them into the planet of Isis. Ironically, men are commodities—material possessions to be owned by proclamation of a "property tattoo" or brand located in the testicle. Bradley purposely invokes this image of sexual ownership in the first few pages of the novel as an intense example of the reversals we are to expect throughout the novel. However, while this is a powerful image of gendered role reversal, it becomes clear throughout the course of the text that such extremes are equally undesirable as those experienced in patriarchal cultures. By the novel's end, the gender reversals created here are exposed as damaging ones. This is indicative of Bradley's early writing where she consistently sets up dramatic/extreme gender and role reversals only to illustrate the ultimate ineffectiveness or errors in such cultural systems.

While Cendri poses as an archaeologist, she is in fact an anthropologist hoping to study the social and cultural customs of women on a planet wholly independent from the Unity. The fact that she is intrigued by the culture of Isis must be carefully hidden from the women who are suspicious of outsiders and have distinctly refused to be studied by others. While Cendri does her best to merge with the matriarchal culture of Isis she finds herself unable to accept their core belief that women are superior to men in all aspects. Moreover, she soon finds that her own beliefs of gender equality are continually challenged on Isis—while Cendri 'believes' that she is from an

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[19] University is Cendri's home planet

equal opportunity world, it is soon clear to the reader (and later to Cendri) that

this supposed 'equality' is a false construction.[20]

While men are seen as essential to the conception process, the

women of Isis spend their intimate lives in same sex relationships. Thus, life

partners on Isis are always same sex (lesbian), although some women

ironically choose to keep "companions" (men) as "playthings" and sex objects.

However, women who are exclusively heterosexual are seen as strange and

perverse:

> on Miranda's world [...] romantic love served none of the social
>
> functions of family formation and child-nurture which it served
>
> elsewhere. Here, the major bonds of social cohesion were
>
> family bonds between women, and sexuality had little or no part
>
> in them. A woman who found herself irresistibly drawn,
>
> emotionally, sexually, personally to a man, might well believe
>
> that this was a strange and unlikely perversion; might find
>
> herself at a loss to understand, or even express, her own
>
> desires and hungers. (120)

This view of heterosexuality reinforces the sexual norms on Isis as well as

highlighting the obvious reversal of western social structure. As an

anthropologist, Cendri is intrigued by the rules Isis has established and

importantly makes note, through her observations on the planet, that family

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[20]Cendri continually apologizes to Dal in vain attempts to appease his bruised ego after being treated as a lesser human being by virtue of his sex (by the women of Isis) and even finds herself engaging in sexual relations with him as a means of appeasing his foul moods (47).

bonds exist primarily between the women. Strength (both physical and emotional) is associated with womanliness, not manliness; it is an emotional, economic and social bond that ties these women closely together in their sexual politics.

Lesbianism and lesbian relationships are both serious and casual on Isis. Thus, while "life partners" are chosen for compatibility as well as mutual love and trust, physical gratification and public displays of affection amongst women are also the norm. As a woman accepted into this foreign world, it is not long before Cendri finds herself included in the romantic same sex gestures of the women of Isis:

> With everyone standing near the exits it was crowded in the box, and Cendri was shoved against the other women. She felt a body pressed tight against hers, knew it was the ample form of Vaniya; the Pro-Matriarch put an arm around her waist, and Cendri let herself lean on the older woman. Vaniya's cheek pressed hers, and Cendri, responding for a moment to what seemed a spontaneous gesture of affection, let her head rest a moment on Vaniya's shoulder. Then she realized, startled and more than a little shocked, that the heavy body was pressing hard and purposefully against hers, that Vaniya's hands had strayed to her breasts and were fondling them gently, but insistently [...] Such an event seemed to be a legitimate occasion, among the women of Isis, for near-public displays of

sexual arousal; and Vaniya, forgetting or ignoring her alien

origin, was treating her as one of their own. (185-186)

This is a crucial point in the novel because it is through Vaniya's public sexual

actions that Cendri becomes fully accepted into the female collective on Isis--

"a woman like us". As Vaniya is one of the two head Matriachate leaders on

Isis this is, therefore, as much a political message as a social gesture.

Cendri is awed by the experience and flattered by this honor; Vaniya clearly

considers her a legitimate woman, and more importantly a woman who is not

a threat to the independent nation of Isis—Isis's fear of being colonized by the

Unity and consequently its fear of losing its cultural identity is essential to the

understanding of this gesture. By accepting Cendri in this way, Vaniya

illustrates that she no longer views Cendri as a threat or as a representative

of the Unity. Interestingly, Maureen Moran (1999) argues that "the

representation of the colonized nation [...] serves to establish a strong link in

sword and sorcery fiction between the land and personal identity, between

nation and the gendered subject" (44).[21] Moran goes on to suggest that such

narratives call gender and boundaries into question precisely as a reaction to

colonization. Here, however, Bradley has anticipated colonialism long before

it actually occurs (indeed, one of the central conflicts in the novel is the

question of amalgamation with neighboring planets of the Unity). Thus, Isis

fears it is in danger of losing its matriarchal and by extension its cultural

lesbian identity with the impending threat of colonization.

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[21] For futher reading see: "Anarchic Spaces in Sword and Sorcery Fiction." *Diegesis: Journal of the Association for Research in Popular Fictions.* No. 4 (Summer 1999): 41-50.

Bradley's attitude toward a lesbian existence among women is much the same in her later publications. She continues to explore the theme in *The Mists of Avalon* highlighting the unique and powerful women-centered relationships on the island of Avalon as well as the fear Avalon experiences in losing its women-centered identity:

[...] the world itself has changed [....] For this is the great secret, which was known to all educated men in our day: that by what men think, we create the world around us, daily new. And now the priests, thinking that this infringes upon the power of their God, who created the world once and for all to be unchanging, have closed those doors (which were never doors, except in the minds of men), and the pathway leads only to the priests' Isle, which they have safeguarded with the sound of their church bells, driving away all thoughts of another world lying in the darkness. Indeed, they say, that world, if it indeed exists, is the property of Satan, and the doorway to Hell, if not Hell itself. [original text in italics] (ix)

The dominant theme within *Mists of Avalon* is the preservation of the island of Avalon which represents both matriarchy and Goddess worship.[22] The main fear throughout the text is that paganism, or 'the old ways', will be lost to the world with the growing acceptance of Christianity; moreover, with this metaphorical 'loss' comes the literal loss of Avalon from the physical world—

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[22] For further discussion refer back to chapter two and see also: Deneka MacDonald, "Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*". *Beacham Encyclopædia of Popular Fiction.* Volume 15. (New York: The Gale Group, 2001).

Avalon's existence in the physical world is only secure if the people 'believe' in it. If belief in the Goddess fades, so too will Avalon, drifting further into the mists until it exists only as the land of Faery does. The fight to secure Avalon's presence in the world is what propels Morgan's actions throughout the text, altering her from the force of evil that she is in Malory to a priestess driven to protect her women-centered space.

In keeping with her conceptual lesbianism (Bradley sees lesbian relationships as spiritual and emotional as well as physical), established in earlier works, in *The Mists of Avalon*, the women of Avalon form strong sexual bonds with each other that go well beyond physical gratification. Thus Morgan reflects on her lesbian relationship with another priestess, Raven:

> As she lay quiet, listening to the other woman's breathing, she remembered the night she had brought Nimue here, and how Raven had come to her then, welcoming her to Avalon ... *why does it seem to me now that of all the love I have known, that is the truest.* [italics and ellipsis in original] (760)

Bradley introduces lesbian bonding early in the text when Morgan and Viviane first meet, and she maintains the motif consistently throughout the story. Female bonding is further used as a tool that speaks specifically to a female readership that she has calculatedly endeared toward paganism and female bonding throughout the narrative:

Morgan clasped her close and kissed her, rocking her like a

child. Then, as if they entered together into a great silence, she

held Raven against her, touching her, caressing her, their

bodies clinging together in something like a frenzy [...] woman

to woman, affirming life [...] (765)

While Bradley does not describe a genital experience she nonetheless

outlines a coming together of femininity that goes beyond physical penetration

and instead focuses on a deep emotional and spiritual connection. This

emotional connection is not unlike Rich's observations regarding relations

among lesbians and women:

As the term *lesbian* has been held to limiting, clinical

associations in its patriarchal definition, female friendship and

comradeship have been set apart from the erotic, thus limiting

the erotic itself. But as we deepen and broaden the range of

what we define as lesbian existence, as we delineate a lesbian

continuum, we begin to discover the erotic in female terms: as

that which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely

to the body itself; as an energy not only diffuse but, as Audre

Lorde has described it, omnipresent in "the sharing of joy,

whether physical, emotional, psychic" and in the sharing of

work; as the empowering joy which "makes us less willing to

accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being

which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-

effacement, depression, self-denial." (*Poetry and Prose* 218)

Bradley consistently reiterates the concept that there is something special,

and something inherently female to be shared amongst these women that is

physical, emotional and psychic. Moreover, the existence of Avalon itself, as

a space for a collective of spiritual women, is a crucial aspect of the novel;

there exists a connection among all women in the novel, especially those who

make their home on the island of Avalon. Because of the space they share

and the spiritual training they learn whilst inhabiting this space, they are able

to feel telepathically and instinctively know one another in a way that is

exclusively female. Like Isis, Avalon's identity is a lesbian one; its culture

rests on its (emotional) lesbian relationships with women. However, in

Avalon (and in Isis), the Goddess also occasionally requires her priestesses

to fulfill heterosexual roles, as, for example, when Morgan and Arthur are

required to perform the Great Marriage in *Mists of Avalon*. Such Goddess-

guided heterosexual encounters are imperative if Avalon (and Isis) is to

survive. Avalon's claim on Arthur is primarily through the incestuous,

Goddess-sanctioned relationship between him and Morgan. Thus, both Isis

and Avalon are highly political geographical places; both Isis and Avalon

struggle to maintain control over their distinctly lesbian women-centered

cultures regardless of their heterosexual 'necessities'.

While Bradley is consistent in her treatment of a lesbian identity that is

dependent upon emotional attachment for its existence, the female

relationships in Rivers' texts are clearly attendant to physical aspects first and

(only) then emotional affinities. Lesbianism in *Daughters of the Great Star* is primarily about corporal gratification, but its sequel, *Journey to Zelindar*, explores the emotional side of compulsory homosexuality among these women.

From the beginning of *Daughters of the Great Star*, Rivers illustrates sexuality as something shared among women almost solely for sexual release:

> We had been swimming and were lying naked on the mossy
> bank, looking at each other's body [....]
> Suddenly we were touching each other all over, laughing and
> full of delight, wondering why, among all our games, we had not
> found this one before. We began by tickling, then soon grew
> serious. It did not take long to discover that when we touched
> each other's body in certain places and in certain ways, currents
> of energy would course through us both, a joy so sharp it was
> almost like pain and yet not pain, for it left us with a great
> hunger for more. After that we played our new game whenever
> we could [....] (*Daughters* 13-14)

While Tazzia does have an intense friendship with Kara, it is this taboo experience that binds them emotionally. Yet the physical pleasure derived from their "exploring" that attaches her so completely (and as we see later in the novel, so irrationally) to Kara, sets the stage for how Tazzia views sexual experiences in the future:

[i]n spite of their constant sparring, Pell and Alyeeta seemed to

have come to some agreement over me. After that first night,

they shared me fairly between them, exchanging a look or word

or a slight nod to indicate who had claim, as if I were some

baggage to be traded back and forth and had no mind or will of

my own. Still, I had choices. I could have said no. But what did

it really matter? I got my pleasure [....] Whichever of them

wished to claim my body was welcome to it. (175-176)

There is an emotional detachment about Tazzia's sexual experiences in

Daughters of the Great Star that does not exist in the lesbian experiences

found among the women in any of Bradley's novels. While Tazzia's

indifference to her lovers could be a product of being savagely driven from

those she loves previously, it is equally important to note that most of the

sexual experiences in *Daughters of the Great Star* are somewhat cold and

detached: "The truth is, as long as this strange war goes on, it matters little to

Pell who fills her bed, only that it be someone"(207). Thus, the lesbianism in

Daughters of the Great Star is one derived from physical need, in contrast to

the conservative lesbian relationships based primarily on emotional ties in

Bradley's work. More importantly, Rivers does not romanticize lesbianism,

nor does she make apologies for the obvious hierarchical power divisions

found within such relationships. As Judith Butler notes, "power relations

continue to construct sexuality for women even within the terms of a

"liberated" heterosexuality or lesbianism" (*Gender Trouble* 29). Thus, "sex [is

still] a status category with political implications" (Millet 24), because the hierarchies within the text have a sexual politics at their core, even in an exclusively lesbian culture. Further, while *Daughters of the Great Star* presupposes its lesbianism amongst the female characters with a predestined sexual preference shared by both star-born and witch, it is seen as something that sets them apart from 'normal' culture and is therefore dangerous. Like western culture, the normative sexual culture in *Daughters of the Great Star* (and *Journey to Zelindar*) is a heterosexual one and holds, as Rich has noted in a similar context, that,

> [women] are the emotional and sexual property of men, and that
> the autonomy and equality of women threaten family, religion,
> and state. The institutions by which women have traditionally
> been controlled—patriarchal motherhood, economic
> exploitation, the nuclear family, compulsory heterosexuality—
> are being strengthened by legislation, religious fiat, media
> imagery, and efforts at censorship. ("Compulsory
> Heterosexuality" 204)

Unlike the gradual lesbian experiences that seem to be secondary to the plot of Bradley's texts, Rivers has an overt political message in her lesbian narratives. In other words, Rivers' work seems to be propelled by rejecting the notion that 'women are the emotional and sexual property of men'. Thus, she creates physical and emotional spaces, removed from the world of men and entirely exclusive for women: the supernatural women in *Daughters of*

the Great Star are hunted by men with a bounty on their heads because they are a political threat to the state, and the heroine of *Journey to Zelindar* flees her homeland after being brutally gang raped at her husband's arrangement.

The reader will recall Rivers' command of spatial metaphors and conscious use of spatial landscape throughout *Daughters of the Great Star.* ""You are crowding my *space* like so many circling wolves". She swept the gathering with her eyes. All of us obeyed, even the other Witches. Somehow we all found *space* on her cushions. Her shelter seemed to *stretch* and *reshape* around us" [emphasis mine](*Daughters* 172). And indeed *Journey to Zelindar* employs a similar devotion to geography within its narrative. Perhaps the most striking example of this can be found in the so- called Redline that protects the star-born Hadra from the Zarn's army of men.

The Redline is both a physical mark on the earth, stained with the blood of the women who fought to secure Yarmald as a space separate from patriarchal authority, and a spiritual line that 'magically' cannot be crossed by anyone wishing ill intentions toward the Hadra women. Crucially, the line begins with forest and the power behind the Redline is secured by the Hadra women, safe within the forest's protective cluster:

> Huge oaks and Gobal trees pressed together. Thickets of
> rithberries covered the road banks with hard-thorned branches
> and white blossoms thick as snow. Only a small corridor was
> cleared through this growth for the Redline itself [....] this grove
> of ancient trees seemed almost sacred, an ill-suited place for
> such a clash [with the Zarn's men]. (*Journey* 117)

When Yarmald is threatened by the Zarn who wishes to overthrow the women-centered lesbian community of the Hadra, the women sense the approaching hostility of the army and come forth from their forest homes to the Redline. As they line up along the line itself, they link their minds together and, calling upon their supernatural kersh power, protect their space:

> Quadra raised her arms and said in the old ritual way, "No
>
> armed man of Eezore shall pass this line our foremothers laid
>
> down for us. As it was before we took first breath, so it shall be
>
> long after we are blown to wind [...] "Together we took up
>
> Quadra's words, repeating them until we had raised a chant.
>
> Palm to palm, we pressed our hands against each others' hands
>
> at shoulder height to make a flow of energy between us. That
>
> contact shook my body with such force [and] I was more in awe
>
> of its power. (117)

> They came forward at a trot with swords drawn and raised, and
>
> again, swerved before the line. I could clearly feel an impact
>
> and a tremor. Between the Hadra on the line, there ran a force
>
> like living lightning. (118)

> Then a command was given and those tubes were raised.
>
> Another shout was followed by a great blazing flash of light and
>
> a blast [...] The destruction was so sudden and so total that it
>
> numbed the mind. Huge clouds of smoke rose over the scene.

(121, 122)

As the Zarn's army soon discovers, any ill will toward the Hadra rebounds

upon the doer. Thus, their cannon, gunfire and spears all fail to destroy

Yarmald. Instead, their own weapons are turned against them, leaving them

crushed, bloody and dead (121-124). The power of kersh is supreme and the

Hadra women return to Yarmald with the hope that future generations of men

will remember that Yarmald is a protected space for women that cannot be

invaded.

In both *Daughters of the Great Star* and *Journey to Zelindar*, the

women come together and claim a physical space of their own that becomes

a safe haven removed from the possibility of patriarchal claim over their

bodies and minds. In their unknown powers, and in their physical

relationships, the star-born are a threat to compulsory heterosexuality. As

predisposed lesbians their otherness is strengthened; in making the star-born

both supernaturally powerful and gay, their differences are doubled, they are

drawn to one another by the obvious fear of being controlled (and in fact

murdered) by opposing political forces. Eventually, they are able to fully

resist the planet's patriarchy (sexual and otherwise) and create their own

cultural space in the forest beyond the Redline.

Let us now return to our earlier question: do women-centered texts create

a *lesbian* space? We can see that an unrivalled lesbian space is apparent in

women-centered fantasy fiction and is one that can be mapped physically and

emotionally. In "Towards a Cartography: Radclyffe Hall, Virginia Woolf and

the Working of Common Land" (1991), Lyndie Brimstone addresses lesbian

identity in women's fiction and notes:

> One [...] pleasure is undoubtedly derived from the simple fact
>
> that once a *moment* has been established it becomes public
>
> property, a common reference, opening up possibilities for a
>
> shared discourse in which anyone can participate [....] For those
>
> who have found little in the way of explanation, validation or
>
> direction in the record of significant *moments* produced and
>
> preserved by dominant culture, the impulse to claim, name and
>
> restore those markers that do come to light has been
>
> understandably great. So [...] large numbers of culturally
>
> disinherited peoples began the self-conscious project of both
>
> filling in the spaces on the existing map and demanding
>
> territorial rights. Often through a positive (re)appropriation of
>
> what has been rejected by dominant culture, these groups
>
> would determine their own (oppositional) identities, values and
>
> beliefs and set up their own reinforced networks [italics in
>
> original]. (87)

Brimstone is referring to the formation of the Black, gay and women's

liberation movements taking place at the turn of the decade and the 'creation'

of lesbian feminism (88). She sees the movement of lesbian feminism as

reaching a plateau in the 1990's and suggests that "a fresh approach to

cartography and the creation of a new, as yet barely envisaged, multi-

dimensional cultural map" is in order (88). Significantly, by using a metaphorical cartography of the dominant and marginalized social discourses, Brimstone envisions the lesbian experience as a space that can be defined and charted upon a "multidimensional cultural map" (88).[23] The multidimensional element of this cultural map must exist on several planes. These planes, I suggest, are cultural, political, sexual and personal. Women-centered fantastic texts use lesbian identities to explore the nexus where these various planes intersect and coexist. In applying feminist critical response of space and sexuality to women-centered fiction, remarkable similarities between theory and fiction emerge. We can begin to see that a significant women-centered space, highly dependent on geographical location, does exist in the experiences of the female characters who are explicitly lesbian. Such novels highlight the relationships between women on various levels, promoting the uniqueness of female friendships, relationships and experiences. They explore sexuality in various forms and, importantly, they treat it politically. In concentrating on the lives and experiences of women they create and highlight communities of women existing within very specific social, cultural and political spaces as well as creating new spaces that become both powerful and empowering locations.

The women-centered texts discussed in this chapter are examples of fantasy fiction that creates a lesbianism located in a cultural identity highly dependent upon physical places. In *Ruins of Isis* and *Mists of Avalon*, women struggle to maintain an existing identity and culture in a specific location (the

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[23] For similar arguments, see also: Valerie Miner, "An imaginative collectivity of writers and readers." *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical revisions.* Eds. K. Jay and J. Glasgow. (New York: New York UP, 1990).

planet of Isis/ the island of Avalon), while in *Daughters of the Great Star* and *Journey to Zelindar*, women search for their own space where they can be free to establish what already exists for the women of Isis and Avalon (and they finally find solace in the forest and then in the Yarland Peninsula). Jointly, all the women in the different fictions establish their connections with one another through intense telepathic means, a unique understanding of a lesbian existence, and a struggle for location. These themes are codependent. None of these elements can be separated from their narratives; it is precisely the threat of a possible separation from any of these elements (lesbianism, identity, location) that propels the plot of each text. While the lesbian continuum seems to exist within the concept of women-centered space, it is more profoundly grounded by the relationships developed among the women simultaneously located in the mind, body and place they inhabit. It is with this connection solidly made, that we can now move on to explore how physical and emotional and mental spaces are more profoundly linked by telepathy within women-centered fantastic fiction.

Chapter Four
Telepathic Spaces, (Anti)Essentialism
and the Difficulty with 'We'

*"When anyone adduces my fall into sin, just answer him calmly that
conversion to telepathy is my private affair like my Jewishness, my passion for
smoking and many other things, and that the theme of telepathy is in essence
alien to psychoanalysis."* [1]

*One need not be a Chamber - to be Haunted
One need not be a House-
The Brain has Corridors - surpassing-
Material Place-* [2]

*While medical science can cut open an abdomen and cut muscles to fix
things, the human psyche cannot be dissected nor the brain's workings put
out on the table to display.* [3]

While this thesis is always concerned with the physical geographies of women

(ie. the literal spaces they enter or do not enter), it is also concerned with less

tangible women-centered spaces. Having explored the body one inhabits as

a 'home' in chapter two and the body as a political place of resistance in

chapter three, this chapter investigates moves beyond the body to consider

the mind from a spatial perspective. The movement from a physical location

to an emotional or mental space that is not necessarily attached to a specific

place or time, but nonetheless is necessitated by it, is a crucial one that we

continually return to throughout this chapter. Thus, I discuss the limitations,

rules and exclusionary/inclusionary traits of these kinds of women-centered

spaces marked distinctly by male/female and female/female divisions. We

have already seen that physical place plays an integral role in the women-

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[1] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard edition of the complete psychological works of* Sigmund Freud. Trans. James Strachey. Vol. 19. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953).

[2] Emily Dickinson, "407" *The Poems of Emily Dickinson.* Ed. R.W. Franklin. Vol. 1. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999): 431, ll. 1-4.

[3] Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace.* (London: Virago, 1997): 51.

centered fantastic text, and to be sure location continues to be a conscious theme. However, so too is the mental condition or emotional presence created and maintained by places. Indeed, as we will see, the texts within this chapter challenge understandings of emotional and mental awareness, wellness and fitness, as well as the notions of 'reality' and 'truth'.

Just as the body has its physical and metaphorical locatedness in the world, the mind is both a literal and figurative location within one's body. The secrecy of thought is a effective tool in challenging power, awareness and physical location; mind-to-mind communication is arguably one of the more powerful forms of possible discourse because of its non-tangible, non-physical, potentially secretive and undeniably private nature. Naturally, private thoughts are contested by those who wish to impose control over what individuals think, by those who claim, like psychoanalysts, to arbitrate and interpret the 'true' meaning of thought, and by individuals who find in the privacy of their own thoughts a means of power and a way to resist and subvert authority. Indeed, as Foucault (1972;1980) notes, truth and power have an intimate binary relationship:

> [t]here is a battle "for truth", or at least "around truth"—it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean "the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted", but rather "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true", it being understood also that it's not a matter of a battle "on behalf" of the truth, but of a battle about

the status of truth and the economic and political roles it plays.

