

The Return of the Girl Behind the Door

Author's Commentary



THE LESSONS

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Also written by Maree Aldridge

Letters to a Missing Woman

The Return of
the Girl Behind the Door

The Return of the Girl Behind the Door - The Wild Seed
Dream Reflection Guide (PDF)

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THE LESSONS

Author's Commentary

"I reached out for the book but was told I would not carry it on the journey with me. When wisdom text in the form of another lesson was needed it would find its way to me through messengers who would cross my path. Instead, I was to try and hold these words in my heart as a truth. Rather than travelling with a book under my arm, I was to travel with a word made flesh."

From **Scene One: THE GIRL BEHIND THE DOOR**



Welcome to **The Lessons**, author's commentary to *The Return of the Girl Behind the Door* Visual Novella.

There are many 'way signs' embedded in the metaphorical language throughout this novella, and they may take on multiple meanings as readers look into the mirror that fictional stories tend to offer. This commentary is not meant to take away from any meanings that are gleaned by readers. However, sometimes as readers we can find handholds helpful to demystify what we cannot fathom. This is not an exhaustive commentary, rather it offers some thrifty guidance, with gaps to be filled in by readers as they muse what is meaningful from within the story. These are the lessons I was learning as I wrote about Returning, and as I sought to live into it in my own life, myth and soul-making as I went. As such, they made their way into my Doctoral thesis, which contained the first incarnation of this story that I had named 'The Return' for lack of a more imaginative title at the time.

The commentary that follows is a mixture of content from my thesis (including my footnotes and references) where I focused the themes that felt critical in 'The Return' story, some of my experiences of crafting this mythopoetic heroine's narrative, reflections about characters who grapple with Returning, and the wider cast of influential figures that act as wise guides.

North American psychotherapist, writer/lecturer and theologian Thomas Moore says, "*all work with the soul is process – alchemy, pilgrimage, and adventure.*"¹ I used the process of alchemy as a frame to describe the lessons of soul-making in my 2018 thesis. That framework is included in this commentary. My characters charted their soul-making through pilgrimage and adventure, and another frame which I use to discuss the story, that is the 'heroine journey' arc.

Kathleen Brehony, Jungian psychotherapist, and author of *After the Darkest Hour* analyses, educates and offers alternative paradigms describing recovery processes in the aftermath of traumatic events or losses. One of the lenses she expounds upon is that of a Jungian therapeutic interpretation of the ancient practice of alchemy. This process highlights how one can draw wisdom and solace from suffering the experience of being cracked open by trauma and turning the lead of life into gold.

*"The 'secret hidden in plain sight' of alchemy and Jungian psychology is that the goal, the sought after, is always there to be found. Both posit that the process of bringing forth gold from lead is not achieved by adding anything at all. In fact, both assume that the core of what is searched for is already present though hidden. That the good is already there in lead and with enough time it would, by itself, transform into this splendid metal. The alchemists' task is simply to help the knowledge Nature provides by speeding up the process through boundless amplification."*²

The alchemists in this story, the Mermaid Woman, the Dark Mother, the Phoenix Woman and the Wizenened One, through their interruptions and disruptions (interventions) are trying to bring forth the gold in the heroine/s from a traumatic history. They assume that the courage, compassion, and action-orientated initiative are already there within the reluctant Returning Woman. The journey the woman is sent on with her unwanted companion provides the 'boundless amplification' required.

1 Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 259.

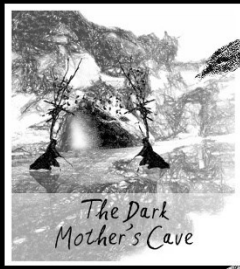
2 Kathleen Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour: How Suffering Begins the Journey to Wisdom* (London UK: Fusion Press, 2001), 74.

Brehony's explanation and interpretation of alchemy and its three processes³ was a helpful lens through which to analyse the processes of transformation, and offered a framework to consider the lessons from within each part of the novella.