(*Power/Knowledge* 132)

The private musings of one's mind are thus undoubtedly among our most cherished and sacred moments, irreducible by measurement. Seemingly, to invade that space or to link one's mind to another are acts that transgress spatial boundaries in a way unlike any discussed thus far.

Perhaps because of the untouchable power that it represents, or perhaps because it is continually presented as a women-centered concept, telepathy, mind-to-mind communication or clairvoyance are recurring motifs in all women-centered fantastic texts that deal specifically with the supernatural woman.[4] Such novels engage with the notion of telepathy and the consequent invasions of the privileged space of the mind. While individual texts address this issue uniquely there are, as we will see, useful similarities between texts, which serve to strengthen the argument for a telepathic women-centered location within women-centered fantasy fiction.

The Telepathic debate

We will begin our search for a telepathic location within a theoretical framework that is equally intangible: psychoanalysis. "Psycho-analysis and Telepathy" is Freud's first 'lecture' on the subject of telepathy and its argument is highly obscure.[5] While he begins by stating that "[I]t no longer

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[4] The sight, second sight, the touch and the kersh are all further terms that describe telepathic abilities or additional ways of 'seeing', communicating and sensing within women-centered fantastic texts.

[5] The original essay bears no title and the one here was adopted by the editors of the *Gesammelte Werke*. While it was originally thought that the paper was written for "the

seems possible to keep away from the study of what are known as 'occult'

phenomena [....] The impetus towards such an investigation seems irresistibly

strong" (177), he immediately begins to back-pedal and outline the 'dangers'

in recognizing telepathic abilities within 'science'. Freud's main concern is the

suggestion that psychoanalysis align itself with occult phenomena (178).

Freud sees this as problematic for two major reasons—first that occult

phenomena could fundamentally endanger psychoanalytic theory by

challenging the 'authority' of the therapist, and second that the nature of

occultism should not be seen as similar to that of psychoanalysis:

> [...] co-operation between analysts and occultists offers small
>
> prospect of gain[6] [....] There is little doubt that if attention is
>
> directed to occult phenomena the outcome will very soon be that
>
> the occurrence of a number of them will be confirmed; and it will
>
> probably take a very long time before an acceptable theory
>
> covering these new facts can be arrived at. But the eagerly
>
> attentive onlookers [the occultist] will not wait so long. At the
>
> very first confirmation the occultists will proclaim the triumph of
>
> their views. They will carry over an acceptance of one
>
> phenomenon to all the rest and will extend belief in the

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meeting of the Central Executive of the International Psycho-Analytical Association held in the Harz mountains at the beginning of September, 1921. Ernest Jones, who was at that time President of the Central Executive, tells us, however, that no meeting of that body took place in the Harz mountains at the date in question, but it was thought there was gathering of Freud's closest followers [....] It was to this unofficial group that the paper seems to have been read" (Ed. And Trans. Strachey 175).

[6] The differences in mental attitudes that Freud cites are "occultists are not driven by a desire for knowledge" whilst analysts "are at bottom incorrigible machinists and materialists" ("Psycho-analysis and Telepathy" 181).

phenomena to belief in whatever explanations are easiest and

most to their taste. They will be ready to employ the methods of

scientific inquiry only as a ladder to raise them over the head of

science. Heaven help us if they climb to such a height! (180)

Somewhat bizarrely, Freud assumes that psychoanalysis carries a

considerable amount of weight within the scientific community, and is,

moreover, capable of "carrying" occultism to equal heights at its own expense.

By Freud's own admission, however (not a paragraph earlier), psychoanalysis

has received contemptuous and arrogant treatment by official science (178).

Further, his attitude toward the occult, a clearly negative one as indicated by

the tone of the paper, seems to be born of fear of the unknown. This is

unsettling and perhaps indicative of Freud's overall attitude toward the

marginalized Other. Freud's concerns, no matter how cleverly disguised,

seem to stem from a fear of leading psychoanalysis into further disrepute by

aligning itself in any way with the occultists. He starts to reveal particular

observations (about telepathy) that he has made, to this intimate circle of

friends and colleagues, but cautions them about his reluctance to reveal such

discoveries to a "wider public".[7] And indeed he never does, for this 'lecture'

was never published in his lifetime.

If "Psycho-analysis and Telepathy" reveals little about telepathy and

makes only passing reference to what Freud calls 'thought transference,' his

---

[7] The "particular observations" which Freud alludes to and then describes have little to do with either proving or disproving the existence or theoretical discussion of telepathy. They are, therefore, omitted here as irrelevant.

second piece on the subject, "Dreams and Telepathy" appears equally

ambiguous.[8] Obscurely it begins:

> [y]ou will learn nothing from this paper of mine about the enigma
>
> of telepathy; indeed, you will not even gather whether I believe
>
> in the existence of 'telepathy' or not [....] You will know that the
>
> connection between dreams and telepathy is commonly held to
>
> be a very intimate one; I shall put forward the view that the two
>
> have little to do with each other, and that if the existence of
>
> telepathic dreams were to be established there would be no
>
> need to alter our conception of dreams in any way. (197)

Freud rejects telepathy on the grounds that it threatens his established tools

of analysis. His paper is, thus, more concerned with preserving

psychoanalysis as a distinct and separate analytical treatment, than in truly

exploring the possibility of telepathic communication (in dreams or

elsewhere). He emphatically states that "telepathy has nothing to do with the

nature of dreams" and suggests that if there were indeed such a thing as

telepathic dreams, then one ought not to consider them dreams at all, but a

further stream of consciousness (207); further "if the phenomenon of telepathy

is only an activity of the unconscious mind, then, of course, no fresh problem

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[8] Written c. November 1921 this is the first of Freud's 'lectures' to be published on the subject of telepathy. As the editor of the text observes, while "the words 'Lecture given before the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society' appear below the title [....] the published minutes of the Vienna Society give no evidence of the paper having ever been read before it. It seems likely that Freud's intention to read it was for some reason abandoned [....] (Editors note 196). It is this fact that would later lead Jacques Derrida to refer to this and the preceding telepathy 'lecture' as Freud's "fake lectures" ("Telepathy" 508).

lies before us. The laws of unconscious mental life may then be taken for granted as applying to telepathy" (220).   Finally, he ends "Dreams and Telepathy" with the following statement:

> [h]ave I given you the impression that I am secretly inclined to support the reality of telepathy in the occult sense? If so, I should regret that it is so difficult to avoid giving such an impressions. For in reality I have been anxious to be strictly impartial. I have every reason to be so, since I have no opinion on the matter and know nothing about it. (220)

So what are we to learn from Freud's ambiguous discussion around, through and near, but never of, the subject of telepathic communication and thought processes? Perhaps his work can be more clearly understood in retrospect and with the additional perspective of Jacques Derrida. Decades after Freud, Derrida would write his highly comical essay "Telepathy" (1981) attacking Freud's disregard of telepathy's relationship to psychoanalysis.[9]

In "Telepathy", Derrida calls Freud's work "contradictory from start to finish" (505). Derrida sees Freud's inability to come to any sort of conclusion with regards to telepathic ability as a "hesitation-waltz (la valse-hesitation)" performed by Freud in an attempt to uphold his tenuous analytic theories (505). Consequently, Derrida takes up a highly sarcastic tone in his writings

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[9] Derrida's "Télépathie" was first published in *Furor* 2 (Februrary 1981): 5-41. It is, however, a difficult text to locate. It was translated by Nicolas Royle from *The Oxford Literary Review* 10 (1988): 3-41. The essay thus appears, in full, in *Deconstruction: A Reader.* Ed. Martin McQuillan. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000). Acknowledging the difficulty of locating several of Derrida's texts, McQuillan assembles various works in *Deconstruction*, having gained permission from original publishers. With this in mind, I have used McQuillan's reprinted copy

on Freud, calling Freud's work on telepathy a collection of "fake lectures" (508). He further contends that it is, "difficult to imagine a theory of what they still call the unconscious without a theory of telepathy. They can be neither confused nor dissociated" (505). Derrida's work, here, is highly critical as he interrogates first "Psycho-analysis and Telepathy" and then "Dreams and Telepathy", taking on the voice of Freud himself:

> [t]here is a lot of interest in the occult today, and because I've put Telepathy on the bill, here you are, all excited about it. You have always taken me [...] for a 'mind reader' [....] Well, you are wrong, for once, you will discover nothing from me as regards the 'enigma of telepathy'. In particular, I will preserve this at all costs, you will not be able to know 'whether or not I believe in the existence of telepathy.' This opening could still allow one to think that I know, myself, whether or not I believe, and that, for one reason or another, I am anxious to keep it secret, in particular to produce such and such a transferential effect [...] And again, at the end of the fake lecture, when I take up the word 'occult' once more, I pretend (more or less, as my father used to say) to admit that I do not myself know. I know nothing about it. I apologize [....] ("Telepathy" 511)

While Freud is perhaps an easy target because of the ambiguous conclusions in his work, it is difficult to deny Derrida's critique of his 'dance' around the

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of "Telepathy" for convenience.

subject of telepathy. Further, in his ventriloquism of Freud, Derrida takes on a clairvoyant position himself, speaking as Freud and interrogating the motives behind Freud's analysis. Thus, unable entirely to reject the notion of telepathy, yet equally unwilling to determine how it would best fit with his established analysis, Freud ambiguously discounts it and Derrida relentlessly continues:

> I have never been in a position to witness or take part in, miterleben [correct] a dream which is truly, precisely, 'correctly' telepathic, and I leave them to ruminate on the 'richtige'.[10] That said, the hor-d'oeuvres, my two dreams of death, *you* have quickly understood, bears the essential points of my fake lecture. ("Telepathy" 514)

> In my new fake lectures, I insist as always on reestablishing the legitimate order: only psychoanalysis can teach something about telepathic phenomena and not vice-versa. Of course, for that it must integrate telepathy without obscurantism and some transformation may ensue for psychoanalysis.[11] But it is not opportune to present things in this way for the moment. I'm desperately trying to distinguish between telepathy and 'thought transference' [....]("Telepathy" 516-517)

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[10] In Freud's original 'lecture' he states: "[a]nother fact certainly seems to me of more significance, namely, that during some twenty-seven years of work as an analyst I have never been in a position to observe a truly telepathic dream in any of my patients. And yet those patients made up a fair collection of severely neuropathic and 'highly sensitive' natures" ("Dreams and Telepathy" 199). Freud offers this as further explanation of the nonexistence of telepathic thought, since he himself has yet to witness it.

[11] Here Derrida is referring to Freud's second piece of writing on telepathy, entitled "Dreams and Telepathy", also never delivered as a lecture.

Derrida's interrogation of Freud's work seems to mockingly suggest that the existence of telepathy is as 'legitimate' as the various categories on which psychoanalysis is based (the Unconscious, the Ego, the Id). Freud's "fake lecture," then, is seen as a struggle to re-establish psychoanalysis as the "legitimate order" from which all things must emerge. For my purposes, taking the Freud-Derrida nexus as a point of departure, telepathy (and occultism in general) might be viewed as the repressed 'feminine' other of male-constructed psychoanalysis and theoretical frameworks of the mind. Indeed, binaries within both theoretical discourse and literary fiction abound: telepathy/ psychoanalysis, private/public, repression/expression, feminine/masculine and depth/surface. Certainly no friend to feminism, Freud disregards telepathy, the occult, the feminine and other unknown phenomenae throughout his discourse, while Derrida has often been accused of offering a "negative feminism."[12]

I will return to the musings of Freud and Derrida later in this chapter with the benefit of textual analysis. First, however, I would like to pause on the notion of otherness and visibility since these terms interact significantly with telepathic abilities within fantastic texts. While telepathy is undoubtedly associated with *other* within male-centered psychoanalysis, it is allied with power and empathetic vision within the women-centered fantasy novel. Often

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[12]See: Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 13, no.3 (Spring 1988): 405-36; and Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Alcoff argues that for Derrida the category of woman is undecidable and through his indecision he offers a negative feminism. Similarly, Whitford charges Derrida with offering feminism a "disembodied nominalism" (82-83) and further asks: "where is Derrida's place of enunciation if he is always quoting someone else? In a sense he wants to make his position impregnable, ultimately undecidable, ultimately "feminine". Deconstruction enables him to speak indefinitely, to hold the floor. [H]e "masters" feminist discourse by speaking about it" (130).

derived from the Mother Goddess, this telepathic power allows selected women to see past and future events, as well as to receive warnings of danger and ill will.

This extra way of seeing and communicating is representative of what is unseen and unheard in social and political contexts, and it is most often 'awarded' to the feminine other. More importantly, telepathy is a way of *seeing* that is fundamentally different from regular optic experiences; there is a multiplicity to this sight—objects, issues, situations and places are not just seen with the biases of the physical eye, but rather, they are felt, examined, refocused and re-analyzed using the other bodily senses. As we saw in chapter one, the notion of vision is not always what it seems in the fantastic novel:

> [a]n emphasis upon visibility points to one of the central thematic
> concerns of the fantastic: problems with vision. In a culture
> which equates the 'real' with the 'visible' and gives the eye
> dominance over other sense organs, the un-real is that which is
> in-visible. That which is not seen, or which threatens to be un-
> seeable, can only have a subversive function [....] Knowledge,
> comprehension, reason, are established through the power of
> the *look*, through the *'eye'*, and of the *'I'* of the human subject
> whose relation to objects is structured through this field of vision
> (Jackson 45).

At stake in this battlefield of perceptions are the concepts of 'absolute' truth and 'objective' reality. Telepathy, the ability to see with the mind's eye/I challenges 'absolute' truth and the 'objectivity' of reality as experienced through the senses because it is irreducible to measurement; it therefore has the ability to create new spaces from which to 'see'. In fantastic fiction, the reader also enters into this new space. Like telepathic mind-to-mind communication, reading also creates voices 'within' one's mind. Active participation with the text is possible, especially if one identifies with particular characters, places or themes. Thus, while fantastic theory calls for 'absolute hesitation' on the part of the reader (Todorov 25), clearly this hesitation is always, ultimately, subjected to one's individual perception. Like telepathic communication, reading is a private experience in communication that is not subject to the 'look', but which is accomplished through the eye/I; words are absorbed by the vision of the eye, whilst the I of the reader experiences a distinctive adventure. Since perception is an individual experience, absolute truth becomes an impossibility.

Western society is constructed, for the most part, on the rationalist ideals of the Enlightenment that privileged observable phenomena over invisible phenomena. History and science are the records of what can be publicly viewed, and anything invisible from public scrutiny, namely anything in the private sphere, can be marginalized. Yet, as we will see in the textual analysis to follow, because telepathy is invisible and private, instead of visible and public, it remains, as Freud saw, outside the 'scientific' domain of control, and is, as such a perfect instrument for female resistance to male authority. Thus, while we often encounter significant challenges to established social

and political boundaries in the fantastic, telepathic themes in the women centered novel serve to re-situate the notions of *visible* and the *invisible*; telepathic themes also interrogate our ideas of woman, difference, other and madness.

Woman on the Edge of Time

Perhaps one of the more striking contemporary literary texts which interrogates traditional ideas about difference and reality is Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). Like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's much earlier work "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), Piercy's text presents an intriguing perspective on women-centered spaces, the unconscious, telepathy and mental illness. *Woman on the Edge of Time* chronicles the life of Consuelo Camacho Ramos (Connie), a struggling Mexican-American woman who has been in and out of mental hospitals for the majority of her life, and is, again, hospitalized shortly after the novel's onset. Connie is placed in Bellevue[13] against her will through a series of unjust actions: when her niece Dolly comes to her, beaten, frightened and pregnant with her pimp's child, Connie tries to shelter Dolly in her home. Geraldo eventually finds Dolly, however, and when Connie attempts a defense, she herself is brutally beaten by Geraldo. When Connie awakes, she discovers that she has been deposited at the psychiatric hospital on the grounds that she violently attacked both Dolly and Geraldo. Thus labeled and heavily drugged, Connie begins to

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[13] Bellevue is an infamous mental hospital in North America. Located in New York City, Bellevue is the oldest public hospital in United States of America and is equipped with a prison ward as well. It is therefore fitting that such an ancient space of oppression is invoked here as Connie's prison.

contemplate her new life within the prison walls of the hospital as she does the "Thorazine shuffle" (13) through its halls.

Just before Connie arrives at Bellevue, and much more frequently after she is hospitalized, she is 'visited' by Luciente, who has linked her mind with Connie's. Luciente lives in the future, in a world where people treat one another fairly, have the ability to communicate in clear and equal ways, have their own individual spaces (everyone lives alone in their own space), and most importantly, distribute power equally (no one has control over another individual). Luciente explains to Connie that she is only able to 'visit' her because of her receptive mind that is able to 'catch' Luciente's own mind. While Connie is able to enter Luciente's world and materialize (i.e. she takes on a physical presence and interacts with others), the entire experience only exists within her own mind and the minds of Luciente's future community: Connie is still physically within the hospital walls.

It is important to note that while we later learn that Connie never physically leaves the hospital during her 'trips' to Mattapoisett, Connie and the reader of *Woman on the Edge of Time* participate in the experience as the narrative progresses. The eye/I of this experience cannot be separated. Similarly, the reader of "The Yellow Wallpaper" participates in the protagonist's struggle in her secluded attic room. Both texts draw the reader into the text, encouraging patience, perspective and empathy from the reader. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," a lonely woman takes notice of the 'irritating' paper covering the walls of her attic suite, explaining in detail how and why it offends her, at first casually and then more insistently. As the narrative progresses, it paints a picture of this irritating yet intriguing paper for the reader, thus

drawing us in to the perspective of the woman. It soon becomes clear to both protagonist and reader that the wallpaper is a powerful symbol for lack of freedom in the confined space of the attic. Similarly, in *Woman on the Edge of Time,* although we are aware that Connie has been 'accused' of being mentally ill, we nonetheless journey with her to Mattapoisett and, at times, suspend our belief in its existence. Again, like the protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper," Connie does not appear to be 'mad'. Both women are lucid, rational and physically trapped by a male authority. It is therefore, arguably a surprise for the first-time reader of *Woman on the Edge of Time* and "The Yellow Wallpaper," to discover that both women are not only considered to be, but quite possibly are, 'mad'. At the same time, at narratives' end, one still questions this label and applauds the characters' respective quests to overcome their confined passivity and participate in subversive action: Connie poisons the staff at the hospital and the protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper" creeps along the walls of her attic room:

"[w]hat is the matter?" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing?"

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

"I've got out at last," I said, "in spite of you and Jane? And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time! ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 657).

After a while she heard the commotion and they came with

stretchers--four. Dr. Morgan was trying to cut down on coffee

and Miss Moyihan was being sick in the staff bathroom. I am

not sorry, she thought, her heart pounding terribly, and she on

her bed, waiting (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 371)

Both women in these stories retreat to their own minds, to what they feel is

their last private space, to escape the suppression they forcibly experience.

Both women (at least in their own minds) escape.

As *Woman on the Edge of Time* progresses, it soon becomes clear

that two alternate explanations for Luciente's world are possible: either

Connie is in fact a receiver and is able to communicate telepathically with a

future world, or Connie's unconscious has created this alternate world where

she is able to escape hospital confinement and live her life with power and

enjoyment. Indeed, the characters in the future world correspond to the

people that exist in Connie's present/real life: thus a possible reading of the

text could conclude that a current patient and friend in Bellevue, Skip,

becomes Jack Rabbit in Mattapoisett; Connie's lost lover Clyde becomes the

strong and comforting Bee; her close friend and self proclaimed witch Sybill

becomes the psychic and healing Diana; her young daughter Angelina, lost to

her through social services, becomes the sweet and free Dawn; and Connie

herself becomes Luciente, a woman who is both strong and free. In this way,

Connie projects herself to a better world, outside the hospital, where she is

able to choose, to learn and to explore; she revisions her whole world to

illustrate how the people in her present life would be able to exist in a world where communication is central to living and power 'over' is nonexistent.

Is Connie experiencing a telepathic connection with Luciente? Or is she creating an elaborate state of unconsciousness, a dream state, whereby she is able to escape the hospital and project herself into more desirable surroundings? Both readings are equally plausible. On the one hand, at the novel's end the reader is presented with a final chapter, dubiously subtitled "Excerpts from the *Official* History of Consuelo Camacho Ramos [italics mine]". Here, we learn that Connie is a "socially disorganized individual" who has been "increasingly deteriorating since the break up of her marriage", that she lacks "motivation and insight", needs to be "carefully watched", is both a schizophrenic, undifferentiated Type 295.90 (on one occasion) and a paranoid schizophrenic, type 295.3 (372-376). On the other hand, the main narrative, told in the third person, consistently suggests that Connie experiences all that is related within the text.

There is no doubt that Connie exists before being incapacitated in the mental hospital, in a world of extreme poverty. She is a woman living 'on the edge of time' as she works tirelessly to protect her precarious surroundings: "[s]he sucked smoke hard, burst into coughing and padded into the kitchen, to face the day already bleeding at the edges. Straighten, clean, tidy, make perfect the rotten surfaces. Her welfare worker, Mrs. Polcari, came today" (26). Connie is fully aware that because of her economic status, there is a threat to her freedom at all times. As Elaine Showalter notes in *The Female Malady* (1987) "[c]lass remained a strong determinant of the individual's

psychiatric career" (26).[14] Existing in this state of instability it is plausible that Connie should wish to escape the world that judges her so harshly. However, when she first meets Luciente it is not in the hospital, but in her home; Connie rejects the notion that Luciente is real, believing herself to be mad. "If you say you aren't crazy, it is a sure sign that you are crazy, or so they tell you" (127), she tells her new friend. Perhaps then, "[m]adness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation" (Felman 7).

Luciente explains to Connie that she is "an unusual person. Your mind is unusual. You're what we call a catcher, a receptive" (34). Connie is doubtful and full of questions. Luciente admits: "[m]ost we've reached are female, and many of those in mental hospitals and prisons. We find people whose minds open for an instant, but at the first real contact, they shrink in terror" (188). Here, Piercy casts suspicion in the existence of Mattapoisett whilst simultaneously suggesting that the label 'madness' is highly problematic.

Communication between Connie and Luciente is aided by the use of a kenner, a device worn by the futuristic community in which their memory annex is kept and they are able to consult it like a dictionary of sorts when they do not understand concepts of Connie's world. One of the more striking examples of confusion between the two worlds can be seen in the following illustration:

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[14] By "career" Showalter is referring to the extended length of time that the poor remained in lunatic asylums and mental hospitals.

"Diana goes mad every couple of years. Has visions. Per earth

quakes. Goes down. Emerges and sets to work again with

harnessed passion [. . . .] But I have to say this—in truth you

don't seem mad to me. I know I've never gone down myself, I'm

too flatfooted [. . .] earthen somehow, so it's beyond my

experience [. . . .] I don't mean to pry or make accusations, but

are you truly mad?"

"Here they say if you think you aren't sick, it's a sign of

sickness." "You're sick?"

"Sick. Mad."

"We do not use these words to mean the same thing." (57)

While Connie is both confused and pleased with this alternate view of mental

illness offered in Luciente's world, she also feels resentful: ""[d]o you tell

everyone you meet that you've been mad twice?" She resented his casual,

almost boastful air" (116). Ultimately, Luciente's kenner is unable to

comprehend Connie's definitions of 'madness' and 'confinement' against

one's will.

When Connie is chosen as one of ten people who will be part of an

experimental treatment procedure involving removing parts of the brain and

stimulating other parts with mechanical devices, her 'trips' to Mattapoisett

become more frequent and intense:

[h]er ability to stay in the future amazed her. They had been

trying to rouse her since the evening before. This time, locked

into Luciente, she had not even felt them. She watched the fuss through narrowed eyes. They were scared [. . ..] What they had stuffed into her head was experimental and they did not want death. (318)

Connie's visits could here be interpreted as a severe conscious desire to escape further operations, manifested in a deep unconscious dream state. For indeed, the longer Connie 'visits' Luciente and the others, the more fearful the hospital staff become of her despondent and comatose state. As a result, after such extended visits, they remove the device from her head and leave her for 'careful observation.' Finally, to add to the ambiguity of a 'sane/insane' reading of the text, Connie never tells anyone that she is able to communicate with another world. Again, the unusual intersection between telepathy and psychoanalysis is, here, called into question. Freud's anxiety to privilege psychoanalysis over telepathy would argue that Connie's experiences are not real, but rather unconscious desires. As Freud maintains "the laws of unconscious mental life may then be taken for granted as applying to telepathy" (220). The psychiatric attempts (as we will soon see) to explain away Connie's telepathic experiences as 'illogical' and the product of an 'unhealthy mind' are an effort to keep her from disrupting social order and might be seen as analogous to Freud's initial attempts to silence discussion about telepathy.

Telepathy, Space and Place

While both a telepathic and a schizophrenic reading of the novel are possible,

I do not wish to draw either conclusion here; I refuse to privilege one over the

other and will not enter into "la valse-hesitation" (Derrida, "Telepathy" 505).

These terms are not mutually exclusive and neither is capable of revealing

'truths'. Moreover,

> [t]ruth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of
>
> multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of
>
> power. Each society has its régime of truth, its "general politics"
>
> of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and
>
> makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which
>
> enable one to distinguish between true and false statements, the
>
> means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and
>
> procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status
>
> of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.
>
> (*Power/Knowledge* 131)

Indeed, how would a 'sane' person distinguish a telepathic person from a mad

person, since neither label can be suitably measured? Rather, I would like to

explore a different relationship between Connie and her so called 'telepathic'

abilities for communication with a future world and suggest that Connie's

abilities, whether true telepathy or purely an unconscious manifestation of her

own anxiety, are significant *because* they are born (in either case) from her

desire for freedom and private space.   As Foucault writes in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963):

> [c]lassificatory thought gives itself an essential space, which it
>
> proceeds to efface at each moment. Disease exists only in that
>
> space, since that space constitutes it as nature; and yet it
>
> always appears rather out of phase in relation to that space,
>
> because it is manifested in a real patient, beneath the observing
>
> eye of a forearmed doctor. (9)

Classification, then, exists within a privileged space. The doctor, armed with diagnostic strength, has full power over the patients he supervises yet disease itself is problematic and subjective. Connie's (very real) desire to escape this diagnostic strength is one that engulfs her throughout the novel; she is aware, from the outset, that her freedom is easily threatened-- by her social worker, by her brother or by any one possessing more power than she (10). Immediately upon incarceration, she begins to imagine freedom again:

> [h]ow she would celebrate her release! Her dingy two rooms
>
> with the toilet in the hall shone in her mind, vast and luxurious
>
> after the hospital. Doors could be shut! A toilet with a door!
>
> Chairs to sit in, a table of her own to eat on, a TV set that she
>
> could turn on and off and tune to whatever program she wanted
>
> to watch, her own bed with clean sheets and no stink of old piss.
>
> Her precious freedom and privacy! (20)

But the dream is a short lived one. Despite having been confined to Bellevue against her will and without just cause, Connie soon discovers she has little hope of escape:

> [t]he iron maiden was carrying her to Rockover again. Luis had signed her in. A bargain had been struck. Some truce had been negotiated between the two men over the bodies of their women [Dolly and Connie]. Luis, who never admitted his oldest daughter was a whore, but made her feel like one whenever he got her in his house. The iron maiden jounced roughly on, battering her [....] Into the unnatural darkness of the April storm she was carried blind in the belly of the iron beast. (23)

Notice that the two men can negotiate a truce "over the bodies of their women," because bodies are accessible at the public level, yet they cannot negotiate control of Connie's mental experiences, because these are private; even when Connie shares her mind with Luciente, she does so only by choice. As Luciente explains, Connie must be willing to "catch" Luciente's signals and "latch on" (36) or they cannot communicate. Piercy's metaphor here, as elsewhere, is both angry and profound; invoking the confined spatial image of cruelty that is the Iron Maiden, Connie imagines herself devoured and captive within the great stomach of torture. The command of similar metaphors continues throughout Connie's experiences in the hospital and are at once confining and freeing; on the one hand, Piercy uses spatial language

to contrast Connie's terrifying confinement with the most seemingly

disempowered individual: "[t]he poorest most strung out fucked up worked

over brought down junkie in Harlem had more freedom, more place, richer

choices, sweeter dignity than the most privileged patient in the whole

bughouse" (162). On the other, she uses them to juxtapose the oppressive

hospital space with the freedom of space in Luciente's world:

> Luciente sat down, taking up more space than women ever did.
> She squatted, she sprawled, she strolled, never thinking about
> how her body was displayed. It was hard to pace with dignity in
> the tiny space between the stained mattress and the wall.
> Connie no longer felt in the least afraid of Luciente." (59)

> "We each have our own space! Only babies share space! I have
> indeed read that people used to live piled together[...] you have
> space of your own. How could one live otherwise? How
> meditate, think, compose songs, sleep, study?" (64)

> "Everyone has private space." (141)

Despite the confusion and disagreements that Connie and Luciente discover

between one another's 'world views', the desire for and the respect of private

space is the one thing that both women agree upon and understand; it is also,

unequivocally, the most important concept of the entire novel.

Significantly, it is the team of doctors (psychiatrists, psychologists and neurologists), as well as the people who assist them (the nurses, attendants and so on) that represent the oppressors of such space. Those in power are "adviser[s] on punishment; it is up to [them] to say whether the subject is 'dangerous', in what way one should be protected from him, how one should intervene to alter him, whether it would be better to try to force him into submission or to treat him" (*Discipline and Punish* 22). Thus, when the narrative concentrates on Connie's world there are distinctive spatial motifs that dominate the text. To begin with, there is a fear of punishment (if you did not 'behave' yourself, you couldn't get toilet paper, use the phone or other extras, Connie notes). Moreover, there is a distinct lack of private spaces (one cannot even experience the dignity of a closed door in the toilet). There is also a great desire for private space (elaborate escape plans are conceived of and much time is spent dreaming of privacy and freedom). Finally, and most importantly, there is an overt dismantling of private space; as one moves from floor to floor throughout the wards of the hospital, there is a notable increase in both security and drug intake that corresponds with the floor map of the hospital. These powerful spatial motifs exist at all times within the hierarchy of Bellevue and are representative of those with power over others. In the end, Connie placidly submits to the doctors' overwhelming power because she is tired and has become accustomed to "being ordered to submit to the authority of [her] fathers, brothers, and husbands" who controlled her before Bellevue (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 81).[15]

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[15] This is also the case in "The Yellow Wallpaper," where the protagonist finally submits to madness in order to escape her domineering husband ("you can't put me back!").

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Foucault

maintains that the body is the central object for confinement. He notes a

change in the nineteenth century penal system whereby the body becomes

untouchable as well as an instrument upon which one intervenes during

imprisonment in order to "deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded

both as a right and as property"(11). He goes on to suggest that at the point

of disregarding the severe penalty or punishment of the body (physical), it is

replaced by a new punishment—one that "acts in depth on the heart, the

thoughts, the will, the inclinations" (16). The key to Foucault's theoretical

observation lies in the relationship of power between the architecture of the

prison, the controller of the prison, and the body in the prison:

> [...] that punishment in general and the prison in particular
>
> belong to a political technology of the body is a lesson that I
>
> have learnt not so much from history as from the present [...]
>
> What was at issue was not whether the prison environment was
>
> too harsh or too aseptic, too primitive or too efficient, but its very
>
> materiality as an instrument and vector or power; it is this whole
>
> technology of power over the body that the technology of the
>
> 'soul'—that of the educationalists, psychologists and
>
> psychiatrists—fails either to conceal or to compensate, for the
>
> simple reason that it is one of its tools. (30-31)

Foucault then turns his attention to the notion of surveillance and the end of

privacy for patients and prisoners alike. Using Bentham's Panopticon as the

optimum example of the corrosion of privacy and execution of perfect control, Foucault notes that the enclosed and segregated spaces of the Panopticon allow for observation at every point, allowing power to be exercised without division on the mass of constantly visible prisoners within its walls (197). What could be a private space becomes an invaded space. These "mechanisms of power" or authorities of control operate with two primary concerns: first, the binary labeling of mad/sane, dangerous/harmless, abnormal/normal, and, second, the "coercive assignment of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc.)" (199-200), so that the patient/prisoner is always seen, but never sees. The patient, therefore, is the object of information but never the subject in communication (200). The Panopticon, then, is

> a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of
> men [...it] presents a cruel, ingenious cage. The fact that it
> should have given rise, even in our own time, to so many
> variations, projected or realized, is evidence of the imaginary
> intensity that it has possessed for almost two hundred years
> [....] it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its
> ideal form [...it] must be detached from any specific use (205).

Bellevue is experienced as a "cruel cage" by the patients who are contained within its walls. Moreover, the most prevalent concern for Connie and others

in the text is the loss of privacy as well as the faint hope of obtaining their privacy upon release or by escape. Foucault often refers to the hospital, the school, the barracks or the factory as interchangeably related to the prison (*Discipline and Punish* 227). Because the hospital is both architecturally and psychologically operated in ways akin to those of a prison, it is not surprising that Connie dares an escape and eventually finds herself outside:

> [t]he sun had sunk to the height when it usually disappeared behind the administration building next to the hospital [....] She was too glad to be outside, even in this patch of woods with her feet raw, waiting to graze on the grasses of the field like a cow put out to pasture. She felt happy as a cow was supposed to feel chewing its cud [....] She noticed her hands had tendency to shake. That tremor seemed to get worse as the day wore on. Thorazine and barbiturate withdrawal. It would help if she had water. But a strange tranquility filled her. She felt space around her body, the space of privacy and choice. (235-236)

Real or imagined, Connie is briefly able to experience a sense of privacy and choice as she sits, cold and alone in the degenerated and littered forest off the side of a freeway, before being recaptured and brought back to the hospital. This 'experience' gives her a taste for freedom and the strength to envision a second escape attempt.

Under the guise of a 'loving' family holiday, Connie sacrifices her pride for her freedom when she visits her brother Luis's house for Thanksgiving.

She goes with the hope that she will find an open window in the house that would afford her the opportunity to escape her brother's house and her hospital chains. Once there, however, she is treated as little more than a slave, cooking, cleaning and preparing the house for a high society dinner party (before which she is meant to be safely back at the hospital). Despite this abominable treatment from her family, Connie is overcome by the brief moment of choice she experiences in Luis's home:

> [t]he room has twin beds, and she felt dizzy at the thought of choosing one or the other. For a moment tears burned the inside of her eyes. She blinked. Why should a bed make her cry? For months she had not chosen anything. Luis dropped her little overnight bag on one bed, so she decided to sleep in the other. She felt relieved. So much space around her, it was almost frightening. It made her dizzy, it distracted her as it is were freedom instead of a fancier imprisonment. (345)

Connie is overcome with this small gesture of a freedom that she notes others around her taking for granted. More particularly, it is the freedom of choice that overwhelms her, as this small courtesy has been denied her for so long in the hospital that assumes all power—" […] without any physical instrument other than architecture and geometry, it acts directly on individuals; it gives 'power of the mind over mind'" (*Discipline and Punish* 206).

Having spent some time at the beginning of this chapter, as a point from which to depart, outlining influential male-centered views of telepathy, let

us return to psychoanalysis, Freud and Derrida. In *After Derrida* (1995), in a

chapter entitled "The remains of psychoanalysis (i): telepathy", Nicholas Royle

ponders Derrida's and Freud's interest in the subject, arguing that telepathy

can be seen as central to the foundations of psychoanalysis. Royle sees the

concept itself as "irremediably interfereing with the borders, the relations

between what is proper and what is not proper, what belongs and does not

belong, what is inside and outside psychoanalysis [...] and the promise of

another kind of thinking and writing" (63). Despite the comedy within the

piece, Royle sees Derrida's "Telepathy" as making a "perfectly serious point"

(67). The possible existence of telepathy is problematic for Freud because it

calls into question the concepts of the unconscious, dream analysis and the

ego and hence the authority of psychoanalysis; Freud argues that dreams

arise from the unconscious mind within oneself, while telepathy suggests an

outside source. While this may seem obvious, it is still a critical point:

Freud's initial apprehension and Derrida's comic telling of the faults in logic

within Freud's 'lectures' illustrate that the debate surrounding telepathy was

both as threatening as it was intriguing. Indeed, Derrida calls the debate a

"foreign body" and accuses Freud of trying to both "swallow" and "reject" it

("Telepathy" 505); as an 'unknown', telepathy is as enticing as it is dangerous.

In the end, Freud himself surrendered to a belief in telepathic ability calling it

his "fall to sin".[16] Moreover, for Freud, telepathy's clear association with the

occult is the key factor in both discrediting it and being drawn toward it. And,

of course, the word 'occult' has significant connotations: "1a.) Hidden (from

sight); concealed (by something interposed); not exposed to view; 3a.) Not

---

[16] Refer back to the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter for reference.

apprehended, or not apprehensible, by the mind; beyond the range of understanding or of ordinary knowledge; recondite, mysterious" (OED). However, our concern lies mainly in the expression of telepathy in the literary text, particularly in the women-centered fantastic novel. With this in mind, Royle's analysis makes an intriguing observation about the relationship between telepathy and sympathy:

> [t]he word 'telepathy' was invented and first used by Frederic
>
> Myers in 1882; psychoanalysis came into being a few years later
>
> and it can be seen to have done so by marking itself off, not only
>
> in relation to other more or less medically and scientifically
>
> respectable forms of psychology, but also in relation to the
>
> occult[17]
>
> [....] Telepathy embodies both the hyperbolisation or extreme
>
> limit of sympathy and *at the same time* its opposite, that is to say
>
> a loosening or fragmenting, a dispersion and dissemination of
>
> the conceptual ground of sympathy. This dissemination is in
>
> part the challenge presented by Derrida's work on telepathy.
>
> (70-71)

While Connie consistently experiences a gross invasion of her personal space in her own world, the exact opposite is true for Luciente. Juxtaposing these two worlds, Piercy outlines a somewhat utopic future whereby Luciente

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[17] Royle points to two general accounts of the historical background of telepathy here: Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970); and Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychological Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge

enables Connie to experience variations of space: space in Luciente's world is vast, purposefully private and valued. Moreover, accruement of such space is done with ease in Mattapoisett. Importantly, it is Luciente's ability to perceive, empathize and sympathize with Connie's lack of space and choice that bonds these two women together. Thus, whether or not Connie Ramos ever actually travels to Mattapoisett through the aid of telepathic abilities is perhaps largely irrelevant—there is no doubt that Connie *experiences* (as does the reader), this world and develops a significant bond with Luciente through these shared sympathetic experiences. It is this ability to 'share' and to 'know' what exists in the private spaces of another's mind that is perhaps most fascinating about the phenomenon of telepathy.

(Anti)essentialism: a possibility for further telepathic debate?

During second wave feminism it became evident that 'difference' (of class, race, gender, experience etc) would become a key concept in Anglo-American political and social arenas. However, although it was clear that a conscious raising of the politics of the personal was powerful, "the emphasis on the personal as political could never be enough on its own" (Weedon 179). A great divide between notions of individual and collective feminisms drew wider; the pronouns *I* and *we* became more difficult and problematic; locatedness became an important consideration. As we have already seen, the politics of location recognizes the danger of generalization noting that "this recognition of a common condition of sisterhood in oppression cannot be the final aim; women may have common situations and experiences, but they are

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University Press, 1985).

not, in any way, *the same*" [emphasis in original] (Eagleton 300). The debate

continues and the split between what Carol Thomas Neely (1993) and others

call essentialism and anti-essentialism seems no closer to resolution. Neely

explains the conflict in current feminist discourse as one whereby 'maximizers'

want to emphasize gender whilst retaining the categorization of 'woman' and

'minimizers' aim is to minimize gender difference whilst undoing the category

'woman'" (188). While we will return in more detail to this debate later on in

this chapter, I make the point here to suggest that there is a possible meeting

place for these two seemingly opposed theoretical positions. Through further

textual analysis of women-centered fantastic fiction, I hope to make clear that

it is perhaps in women-centered spaces, or more specifically in the unique

female telepathic space created within the women-centered text, where an

understanding of 'woman' becomes possible.

Telepathic connections among women are overwhelmingly prevalent in

women-centered fantastic fiction. For example, as we have seen in

Daughters of the Great Star (1992), while all the star-born have very different

supernatural powers, the telepathic connection between women is the *only*

quality of power that the star-born share. Similarly, telepathy in *Ruins of Isis*

(1978) comes in two forms: first as a communication between all women (but

never men) and second, as a communication with women and the being

believed to be the Goddess dwelling in the Builder ruins of We-were-guided.

The experience of communicating with this strictly women-centered Goddess

is described as loving and gentle: "[s]*he felt a flood of love poured out on her,*

and poured it out lavishly in return. Some fragment of wonder in her cried out

"Oh! Who are you?" and the answer came, a steady pulsing glow; I am; that is

enough. Love me, love me as I love you." [italics in original] (123). Telepathy

also plays a prominent role in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Firebrand* (1987),

a retelling of the Cassandra story, whereby the 'unlucky' prophetess is

destined to feel and know the pain of others (most often women), as well as to

see visions of future events. Again, telepathic communication can be seen in

Sheri Tepper's *Gateway to Women's Country* (1988). Like Bradley's *Ruins of*

Isis, Tepper's novel centers on a community of women in the distant future

who have gathered together to form Women's Country, a series of towns

created and inhabited by women and whereby men are only permitted to live

on the outskirts. In a fundamental gender reversal *Gateway to Women's*

Country privileges women as creators of knowledge and civilization (146).

Unlike Bradley and Rivers' use of telepathy and psychic powers within

selected groups of women in women-centered novels, Tepper awards this gift

of special sight to the servitor men, or "honorary women" (92). Honorary

women have none of the stereotypical qualities of men within the text because

they choose to return to Women's Country and live their lives among women.

As we discover that all the children in this fictional world are secretly fathered

by the servitors and not the garrison men, it is no surprise that their special

powers are inherited from their mothers. Those who wish to embrace their

psychic power must return through the gate to their mothers and cannot

remain within the walls of men. Thus, their power is only useful within the

walls of women.

More ambitiously, the role that telepathy and mind communication

plays in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Mistress of Spices* (1997) is deeply

rooted in the notion of locatedness. Divakaruni's novel chronicles the life of

Tilo whose 'station' as Mistress of Spices is a conditional one; while she is a telepath who can 'speak' with the magical spices in her spice shop and she can offer help to those in need, she can only "help her own kind, and them only. The others, they must go elsewhere for their need" (68). Here, 'other' is a label reserved for white Americans who are excluded from the magical abilities that the Mistress of Spices has to offer. Tilo is confined within the space of the store where she both sells and commands her spices (25). Restricted within this space, and unable to touch people physically (27), Tilo embodies the main theme of the text: a lonely duality of power and pain.

It is in her second sight, telepathic abilities or through the "calling thought" that Tilo functions most significantly within the novel. But all of the body's senses assist Tilo's supernatural 'powers' as she struggles at times to trust what the spices and the resonating thoughts of others tell her:

[s]o many people on Saturday, it seems the walls must take a break just to hold them in. All those voices, Hindi Oriya Assamese Urdu Tamil English, layered one on the other like notes from a *tanpura* all those voices asking for more that their words, asking for happiness except no-one seems to know where. And so I must listen to the spaces between, must weigh them in my coral-boned hands. (78)

But the treatment of telepathy in Divakaruni's text, while women-centered, is significantly different from that seen in Bradley, Rivers or Tepper. Significantly, Tilo's telepathic abilities are for the purposes of helping her own

(race) with their difficult adjustments in this new land of America. Thus, Tilo

senses the unhappiness of Jagjit, a small boy being harassed by white

American schoolmates, and sends the "North wind [to] carry them [the spices]

to open your teacher's unseeing eyes" (39). In this sense, Tilo's telepathy is

combined with her magical use of the spices to promote 'seeing' when things

have been 'unseen'.

Most significantly, (and not unlike Marge Piercy in *Woman on the Edge*

of Time), Divakaruni uses the motif of telepathy to address darker issues such

as battery and domestic physical violence whilst also engaging with the

problematic maximizing/minimizing debate within feminist discourse:[18]

Ahuja's wife is young and seems even younger [....] Ahuja's wife

has of course a name. Lalita. *La-li-ta*, three liquid syllables

perfect-suited to her soft beauty.[19] I would like to call her by it,

but how can I while she thinks of herself only as a wife. (14)

She has not told me this. She has said little to me, in all

her times of coming, except *'Namaste'* and 'Is this on sale' and

'Where can I find.' But I know it as I know other things [....] Here

is what she wants to tell me, only how can she, it is not right that

a woman should say such things about her man: all day at home

is so lonely, the silence like quick-sand sucking at her wrists and

---

[18] This theme is a prevalent on in women-centered fiction and can be seen as well in Diana
Rivers' *Daughters of the Great Star* and *Journey Zelindar,* as well as Sherri Tepper's *Beauty*
and *Gateway to Women's Country.* For a more detailed discussion on the spatial metaphors
surrounding violence (and rape), refer back to chapter three.

[19] Divakaruni is almost certainly making reference to Vladimir Nabokov's infamous novel *Lolita*
in which the main character, Humbert Humbert, kidnaps and seduces (if not rapes) his
fourteen-year-old stepdaughter, Dolores Haze and later renames her Lolita. Her name and
her body are 'pulled apart' in Nabokov's novel, as Lalita is somewhat torn in Divakaruni's text.

ankles. Tears she cannot stop, disobedient tears like spilled

pomegranate seeds, and Ahuja shouting when he returns home

to her swollen eyes [...] For that is what Ahuja's wife wants most

of all. A baby. Surely a baby would make everything right, even

the heaving, grunting, never-ending nights, the weight pinning

her down, the hot sour animal breath panted into her. His voice

like the callused flat of a hand arcing out of the dark [....] O

Lalita who is not yet Lalita, I have the balms to lay over your

burning. But how unless you ready yourself, hold yourself open

to the storm? How unless you ask?

Meanwhile I give you turmeric.

A handful of turmeric wrapped in old newspaper with the words

of healing whispered into it, slipped into your grocery sack when

you are not looking. The string tied into the triple flower knot,

and inside, satin-soft turmeric the same colour as the bruise

seeping onto your cheek from under the dark edge of your

glasses. (14-16)

Divakaruni's language here, as often throughout the text, is loaded. Invoking

the metaphor "disobedient tears like spilled pomegranates", Divakaruni

alludes to the myth of Persephone, who ate seven seeds from the forbidden

pomegranate, thus unintentionally enslaving herself to the underworld for

seven months of the year.[20] Additionally, like Lalita, Demeter cries for a lost

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[20] Persephone is often perceived to have disobeyed Hades by partaking in the 'forbidden fruit'—however, the bargain struck between Zeus and Hades was made both without Persephone's consent and, more importantly, without her knowledge.

child, the tears causing the land to grow barren "forbidding the trees to yield fruit and the herbs to grow, until the race of men stood in danger of extinction" (Graves, *The Greek Myths* 91).