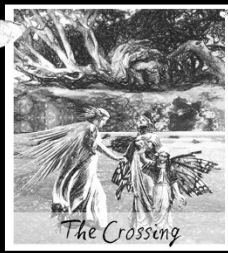
I have renamed the three alchemic processes as they relate to the novella's themes of "Descent", "Let there be room to thrive", "New order." **Descent** (Act One) - the lead of the inflexible ego is broken down. **Let there be room to thrive** (Act Two) - mourning a way into acceptance and claiming new possibilities. **New Order** (Act Three) - the gold of psychospiritual renewal or meeting with the Self is experienced as rebirth, and the old communal order is challenged. In each Act there are three lessons that relate to the above themes; 1. To Return is to not go back, 2. To Return is to speak the first words of creation, 3. To Return is to heal the home of your Scared Root.

The process of a psychospiritual alchemic transmuting of our lead to gold is cyclical and can be arduous. Returning as an internal process is not linear or sequential, neither is it event or destination orientated. As the Guardian Pohutukawa tree says to the Returning Woman in SCENE NINE: RE-TURNINGS, *"The return is never a singular event you know. We are forever moving towards an edge of many re-turnings."* These necessary elemental oscillations help free the voice of our primordial or original Self, wear down the patterns and inflexibility of intergenerational trauma narratives in which we can become wedged, and allow us room to take our story in our own hands to own and draw meaning out of.

³ Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 80-86. The three stages of alchemy referred to by Brehony are; "the nigredo, or the 'blackening'", "the albedo, 'the whitening'", "the 'rubedo, or the 'reddening'".



The Dark Mother's Cave



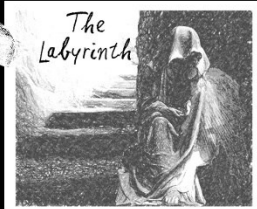
The Crossing



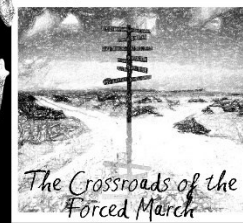
The Guardian Pohutukawa



Bone Valley & the Four Winds

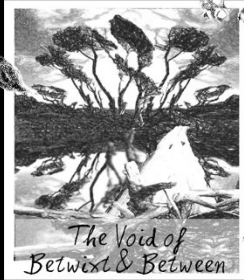


The Labyrinth

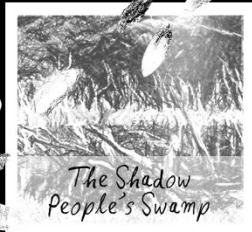


The Crossroads of the Forced March

The Pathfinder's Many Soul Turnings



The Void of Betwixt & Between



The Shadow People's Swamp



The Sacred Root



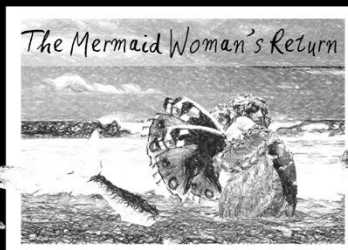
Re-turnings



The Exiles' Encampment



The Matriarch's House



The Mermaid Woman's Return



The Dark Mother's Apprentice

A few comments about the structure of the story

The Return of the Girl Behind the Door is a book of 3 Acts, 3 Scenes (or chapters) per Act. Each Act is focused on the three phases of the Hero/Heroine Journey. Like *Letters to a Missing Woman* the story is layered with images, narrative, letters, poems and prayers. There are few new additions to the structure of this story, which I felt was bigger and weightier than its predecessor, and found it helpful to add in different ways to tell the story.

There are two introductory chapters; one about the deeper history of the Binding Lullaby, and one as the starting point or the initiating events that disrupt the Woman with Renewed Wings. It felt important to highlight the relationship of the traumatic history, some of the past source material, alongside the present timeline of the Woman with Renewed Wings.

The pattern in each chapter

Dear Reader introductions to each chapter were added in the 2021 rewrite. These memoir-type apertures were to help to connect past and present with a future reference point. These reflective notes to the reader from the Returning Woman, written retrospectively consider the events of each scene from a future unspecified time in life.