There is a furiousness in the writing that comes across most purposefully in the commanding spatial metaphors; invoking the images of battery, rape, oppression and difference amongst a seemingly 'light' narrative sets up a powerful dichotomy. Thus, silence is like "quick-sand sucking at her wrists and ankles", tears are "disobedient" and voices are "like the callused flat of a hand arcing out of the dark". Indeed, "we are laughing, but there's a raw edge to it" (118). This raw edge is particularly located in Tilo's ability to 'touch' Lalita's mind and to consequently 'feel' her pain. While this may seem a distressing invasion, Tilo is only allowed to connect to another mind if that individual wills her, consciously or not. In her unique ability to 'know' Lalita's pain, Tilo can cross the boundary of the private mind and transgress the notion of individual experience.

Adrienne Rich has argued that even ordinary pronouns become political with "[t]he difficulty of saying I—a phrase from the East German novelist Christa Wolf. But once having said it, as we realize the necessity to go further, isn't there a difficulty in saying 'we'?" (*Arts* 75). Responding to Rich's essay, Mary Eagleton (2000) notes that "[t]here is a move from the encouragement to claim an 'I', a subjecthood, certain rights; to an awareness of a position where any collective identity as 'women' is radically questioned [....] It is being '*reduced* to I' [my italics], cut off from a wider consciousness that disturbs Rich" (301). Personal pronouns, individual experience and the blur between these boundaries are important undercurrents in *The Mistress of*

Spices and *Woman on the Edge of Time.* Piercy's text refuses to allow gender division in the future world of Mattapoisett and uses "per" (person) to replace the gendered pronouns "her" and "him". Similarly, throughout *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo repeatedly prefaces her thoughts with the words "I, Tilo" as if through repetition she is more able to identify with the 'self' she has become. The location of *I* and *Tilo* intensifies her subjectivity. Moreover, Tilo is particularly distressed about Lalita's name—she is not simply Ahuja's wife, she is more. But Lalita is not yet able to find an individual space of her own. Tilo roles the "liquid" syllables of her name about on her tongue "*La-li-ta*", but comes no closer to a resolution (or a union). This process of individual discovery is made more difficult and is indeed blurred when Tilo is able to hear the thoughts of other women and is left helpless with knowledge; she is left feeling their pain as if it were her own. Thus, while she struggles with the distinction between her own experience and the experience of the women who come into her store, she finds it difficult to separate their pain from her own; at times, she cannot separate the two at all. The boundaries between the individual and the other are blurred.

While most of the space discussed thus far in this thesis has been both public (the body) and private (the forest), the spaces of the mind offer a wholly (and uniquely) intangible private space. Telepathy creates a truly private and subjective space. This space is rich for women-centered fiction because it is one that, by its very nature, resists masculine colonization. Telepathy, and the inner space it reveals, is inviolable and impenetrable by the male body. As such, unlike the other spaces discussed throughout this thesis, this inner

space is significant to feminist texts because it resists claims of authority, and

takes power away from the collective to bestow it on the individual.

Chapter Five
Beyond Good and Evil:
Resisting Simplistic Binary Labels

The theory of mutedness [...] does not require that the muted be actually silent. They may speak a great deal. The important issue is whether they are able to say all that they would wish to say, where and when they wish to say it. Must they, for instance, re-encode their thoughts to make them understood in the public domain? Are they able to think in ways which they would have thought had they been responsible for generating the linguistic tools with which to shape their thoughts? If they devise their own code will they be understood?[1]

As we have seen, "the politics of location" play an integral role for

(supernatural) women in terms of defining identity and finding areas of

resistance from patriarchal modes of expression in fantasy fiction.

Consequently, thus far we have sought to examine women-centered fantastic

texts which pay particular attention to physical geography, personal space,

the protection of place, the sexual politics of space and the emotional or

abstract spaces of the mind. In this chapter, we shall go on to explore

abstract spaces that extend to us through the dynamics of language because

it is within the limits of linguistic labels that fantasy characters have been

traditionally defined. To be sure, fantasy, like science fiction, its neighboring

genre, has typically been preoccupied with the simplicity of its characters and

has opted for more elaborately constructed worlds as its focus.[2] As Sherry

Turkle notes in *The Second Self* (1984),

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[1] *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society.* Shirley Ardener (ed). (London: Billing & Sons, 1978): 8.

[2] The distinction between science fiction and fantasy is arguably minimal, usually involving the incorporation of technology in the former. Both fantasy and science fiction, deal with elaborate worlds, often set in a distant future or past and both genres are more deeply concerned with these 'worlds' than with the characters who inhabit them. As Eric Rabkin notes, "we often find ourselves wondering if we really can distinguish between [...] science fiction and Fantasy" (*Fantastic Worlds* 172).

[o]nce you write a microworld, in computer code or between the

covers of a book, you have to obey its constraints. Hackers are

drawn to making microworlds [...] Science fiction gets its

complexity from the invention of worlds rather than the definition

of character. While most everyday fiction takes everyday reality

as its backdrop and develops interest in the complexity of its

human characters, science fiction characters tend to be more

one-dimensional. (Turkle 222)

Characters, thus, are impoverished or 'simple' in fantasy. Moreover, they are

often dissolved into one-dimensional embodiments of simple terms such as

'good' and 'bad'.[3] These characters operate within a system of binary logic,

representing the unrealistic and unsophisticated label imposed upon them.

Yet the women-centered fantasy text directly challenges this convention of

fantasy, making the development of characterization its focus and dispelling

the simplistic binary logic of good and bad embodiments of female figures. It

is this important challenge to binary logic that this chapter explores.

Challenging Language

In 1966 Jacques Derrida gave his influential paper "Structure, Sign and Play

in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" at Johns Hopkins University,

effectively changing the way that the academy thinks about literary structures

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[3] Certainly discussion of characterization in terms of 'good' and 'bad' is simplistic; however, it is precisely because fantasy uses this unsophisticated framework to define its characters that this chapter also employs these terms. For further reading on the emphasis fantasy places on its elaborate worlds see: Eric Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* (New York: Oxford UP,

within language. While there has been much work done in 'deconstruction'

and related discourses since (and indeed before) Derrida, his ideas are

nonetheless at the center of all branches of the theory.[4] At the crux of

Derrida's critique of binary logic is the distinction between oppositions within

structured language, which have, at their center, *différance*.[5] "Derrida's

analysis undermines and subverts the comforting closure of the binary

opposition. Throwing the field of signification wide open, writing--textuality--

acknowledges the free play of the signifier and breaks open [....] the prison-

house of patriarchal language" (Moi 107).

While this chapter is not specifically concerned with linguistic history

and the various discourses of linguistic theory, it is concerned with the social

context of patriarchal language in which extreme literary images of

supernatural women exist and are upheld. This link is an important one.

Linguistic history and a range of ideologies including religious and political

ones have shaped (and continue to shape) the way in which language exists

within social contexts; such culturally constructed labels, within language, are

reflected within literature in a variety of complex ways. My aim is to use the

women-centered fantasy text as a tool which illustrates how these labels can

be interrogated and dismantled; I wish to examine the representation of

supernatural women within the framework of the binary oppositions

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1979); --., *Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales and Stories.* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977).
[4] See also: Howard Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985):113.

[5] Derrida points out the ambiguity of *différance* and *difference* is perceptible only in writing: the verb *différer* means both "to differ" and "to defer". To differ is a spatial concept: the sign emerges from a system of differences that are spaced out within the system. To "defer" is temporal: signifiers enforce an endless postponement of 'presence'. Phonocentricism ignores *"différance"* and insists upon the self-presence of the spoken word. For further reading see: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology.* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator. (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

superimposed on them. I am not interested in dismantling the hierarchies of language; such dismantling has already been explored by the deconstructionists of our time.[6] Rather, I wish to suggest a further point of exploration: the dangers of the one-dimensionality that these binary labels depend upon for their maintenance within language and within social perception of the images themselves.

Supernatural women within fantasy fiction are reflected within literary traditions that have seemed, until recently, unable to escape unsophisticated binary labels. But, as deconstruction has shown us, it is possible to deconstruct such binaries, reverse their hierarchy and refuse to impose an alternative hierarchy.[7] Yet I want to investigate the images themselves, as representatives of literary goodness and badness within a genre traditionally less concerned with characters than with place. Indeed, "critical interrogation of modes or representation is necessary before other, more emancipatory, forms of representation can be formulated" (Blunt and Rose 8).

The reader will remember that Shirley Ardener (1981), among others, has argued that all physical areas have sets of rules which determine how they will be crossed and who will occupy particular spaces (11).[8] Crucial to this chapter is her argument that, "the extended use of such spatial terms is firmly embedded in the language in which [it] is written" (*Women and Space*

---

[6] In addition to Derrida's work on deconstruction the following theorists offer useful insight toward dismantling binary labels: Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1983); --., *Allegories of Reading* (London: Yale UP, 1979); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1979).

[7] See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. (London: Johns Hopkins, 1997).

[8] Refer back to chapter one for a full discussion of Ardener's contributions to feminist geography.

11). In terms of defining gender boundaries, Ardener sees the language of
space as equally important as physical space. Offering, as examples, phrases
such as 'high society' and 'narrow-mindedness', she formulates an argument
in which the physical world and the social reality of that world are dependent
upon one another:

> [s]ocieties have generated their own rules, culturally determined,
> for making boundaries on the ground, and have divided the
> social into spheres, levels and territories with invisible fences
> and platforms to be scaled by abstract ladders and crossed by
> intangible bridges with as much trepidation or exultation as on a
> plank over a raging torrent. (*Women and Space* 11-12)

In her metaphors Ardener emphasizes the difficulty of crossing social
spheres, but also the intangibility of social spheres. Abstract boundaries, as
Ardener suggests, are as difficult to 'cross' or 'break free from' as concrete
planks 'over raging torrents'. These marginal boundaries, embedded within
language, create labels and categories that in turn assign meanings to given
things. Consequently, such culturally determined meanings consistently
reflect inaccurate and often oppressive images in literature. Moreover, as we
will see, when literary discourse defines characters in terms of binaries such
as good/bad, beautiful/ugly, young/old etc. it sets up a series of extreme
difference. These 'labels' at once exist in relation to the other and become
separate from one another. Moreover, in their extremeness, they encourage
(in fact insist upon), one-dimensionality within characterization. "Linguistic

imbalances are worthy of study because they bring into sharper focus real

world imbalances and inequities. They are clues that some external situation

needs changing, rather items that one *should* seek to change directly" (Lakoff

43).

In *The Light and the Dark: A Cultural History of Dualism* (Volume 1,

1986), P.F.M. Fontaine asks:

> [what happens when] people, or rather certain people, feel the
>
> need to push an opposition to extremes? If this is the case them
>
> we must speak of >>dualism<< [sic]. It is then no longer
>
> possible to reduce the terms of the opposition more or less to
>
> each other; there are no longer intermediate terms; there is no
>
> longer any relationship or connection at all. In that case the
>
> terms of the opposition easily acquire the character of principles,
>
> and they tend to grow into systems with a complete ideology;
>
> behind these ideologies may stand organized groups or sects
>
> [....] The most forceful dualistic opposition, however-- the one
>
> that has been the most productive--, is that between good and
>
> evil. (preface x).

Using the women-centered text as a paradigm I will illustrate how extreme

binary labels embedded within language and associated with the supernatural

woman can be unmasked and dismantled. To be clear, we are here

concerned particularly with women-centered texts, the supernatural woman,

and the binary models of language attached to her character throughout

various literatures. It is thus fitting that we begin by addressing the most extreme (and the most common) binary label attached to supernatural women in fantastical myth and fiction: good/bad.

The Binary Logic of Literary Tradition

In *The Virgin: Mary's Cult and the Re-emergence of the Goddess* (1976; 1988), Geoffrey Ashe chronicles various female images throughout literary history which, he argues, ultimately led to the idolatry of the Madonna. He begins with the Madonna's association with the Goddess (her predecessor according to Ashe), stressing that it was the ever present juxtaposition of universal life bestower and virgin that made both figures powerful (13). Ashe argues that male deities took command during the second millennium BC due to war and conquest, the institution of kingship and changes in relations between the sexes (15). He moves on to acknowledge several female figures contributing to the image of the Madonna, including Pandora (16). Pandora is, of course, an archetype of both feminine beauty and danger, a "beautiful surface" and a "femme fatale" as Laura Mulvey (1996) notes (*Fetishism* 55). Mulvey also makes the critical point that Pandora is "a secret thing to be hidden away, in a concealed place, but a secret meaning must be transformed into code. One can be simply discovered by the eye, the other has to be deciphered [....her] significance for myths and iconographies of the feminine is coded" (53-54). As Mulvey rightly observes, Pandora remains frozen within patriarchal discourse; her image has been "coded" and she can therefore only be understood within the system of binary logic that defines her.

Marina Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976), also challenges dualistic images of women in literature. Warner argues that dominant images of female figures such as Eve, Mary of Magdalene, Pandora and the Goddess have contributed greatly to notions of female 'goodness' and 'badness', as well as to the image of the Madonna. Moreover, both Ashe and Warner insist that the identity of the Madonna has been comprised of a collage of images originating with Goddess worship. In their association with virginity, with motherhood and with rebirth, the Goddess and Madonna became one: "[t]he world's nostalgic desire would prepare a place for her. Doubtless, like Christ, she would transcend myth as well as fulfilling it. And the original relationship of the Young God to the Goddess made Christ's mother the best candidate [for representing female 'goodness']" (Ashe 39).

Both Warner and Ashe also consistently address the inevitable damage that extreme binary labels of 'goodness' and 'badness' have inflicted on literary women. Ashe argues that, "[w]hatever the Life-Goddess Eve was originally like, she appears in Genesis as a Hebrew Pandora, the villainess in a story about the origin of human misfortunes"(17). Mulvey makes this connection as well, noting that it is curiosity that links Pandora's story to Eve's (60) further illustrating the disturbing divide amongst images of women in literature whilst noting that it is a male prerogative to be curious.

For Roman Catholicism and Greek myth, while the story of the original female villain begins with characters like Eve and Pandora, it does not end with them. In literature, images of female 'badness' must be balanced with images of female 'goodness'. Thus, a juxtaposition of binaries like Eve and

the Madonna, Pandora and various others like Athena or

Demeter/Persephone, and Medusa and Andromeda dominate images of

women throughout male-centered western literature. Indeed, the juxtaposition

of binaries can even be found within the same female character, as is the

case for Eve in the less widely known Gnostic Gospels found in the *Nag*

Hammadi Codex. P.F.M. Fontaine notes in *The Light and the Dark* (1986):

> [t]he one is the spiritual, the pneumatic Eve who is far above all
>
> ideas of sexuality and dwells in the home of Knowledge, the
>
> other the carnal, hylic Eve who is a fair object for sexual lust. If
>
> we remember that the First Woman is the 'Mother of the Living',
>
> the double Eve is not only the prototype of woman, Madonna
>
> and Aphrodite at the same time, but also of all human beings,
>
> male and female, who are both spiritual and carnal. (Volume IX
>
> 19)

Fontaine claims that dualism is "two utterly opposed conceptions, systems,

principles, groups of people, or even worlds, without any intermediate terms

between them" (xv).[9] He contends that these opposites cannot be reduced to

each other, and that in some cases one is not even dependent on the other.

However, he also argues that Gnostic systems employ a relative dualism, in

which one system or group is dependent on the other (such as light and dark).

In such Gnostic systems, "[h]owever strongly opposed they may be, they can,

nevertheless, not do without each other" (Volume 9 xv).

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[9] Fontaine's dualistic arguments are clearly contrary to Derrida's work with binaries.

The good/bad binary, and, of course, the Christian/Pagan binary, begins in literature somewhere among these ruins, but it continues throughout literary fiction. It has attached itself to various malign female characters and to an equal number of virtuous female characters. That it should have attached itself particularly to the figure of the witch, priestess or pagan Goddess is not surprising, given the literary history from whence it came. Clearly, while the Virgin Mary and the Magdalene are binaries, they are also one, just as the Goddess is a multifaceted maiden/mother/crone simultaneously. Moreover, as the first mother for Christians, Eve makes all of this possible, as does the Goddess for the Pagans and Pandora for the Greeks. Thus woman, in both literary cultures, is good and bad, both giver of life and taker of life.

The reader should note that the emphasis here is purely on the binary as a means of labeling characterization. Moreover, although the supernatural woman has become 'split' into two distinct characters in (most) contemporary literatures, she is also still a single character (as in the case of Pandora); the binary itself does have a center--here, the center is the same woman. The femme fatale is feared, the virgin is desired. Sexuality has been a key concept in defining both good and bad women throughout literature. It is, therefore, not surprising that from early medieval legend, to children's literature and fairy tales, such extreme binary images of women are also sexual in nature. A few examples will illustrate my point. Snow White is pure and virginal, whilst the Queen is used and tainted (sexually and morally). Dorothy and Glinda are innocent, kind and surrounded by children, but the Wicked Witch of the West is corrupt, evil and surrounded by both her familiars

(monkeys) and her male guards. Similarly, Gwenivere although an adulteress and a barren woman, is still pious and obedient, in contrast to Morgan Le Fey who is incestuous and practices heathen pagan magic. "Together, the Virgin and the Magdalene form a diptych of Christian patriarchy's idea of woman. There is no place in the conceptual architecture of Christian society for a single woman who is neither a Virgin nor a Whore" (Warner, *Alone* 235).

Conventionally, images of powerful supernatural women in fantastic literature have existed primarily in male-authored (and often male-centered) fiction. In such male-centered texts women are held accountable for their goodness and badness or, at times, for the goodness and badness of men or even the world. In their simplistic one-dimensional binary determined characters, they embody a definition of what it means to be good and bad in one instance, followed by all that is associated with good and bad in the other. An example of how the flat characterization of supernatural women is associated with more worldly definitions of evil is provided in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* when Merlin laments: "[f]or men at most differ as heaven and earth/ But women, worst and best, as heaven and hell" (ll 812-813). Thus exemplifying the sentiment of female characterization, Merlin tells Viviane, men are given the privilege of humanity (the earth lies between heaven and hell), whilst women can only ever be angels or demons. This kind of sentiment is particularly evident in fantasy because of its predisposition to mythical absolutes.

Male-centered fiction works to explore the 'story' of male characters and their patriarchal 'kingdoms'. As a result, infamous female characters such as Morgan Le Fey, Cassandra, Snow White's stepmother (or

Cinderella's) and the Wicked Witch of the West have traditionally been portrayed as mad, evil and ambitiously corrupt women who personify these negative labels which extend to more worldly evidence of their corruption. Moreover, a token 'good' woman, to complete the binary relationship, accompanies them. This can be seen in the literary works of Aeschylus (c. 458), Malory (c. 1470), the Brothers Grimm (1812) and L. Frank Baum (1900) to name but a few. Their stories, varied as they may seem, have a common theme: they invoke the notion of female power, only to defuse it by forbidding full investigation of the meaning of their power. As a result female characters are both one-dimensional and less interesting than male characters; while we are aware that major power lurks in the background in the form of one female character or another, they are denied any telling of their own story. They remain frozen images of 'badness' among a whole entourage of three-dimensional male characters. These women need only 'be there'—their presence is required for the plot to work, but they are essentially silent, best seen but not heard.[10] Not uncommonly, such portrayals have been attacked with great force within feminist and literary discourse. It is therefore on the subject of 'representation' and identity that I pause briefly in order to emphasize the problematic image of women within discourse before moving on to specific images within women-centered writing.

Identifying 'Woman'

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar consider the image of the literary woman in *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century*

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[10] Women's essential presence in fantasy and fairy tale is the subject of chapter six of this

Literary Imagination (1979;1984). While somewhat controversial within feminist discourse, Gilbert and Gubar provide useful feminist literary analysis relevant to this study.[11] They pivot their analysis of the nineteenth-century woman writer on the intriguing image of the mirror. Gilbert and Gubar begin with the notion that poetry is a mirror held up to nature. This mirror "implies that the poet, like a lesser God, has created an ulterior universe, mirrored in our own and in which he (the poet) seems to enclose or trap shadows of reality" (5).[12] From there, they turn to authorship, rejecting the romantic notion of invoking the muse, and the concept of the author as father of the text. They use the image of the mirror as both a metaphor for self analysis and for the author's viewpoint before moving on to discuss the image as it is invoked in literature. But, as we will see, this metaphor can also be extended to the shadows of language.

While there remains much debate surrounding the notion of 'women's writing', Gilbert and Gubar usefully maintain that a woman writer's self contemplation begins with a searching glance in the mirror of a male inscribed

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thesis.

[11] Gilbert and Gubar's work in *Madwoman in the Attic* is controversial among feminist scholars because it attempts to fit a theoretical 'grid' over women authored texts without considering texts of the same genre which do not apply to their hypothesis. Moreover, they fail to take a more "sophisticated account of the contradictory, fragmentary nature of patriarchal ideology" (Moi, 64), throughout their work. For further critical reading of Gilbert and Gubar's theoretical queries in *The Madwoman in the Attic* see: Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory.* (New York and London: Routledge, 1985): 57-69. It should nevertheless be acknowledged that Gilbert and Gubar's text made a valuable contribution to feminist theory in the 1970's and it has subsequently influenced feminist discourse on many levels. Whilst acknowledging its flaws, *Madwoman in the Attic* is a useful text for my purposes in its metaphorical discussion (mirrors) and its literary analysis of Snow White which is a primary text for this chapter.

[12] For alternative discussion on the authorial voice, see: Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author". In *Image Text Music* (London: Fontana Press, 1977). The concept of the father as the owner of a text is one that Roland Barthes' has influentially worked to overturn, claiming that the author dies when writing begins. Barthes theory of authorship is also discussed briefly in chapter one.

literary text.[13] There she sees those "eternal lineaments fixed on her like a

mask" (15). In other words, she begins her self-analysis with preconceived

notions—notions created and maintained by male-centered literary texts.

Specifically Gilbert and Gubar make reference to Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's

"The Other Side of the Mirror" in which a woman discovers she is a prisoner of

the mirror. This is an important text for the authors as its fundamental ideas

are similar to those Gilbert and Gubar present in their analysis:

I sat before my glass one day,

And conjured up a vision bare,

Unlike the aspects glad and gay,

That erst were found reflected there--

The vision of a woman, wild

With more than womanly despair[. . .]

Her lips were open—not a sound

Came through the parted lines of red.

Whate'er it was, the hideous wound

In silence and in secret bled.

No sigh relieved her speechless woe,

She had no voice to speak her dread [. . .]

Shade of shadow in the glass,

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[13] For more on this debate see Héléne Cixous's concept of 'writing from the body': "The Laugh of the Medusa," In *New French Feminisms* (New York:Schocken Books, 1981); and Julia Kristeva's analysis of 'the revolution in poetic language': *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984).

O set the crystal surface free!

Pass-- as the fairer visions pass--

Nor ever more return, to be

The ghost of a distracted hour,

That heard me whisper, 'I am she!'

(qtd. In Gilbert and Gubar 15-16)

The woman in Coleridge's poem is similar to the trapped one-dimensional representations of female characters in fantasy fiction. The woman sits in horror; she cannot recognize the image before her in the mirror. She is 'wild with despair' but cannot speak her pain. Try as she might to escape the image reflected in her looking glass—an image constructed by her social surroundings and estranged from herself—she realizes that she is but a *vision*, a "shadow in the glass" who cannot escape her domination whilst her "silence bleeds". Like the fantastic female character, she is muted, existing in the margins of language without a voice, or rather, her voice is no more than a shadow. This frightening silence is one that appears often in feminist literature as the image of woman, her relationship with her person and the representation of her body and self becomes more prominent in feminist discourse.[14] Indeed, "[m]en look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only the relations of men to women, but the

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[14] For further discussions on women, body and image see also: Linda Badley, *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (London: Greenwood Press, 1995); Christine Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1984); Shoshana Felman, "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy" in *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Robyn R. Warhol and Dianne Price Herndl (eds). (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1991); Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (New York: Crossing Press, 1983).

relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female" (Berger 47).

Many feminists call for women writers to "reach toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror/text and help her climb out" (Gilbert and Gubar 16), or to create the "psychological sentence of the feminine Gender" (Wolf *Dorothy Richardson* 191).[15] And indeed this is an essential aspect of feminist politics that is essential in creating new spaces for women's voices, within and outwith the margins of language. However, I want to insist that it is possible to author women-centered texts, and consequently create new spaces for female characters, without the necessary experience of being a woman. In keeping with such thinking, Catherine Belsey attacks the notion of perspective and experience in *Critical Practice* (1980) stating that,

> [it] assumes that valuable literary texts, those which are in a
> special way worth reading, tell truths—about the period which
> produced them, about the world in general or about human
> nature—and that in doing so they express the particular
> perceptions, the individual insights, *of their authors.* [italics
> mine](2)

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[15] For further discussion of women's writing and what constitutes a woman writer, see also: Adrienne Rich, "Compulsive Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." In *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose.* Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Robert Gelpi (eds). (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Copmany, 1993); Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth.* (Toronto: Random House, 1991); Virginia Woolf, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," In *Collected Essays*, vol. 1 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966) ; Alice Jardine, *Gynesis, Configurations of Woman and Modernity.* (London: Cornell UP, 1985).

Belsey's point is that 'experience' does not have to be autobiographically truthful to be compelling; experience is an individual prerogative.[16] Consequently, one might question whether texts about women (ie. women-centered), which compel a greater understanding of female experiences, must necessarily be written by women (ie. women-authored).

Certainly, 'reaching toward trapped Woman' is often (or should be), the goal of women-authored texts about women. However, while this is a noble and ambitious goal, is it one that must be accomplished solely by women? Does one need to be a woman to free women from their frozen binary spaces in literature? I would suggest that the bigger issue is the 'freeing' of the victims of detrimental images by authors, regardless of gender or biological sex. The success of such freedom, for this study, then shifts from women-authored texts to women-centered texts (i.e. texts which center on the images and lives of women) which are not determined by the sex of their author. Although I have previously made these distinctions (see chapter one) I will briefly remind the reader here. Women-centered texts deal chiefly with female characters that interact with patriarchal worlds and offer three-dimensional characterization. Such texts often explore female characters who have traditionally been 'silenced' by male-centered texts. In contrast, male-centered texts deal primarily with male characters interacting in patriarchal worlds in which female characters often serve as objects within the narrative. As such, it is on the subject of women-centered texts and their aim

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[16] Belsey uses an example from *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses*, in which a visiting professor at an American University is confronted with a dilemna of authorial voice: Wily Smith believes he can author a text about "a black kid growing up in the ghetto" despite the fact that he is a Caucasian boy (1-2). See: David Lodge, *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses* (London : Secker and Warburg, 1975).

toward 'freedom' that I now focus as we explore particular women-centered texts that effectively dismantle the unrealistic and overly simplified good/bad relationship.

While there are many women-centered texts that concentrate on infamous supernatural women, we are here focusing on two well-known good and two equally prominent bad female characters in children's literature: Galinda and the Wicked Witch of the West and Snow White and her Wicked Stepmother.[17] These female characters have been traditionally frozen in the margins of language as good and bad extremes by male-centered textuality, and they are here released from these extremes (primarily) by contemporary male authorship.[18] The reader should note that while I have chosen to concentrate on male-authored texts in this chapter, there are several additional feminist novels, written by women, that re-imagine prominent supernatural female characters. Any of these texts could be used to illustrate the argument in this chapter.[19] I have, however, specifically chosen to use male-authored texts that represent women-centered writing in order to dismantle the myth that only women-authored texts can produce women-centered stories.

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[17] While these characters are well-known in literature they have been equally popular in film. As both the Walt Disney version of Snow White (1937) and Victor Fleming's version of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) have been widely received by western audiences, it is fitting that both literary versions and film versions are discussed here.

[18] It should be noted that while the very nature of binaries is oppositional and therefore acute, I use the term 'extreme' here, and elsewhere, to reinforce and illustrate the excessive employment of binary images within texts that portray women within a system of binary logic.

[19] Marion Zimmer Bradley (1985) *The Mists of Avalon* (Morgan Le Fey), Marion Zimmer Bradley (1987) *Firebrand* (Cassandra), Sheri Tepper (1991) *Beauty* (Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White).

The Wizard of Oz

In both L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900) and Victor Fleming's 1939

film version of the tale, the story is less concerned with the 'wizard' than the

'witch'. The Wicked Witch of the West is, from the very beginning of the tale,

a nefarious woman, devoid of any emotional subjectivity. Before Dorothy's

adventure begins, the Wicked Witch of the West is Miss Gulch, a mean

spirited woman who seeks to terminate the life of young Dorothy's puppy

Toto: "[o]h! You Wicked Old Witch!" exclaims Dorothy at the thought.[20] But,

curiously, there is no explanation given for her wickedness. Instead, *The*

Wizard of Oz (both the film and the novel) makes extensive use of our

conventional body of knowledge of fantasy.[21] In terms of appearance, the

Wicked Witch of the West is a striking stereotypical figure with her bright

green face, rotten teeth, black gown, pointed hat, pointed chin and long

scraggly fingernails. We are not surprised at her appearance or her

demeanor because they adhere to what we have come to accept as the

image of witch and her representative 'badness'—witches ride broom sticks

and live in forests or dark and gloomy castles.[22] Witches are bad for no other

reason than because they *are.* It is thus fitting that Gregory Maguire's feminist

novel giving an account of the witch of Oz is called *Wicked* (1995). While L.

Frank Baum's 'Wicked' Witch of the West is a one-dimensional figure of

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[20] *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Dir. Victor Fleming. With Judy Garland and Margaret Hamilton.
[21] See chapter one for a more detailed account of fantastic conventions in literature.

[22] Refer back to chapter two for discussion on the physical spatial significance of the witch.

grossly exaggerated stereotype, Maguire's 'witch' has substance. To begin with, she has a name.

Naming the 'witch' is an integral step in bringing the reader closer to the presence of the supernatural character in stories that rework traditional tales of witches. In almost every one-dimensional extreme (or male-centered/authored) account of supernatural women, these characters are nameless and identified only by the evilness or goodness they presumably embody.[23] This is particularly the case in fairy tales such as *Snow White* and *Cinderella* (which have evil nameless stepmothers), *Sleeping Beauty* and *Hansel and Gretel* (which have evil nameless witches), or in *The Wizard of Oz* (where the good witch is named, but the bad witch is not).[24] However, in Maguire's women-centered retelling of the story (*Wicked*) the Wicked Witch of the West is named Elphaba.

Wicked begins with an explanation of Elphaba's birth. She is born to Brother Frexspar (a minister) and Melena of Colwen Grounds, a woman of nobility who leaves her home to live in Rush Margins with her preacher husband. Maguire makes reference to the image of both 'witch' and 'woman' often throughout the novel, chipping slowly away at the connotations these words embody, as Elphaba struggles with her own ongoing otherness (to begin with, she is born green). Further, he works to incorporate the notions of social labeling and alienation of self-image consistently within his work: "[n]ow I just think it's our own lives that are hidden from us. The mystery—who is

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[23] While authors such as Malory (Morgan le Fey) or Aeschylus (Cassandra) may give names to their 'witches' this is not the norm. Moreover, both authors still represent these women as one-dimensional characters.

[24] See chapter six: "Women Against Women? The Fantastic Fairy Tale" for further discussion of women's roles in fairy tales.

that person in the mirror—that's shocking and unfathomable enough for me" (267). Maguire's 'witch' is aware of how others see her:

> Elphaba stood facing the fire, but turned her head on her shoulders to look long and unblinkingly at Galinda, who had not yet hopped down from the chair. The Munchkinlander was in her nightgown, a drab sack without benefit of lace edging or piping. The green face above the wheat-gray fabric seemed almost to glow, and the glorious long straight black hair fell right over where breasts should be if she would ever reveal any evidence that she possessed them. Elphaba looked like something between an animal and an Animal, like something more than life but not quite Life. There was an expectancy but no intuition, was that it?-- like a child who has never remembered having a dream being told to have sweet dreams. You'd almost call it unrefined, but not in a social sense--more in a sense of nature not having done its full job with Elphaba, not quite having managed to make her enough like herself. (77-78)

She is, at times, detached from herself and unable to identify with her own image that is imposed upon her by outside forces. Elphaba lives the deconstruction process.

Maguire focuses on the shadows of language that create or attach meaning to words. He pokes fun at these connotations, exposing them as fraudulent:

"[s]o tell us how your broom came to be magic," said Sarima.

"I never said it was magic. I got it from an elderly maunt named

Mother Yackle. She took me under her wing, when she was alert

enough, and gave me-- well, guidance [....]

The old maunt said the broom would be my link to my destiny

[....] I assume she meant that my destiny was domestic. Not

magic [explains Elphaba]." (271)

"They're calling you a witch, do you know that?" said Nanny.

"Now why ever is that?"

"Silliness and stupidity," said Elphaba [....]

"Hmmm," said Nanny, "I don't think you're much of a witch. You

mother would be scandalized, bless her soul. Your father too."

(287)

"you [....] are neither this nor that-- or shall I say *both* this and

that? Both of Oz and of the other world. Your old Frex was

wrong; you were never a punishment for his crimes. You're a

half-breed, you are a new breed, you are a grafted limb, you are

a dangerous anomaly. Always you were drawn to the composite

creatures, the broken and reassembled, for that is what you are.

Can you be so dull that you have not figured this out?" (373-374)

Maguire challenges the myth of the witch with her magic broom, and questions the significance of the label of witch; the text presents evil as a complicated presence and illustrates that Elphaba is incapable of embodying any of these notions simply. Elphaba, as the dwarf tells us, *is* otherness. She literally does not belong to a world. She is both Oz and the other, a "composite creature", a "half-breed". As her Nanny acutely notes, she is "not much of a witch" and Elphaba herself admits that people only resort to such labels because they are both "silly" and "stupid." Moreover, Elphaba observes people's inability to understand the meanings of labels:

> "[t]he real thing about evil," said the Witch at the doorway, "isn't any of what you said. You figure out one side of it-- the human side, say-- and the eternal side goes into shadow. Or vice versa. It's like the old saw: What does a dragon in its shell look like? Well no one can ever tell, for as soon as you break the shell to see, the dragon is no longer *in* its shell. The real disaster of this inquiry is that it is the nature of evil to be *secret*." (371-372)

Importantly, Maguire pulls our attention to the characters' ability to be fearful of the unknown as well as their wish to propel evil and its nature to the zone of the unknown and secret; they do not wish to truly discover the nature of evil. Rather, they wish to be entertained by it (369-371) or to attach it to a "something" and put it safely in the realm of other: "I think it's a presence, not

an absence [....] Evil's an incarnated character, an incubus or a succubus. It's an other. It's not *us* [italics in original]" (370).

Elphaba is also full of (secret) political ambitions. Her 'wickedness' becomes the plight of the othered, struggling in the face of social denial and oppression in a rebellion against a culture that denies her (and others like her) a fair existence. The novel chronicles the movement toward a dangerous technology by a social body too ignorant to successfully cope with its advances. At the same time the novel raises important questions of social criticism revolving around racism, gender bias, problematic issues in and around education, domesticity and sexuality. As Elphaba's Nanny reminds us "little green Elphaba chose her own sex, and her own color, and to hell with her parents" (31). Moreover, while Maguire chips away at the extreme notion of 'badness' traditionally upheld by this story, he also dismantles 'goodness' in his re-presentation of Glinda.

In the film version of *The Wizard of Oz*, Glinda, the 'good witch of the north' arrives dramatically in a wandering soap-bubble-like ball. Upon meeting Dorothy, the following conversation takes place:

Witch of the North: "are you a good witch, or a bad witch?"

Dorothy: "why, I am not a witch at all. Witches are old and ugly!" (Background giggling)

Witch of the North: "the Munchkins are laughing because I am a witch."

Dorothy: "I've never heard of a beautiful witch."

Witch of the North: "only bad witches are ugly."

Reinforcing the notion that Evil is Ugly, while Good is Beautiful, the Witch of

the North poses any number of problematic gender issues.[25] Moreover, the

comment that "only bad witches are ugly" posits additional problems in terms

of aesthetic expectations which seem to convey plastic notions of Beauty

whilst imposing a set of social and cultural expectations on an increasingly

passive western audience.

     The Wizard of Oz, like many fantastic stories, contributes to the

tradition of equating morality with aesthetics in both its stereotypical

representation of beauty (we need only look at Glinda's ridiculous attire to

grasp this) and its apparent attitude towards it.[26] In juxtaposing the 'beautiful'

with the 'ugly' and further matching each figure with corresponding attributes

of acute 'goodness' or excessive 'badness', a detrimental myth of self and

identity is perpetuated and imposed on interpreters of this image. Maguire,

however, successfully works to expose such myths. Ugliness and beauty

within the text are words exposed as meaningless. Thus, Galinda's

preoccupation with her beauty is portrayed as foolish and detrimental to her

both her education and to her morality. She is a vain and silly girl who

struggles throughout her education (a valued experience within the novel)

because her obsession with self image and beauty makes her less intelligent

than Elphaba (79). Further, Maguire shows Galinda to be a lazy and flighty

character:

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[25] The upper case is employed here because 'Evil' and 'Beautiful' are literally personified by the characters.

[26] Morality and aesthetics are equated in other tales such as *Snow White, Sleeping Beauty,*

"[f]rankly, I thought my talents would just emerge and make it

clear whether I should try natural science, or the arts, or sorcery,

or perhaps even history. I don't think I'm cut out for ministerial

work." [said Galinda].

"I'm not surprised that *one such as you* [emphasis mine] should

be in doubt," said Madame Morrible, which wasn't greatly

encouraging to Galinda. "But may I suggest sorcery? You could

be very good at it. I pride myself on knowing this sort of thing."

"I'll think about it," said Galinda, though her early appetite for

sorcery had waned once she'd heard what a grind it was to learn

spells and, worse, to *understand* them. [emphasis in original]

(91)

While 'gullible' boys find Galinda irresistible at times (103), the tone of the

novel consistently conveys the absurdity of her attitude toward education and

beauty, especially as she grows older:

Glinda approached slowly, either though age or shyness, or

because her ridiculous gown weighed so much that it was hard

for her to get up enough stream to stride.[27] She looked like a

huge Glindaberry bush, was all the Witch could think; under that

skirt there must be a bustle the size of the dome of Saint Florix.

There were sequins and furbelows and a sort of History of Oz, it

seemed, stitched in trapunto in six or seven ovoid panels all

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and *Cinderella.*

around the skirting. But her face: beneath the powdered skin,

the wrinkles at eyelid and mouth, was the face of the timid

schoolgirl from the Pertha Hills.

"You haven't change a whit", said Glinda [....]

The Witch took Glinda's arm. "Glinda, you look hideous in that

getup. I thought you'd have developed some sense by now."

(340)

Maguire rebuilds the Oz tale from the inside out—the central character is the

witch; she is no longer one-dimensional, no longer extreme in her Evil actions

or her Ugliness, no longer silent, no longer speechless or frozen. More

importantly, she is no longer the true villain of the tale. As we will see in

further examples of women-centered texts, in giving these characters the

exploration they have previously been denied, authors are able to kill both

poles of extreme images. Maguire's 'wicked witch' is no longer wholly

'wicked' just as his 'good witch' is no longer fully 'good'. He has effectively

blurred the dividing boundary between each image, erasing the need to define

them in such binary terms. Both villainess and heroine are no more.

Snow White

Just as Maguire has reinvented the tale of the Wicked Witch of the West,

giving her character depth and compelling readers to consider her

motivations, feminist authors have made similar attempts with other popular

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[27] Within the novel, as Galinda ages she decides to drop the 'a' from her name and be known as Glinda.

stories featuring supernatural women. Perhaps the most popular of these is the story and images found in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.*

Responding to the forces of Romantic nationalism, the Grimm brothers offered several variants of *Snow White* before the final version in 1857. In her critical essay "Three Transformations of Snow White," Kay Stone (1990) notes that the earliest known Grimm version is in a manuscript dating from 1810, "sent to Clemens Brentano but never published" (57). The differences between it and the 'authoritative' 1857 version are worth noting. To begin with, the beautiful and then wicked queen in the earlier version of the story is Snow White's natural mother, who first wishes for her daughter and then grows distraught over her ever-increasing beauty. It is the mother herself who takes the girl into the forest to kill her. Moreover, the death-rebirth motif at the conclusion of the story tells of Snow White's father finding and removing her coffin. In an 1812 version of *Snow White*, the queen is still her natural mother and villain, but she orders a huntsman to destroy the girl rather murdering her herself. The huntsman is told to return with the girl's lungs and liver as proof of her death. In this version, it is the handsome prince who finds Snow White and carries her coffin, and it is his servants who revive her by accidentally dislodging the poison apple (an obvious Eve reference) after striking her (57-59). However, the final version of *Snow White* in 1857 is accepted as the "original" version. As Stone rightly notes: "Snow White in print becomes frozen into the wording of the 1857 edition" (58). This version makes the change from natural mother to stepmother and also creates a most intriguing difference in terms of the witch because it separates the good and bad aspects of the queen into independent characters. It is on this point of dividing

the character of the queen that I would like to rest for a time as this seems a most crucial and pivotal change to previous versions and moreover, allows for an enhanced portrayal of 'good' and 'bad' in the story.

Nowhere else is the separation of the good and bad, nor the transformation from queen to wicked witch as dramatic as in Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937).[28] While the queen merely disguises herself as an old beggar woman in the Grimm version of the tale, Walt Disney modifies the visual impact of the queen by physically metamorphosing her character from queen to witch on screen. Indeed, as Stone maintains, "[f]ilms create an even greater separation of makers and viewers, giving the latter even less possibility for interaction. Both story-listening and story-reading give us the opportunity to provide our own visual, oral, emotional and other elaborations, but film provides these all ready-made for our consumption" (58). A powerful visual image such as this metamorphosis commands the attention of child and adult alike. We become passive viewers assaulted by the image and accept the extreme evil that the witch embodies.

As we have already maintained, the series of binary labels foregrounded in our knowledge of the witch is crucial to our understanding of her. When the Snow White witch metamorphoses on screen in the Disney version, the queen becomes a figure of horror who has (and has had for the duration of the film, we must assume, as there is no explanation for the

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[28] We move here, as elsewhere, briefly into the realm of film because this text is arguably the most well-known version of the Snow White story in contemporary culture. Released in 1937, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (the first of Disney's feature animated films), grossed an immense $8 million at the North American box office. *Snow White* has subsequently been dubbed into over twenty languages and enjoyed great success on VHS and DVD.

sudden ability), immense magical power. The film medium, in this case, not only transforms the witch into a much more hideous creature by virtue of its powerful visual capability, but also through the poignant alternation of her character from its initial stage (Queen and stepmother), and through the addition of magical or supernatural abilities which have been motivated by jealousy.

Since Gilbert and Gubar specifically discuss the notion of female jealousy, let us briefly return to their *Madwoman in the Attic* where they provide an analysis of *Snow White*. Gilbert and Gubar contend that the woman writer acknowledges that "what she sees in the mirror is usually a male construct" (17). This metaphor is striking as it is both metaphorically and literally problematic. In other words, when one looks in a mirror at one's own reflection it is not just the physical image that is returned. Rather, one sees all that one has been conditioned to see. Thus, in their feminist analysis of the Snow White story, the mirror is the essential metaphorical and literal image in Gilbert and Gubar's thesis; the mirror is the object on which jealousy hinges. The mirror is the instigator of insecurity and fear. On the one hand it is the metaphorical mirror (or margin) in which women are trapped and on the other, the literal mirror in which one's imperfect (for it cannot ever be perfect) image is both ensnared and reflected:

> to be caught and trapped in a mirror [....] is to be driven inward,
> obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self. The
> first Queen seems to have had prospects; not yet fallen into
> sexuality, she looked outward, if only upon the snow. The
> second Queen is doomed to the inward search [...] necessitated

by a state from which all outward prospects have been removed.

(37)

Noting that the King is literally absent from the tale, Gilbert and Gubar argue that metaphorically he is present in the most crucial way, as he is the masterful patriarchal voice of the mirror who drives the Queen/Witch/Woman against her younger, more beautiful daughter. Snow White is, of course, a potential replacement for the Queen—a younger version of 'woman', a freshly and newly beautiful woman to replace the older and now (sexually) used 'mother'.[29] Indeed both audience and 'witch' succumb fully to the perpetuated myth in the story; pitted against each other, with the mirror as both driving and discouraging force, neither woman 'wins' this battle—a battle sought in vanity and waged in fear. "Given the female vulnerability such perils imply, female bonding is extraordinarily difficult in patriarchy: women almost inevitably turn against women because the voice of the looking glass sets them against each other" (Gilbert and Gubar 38).[30] The voice in the mirror is, of course, a misogynist patriarchal voice—one that values beauty and passivity above all else—one that even promotes both physical and mental sickness in women (53).

Symbolizing social confirmation of one's acceptability, the mirror on which the Queen relies is a reflection of her own insecurities: "[l]ooking-glass upon the wall/ Who is the fairest of us all?" To which the mirror replies "You are the fairest of them all," until the day arrives when Snow White surpasses

[29] Will we return to this motif and discuss it in more detail in the following chapter.

[30] We return to the issue of pitting women against each other in the conclusion of this chapter and then again in more detail in the following chapter.

the queen in aesthetic beauty: "Queen, you are full fair, 'tis true, But Snow-white fairer is than you" (*Grimm's Fairy Tales* 216-217). The queen's preoccupation and eventual obsession with the mirror image of herself is key to understanding her vulnerability and unhappiness in the story.

The mirror is also important in terms of fantastic conventions. As we have seen, magic in many fantastic tales is represented by the notion of vision associated with women, especially with supernatural women. This concept is one that works particularly well with Rosemary Jackson's theory of the fantastic, as Jackson's chief concern lies with the social and political implications of fantasy through visual metaphors:

> [m]any of the strange worlds of modern fantasy are located in, or
> through, or beyond, the mirror. They are spaces behind the
> invisible, behind the image, introducing dark areas from which
> anything can emerge [....] glasses, reflections, portraits, eye—
> which sees things myopically or distortedly as out of focus—to
> effect a transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar. (43)

Thus, when the queen, who always receives an 'honest' answer from her magic mirror, learns that Snow White has become the most beautiful in all the land, she flies into a rage. Beauty has become the most important social quality; her preoccupation with beauty instigates her transformation from the familiar to the unfamiliar as she actively plots against her stepdaughter. Ultimately, however, the queen's perfect beauty is denied by her fatal flaw of conceit and vanity: "knowledge, comprehension, reason, are established

through the power of the look, through the eye, and of the I of the human subject whose relation to objects is structured through this field of vision" (Jackson 45).

While the Brothers Grimm and Walt Disney seem to have successfully "frozen" the female image in this binary portrayal, contemporary feminist accounts of the story work to undo such overly simplified and detrimental images. Anne Sexton's poem "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1971;1981) challenges the traditional representation of sexuality found in the fairy tale whilst questioning gender roles. In Sexton's ironic poem, Snow White has eyes like a rolling china doll which "Open to say/ Good Day Mama/ and shut for the thrust/ of the unicorn./ She is unsoiled./ He is as white as a bonefish" (ll 8-13). Clearly Sexton's Virginal Snow White is more than passive, she is literally incapacitated, able only to open and shut her eyes like a inanimate doll, a material object of desire. Additionally, the Wicked Witch is poisoned by pride and is confronted with real aging worries when she discovers that Snow White is more beautiful.