The Letters written by the Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door are also written retrospectively. These are memories of their respective experiences, aged by time. The letters written to the Matriarch are the Returning Woman's way of practicing truth-telling before an anticipated showdown with her community of origin. Though the Matriarch never replies to these letters, determined to ignore the challenges written within, she does write one last letter to the Girl Behind the Door. This letter was added during the 2021 rewrite.

The Undersong's Refrain poems at the end of each chapter are the story told in the present tense by 'Girl Behind the Door.' She signs off as "The Long Forgotten Girl." While most of the story is narrated by the Returning Woman, each "Undersong's Refrain" speaks from the "*unwanted, the untold, the unmentionable and uncomfortable shame story.*" The poems echo with the many silenced girls that have been forgotten throughout history. These poems were added a few months before publishing, threading the story through the longing to be remembered, to be seen and claimed with radical acceptance.

The Three Entr'actes were a new addition in the 2021 rewrite. An entr'acte is an interval between acts of a play or opera where a piece of music or a dance may be performed. These intervals felt fitting to hold space between the Scenes and Acts. Including the entr'actes gave an opportunity for cameo perspectives from different characters and their reflections. There are two strands of Return in this story: one being personal and internal, the other being communal and therefore seen through the eyes of others. In the first Entr'acte the Dark Mother imparts wisdom needed for the Return through dream and

poetry. The second Entr'acte is a creation story told by the Wizenred One about the necessity of befriending our monsters. These first two cameos did exist in the thesis but were tagged onto the end of THE WILD SEED DREAM and BONE VALLEY Scenes. The third Entr'acte is from the Matriarch as we catch her discomposed just days before her death, struggling with how the letters from the Returning Woman were aiding an unwilling change of heart. This was added during the 2021 rewrite.

The Testaments

There are three testaments that serve as containers for specific pieces of the story. The 'shame making' experience of the Girl Behind the Door, the haunting history of the Shadow People told by the Wizenred One, and the confession of the Matriarch read out at her funeral.

Exposition - **PRIOR TO RETURNING**

A Dilapidated History - **THE BINDING LULLABY**

"The shame-filled secrets women carry are old, old tales. Any person who has kept a secret to her own detriment has been buried by shame. In this universal plight, the pattern itself is archetypal: the heroine has either been forced to do something or, through the loss of instinct, has been trapped into something. Typically, she is powerless to aright the sad condition. She is in some way sworn or shamed into secrecy."

Clarissa Pinkola Estes – *Women Who Run With the Wolves*⁴

This was a new section added to the introduction during 2021's rewrite of 'The Return.' The original story bound in my thesis started with SETTING THE SCENE: THE TURNING. And up until the rewrite there had been no reference to the 'Binding Lullaby' except for the story's repeating phrase of *"stay cold child, stay behind death's door. Remain cold child laid under the concrete floor."*

History – Herstory and its narrative became increasingly important, almost urgent to write. There was a gap that was not satisfied by later explanations in the novella. I needed to know how the inherited shame had been transferred from one generation to another, and what made it so powerful. It was the 'Long Forgotten Girl' who seemed to have something to say about that. This voice/character did not show up in the original story. Why she waited until the rewrite to appear I have no answer for. As I tuned into she knew, I discovered through writing into the historical dark the ingredients; language, reinforced by song (being sung to sleep/amnesia), and the stalwarts of tradition, who misused the notion of 'loyalty' to the trauma narrative as a form of control to keep inherited shame in place. Though the 'Matriarch' archetype is somewhat introduced as a character in the Returning Woman's first letter to her in SCENE FOUR: THE FORCED MARCH, I felt a need to place her in history and describe something of her relationship to the 'Long Forgotten Girl' (as a representation of her 'power over' way of denying trauma, resisting change, growth, and healing).