Suddenly one day the mirror replied,

Queen, you are full fair, 'tis true,

but Snow White is fairer than you.

Until that moment Snow White

had been no more important

than a dust mouse under the bed.

But now the queen saw brown spots on her hand

and four whiskers over her lip. (ll 33-40)

Sexton's wicked witch does not simply fear an abstract concept of aging or a fairy tale notion of beauty—this witch finds liver spots on her hands and grows hair above her lip. Sexton introduces real life anxiety to the tale and thus brings the tale from fairy to reality--this witch is human after all. Indeed the queen's obsession with the mirror image of herself is fundamental to the story because it reinforces the myth of beauty and her own insecurities about her image—something present in all versions of the Snow White story, feminist or not. Similarly, Snow White's virginal and domestic identity (indeed her Madonna image), is also essential—without her naiveté and weakness of character she would not succumb to the witch's tricks.[31] Beauty, and all that the word itself connotes, is the most important social quality in the Snow White tale. It is the queen's preoccupation with beauty, instigated by her jealousy and propelled by her position as stepmother that makes us feel in the first instance that she is deserving of her fate. Yet upon closer examination, it is the binary construction of the two fabricated female characters that makes us react this way—the two women are set against each other from the beginning—good must win out over evil. Such simplistic moralistic conventions are embedded elements on which fantasy relies.

In an attempt to deconstruct the 'wholly good' image of Snow White, Donald Barthelme rewrites the story from several different perspectives. In *Snow White* (1967), Barthelme presents a variety of 'Snow Whites' whose

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[31] Warner contends that an essential sign of godhead was virginity which itself was the essential sign of goodness. See: Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: They Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary.* (London: Random House, 1976).

relationship with the seven dwarves is both complicated and sexual. The book is a collage of fragments that differ greatly from one to the next in tone if not in theme:

> "[i]t is marvelous, " Snow White said to herself. "When the water falls on my tender back. The white meat there. Give me the needle spray. First the hot, and then the cold. A thousand tiny points of perturbation. More perturbation! And who is it with me, here in the shower? It is Clem. The approach is Clem's, and the technique, or lack of it, is Clem [....] And Hubert waits outside, on the other side of the shower curtain, and Henry in the hall, before the closed door, and Edward is sitting downstairs, in front of the television, waiting. But what of Bill? Why is it that Bill, the leader, has not tapped at my shower-stall door, in recent weeks? (40)

> Snow White is agitated. She is worried about something called her "reputation". What will people think, why have we allowed her to become a public scandal, we must not be seen in public *en famille*, no one believes that she is simply a house keeper etc. etc. These concerns are ludicrous. No one cares. When she is informed that our establishment has excited no special interest in the neighborhood, she is bitterly disappointed. She

sulks in her room, reading Teilhard de Chardin and thinking.[32]

"My suffering is authentic enough but it has a kind of low-grade concrete block quality. The seven of them only add up to the equivalent of about two *real men*, as we know them from the films and from our childhood, when there were giants on the earth". (47- 48)

Miseries and complaints of Snow White: "I am tired of being just a housewife!" (49)

The psychology of Snow White: What does she hope for? "Someday my prince will come." By this Snow White means that she lives her own being as incomplete, pending the arrival of one who will "complete" her. (76)

In illustrating these varied voices and situations in which Snow White finds herself, contemplates her own existence or worries about her reputation, Barthelme de-mystifies her character. To begin with, she has a voice: "I am tired of being just a housewife!", she has thoughts (she wonders why Bill has not visited her in the shower recently). This Snow White also has anxieties-- she wonders about her reputation, living with seven men, and she does not just read Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, she clearly thinks upon the contents of

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[32] de Chardin wrote extensively on 'man' and his relationship with philosophical thought and science. Titles include: *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); *Christianity and Evolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971); *Human Energy* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).

the text. Interestingly, Teilhard (1881-1955), a Jesuit Priest and paleontologist, sought to reconstruct Christian doctrine from the perspective of science. A radical thinker, Teilhard was seen as a threat by the Vatican. However, despite such resistance to his 'teachings', he became a hero and a role model for younger priests and theologians, setting the stage for the renewal movements that finally came to flower in the era of Vatican II (McCarthy, 28). That Barthelme's Snow White should be reading such sophisticated philosophy adds a further layer of irony to the tale. This Snow White is not simply a one dimensional character who happily goes about her daily domestic chores and she is surely not the image of virginal purity extended in most other versions of the tale. Yet, she is not wicked either. Barthelme's Snow White does not exist at either end of the 'pole' offered by binaries; Barthelme's Snow White no longer floats in the marginal shadows of language. Rather, this Snow White is three-dimensional.

Demystifying the Image of Woman

The dichotomy of the good and bad woman in fantastical myth and literature offers an unrealistic and overly simplified image of woman. As we have seen, this binary divide is a long-maintained construction derived from the patriarchal concept of ideal/fear, good/bad and/or Christian/Pagan. The powerful products of these binaries can be seen in the maladjusted figure of the Medusa(s) or the absurd passivity of the Madonna(s). Yet this simple equation does not resolve the conflict. Let us return then to our original villain (Eve), whore (Magdalene), and virgin (Mary). It is interesting to notice that these 'archetypal' women, as Ashe and Warner repeatedly point out, have

received no extended discussion in the literature of the Bible, Genesis or any other religious writings, despite the fact that their infamy is astounding. In short snippets and occasional references to their characters in various male-centered writings, the villain, whore and virgin have interchangeably dominated images of women throughout literary history. These images, based solely on one-dimensional characters, have been maintained in male-centered works and can be seen, as already demonstrated, in various female figures since. To be sure, the Medusa is the Gorgon villain for Ovid and Apollodorus, yet her story is actually the story of Perseus and she is 'glossed over' in less than a paragraph in each lengthy text.[33] Morgan le Fey is the true villain of *The Morte de Arthur*, but Malory devotes less than a page of text to her character.[34] Similarly, Cassandra is scandalously mad in Greek tragedy even though her appearances in the plays of Aeschylus are meager by any standard.[35] And the wicked Queen or witch in any male-centered story is the unquestionable villain even though the explanation for this villainy is simplistic and unsatisfying. The 'bad' woman in literature cannot exist without the 'good' figure that she balances. But, as we have seen, what is most damaging about this binary is the trap of one-dimensionality that it insists upon. In making a powerful woman exceedingly bad or in making a submissive woman extremely good she becomes conveniently slotted into a

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[33] Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London: Penguin, 1960); and Stephen Wilk, *Medusa: Solving the Mystery of the Gorgon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[34] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[35] See: Aeschylus, *Oresteia; Agamemnon; The libation bearers; The Eumenides.* Richmond Lattimore trans. (London : University of Chicago Press, 1969).

formula. She becomes the female hero or the female villain--both unsophisticated characters.

Perhaps more than any other character, the witch suffers from the consistent Medusa image, while her victims or counterparts are typecast as Madonnas. As noted, this extreme categorization can most often be seen in texts that are not women-centered, but rather, where powerful women play secondary roles or in texts which pit women against each other. Thus, stories (such as those we have listed above) whose plots are supposed to center on women, offer little insight into the lives of the women they portray. These stories depict ambiguously evil wicked witches and equally exceedingly good women. In these examples, the story is not *theirs* (the women's): these stories are about male conceived notions of women and we are left with lifelessly flat depictions of 'good' and 'bad'. It is therefore, only in their one dimensionality that they appear extreme. If character development exists then the good/bad binary image of woman becomes an impossibility.

If we need to kill the angel and the monster, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, how does one accomplish such a task? And if both angel and monster are murdered within the fictive text, what is the alternative? Texts that are women-centered, regardless of the author's gender, tell the story of women. They detail the lives, histories, predicaments, actions and reactions of their characters. By this token, their characters take back individuality and cannot be one-dimensional. Their actions, therefore, can never be wholly extreme (as they are under a binary system—a system that disposes of female individuality). Women-centered texts work to deny the slotting of categories and replace this construction with a variety of voices. Thus, the

women in women-centered texts no longer exist in a vacuum. They are situated in particular social contexts rather than patriarchal fantastic ideals. In their dismissal of extremity and villainy, women-centered texts kill the angel and the monster whose damaging binaries maintain an illogical extreme.

Angela Carter reminds us that three dimensional female characters are important because they have the ability to transform "the story into something else", as indeed, the texts of this chapter accomplish:

> [b]ut it would transform the story into something else, because it would provide motivation, and so on; it would mean I'd have to provide a past for all these people, that I would have to equip them with three dimensions, with tastes and memories, and I would have to think of things for them to eat and wear and say. It would transform 'Ashputtle' from the bare necessity of fairy tale, with its characteristic copula formula, 'and then', to the emotional and technical complexity of bourgeois realism. They would have to learn to think. Everything would change. (392)

Moreover, if words have centers of meaning, then they also have margins or shadows. The margins of language are important because binary labels are the centers that depend on their margin for maintenance, definition and power. Without the margin they would not exist. And it follows that without the center the margin would also not exist. Therefore each are mutually dependent upon the other:

[t]he center needs its margin; the inside requires an outside;

and, as Lefebvre argued, the homogenizing tendency of

transparent space is always threatened by the persistent

presence of difference[....] the paradox that the 'others' of the

master subject are marginalized and ignored in its gaze and

space [but they] are also given their own places. (Blunt and

Rose 16)

Feminists challenge the structures of power within language that underpin

identity and attempt to displace the distinction "between the center and the

margin not necessary to the master subject" (Blunt and Rose 17). Language,

then, has shadows that signal meaning and value to society and when women

are termed and labeled one way or another, these shadow meanings follow

them.

The good/bad, Madonna/Medusa or angel/monster label perpetuates a

distinctive image of woman. This image shadows other female figures, all of

which illustrate the relationship between woman and badness or woman and

goodness. The shadows around these words (these labels) and the meaning

that they facilitate contribute to one-dimensional images of woman in

literature. This is why we can have fairy god-mothers who are good without

explanation or witches who are bad without any contextual elements added to

make it sensible. Language is our most powerful form of communication and

through language and words we define others and ourselves. It is in these

margins that many female characters have existed, but it is also within these

margins that they have found a space of resistance.

Chapter Six
Woman Against Woman:
The Fantastic Fairy Tale

A libel action, that's what I'm thinking. Put an end to this nonsense. Just because I'm old and live alone and can't see well, they accuse me of all sorts of things. Cooking and eating children, well, can you imagine? What a fantasy, and even if I did eat just a few, whose fault was it? Those children were left in the forest by their parents, who fully intended them to die. Waste not, want not, has always been my motto.[1]

The fear that dare not speak its name, for some women these days, is a fear of other women. But you aren't supposed to talk about that.[2]

We have been lost to each other for so long. My name means nothing to you. My memory is dust. This is not your fault, or mine. The chain connecting mother to daughter was broken and the word passed to the keeping of men, who had no way of knowing. That is why I became a footnote [....][3]

We have thus far maintained that the heart of one-dimensional female characterization in male-centered fantasy is the pitting of women against one another in a necessary good versus evil dichotomy. However, as analysis in the previous chapter has shown, it is possible (through the women-centered text) to dismantle these one-dimensional images. But what about the deeper issue of pitting women against each other to create this dichotomy in the first place? This chapter explores the contemporary fairy tale in terms of traditional themes, such as the mother/daughter relationship and transformation of character, that are catalytic in pitting women against one another and thus creating a unique space of aggression among women. Having already

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[1] On witches in fairy tales: Margaret Atwood, "The Unpopular Gals." In *Good Bones*, (London: Virago Press, 1993):27.

[2] On women against women: Margaret Atwood, "What We Aren't Told: If You Can't Say Something Nice, Don't Say Anything At All." In *Dropped Threads.* (January 6 2001):32.

[3] Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997):1.

established that women-centered texts dismantle the one-dimensionality of women, I want to move on to ask the questions: is the imagination so dangerous that it must remain chained to the grip of formula? Is it problematic that women-centered revisions of fairy tales include the same seemingly anti-feminist themes as their literary predecessors? And if so, why?

The theme of women distrusting women is a common one that runs throughout all western fairy tales. In *The Little Mermaid,* the older and spiteful sea witch is a monster who steals the young mermaid's voice.[4] The step-mothers of *Snow White, Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel* and *The Three Little Men in the Wood* are the villains of the story. And the witches in *The Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel,* or *The Frog Prince* seek to harm or destroy the young girls they pretend to protect.[5] Additionally, men and heterosexual relationships are presented as a means of escape for women who find themselves dominated or abused by other women in these stories. Thus the prince, father, or king of any given tale 'rescues' the young girl from the harmful older woman who seeks to destroy her. While women in many fantastic women-centered texts turn to other women (and often homosexual relationships) to escape the patriarchal confines of male centered worlds, women in traditional fairy tales turn to men and enter heterosexual relationships to escape women-women relationships. Andrea Dworkin (1974), notes this gendered cultural bias and argues:

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[4] Originally published in 1836, Hans Christian Anderson's story is currently difficult to locate in print. See: *The Little Mermaid* (California: Blue Star Communication, 1996).

[5] See: J.L.C. and W.C. Grimm, *Grimm's Fairy Tales.* (Kent: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993).

[t]he point is that we have not formed that ancient world-it has

formed us. We ingested it as children whole, had its values and

consciousness imprinted on our minds as cultural absolutes long

before we were in fact men and women. We have taken the fairy

tales of childhood with us into maturity, chewed but still lying in

the stomach, as real identity. Between Snow-White and her

heroic prince, our two great fictions, we never did have much of

a chance. At some point, the Great Divide took place: (the boys)

dreamed of every necrophiliac's lust-the innocent, *victimized*

Sleeping Beauty, beauteous lump of ultimate, sleeping good.

Despite ourselves, sometimes knowing, unwilling, unable to do

otherwise, we act out the roles we were taught. (*Woman Hating*

37)

Curiously, this formula does not change in contemporary women-centered

fairy tales. Marina Warner (1994) asks: "[i]f and when women are narrating,

why are the female characters so cruel and the mother so often dead at the

start of the story? Why have women continued to speak at all within this body

of story which defames them so profoundly?" (*From the Beast* 209-210).

Indeed, perhaps naively, one would expect that feminist appropriations of

popular fairy tales would disregard the somewhat tired convention of pitting

women against one another, and instead, offer a new and refreshing plot to

follow. But they do not. Rather, these contemporary tales illustrate the same

themes that exist in traditional fairy tales (ie. traditional male authored and male-centered fairy tales).

My objection is not to woman or women being portrayed as evil. Rather, my dissatisfaction is with the excessive one-dimensionality of evil (or goodness) that is explicitly association with femaleness and, more often than not, with the supernatural. Certainly, this is the case in the traditional fairy tale—for the one-dimensional wicked mother/stepmother—from Basile, to Perrault, to the Grimms' to Walt Disney.[6] Further, one must object to the misogynistic tradition of punishing women who investigate within traditional fairy tales purely because they are curious;[7] after all, men do not suffer as women do for their curious nature in literature.[8] If we can agree that these notions are problematic, then why do women-centered visions of traditional tales engage with the seemingly misogynistic mother/daughter struggle?

Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968), is still one of the most useful tools in discussing the conventions of the folk/fairy tale. Propp himself, in a foreword to *the Morphology* explains:

[. . .] it is possible to make an examination of the forms of the

tale which will be as exact as the morphology of organic

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[6] For a further chronology of fairy tale themes throughout history, see: Marina Warner, *From The Beast to the Blonde: on Fairy Tales and their Tellers.* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994).

[7] For further discussion on women and curiosity in texts, see: Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity.* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996). Other literary examples of women punished for curiosity include the fairy tale *Bluebeard* or the Judaeo-Christian myth of Eve and the apple, as Mulvey notes (60).

[8] Examples include the witch's eventual demise at the hands of Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*, as well as the various princes in fairy tale who win their princess through their investigations of the castle (*Sleeping Beauty*) or the mystery surrounding the woman (*Cinderella* or *Rapunzel*).

formations. If this cannot be affirmed for the tale as a whole, in its full extent, it can be affirmed in any case for the so-called fairy tales, that is, tales in the strictest sense of the word. It is to these tales that this work is devoted. (iii)

Therefore, Propp outlines specific criteria occupied by individual tales, in which he tables a series of vital conventions. Since the appearance of Propp's *Morphology* in English translation, there has been an interest in attempting structural analyses of the various folk genres by others, including the less detailed but still useful work of Axel Olrik. For Olrik, the "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," have similar conventions, to which he adds that the *Sage* (myths, songs, heroic sagas, local legends) must not begin or end abruptly as a matter of "law" consequently termed the Law of Opening. Rather, such tales move from calm to excitement to calm. Moreover, he formulates the *Law of Contrast* in which he claims that there must always be polarization within the tale, working from the protagonist, "to other individuals whose characteristics and actions are determined by the requirements that they be antithetical to those of the protagonist" (136). As we have seen, this is most often depicted in the general sense of the good/bad binary.

There seem to be at least two distinct types of folklore narrative: one is the formal organization described by Propp in which a text follows a chronological order of elements A-Z (or in Propp's case 1-151) and the structure of the tale is delineated in terms of this sequence. The other type follows a less rigid path and rather than follow the ordered "steps", picks and chooses the elements at will. However, while structuralist analysis is a useful

tool, it is only a beginning. Indeed, as Alan Dundes notes, "the form must

ultimately be related to the culture or cultures in which it is found" (Introduction

to *Morphology*). On that note, Dundes asks: to what extent can Propp's

analysis be applied to genres of folklore other than those of folk narrative?

Indeed, cultural patterns are not limited to single aspects of culture, and

rather, manifest themselves in a variety of cultural materials. In this way

Dundes argues that Propp's *Morphology* implies that there can be structural

borrowings as well as content borrowings:

> Propp's *Morphology* may also have important implications for
>
> studies of thinking and learning processes. To what extent is the
>
> structure of the fairy tale related to the structure of the ideal
>
> success story in a culture? [...] and how precisely is fairy tale
>
> structure learned? Does the child unconsciously extrapolate
>
> fairy-tale structure from hearing many individual fairy tales? Do
>
> children become familiar enough with the general nature of fairy-
>
> tale morphology to object to or question a deviation from it by a
>
> storyteller? (xv)

Indeed, as most adults who have narrated fairy tales to children know,

children quickly become familiar enough with the morphology of fairy tales to

object when the narrator strays from the formula. In fact, much of the humor

in modern retellings of fairy-tales (e.g. politically correct fairy tales) is a result

of intentional transgressions by the narrator.[9] But fairy tales are not just for children, as the marketable contemporary versions of such tales have proven. Yet many reworkings of popular tales maintain the morphology of the fairy tale and do not stray from the general formula. On the one hand, this seems likely to be attributable to the fact that contemporary authors do not originate fairy tales or folk tales, rather they merely retell them and elaborate on them. Thus, an author may present a fairy tale from the perspective of the villain, but she does not possess the freedom to simply excise the villain from the story. As Margaret Atwood ironically notes: "[y]ou can wipe your feet on me, twist my motives around all you like, you can dump millstones on my head and drown me in the river, but you can't get me out of the story. I'm the plot, babe, and don't ever forget it" (*Good Bones* 30). Instead, many authors choose to use the inherent strengths of fairy-tales (the fact that they are well known and have already been absorbed into mainstream culture), and then go on to locate gaps, ambiguities, and slippage in these traditional narratives which they use to explore the status of women. In particular these modern retellers give voice to the voiceless women in fairy-tales. Thus, women within many of the women-centered rewrites of fairy tales are still found to be struggling along with their primary persecutors (women) still present and (even if she has become the heroine of the tale), just as evil.

From the second wave feminist writing of poets Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, who explore their own difficult relationships with (and as) mothers and daughters throughout their writing, to the more recent collection

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[9] See James Finn Garner, *Once Upon a More Enlightened Time* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1993); --., *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1994); --.,*The Politically Correct Holiday* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

of short works by Angela Carter, female rivalry is a very real and prominent issue for feminist scholars and critics. Moreover, the fact that women are pitted against each other in literature and in criticism is exemplified by the essentialist and anti-essentialist feminisms of our time:

> [i]n the terminology of its current manifestation, anti-essentialist postmodernism, by theorizing multiple selves, identifications, and instabilities in self, language and world, seeks to explode the rigid boundaries of traditional gender roles and of the potentially claustrophobic rooms an identity politics relies on for personal and political empowerment. (Neely 188)

Similarly, Margaret Atwood's recent essay "If You Can't Say Something Nice Don't Say Anything at All" (2000) advocates the recognition of difference among women:

> [w]omen are not Woman. They come in all shapes, sizes, colours, classes, ages, and degrees of moral rectitude [....] Some of them are wonderful. Some of them are awful. To deny them this is to deny them their humanity and to restrict their area of moral choice to the size of a teacup (32).

While neither Atwood nor Neely is discussing the depiction of women in fairy tales, both reject the notion that there is (or should be) an underlying solidarity

among women. Rather, they argue for individuality among women and their experiences. Such "minimizing" arguments are possible feminist reasons for continuing to pit women against women in literature. Indeed, if rounded three-dimensional characterization of women is a goal of the women-centered text, then a reflection of real experience is also necessary. As Atwood says, "some of them are wonderful. Some of them are awful" (32).

Theoretical Models for Fairy Tales

In *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976), Bruno Bettelheim offers a psychoanalytic approach to the fairy tale in an attempt to explain or excuse the overt misogyny of hurtful or angry relationships between women. Further to the structural analysis offered by Vladamir Propp and others, Bettelheim claims that "to the child, and to the adult who, like Socrates, knows that there is still a child in the wisest of us, fairy tales reveal truths about mankind and oneself" (66). Pivoting his analysis on the psyche of the child, Bettelheim claims that the fairy tale is a crucial factor in a child's healthy learning process (apparently, despite whatever misogynist messages are made abundantly clear to the easily influenced child). "The child, as he develops, must learn step by step to understand himself better; with this he becomes more able to understand others, and eventually can relate to them in ways which are mutually satisfying and meaningful" (3). For Bettelheim then, the presence of the fairy tale in a child's life is both essential and productive as the child finds meaning through the tales that offer him/her a metanarrative or model of why life is the way it is. He

uses several examples throughout the text, one of which (of particular interest to this thesis) is the transformation or fantasy of the wicked stepmother.

Bettelheim's theory rests on the 'practical' notion that splitting the image of the mother into two keeps her uncontaminated for the child. He offers that children are often confused when a mother (or motherly figure) is sometimes nurturing and other times heavy-handed, using the example of a grandmother who is in the one instance loving and in the next angry at the child for bed wetting. For the child then, the fantasy of the wicked stepmother is a logical solution to a relationship that seems too difficult to understand:

> [u]nable to see any congruence between the different
> manifestations, the child truly experiences [... the mother figure]
> as two separate entities--the loving and the threatening. She is
> indeed Grandma *and* the wolf. By dividing her up [....] the child
> can preserve his image of the good grandmother [...] the wolf is
> a passing manifestation--Grandma will return triumphant. (67)

After all, Bettelheim claims, the young child experiences the world in these binary terms: "either entirely blissful or an unmitigated hell" (69), and as such, the fairy tale is an essential learning process for them. The rest of Bettelheim's work follows the same theoretical framework. He examines such psychological motifs as "the Importance of Externalization", "Bringing Order to Chaos", "Achieving Integration", and "Pleasure Principle versus Reality Principle"-- all of which deal specifically with both child development and interaction with the fairy tale. Thus, Bettelheim concludes that if a witch that is

created in a child's anxious fantasy haunts them, then a witch who can be

outsmarted (*Hansel and Gretel*) or punished (*Snow White*) is one that a child

can come to terms with:

> [a]s long as children continue to believe in witches-they always
>
> have and always will, up to the age when they no longer are
>
> compelled to give their formless apprehensions human like
>
> appearance-they need to be told stories in which children, by
>
> being ingenious, rid themselves of these persecuting figures of
>
> their imagination. (166)

Thus having seemingly 'solved' this issue for children, Bettelheim excuses the

misogyny of the fairy tale, claiming that because children already have such

perceptions, it is not problematic to reinforce them through the good/bad

depiction of women in children's stories.

Noting Bettelheim's extensive work in psychoanalytic theories of the

fairy tale, feminist author and scholar Marina Warner, in *From the Beast to the*

Blonde (1994), chronicles the progression of fairy tales throughout history.

Warner notes the distinct misogyny of women, especially the angry

relationships portrayed between mothers/stepmothers and daughters within

the fairy tale. Like many other feminist scholars, Warner finds Bettelheim's

work highly problematic, observing that,

> [t]he bad mother has become an inevitable, even required
>
> ingredient in fantasy, and hatred of her a legitimate, applauded

stratagem of psychic survival. Bettelheim's theory has

contributed to the continuing absence of good mothers from fairy

tales in all kinds of media, and to a dangerous degree which

itself mirrors current prejudices and reinforces them. His

argument [...] has made such behavior seem natural, even

intrinsic to the mother-child relationship. It has even helped to

ratify the expectation of strife as healthy and the resulting hatred

as therapeutic. (212-213)

Thus disregarding most of Bettelheim's theory, Warner approaches the fairy

tale from both an historical and economic perspective, searching for a more

fulfilling explanation of the mother/daughter and woman against woman

phenomenon. Drawing on a number of statistical and historical documents, as

well as countless versions of fairy tales throughout the centuries, Warner

argues that it is possible that the portrait of the tyrant mother figure is meant

to conceal her own vulnerability. She further maintains that the villainous

mothers of fairy tale can be excused for their malicious maltreatment of

daughters and stepdaughters (227):

[a] storyteller invites the audience to sympathize with the heroine;

with Cinderella, with Beauty, with Snow White: she deals

death—physical and moral—to the mother of the heroine [....]

mothers order daughters to cut off their toes to please the prince

[....] they die and leave them to the mercies of the wicked. She

is killing off the mother, replacing her, and can be aligned with

the mother-in-law who talks to her grandchildren, and claims

them for her own, overlooking, disparaging, undoing the work of

her son's wife, their mother, and hoping she will not end in the

poorhouse. Yet, even as the voice of the fairy tale murders the

mother who is her rival for the children, she remembers how she

herself was maltreated [...] (239-40)

In other words, throughout history real women have dealt with many of the

issues in fairy tales. Warner reminds the reader that women in previous

centuries often died in childbirth and left their children to be raised by new

mothers, step-mothers or mothers-in-law. As a result, many women

remarried, bringing their children with them whilst being expected to raise their

new husband's children. Offering such 'real life' scenarios as the original

archetype of the wicked stepmother, Warner insists that, historically,

maintaining a position in the patrilineal household was essential, real and not

at all 'fairy tale'.

There seem to me to be two crucial elements missing from both

Bettelheim and Warner's analysis of the fairy tale. First, neither author

discusses the good/bad dichotomy of male characters or, indeed, the lack of

human male characters in fairy tales. Indeed, (human) male characters in

fairy tales are inevitably good, and very rarely purposefully malicious.[10] Yet,

existing in the periphery of the narrative and functioning mainly to 'save', the

male character has a significant presence in the fairy tale, albeit not a physical

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[10] Hyper-masculine characters such as giants or the barbarous Blue Beard are created purposefully to mask human qualities; arguably, male characters in fairy tales can only be 'evil' if they are classed as non-human.

one.[11] Second, in the fairy tales as we know them, the evil women (mothers, step-mothers and witches) do not have a voice from which to begin analysis. Traditional fairy tales, the ones western readers have been raised on and the ones that Walt Disney has seen fit to turn into motion pictures, depict one-dimensional characters of evil women.[12] There is virtually no plot development devoted to explain the reasons for the stepmothers' maltreatment of the heroines. The stepmother is voiceless, timeless, malicious and mute—a silent vehicle for rage and wrong doings for no reason other than her a priori 'badness' (and consequently her femaleness). Thus, while we may very well applaud various explanations of historical and economical reasons for the anxiety of the real life stepmother, or accept the psychoanalytical reasons for depicting her badness, there is not enough characterization in the tales as they exist today to posit such claims. Instead, we are left with the disturbing one-dimensional images that the Grimms' and Disney portray. I suggest that it is to both the Grimm and Disney tales and the feminist revisions that work from these tales, that we must look for answers. What I hope to illustrate is that while traditional fairy tales present one-dimensional images of good and bad women, women-centered versions of these same tales fill in the gaps and locate a spatial resistance for female characters. Further, I submit that for a contemporary audience, it is not the

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[11] The significant presence of the physically absent male character is discussed in more detail shortly. See also: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination.* (New Haven London: Yale UP, 1984).

[12] Warner's research shows that the fairy tales we know as 'traditional' (ie Grimm) are not original and moreover that many of them date as far back as A.D. 865.

Grimm or Disney fairy tale that points back to the historical representation of women that Warner describes, but the women-centered fairy tale.

The Feminist Revision of the Fairy Tale: Cinderella

Interestingly, traditional fairy tales assume that the reader or listener of the tale will unproblematically identify with the heroine of the story. Thus, we are meant to feel sympathy for the helpless Snow White, the comatose Sleeping Beauty and the down-on-her-luck Cinderella. Equally, we are meant to loathe the wicked stepmothers, interfering witches and ugly stepsisters that pursue and persecute our beloved heroines. However, the women-centered fairy tale, like the fantastic women-centered text, works to undo these assumptions. Thus, as we have seen in previous chapters, there is a change in the role with which we identify. We move from empathizing with the traditional heroine to identifying with the traditional villain; we witness the deconstruction of the villain, or we see the traditional heroine through new eyes.

The mother/daughter relationship plays a pivotal role in Gregory Maguire's revision of the Cinderella story, *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* (1998) as he resituates the heroine of the novel and shifts the focus from Cinderella to the Ugly Stepsister.[13] The novel's plot hinges not just on the relationship between the Stepmother and Cinderella, but on the relationship between Cinderella and her natural mother; Maguire provides a historical background for the women within the text offering particular consideration for

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[13] The uppercase is employed here because "Ugly Stepsister" has thus far traditionally been the name of the girl.

their social and economical struggles. Moreover, while Angela Carter has made the point that Cinderella "is her mother's daughter. That is all we know. It is the stepmother, who names her Ashputtle[14], as a joke, and, in doing so, wipes out her real name, whatever that is, banishes her from the family"("Ashputtle" 391), Maguire goes further. Indeed, the naming of the nameless one-dimensional women is an important element in the women-centered text.[15] Thus, while Carter notes that Ashputtle's real name has disappeared into history, Maguire establishes the names and characters of the othered women of the Cinderella story—the natural mother, the step-mother and her ugly stepdaughters. Once named, these women then have a voice with which to speak; they become individuals in time and place, individuals with their own experience.

Confessions begins with a mother and her daughters arriving from England by ship to Holland.[16] The mother's husband has died, leaving the family both homeless and penniless; they return to the mother's homeland in search of shelter and work:

> [t]he woman is bad-tempered because she's terrified. The last
> of her coin has gone to pay the passage. For two days, only the

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[14] Clearly it was the Grimm's who bestowed the name upon the girl in their story *Aschenputtle.* Here, however, Carter gives credit to the step-mother.

[15] The reader will recall that Maguire also effectively uses this technique in *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West,* where the witch is named Elphaba.

[16] While Holland may seem an unlikely location for the Cinderella story, Maguire includes the following disclaimer in the novel's prelude to excuse the liberties he has taken: "[b]less the artists who save these things for us. Don't fault their memory or their choice of subject [....] Indeed, were Cinderling to return from the dead, would she even recognize herself, in any portrait on a wall, in a figure painted on a plate, in any nursery game or fireside story?" (Preface).

charity of fellow travelers has kept her and her girls from hunger

[....] The mother has had to turn her face from it. Shame has a

dreadful smell. So mother and daughters stumble [....] (3)

While we later learn that the mother, named Margarethe, correlates to the

traditional wicked stepmother and the daughters, named Iris and Ruth are the

traditionally known Ugly step sisters, here, these women are poignantly not

individuals. Rather, they are "mother" and "daughters", struggling in the face

of adversity, poor and hungry, nameless and faceless just as many other

nameless mothers and daughters have struggled. Choosing to not name

Margarethe and her daughters for this short time, Maguire does not reduce

the value of their experience; rather, briefly, he connects them with the reader.

For a moment, Margarethe and her homeless daughters could be anyone's

mother and sisters whose geography has the power to severely affect their

emotions and well being.

As a consequence of their frightening social predicament, Margarethe

is short tempered with her daughters. They have sailed to Holland to beg pity

from their relatives; they have left behind the only home they have ever

known. However, upon discovering her family (and consequently her hope of

security and a home) is dead, Margarethe pleads with passing people for a

warm place to sleep, any kind of domestic employment, or a crust of bread for

her children. But she is met with hostility: "the merchants lob wilting lettuce at

her" (13); "[a] maid splashes a bucket of dirty water on the cobbles;

Margarethe has to leap back to keep from a dunking" (13). Margarethe is a

mother alone, and Maguire makes a point of illustrating the burden she carries:

> "[h]aven't I suffered enough?—with one of them [the daughters] gibbering and staggering like a drunken farmer on market day [....] and the other plain as a board, an affront to the eye? Why did God deny me sons, who might have been a comfort to a mother in distress? If we die on the streets of this town, for your coldness the hand of God will visit pestilence upon you!" (14-15)

Maguire emphasizes that Margarethe is a single mother without the benefit of husband or son to depend on. Further, her daughters are made more burdensome by the fact that they are unsuitable for marriage: one is ugly, the other is disabled. Eventually Margarethe and her daughters find shelter and work in the home of a local painter, ironically referred to as "the Master" throughout the novel; the Master is called such because he refuses to be named. He is disempowered within the story; it is not, after all, his story.

It is through her association with the Master that Margarethe and her daughters meet and come to work for the van den Meer family. The time spent with the van den Meer family highlights the relationship between ugliness and cruelty existing between Margarethe and her daughters. Moreover, this harshness is juxtaposed by the overly protective and nurturing relationship found between the beautiful Clara (Cinderella) and her (biological) mother Henrika van den Meer.

As the title *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* suggests, Maguire's novel explores the relationship between beauty and ugliness. Clara is said to be a legendary perfect child, "as perfect as a tulip" (106); the most beautiful creature in all the land: "Clara is almost like a ghost, a lambent thing with one hand out against the wall, a shimmeringness in the gloom, like a candle in a midnight forest. She is stunning to look at, with her immaculate skin and her dried wheat hair" (88). In contrast, Iris and Ruth (the Stepsisters) are homely girls, without physical beauty. However, beauty is the source of young Clara's misery. Her mother and father repeatedly allow Clara to be objectified, to be gazed upon and to be a prisoner in her own home. As the old crone of the story tells the children: "[b]eauty has consequence, but I'm ugly as sin, so I don't care" (164). Clara's mother, afraid for her daughters' safety, insists that Clara be confined by the space of the estate, unable to leave the grounds. Comforting herself by pretending to be a changeling that cannot leave her house for fear of safety, Clara tells Iris:

> "I am kept, for my own health and good, merely here; in the
> pretty prison house, with this small room outside adjacent to it [.
> . . .] the same old bushes. Soon there will be enough dead
> leaves to have a fire, and then smoke will be a rope up into the
> sky. That's mine. It's all I have." (93-94)
> "Mama brings the world in to me." (134)

The choice of language within the text points to the narratives awareness of space and place: Clara's house is a 'prison', her small room bordering this

confined jail. Her mother brings the world to her yet she is never able to experience it for herself. Clara's beauty is her prison and her mother keeps her 'safely' locked within its artifice. Similarly, ugliness or plainness is the cause of Iris's misery and is directly linked to the mother. Margarethe is quick to remind her children that they will never marry because of their ugliness. They are, and will always be, a financial burden to their mother.

Margarethe and her daughters move into the van den Meer home so that Iris, bought like a toy (76) by Clara's father, can teach Clara languages. The obsessive relationship between the financially comfortable Clara and Henrika is in contrast to the distant and often cruel relationship between the struggling Margarethe and her daughters. An ambitious woman, Margarethe detests the time she has spent being poor and hungry with two young daughters to care for. Vowing she will never know such hardship again, Margarethe begins her task of replacing Henrika van den Meer as lady of the house: "[t]wo dogs and one bone will rarely agree" (103). The rest of the story, in terms of plot, is similar to the traditional tale, with some notable changes. Maguire's story is about women:

> [m]other and daughter labor over the carcass, removing
> unwanted extremities, bones, organs. Margarethe shows Iris
> how to [...] turn a dead animal into a sumptuous meal. After a
> while, Henrika pads back into the kitchen. They all work side by
> side without speaking, selecting the most perfect fruits [...] for
> the hour is approaching when [the painting of Clara ...] will be
> unveiled for the ravenous merchants. (115-116)

Henrika van den Meer is a powerful woman, richer than her husband and in charge of the family fortune. Margarethe notices this immediately:

> Henrika's portrait, not her husband's, take pride of place in the reception room. The lady in yellow and black silk, a bumblebee humming to herself. The queen of the family hive [...] The house, whole and entire, was part of Henrika's dowry. "If the marriage should dissolve, she has the right to appeal to the law to reclaim all her assets," says Margarethe incredulously. "The wealth of this marriage rests on what she inherited from her father." (83-84)

Thus, "[a]lthough Henrika wears a guise of pretty deference, she acquiesces to no one, least of all her husband" (90). But even Henrika is powerless to protect her daughter from the 'ravenous' gaze of the businessmen who will devour the painting of the beautiful Clara, holding the tulips for which her father hopes to make marketable for profit. She is "caught on the canvass to sell flowers" (121). Her image is a commodity to be possessed and used when necessary.

It is in the art of painting, of really looking and seeing that the mother against daughter phenomenon begins its resolution. For the Master has a unique obsession with painting both the beautiful and the grotesque, keeping small collections of each extreme in two separate rooms. Thus he decides he wants to paint Iris:

Iris isn't sure she wants to be drawn [....] Tears start in her eyes
[...] Her poor stick self isn't fit for it [....] "He wants beauty," says
Iris, rubbing her nose. "He has a hound, and he wants beauty."
Margarethe's expression is blank. At last she says, "Then be
beauty. Make-believe it." (36-38)

When the painting is done, Iris is devastated to see her severe form on
canvas:

"[i]t is severe, and true," says Margarethe. "Iris is plain to look
at. Painfully plain. Don't exaggerate her physical virtues [...] it
does no good in the end. She must accept it like the rest of us
[....] But the eyes are flat, lacking intelligence; the lips pursed,
practicing resentment; the brows furrowed, the chin weak, the
nose large. It is entirely Iris, or the Iris that she can guess at
when she catches her own image in mirror or puddle or window
glass. But [...] it isn't the Iris who tends to Ruth when her
mother has had enough. It is another Iris, a smaller one,
secured on canvas thanks to ivory, olive, and smudged umber.
(50-51)

The Master's physical separation of the grotesque and the exquisite into the
two rooms in his house means that the both the portraits and the characters of
Clara and Iris are significantly separate and increasingly different. But the two

girls are equally imprisoned by their mother's conceptions of physical beauty. Both girls are trapped by the outer shell called the body and equally distressed by the cages of life. As Margarethe tells Iris:

"[i]f Ruth is trapped by her afflictions, to hobble and bawl through all her days, Clara is trapped as well. She's expected to be endlessly docile. Who knows why—because she's so attractive? We're all in our own prisons, I suppose, but Clara's is made worse for her by the fears and strengths of her mother. And maybe by her father's weakness" [. . .] "There was always a window. You can endure any sort of prison if you can apprehend a window in the dark." (114-115)

"[...] you know nothing of how we women are imprisoned in our lives, but there *are* ways to determine the sentence we must serve." (174)

Thus, when Henrika van den Meer dies in childbirth (assisted somewhat by Margarethe), Maguire notes:

[n]otice, notice; let noticing take the place of screaming. Notice Margarethe, doing the act of charity for the bewildered van den Meer [....] Notice Ruth, and how she is left out of this [....] Notice Ruth, with her hands twisting on her knees, as if by dint of force she might fix her legs properly at last and make

them work like legs. . . Notice Clara, the girl of the moment,

caught in all this attention and hating it [....] Notice the Master

and Caspar, and how bothered they both are, despite their

masculine strength. (144-145)

The deliberate repetition of the word *notice* works to illustrate the lack of

seeing and looking that has taken place within the narrative until this point.

From here, there is a marked increase in *noticing* things and people that have

been invisible and unnoticeable thus far. New boundaries are quickly drawn:

Margarethe becomes the mistress of the house, Clara is reluctantly released

from her quarantine, and Iris begins to draw and paint and wonders "If [she]

were to paint Margarethe, what would she notice?" (157):

"[s]he is a witch," says Iris, but it isn't as if that is what she truly

thinks—it's merely a notion to venture upon the air, and to

consider how such a sentence sounds. Does speaking a

dubious thing make it more true? How shallow the words are

really—*She is a witch*. One might as well say, *She is a mother*,

thinks Iris; that about covers the same terrain, doesn't it? [italics

in original] (296).

There is a resolution between mother and daughter in the novel that occurs

when Iris realizes that mothers are not magically good or bad. They are

women. Mother is merely a label, thrust upon a woman, with all the

expectations that the label brings with it. And one might as well say 'she is a

witch'-- indeed, both labels are equally thrust upon women; both labels are capable of occupying the 'same terrain'. This similar topography, as Iris notes, associates maternity with the supernatural.

In making noticing the dominant theme in the novel, Maguire illustrates the distinct lack of notice that women have received in traditional tales; they are either witches or mothers, and the distinction, as noted above, is often ambiguous. Clara does get her prince in the end, but not before learning to break free from the cage of beauty which dominates most of her life (361). Iris learns to paint and draw those things that are less obvious to the naked eye, accepting her plainness as a lesser burden than Clara's beauty. To be sure, Margarethe becomes a wicked woman but only after she has struggled with a brutal poverty which becomes her ultimate prison in the end. And, Ruth, whom everyone has assumed to be not just physically but mentally challenged throughout the novel, reveals herself as the narrator, a woman who may have been silent, but who always listened (360). Maguire successfully works to dismantle the preferred image of woman as beautiful, of step-mother as evil, of daughter as passive victim. But other feminist revisions of the *Cinderella* story accomplish a similar task with more anger than Maguire.

A much harsher and certainly unsanitized treatment of the *Cinderella* story can be found in Angela Carter's "Ashputtle or The Mother's Ghost" (1993;1995). A tale with disturbing gendered images, Carter's conception is assaulting as it concentrates, in particular, on the mother/daughter relationship. Marina Warner influentially notes that "the misogyny of fairy tales engages women as participants, not just targets; the antagonisms and

sufferings the stories recounted connect to the world of female authority as well as experience" (208). Angela Carter acknowledges this participation making it clear that the Cinderella story is really always the story of her mother as she shares in her daughters experience, even from beyond the grave (390). However, Carter's commentary on the relationship between women also clearly illustrates that women in fairy tales, especially daughters, are also helpless targets:

> [...] the girls, all three, are animated solely by the wills of their
> mothers. Even if Ashputtle's mother dies at the beginning of the
> story, her status as one of the dead only makes her position
> more authoritative. The mother's ghost dominates the narrative
> and is, in a real sense, the motive centre, the event that makes
> all the other events happen. (391)

Moreover, in her continued analysis and consequent criticism of the tale, she reminds the reader that:

> [t]he entire drama concerns only women, takes place almost
> exclusively among women, is a fight between two groups of
> women-- in the right-hand corner, Ashputtle and her mother; in
> the left-hand corner, the stepmother and *her* daughters, of
> whom the father is unacknowledged but all the same is
> predicated by both textual and biological necessity. (390)

Like Maguire, Carter also acknowledges an economic validity in the behavior of women in her fiction. Yet she fiercely attacks the ritual humiliation of the woman and the mutilation of her daughters. In a truly gruesome retelling of the glass slipper circumstances, Carter ironically illustrates the extreme portrayal of bad women:

> [b]randishing the carving the knife, the woman bears down on her child, who is as distraught as if she had not been a girl but a boy and the old woman was after a more essential portion than a toe. 'No!' she screams. 'Mother! No! Not the knife!' But off it comes, all the same, and she throws it in the fire, among the ashes, where Ashputtle finds it, wonders at it, and feels both awe and fear at the phenomenon of mother love. Mother love which winds about these daughters like a shroud. (393)

> So now Ashputtle must put her foot into the hideous receptacle, this open wound, still slick and warm as it is, for nothing in any of the many texts of this tale suggests the prince washed the shoe out between the fittings. It was an ordeal in itself to put a naked foot into the bloody shoe, but her mother, the turtle dove, urged her to do so in a soft, cooing croon that could not be denied [....] Her foot fits the shoe like a corpse fits the coffin! (394)

Carter's bloody description is reminiscent of Frida Kahlo's artistic representations of women's miscarriages. Both seem a "provocative breach of the divide between public and private realms [that] expose the limits of what can be spoken within hegemonic culture" (Lomas 5). Like Kahlo's self reflective images of birth, life and death, Carter's bloody slipper revision situates the mother and daughter in an suffocating cycle of both 'awe' and 'fear'. Equally aggressive, Sherri Tepper's account of the glass slipper reads as a horror tale when Cinderella's mother narrates the following circumstances:

"[w]e were waiting for Elly to appear when we heard the scream. Gloriana's voice. Lydia and I ran. We found Gloriana in the kitchen, the great meat cleaver still in her hand, her foot cut half through and blood spurting in all directions. Gloriana had done it herself. In the corner, Elly watched with a remote smile. 'What did you do?' I hissed at her.

'I just told her her feet were too big,' Elly said indifferently. 'That they might fit if she cut them in half' [....] Gloriana was not a pleasant girl. She was a great cow of a girl, with a cow's mute and intransigent hungers. She had little intelligence. Still, there was something monstrously tragical about the manner of her death, not the least that it has shown me what my daughter is. Of the two of them, Elly had been the more brutish. (*Beauty* 290-291)

The imagery, in both Carter and Tepper, is raw, fierce, and of course, strongly gendered. Thus, Ashputtle must slip her metaphorically phallic foot into the menstrual shoe, all the while at the encouragement of her 'loving' mother, whilst a vicious Cinderella malevolently encourages her stepsister to hack off enough of her foot that she should lose so much blood that she die. Carter ends her tale by illustrating the (menstrually) cyclical spatial relationship of mothers and daughters: ' I stepped into *my* mother's coffin when I was your age' (396). Indeed, "Carter's insistence that our self-images are concocted from a powerful medley of already determined and determining projections and reflections [...] underlies her view of myth" (Sellers 108). Further, the mother's statement in Carter's tale and the (mother's) narrated horror in Tepper's tale resituate each mother-- she too was once a daughter before stepping into the confining and frightening space of her own mother's coffin. This cyclical relationship between mother and daughter is the main cause of conflict, jealousy, sacrifice and endearment in many texts; at once repelling and enticing, the relationship between mother and daughter, as well as the cycle between women as daughters and mothers, is integrally spatial.