So often trauma in one's personal life, family life, or ancestry is suppressed, silenced, or denied. Each society, culture, family, or person will have their own unique way and rationale for doing this. Yet often what is held in common is; with trauma comes shame, and because of shame things tend to get hidden, sealed, covered over. Hope can be abandoned when there is no obvious route towards healing or others who know the ways of unmaking shame, while thoughtfully tending to trauma, fostering regrowth and re-sourcing resilience. The identity can form around the trauma story like a tree growing over many years around an obstacle, until you no longer see the object it has encased. In this story trauma begins many generations ago, and the response to it hardens into survival, power over tactics, and

⁴ Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves* (USA: The Random House Publishing Group, 1992), 406.

surrender to the *"nature of neglect."* The wound is left unattended, it festers, it becomes deforming, and it shapes a once hopeful family tree into one that remains grief bound with bitterness poisoning its sap.

The Binding Lullaby keeps reviving the story of how to deal with hurt and pain (trauma) by the method of *"neglect will make you stronger."* There is no other alternative and consequently there are many 'long forgotten' girls who have grown into women, who have passed this narrative onto their daughters, and granddaughters. Except there are those who challenge and ask questions, *"What if the sadness does not freeze, what if I cannot be strong?"* There are those that will be banished, excluded from society because they ask the 'wrong' questions, or innocently challenge the status quo, and cannot seem to comply despite the indoctrination. The Long Forgotten Girl (who goes on to speak in poems/a series of undersongs in the rewrite) is one such dissenter. Who is she in relation to the other characters in the novella? At first, I thought perhaps she was the Girl Behind the Door, however, I have concluded at this time that she is something of the collective silenced voice of the many girls who have gone unheeded over time.

I have experienced in my own life how we can carry our ancestral pains with us. Mark Wolynn, North American pioneer in the field of inherited family trauma, founder/director of The Family Constellation Institute, has utilised the findings of epigenetic science. This branch of science confirms that our trauma experiences are stored in our DNA and are passed forward into the next generation. In his book *It Didn't Start With You*,⁵ he points out that we are not fated or doomed to the mysterious or buried past. As he says, *"all is not silent"* because *"words, images, and impulses that fragment following a traumatic event reemerge to form a secret language of our suffering we carry with us. Nothing is lost. The pieces have just been rerouted."*⁶ We have healing work to do regarding the consequences of intergeneration trauma and the secrets buried within that speak to us through language and metaphor/images. They are reliable guides.

Wolynn, contrary to the belief of some theorists that *"language goes missing during trauma,"* has discovered through his practice that *"language is never lost."* Rather it *"roams the unconscious realms, waiting to be rediscovered."*⁷ The Long Forgotten Girl's roaming and waiting is over. She is the missing trauma, the shame story, and a guide to what else is to be rediscovered in the unconscious realms personally and communally. Psychology (particularly Jungian), science and theology refer to the reality of intergenerational trauma and hopeful possibility of intergenerational healing. We are not forever trapped if we can call upon the powers of nurturing creativity which makes regeneration possible. Through the series of

5 Mark Wolynn, *It Didn't Start With You: How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How to End the Cycle* (New York: Viking, 2016).

6 Wolynn, *It Didn't Start With You*, 60.

7 Wolynn, *It Didn't Start With You*, 10.

Undersongs, the Long Forgotten Girl narrates how she is watching the healing story unfold through the experiences of the Girl Behind the Door. These are archetypal characters; in a sense they represent the 'every girl.'



Setting the Scene - THE TURNING

"Thomas Wolfe warned in the title of America's greatest novel, that 'you can't go home again'... I never agreed with the title. I believe that one can never leave home. I believe that one carries the shadows, the dreams, the fears and dragons of home under one's skin, at the extreme corners of one's eyes and possibly in the gristle of the ear lobe. I believe we feel safest when we go inside ourselves and find home, a place where we belong and maybe the only place we really do."
Maya Angelou – Letter to My Daughter⁸

Unwilled change and a reluctant returner

As it is in *Letters to a Missing Woman*, the sea is still present in various ways in this story. The sea represents the deep unknown, the vastness of soul, an experience of immersion where one can be remade or reformed. Moore, in his book *Dark Night of the Soul*, aptly describes the sea as being *"the vast potential of life, but it is also your dark night, which may force you to surrender."*⁹ Our well-developed egos cannot resist the power of a significant sea change or night sea voyage in which we are undone and stripped of what is false. Moore goes on to say, *"The night sea journey takes you back to your primordial self, not the heroic self that burns out and falls to judgment, but your original self, yourself as a sea of possibility, your greater and deeper being."*¹⁰