While Carter is both extreme and assaulting in her portrayal of the *Cinderella* tale, others have taken a lighter, but still bitter tone, whilst acknowledging the marginalized women of fairy tale. In Margaret Atwood's collection of prose poems *Good Bones* (1993; 2001), which she says she wrote because "bad women get a bad rap," she briefly, but brilliantly, gives voice to *Cinderella's* Ugly Stepsister, and more generically to the Stepmothers

and witches of fairy tales in a story called "The Unpopular Gals".[17]   Of the

Ugly Stepsister Atwood writes:

> [e]veryone gets a turn, and now it's mine. Or so they used to tell
>
> us in kindergarten. It's not really true. Some get more turns
>
> than others, and I've never had a turn, not one! I hardly know
>
> how to say *I*, or *mine*; I've always been *she, her, that one,* for so
>
> long.
>
> I haven't even been given a name; I was always just the *ugly*
>
> *stepsister*; put the stress on *ugly* [....] (*Good Bones* 25)

Emphasizing the dependence women have on one another throughout the

plot of the fairy tale, Atwood effectively isolates the lonely nature of the Ugly

stepsister who was never given a name and who never had a voice. As we

have already seen in chapters three and four, here personal pronouns and the

privilege awarded to 'I' and 'we' are significant to the identity (or lack of

identity) for this woman. She continues:

> As for the prince, you think I didn't love him? I loved him more
>
> than she did; I loved him more than anything. Enough to cut off
>
> my foot. Enough to murder [....] (26)

---

[17] An oral reading of Good Bones at Literatures of the Common Wealth, Manchester, UK.
(May 2002).

But all my love ever came to was a bad end. Red-hot shoes,

barrels studded with nails. That's what it feels like, unrequited

love.

She had a baby too. I was never allowed.

Everything you've ever wanted, I wanted also. (26-27)

And of the Evil Stepmother Atwood writes:

[t]he thing about those good daughters is, they're so *good*.

Obedient and passive. Sniveling, I might add. No get-up-an-go.

What would become of them if it weren't for me? Nothing, that's

what [….] I stir things up, I get things moving. 'Go play in the

traffic,' I say to them. 'Put on this paper dress and look for

strawberries in the snow.' It's perverse but it works. All they

have to do is smile and say hello and do a little more

housework, for some gnomes or nice ladies or whatever, and

bingo, they get the king's son and the palace, and no more

dishpan hands.

Whereas all I get is the blame.

God knows all about it. No Devil, no Fall, no Redemption.

Grade Two arithmetic. You can wipe your feet on me, twist my

motives around all you like, you can dump millstones on my

head and drown me in the river, but you can't get me out of the

story. I'm the plot, babe, and don't ever forget it. (29-30).

Using her characteristic biting irony, Atwood addresses two very important motifs within the fairy tale: woman pitted against woman, and the significant role of the villainous woman. In her treatment of the former motif, Atwood, crucially, does not discuss the mother/daughter relationship but rather, the sister/stepsister relationship. Like Maguire, she ponders on the thoughts of this ugly stepsister, but relates them directly to the other, less considered woman-against-woman theme in the tale-- that between Cinderella and her stepsister.

In the second segment, Atwood addresses the female villain from an alternate perspective. She suggests that the stepmother, is the only active agent within the fairy tale plot. Thus, for Atwood, the battle of woman-against-woman is also the battle of the narrative. Villainy has a new face in these tales (both Carter's and Atwood's) and it is at least partially attributed to the (technically) absent father:

[i]t's true, there are never any evil stepfathers. Only a bunch of

lily-livered widowers, who let me get away with murder vis-á-vis

their daughters. Where are they when I'm making those girls

drudge in the kitchen, or sending them out into the blizzard in

paper dresses? Working late at the office. Passing the buck.

Men! But if you think they knew nothing about it, you're crazy.

(*Good Bones* 28-29)

In the drama between two female families in opposition to one another because of their rivalry over men (husband/father, husband/son), the men seem no more than passive victims of their fancy, yet their significance is absolute because it is ('a rich man', 'a king's son') economic." (Carter 390)

Interestingly, this is, of course, Warner's pivotal point as she reminds us that economic strife was historically a realistic problem faced by women. Like Gilbert and Gubar, Carter and Atwood critique the absentee father: "[h]e [the father] is the invisible link that binds both sets of mothers and daughters in their violent equation" (Carter 391) and cite his patriarchal absence/presence as the causal factor in pitting women against each other. These feminist revisions of the *Cinderella* tale make no apology for their anger. They are quick to point out that the father, the faceless nameless man for whom all of this nonsense occurs, is essentially invisible. But economically, he is essential to the well being and indeed the survival of the women and so his presence can never be wholly ignored.

Sleeping Beauty

In *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Marina Warner argues convincingly that:

[t]he experiences these stories [fairy tales] recount are remembered, lived experiences of women, not fairytale concoctions from the depths of the psyche; they are rooted in

the social, legal and economic history of marriage and the

family, and they have all the stark actuality of the real and the

power real life has to bite into the psyche and etch its design

[....] you can hear vibrating in them the tensions, the insecurity,

jealousy and rage of both mothers-in-law against their

daughters-in-law and vice versa, as well as the vulnerability of

children from different marriages. (238)[18]

Warner's analysis pivots on the knowledge of intense research and centuries

of evolving tales of which contemporary readers have little (if any) knowledge.

As previously argued, the western fairy tale shows us little evidence of such

historical, economic or social 'truths'.   However, women-centered revisions of

traditional tales do show such evidence as they develop and contribute to an

understanding of the difficult relationship between women and the power

struggles that ensue among women.

Based on the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty,* Sheri Tepper's *Beauty* (1991)

reinterprets the traditional tale and follows the character Beauty from her

adolescence to her old age. A women-centered feminist novel, Tepper's story

intertwines its fantastical social concerns and themes with extra-textual issues

of importance. The character Beauty travels between a dystopian 21st century

and her own 13th century searching for both answers to her difficult life and

the presence of her natural mother. The destruction of nature and the

environment is a significant theme within the novel. Moreover, as we shall

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[18] It should be noted that Warner uses mother-in-law interchangeably with step-mother, based on her research which shows that the original word made no differentiation in English, French and German.

see, this struggle between utopian and dystopian nature is juxtaposed with the good/bad binaries reflected in the mother/daughter relationships in *Beauty*.

The relationship between mothers and daughters is the prevailing theme within Tepper's novel. It is in the search for her mother that Beauty's curious adventure begins and in the complications with mother/daughter relationships between various characters that the story repeats its patterns. Beauty is raised by her aunts and often absent father. Consequently, she longs for the mother she never knew. Moreover, when her father makes steps to remarry Beauty is unhappy and exaggerates her dislike for her new stepmother (as is fitting for all fairy tales). Further, the novel embellishes the relationship between Beauty and her stepmother. We learn that the step-mother is a woman who is financially destitute and being forced, ironically, by her own mother, to marry the aged Duke in order to secure her (and her mother's) financial future. While Beauty's new stepmother does not have children of her own, she is fearful of Beauty's relationship with her father, and worried that Beauty will inherit the Duke's property after his inevitable (close) death.

It is in this uncomfortable relationship with her new step-mother that Beauty becomes territorial about her living space within the estate. Sibylla (the new mother) decides that she herself must have the rooms closest to the kitchen—the rooms Beauty has occupied since she was a child. Initially Beauty refuses to give up her private space within the home, but eventually she moves to the tower rooms once occupied by her natural mother before

her mysterious disappearance. As she contemplates her mother's absence, Beauty discovers a message from her mother:

> [t]his afternoon I saw that a shadow on the chimney piece looked exactly like a face. One of the stones was a nose. I went over and stroked it, watching the shadow of my hand, feeling the nose shake a little. The stone was loose [....] It was only a thin piece shaped to fit into the front of a little space. And behind the stone was a box. (35)

After discovering the magic box from her mother, and the letter explaining that she (her mother) is a faery and has returned to her homeland where she hopes Beauty will join her, Beauty begins to question the sanity of her mother, not unlike the hesitation quality called for by Todorov.[19] Significantly, Beauty's doubts acknowledge the spatial significance of madness:

> [m]ama, however lovely, might not have had all her wits about her [....] It would also explain papa's locking her in the tower, since such is known to be the fate of madwomen and madmen whenever madness and towers occur in appropriate contiguity. Towers, or, in a pinch, attics. (40)

---

[19] Refer back to chapter one for discussion of Todorov's claim that hesitation is the more significant criterion of true Fantasy.

Disregarding the notion that her mother is insane, Beauty decides to embark on the journey to find her mother, leaving behind her father and her stepmother.

Beauty makes several attempts to find her mother, without success. As the novel progresses, we learn that in addition to a difficult relationship with her maternal mother, Beauty has her own child whom she abandons. Beauty leaves her daughter to go, again, in search of her own mother. However, although Beauty is successful in her search this time, she discovers that the lost years cannot be recaptured and her feelings of rejection are renewed, most notably when the notion of seeing and looking is addressed within the text:

> [w]hen one eats fairy fruit, one sees it as glorious, lovely, utterly beyond compare. Since I had eaten no fairy fruit prior to arrival, however, my first glimpse of it was disappointing. It looked rather like a waste of moorland with some pigpens and hovels scattered here and there. The moment we arrived, Mama darted away into the bushes [....] Mama emerged from the shrubbery with a handful of berries which she thrust upon me, urging me to eat them all as quickly as possible. While I did so, she gathered others for herself. She chewed them as though famished, eyes rolled up, jaws working furiously. It was an astonishing sight which kept my eyes fixed on her for several minutes. When I look at my surroundings again, I found myself in true Ylles. Parkland had replaced moorland; castle stood

where the hovels had been, and over all stretched a sky of late-

evening blue spangled with early stars [....] though I saw it all

quite clearly, Mama was not content until she had uprooted a

small, hairy-stemmed plant and rubbed the juice of its root into

my eyes. It stung horribly for a time, but when the pain

vanished, my eyesight was like that of a falcon. (213-214)

Beauty's mother tries furiously to control her daughter's ability to see the land

of Fairy. She wants her to see it as she sees it herself. However, Fairy cannot

be 'seen' with human vision. One must look more than once, and for Beauty,

she cannot help but be conscious of looking; yet looking, through her root-

rubbed eyes, reveals only an illusion of 'truth'. Eventually, Beauty realizes

that she is different from her mother and returns to the thirteenth century and

to her daughter, Elly (of whom the story Cinderella will be told in the twentieth

century). Unable to be the mother Elly needs, Beauty poses as Elly's rich

aunt, arranging for her to marry a prince in much of the same way that the

fairy tale *Cinderella* recounts. Elly marries and bears a daughter, Snowdrop

(or Snow White), but dies in childbirth, leaving her motherless.

The recurring imagery of motherless daughters and troubled mothers

within the novel reflects what is and has been, as Warner suggests, a real life

economic and social concern for women historically. Unlike the traditional

tales that simply ignore the biological dead mother of the fairy tale, Tepper's

Beauty centers on the loss of Beauty's maternal mother and her life long

search to find and know the woman. Moreover, the novel's emphasis on a

pattern of motherhood and surrogate motherhood illustrates a profound

concern for the contemporary audience that is highly familiar with single mothers and broken families.

Mothers and Daughters

Today, traditional fairy tales are as much a part of our popular culture as the women-centered revisions (and films) that they have influenced. The Grimms' collection of fairy tales became known throughout Europe and North America within a few decades of its first publication, in 2 volumes (1812 and 1815) and long before the deaths of Wilheim in 1859 and Jacob in 1863.[20] In the twentieth century, Walt Disney's film versions of the fairy tales have significantly added to our familiarity with their stories. Contemporary enthusiasm for fantastic stories of almost every variation include major references to the fairy tale conventions found in the Grimm stories. The jealous stepmother in their (and subsequent) stories gave rise to the suggestion that women who do not have children of their own are incompetent in some fundamental way; the suggestion is that real mothers would not commit such atrocities. Countless examples abound: the stepmother in *Hansel and Gretel* is jealous and resentful of the children because they cannot afford to support them and they are an added hardship; in *Cinderella*

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[20] "The Grimms' first collection of folktales was not published during their lifetime. It was a manuscript containing 53 stories, some written out in detail, others sketched in brief outline form. In December 1810 they submitted this collection to Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim for inclusion in a planned third volume to their successful collection of folk poetry entitled *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Magic Horn, 3 volumes, 1806, 1808, 1808), which was to be dedicated to folktales. This fairy-tale volume never materialized, and the manuscript was not returned to its authors, but the Grimms' interest in collecting and editing folklore did not die. In 1812 they came out with their own fairy-tale collection. *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales), vol. 1, 1812; vol. 2, 1814 (pre-dated 1815) [....] This final version is the basis for most editions and translations published after the Grimms' death". *Folklore and Mythology.* [Electronic text]. D.L. Ahliman (Ed. And Trans.); (University of Pittsburgh, 1996-2002). [http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm.html].

the stepmother (and also the stepsisters) are envious of their younger, more beautiful and of course, kinder, sister; and in *Snow White* the stepmother cannot contain her feelings of inadequacy as, day by day, she watches her stepdaughter grow more beautiful. The presence of the stepmother, then, maintains the following myths: women who do not bear their own children are incapable of maintaining a loving and nurturing relationship with a child, while women who do bear children are only capable of nurturing their own biological offspring, and barren women are jealous and resentful of other women's children. In releasing the stepmother from maternal responsibilities (she is not expected to feel any since these are not her own children) the fantasy is able to portray her horrifying actions as acceptable. Also, the absence of the biological mothers of these tales encourages the frustration between the remaining women in the tales. Dead mothers are still pitted against their daughters; in their deaths, these absent mothers become the objects of distrust, abandonment and loneliness. They are replaced by the step-mother who literally embodies these characteristics.

Let us return to the original question: is it problematic that women-centered revisions of fairy tales include the same seemingly anti-feminist themes as their literary predecessors? The answer would seem to be no. To be sure, women-centered texts include, in fact they highlight, troublesome relationships among women. But in doing so they explore the realistic and problematic relationships that mothers have with their daughters, or that sisters have with their siblings. And they dispel the myth that mothers are cruel for one-dimensional reasons. The women-centered rewrite explores the

motivation behind the cruelty of mothers as well as the perspective of mothers. Further, such texts acknowledge the cyclical relationship of the mother/daughter-- the mothers of these texts are also seen as daughters. Thus, the mother is situated in a cultural context and is not left dangling as an unexplained phenomenon that is logical only within the binary of the good/bad context. Instead, they explore the anxiety of women within the domestic setting. They do not pretend that it does not exist, or seek to view it through a utopian narrative. These novels address the power struggles that women are faced with as well as their vulnerabilities and social fears.

Centering on the mother/daughter struggle, the novels and short stories discussed in this chapter consistently challenge the image of woman within literature. Tepper's *Beauty* combines the stories of *Cinderella, Snow White,* and *Sleeping Beauty* through the mothers of these characters, all the while questioning ideologies and narratives of motherhood. Similarly, *Confessions* focuses on mothers and daughters, the absent fathers and husbands, reiterating the point that the story is just a story. Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood each challenge the conventional ideals associated with women-- ideals related to identity, beauty and curiosity amongst mothers and daughters and with sisters and stepsisters. But these stories consciously include and explore the phenomenon of woman pitted against other woman. None of them choose to exclude this compelling and difficult relationship. The troublesome relationships between women in these texts are intensified. As is characteristic of the women-centered text, the tension between women is explored, given a fuller realization, becomes devoid of extremity, but remains altogether unresolved. As John Stephens and Robyn McCallum note in

Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature (1998)*:*

> [r]etellings do not, and cannot, also reproduce the discoursal mode of the source, they cannot *replicate* its significances, and always impose their own cultural presuppositions in the process of retelling [....] The resulting version is then not so much a retelling as a *re-version,* a narrative which has taken apart its pre-texts and reassembled them as a version which is a new textual and ideological configuration [italics in original]. (4)

Thus, in our gender-conscious western culture, we see a 'reversioning' of traditional tales about women. Seeing, looking and speaking have been a masculine prerogative in the traditional fairy tale. In the women-centered retellings, we see a transformation of seeing, looking and speaking. In these tales, women seek to look and speak as well as discuss and consider the notion of looking and speaking. For Carter and Atwood, the emphasis in seeing and looking is placed on what we cannot see, what is not observed-- the father's role "predicated by both textual and biological necessity" (Carter 390). He is the unseen organizing principle, the invisible link that binds them. But this is also true of the muted others within the fairy tale; the ugly stepsister, the evil stepmother, the wicked witch-- marginalized women in fairy tales are also invisible links, binding each woman to another. As Carter notes, it is, after all, a story about women, about mothers and daughters, about fitting in: "it would be easy to think of it as a story about cutting bits off women, so

that they will *fit in*, some sort of circumcision-like ritual chop [italics in original]" (390).

Tepper treats looking in much the same way as Maguire. We are encouraged to re-look, to envision. We are taught the lesson that looking is not reliable; the eyes themselves can be fooled. Maguire emphasises noticing, encouraging the reader to notice what has been un-noticed in traditional tales: "let noticing take the place of screaming [....] Notice Ruth and how left out she is [....] Notice the Master and Casper, and how bothered they both are, despite their masculine strength" (*Confessions* 144-145). Maguire's focus on noticing forces the reader to consider vision as well as the margins of vision where these characters have previously existed. Similarly, Tepper shows us that vision can be an illusion. What the women-centered revision of fairy tales tells us is that these relationships do not exist just in the spaces of narrative, or even in the spaces of historical accuracy as Warner would have it, but rather, in the everyday spaces of our relationships with other women. They illustrate that ultimately, our mothers are our friends, our enemies, our persecutors, our mentors, our competitors and our victims; just as their mothers were before them:

> [w]omen can domineer over and infantalize women just as well
> as men can. They know exactly where to stick the knife. Also,
> they do great ambushes. From men, you're expecting it [....]
> There are many strong voices; there are many *kinds* of strong
> voices. Surely there should be room for all. Does it make sense

to silence women in the name of Woman? We can't afford this

silencing, or this fear. (Atwood, "If You Can't" 33)

Conclusion

the body's pain and the pain on the streets
are not the same   but you can learn
from the edges that blur   O you who love clear edges
more than anything watch the edges that blur.[1]

We are all located in multiple ways; these locations interconnect with intricate
patternings; and, though certain locations may be to the fore at specific
moments, a whole range of determining factors will always be operating.
What constitutes a location changes and is constantly reformed while earlier
locations can be remembered and reconstructed in different way.[2]

The transgressive nature of the fantastic text, particularly in relation to discussions of feminist geography, is integral to understanding the image of the supernatural woman in literary discourse. Throughout this thesis I have tried to indicate some of the spatial transgressions found within the women-centered fantastic text in an attempt to locate a resistance from notions of identity and gender constructed within political and social spaces. This journey, it is hoped, has taken us to a place where we can answer some of the questions outlined at the beginning of this study.

Textual analysis of the women-centered fantastic texts found within this study has shown that conscious concern with the physical, emotional and metaphorical geographies of women are paramount to their narratives. Corresponding to a movement within feminist geography and feminist ideologies, this fiction, in its themes, contributes to the dismantling of oppressive and problematic images of supernatural women and challenges patriarchal representations of 'femaleness', sexuality and difference.

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[1] Adrienne Rich (1983-1985), "Contradictions: Tracking Poems." (poem 11). *The Poems of Adrienne Rich.* (p. 103).

[2] Mary Eagleton, "Adrienne Rich, Location and Body". *Journal of Gender Studies.* Vol. 9, No.3: 2000; (p.300).

As we saw in chapter two, various movements within feminism can be seen to have influenced the renewed interest in supernatural representations of women and nature found within the women-centered fantastic text. Addressing the notion that supernatural women represent potentially dangerous femininity and thus have frequently been depicted as manifestations of an equally powerful and potentially dangerous "feminized" nature, chapter two explored the ways in which these iconic representations of women stand in contrast and conflict with "masculinized" civilization. However, through the textual analysis within this chapter I have argued that the natural world in the women-centered text is not always untouched by culture precisely because the female characters found within the narratives are influenced by a patriarchal culture. The relationship between women and nature, therefore, remains a complicated one, often incorporating issues of otherness and of power (supernatural power, patriarchal power and hierarchical divisions of power) within its already intricate structure. Further, supernatural women are positioned within a perplexing terrain of dangerous geography that has the capability both to marginalize and empower. Through the linked concepts of the body as home and the home as body, the women-centered fantastic text engages with an important spatial domain, offering a challenge to simplistic ideologies surrounding identity. These texts illustrate that individual identity is comprised, in part, through intricate metaphorical and physical constructions of both public and private space. As I have suggested, an area of resistance can also be found within these spaces.

The emotional and physical identities constructed within spatial frameworks are presented as wholly female spaces, holding no male

presence *within* them but often relying upon a (threatening) male presence for their creation and location. As we saw in chapter three, a specifically lesbian space that is both physically *and* emotionally constructed as a means of transcending patriarchal structures becomes possible within the women-centered text. I have argued that all of the women-centered texts engaging with the idea of a lesbian identity do so with active political agendas and broad notions of sexuality which threaten the concept of compulsory heterosexuality. These narratives, outlining different forms of lesbianism, highlight communities of women with a common cultural identity highly dependent upon physical geography.

Clearly, spatial divisions within women-centered fantastic fiction are complex and often intangible. In keeping with feminist geographers' explorations in recent years of the varied relationships between space, place and women, chapter four addresses less tangible women-centered spaces. Indeed, the movement from a physical location in time and place, to an emotional or mental space to a specific place or time is a crucial one. Thus, contemporary women-centered fantastic texts also challenge ideas of emotional and mental awareness, wellness and fitness, as well as the notions of 'reality' and 'truth'. My discussion of intangible spaces began with an equally intangible theoretical model (as proposed by psychoanalysis and challenged by Jacques Derrida), in order to create a point of departure which illustrates the connection between the repressed feminine other in male-constructed theory and the othered experiences of the mentally ill. Using Foucauldian theories of psychic space, I aimed to illustrate the ideological prisons that false representations of truth and difference can create. I

concluded that intangible telepathic space is a subjective one that has the ability to resist masculine colonization and reclaim authoritative power for the individual woman in the women-centered fantastic text.

In chapters five and six I have sought to explore the relationships among supernatural female figures that have been pitted against one another in a good versus bad dichotomy. As analysis has argued, the multidimensional representations and explorations of individual characters within these texts enable the supernatural woman to escape her traditional fate as a frozen figure within a system of binary logic. The women-centered fantastic text situates women within cultural contexts, often exploring the anxiety of women within domestic spaces as well as propelling characters to venture into forbidden spaces. Moreover, they challenge conventional ideals of identity and gender; they challenge relationships between mothers and daughters, sisters and stepsisters, good women and bad women, natural women and supernatural women.

As I have maintained, it is characteristic of the women-centered text to explore the tension between women, but to remain altogether unresolved. As Mary Eagleton (2000) notes: "[o]ne never knows who one is; one can never know, already, all one's identities or hold them in some perfect political and psychic synthesis [....] we all have too many identities even to comprehend, let alone list" (305). And thus it has been, to some extent, impossible to answer all of the questions surrounding identity, representation and location outlined within this study. Yet this is not necessarily problematic, for we have reached a greater understanding of the supernatural and the natural whilst acknowledging that geography and its related discourses can be used to

resist compulsory heterosexual, colonial, patriarchal and binary logic ideologies. More importantly, we can conclude that the specific geographies of these texts (emotional, physical and intangible geographies) are significant tools for mapping resistance of location as well as locating a resistance for the marginalized other in women-centered fantastic fiction. Using these spatial themes, women-centered texts are able to chart new cartographies. "In the kingdom of fiction, the tension between speaking out and staying silent never ceases" (Warner, *From Beast to Blonde*, 409).

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