THE TURNING is narrated by the Mermaid Woman. She personifies the courage to not only pursue an external search but to dive deep into the inner journey, toward the depths of soul. She herself has already travelled the many paths of transformation. The Mermaid Woman is from and of the ocean, a voice calling from the 'original self,' the 'sea of possibility,' and watches as an experienced mentor. In observing the Woman With Renewed Wings there is an awareness that time is drawing near to guide her initiate once more into a journey towards the 'primordial self' as a necessary part of the antidote to what ails the woman and her community.

In watching, the Mermaid Woman detects the blindness, or the unwillingness to venture further. She begins to orchestrate events (though that is not fully described in the novella) to shift her initiate out of her sleepy state into wakefulness. When the first hints of disruption discompose the woman, she writes to the Mermaid Woman asking for her intervention. However, she unwittingly unleashes the answer, and it does not come in the form she requested.

8 Maya Angelou, *Letter to My Daughter* (Great Britain: Virago, 2009), 4-5.

9 Thomas Moore, *Dark Night of the Soul: A Guide to Finding Your Way Through Life's Ordeals* (USA: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2004), 5.

10 Moore, *Dark Night of the Soul*, 5.

Joseph Campbell, American mythologist says that when the time comes for the hero/heroine to return with the gift or remedy for the renewal of the community *“the responsibility has been frequently refused.”*¹¹ In this story, the Returning Woman is not willing and wants to refuse. She has become accustomed to her state of tranquility, and she is not aware that she might be needed by others. She is not likely to come to this understanding herself. Unwilled change is difficult to accept. Yet sometimes it is the only thing that moves us beyond where we are comfortable and possibly stagnating. Joan Chittister, writer of *The Story of Ruth* points out that unexpected change is often what *“catapults us into what we did not plan to do. Only unwilled change really matters to the molding of the soul, to the stretching of the self beyond the self, in other words.”*¹² Brehony says that usually *“we do not choose the journey. Most often, it chooses us.”*¹³ We cannot control or regain our old equilibrium when this kind of reshaping change seeks us out. David Benner, internationally known psychologist, author and Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Spirituality at Richmond Graduate University, writer of *Spirituality and the Awakening Self*, says we will go through the uncomfortable experience of *“several ever-deepening cycles until we see that we have no alternative but fundamental change.”*¹⁴

When I wrote the first few pages of ‘The Return’ at the end of 2015, I began with this scene. The woman who once had tattered wings, was enjoying the tranquillity of her undisturbed life, and I wondered as an author how I would entice or entreat her to return to her community/family of origin. It seemed clear to me that she needed to receive a message of some kind, and I wondered if she might be sent for because the current ‘Matriarch’ had died. Wouldn’t it be nice, I thought to myself, if she was asked to take over the leadership and bring change to her community, guiding them with what she had learned. A story has a life of its own, and this one had very different ideas to mine. As I wrote ‘she’ arrived on the page, the messenger was a girl who upended the narrative I had been toying with. I did not like her initially, the feeling of her reminded me too much of the girl I had been once. She refused to be written out of the story, and writing about her and the relationship with the Returning Woman became an integral part of my own acceptance of my personal shame story.

This is not what I had planned for my thesis writing process, my life or the Returning Woman; however, it turned out to be necessary otherwise I and she would have shown up amongst our kin and kith without having fundamentally undermined and unravelled the intergenerational trauma, debilitated by shame. She needed to traverse deeper within, deal

11 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (The Collected Works of Joseph Campbell third edition), (California: New World Library, 2008), 167.

12 Joan D. Chittister, *The Story of Ruth: Twelve Moments in Every Woman’s Life* (Michigan: Wm B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 18.

13 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 77.

14 David G. Benner, *Soulful Spirituality: Becoming Fully Alive and Deeply Human* (Ada, MI, USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 64.

with her own bitterness, anger, resentment, and denial, as did I. There was only one way for this to happen, to be reunited with the Girl Behind the Door, who appears as a revenant (returned from the dead), an apparition not yet fully formed as real. Nonetheless, she is real enough to scare the woman out of her wits and cause her to rush to find help.

The Girl Behind the Door, metaphorically speaking, is the shame story personified. She is both the collective and personal shame, rolled into one. Encountering this can be shocking and the Woman With Renewed Wings reverted to her communally learned pattern; deny the trauma, deny the shame. She sought shelter from the reality that was crashing in on her. It's what we do sometimes when we are fearful or on the run. Rather than hide us, shelter can be a place of restoring and strengthening so we stop running and face our fears. Had the woman known this she may have run in the opposite direction, away from the Dark Mother's cave. She seeks help, help she had already asked of from the Mermaid Woman, and the more help she searches for, the answer is reinforced. It is time for change, for the turning has already begun.

The positive, according to Chittister, is that the *"spiritual offshoot of discontinuity... is evolution. It grows us. It cracks us open to God in whole new ways. Creation goes on creating in us."*¹⁵ Brehony says of this stage of being broken down that it is akin to the experience of *"the caterpillar entering into the chrysalis and dissolving into a prebutterfly stew."*¹⁶ The woman's illusive tranquility dissolves, along with her sense of a secure self.



¹⁵ Chittister, *The Story of Ruth*, 18.

¹⁶ Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 80.

ACT ONE

THE FIRST LESSON - Return and back are not one and the same

Returning involves a DESCENT

*"This is the prototype of all life transitions: once we go through the passage,
nothing is the same."*

Jean Shinoda Bolen – *Crossing to Avalon*¹⁷

Brehony says that *"suffering is the alchemical fire"* through which we can experience the *"unearthing of the gold of the Self in the lead of the ego."*¹⁸ Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., Jungian analyst, clinical professor of psychiatry and author, calls this process *"the mystical opposite of illumination."* She names it *"an experience of 'endarkenment',"* a spiritual journey *"through the desert or wasteland"* and *"the via **negativa**, the path where soul encounters negation and pain."*¹⁹ It is necessary to pass *"through the refiner's fire"*²⁰ to truly return. Otherwise, one is merely rearranging things and carrying on with the same old nostalgias, illusions, and conformity or conventions. We are saved from these attachments by having our *"falsehoods die in the smelting of the **nigredo**."*²¹

The woman who has discovered she is not as tranquil as she believed she was, is at war, albeit it silently, with a part of her story. This has been compartmentalised, abandoned and blissfully forgotten about. Little does the woman know that when she runs towards the Dark Mother's cave to hide, she will be met by fire and no longer be able to go on avoiding her own suffering. Her suffering has come and found her and now the woman must descend, feel herself falling, go where she'd rather not, pass through the dark fire of her frozen rage and experience her own dissolution.



17 Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon: A Woman's Midlife Pilgrimage* (USA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 60.

18 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 76.

19 Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon*, 175.

20 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 76.

21 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 81.

Scene One - THE GIRL BEHIND THE DOOR

"Journeying into and back out of the cave of the heart is a journey of initiation. What gestates within us during seasons of introspection eventually comes to birth and leads us out of the cave, drawing us across a threshold. In my seasons of reflection and introspection, I have learned that I cannot create without being recreated myself. The process changes me, calls forth things from me that I didn't always know were there, leads me to passages and to places I had not anticipated. We who give birth – to children, to dreams, to ideas, to relationships and new ways of living – are ourselves born and reborn as we join in the ongoing cycle of creation."

Jan L. Richardson – *Illuminating the Threshold*²²

Life comes calling, disguised as shame

The Woman With Renewed Wings searches for the Dark Mother who is not to be found. Instead, she meets with the fabled Phoenix Woman whom she has only read about in books.

The Phoenix woman offers the first lesson of return; *"To Return is not to go back."* There is a resistance to going back because it would return the woman to the context of shame she wishes understandably to avoid. The first lesson is to establish clearly what the woman is not being asked to do. Returning and the rebirth that goes with it does involve a downward movement or a deepening, yet it is paradoxically also forward momentum. Descent undermines the hold the past or going back, has on us. This doesn't make logical sense to the woman's way of seeing things, it must be lived to be understood.

The woman needs help beyond herself to separate her from the imprisoning 'back' or past. The Phoenix Woman brings the necessary alchemical fire element into the story. First a spark and tinder to light is required; the woman who is about to be initiated into her Return hears "The Testament" of the Girl Behind the Door. It was with apprehension that I laboured over the girl's testament, the wording, imagery, the best way to convey how abuse and objectification injures and results in the loss of connection with ourselves, pressing us into a foreign self-image. The Returning Woman reflects, *"This is the story I would orphan and exile every time. I had swallowed the lie. The concrete floor told me who I was. Caught in the cement of legacy I was held fast, and so it had been for generations before."*

Campbell points out that when the hero/heroine's Return is initiated, there will come a *"knocking at the door,"*²³ or in this novella, the arrival of the Girl Behind the Door and her testimony. This small persona is to be the Returning Woman's travelling companion, and she

22 Jan Richardson, "Illuminating the Threshold", Sanctuary of Women, www.sanctuaryofwomen.com/WomensChristmasRetreat2015.pdf, 9 (cited 12 January 2017).

23 Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 178.

offers an egocentric-shattering crisis. It strikes a match to both the detached pretender who has orphaned/exiled her painful past, and the helpless woman who sees herself imprisoned as a victim to her past. Benner says this kind of crisis is a painful *"collapse of the way we have related to life"* and it is also a *"clash between the ego and the Self."* There is a deeper yearning, or as Benner says, a *"summons"* which draws us *"to connect to the deep ground of our self and thereby become our true self."*²⁴ At first the Returning Woman finds this summons an intrusion in which she loses her grasp on all she feels holds her safe. As Brehony says, *"facing the dark parts of our own personality can be terrifying."*²⁵ And the woman realises with regret and disappointment that shame will accompany her on the Return journey.

Research psychologist, poet and writer Julie Leibrich knows what it is to journey with shame in the form of mental illness. In her spiritual memoir *Sanctuary*, Leibrich shares the crisis of her falling into the experience of shame/stigma and how it became transformed into curiosity about her own emerging spirituality. She went on to become one of New Zealand's first Mental Health Commissioners. Liebrich says that shame is that which *"makes you cover up your true self, and you're not authentic anymore. Shame becomes sham."*²⁶ Liebrich's relationship with shame became one of uncovering and acknowledgement as she holds up a mirror to society. This is a vulnerable journey. Dr Brené Brown, researcher-storyteller, Professor at the University of Houston, social scientist and author, describes vulnerability as *"uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure."*²⁷ She points out that, *"Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it... Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light."*²⁸ It is a practice of courage to face into rather than running from pain, because in the practice and action of courage as Brown says, we become increasingly courageous.²⁹ Fire is needed to keep that courage burning. But there is another subterranean smouldering yet to be acknowledged.

Once the shock of understanding that there is no other choice than forward, going where she doesn't want to go, the Woman with Renewed Wings meets her long-repressed anger. It has a source, a story of first violations, disempowerment, and shaming. This is poured out through a 'creation hymn,' called "The Shadow People." There are telling lines in the hymn, *"I will only make war on them when I cannot return in peaceful refrain, Make war on the Shadow People's offspring who refuse to walk in light, Can concrete be dismembered without breaking something? Do not send me back to the Shadow People's heirs that I cannot understand,*

24 Benner, *Soulful Spirituality*, 62.

25 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 77.

26 Julie Leibrich, *Sanctuary: The Discovery of Wonder* (Dunedin, NZ: Otago University Press, 2015), 17.

27 Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012), 34.

28 Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let go of who you think you're supposed to be and embrace who you are* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 2010), 6.

29 Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, 7

Unless you remake me fearless, oh God, unless you remake me bolder.” Her resentment is evident. This is not dismissed or judged and there is room provided for her memories speak. However, the Phoenix Woman advises, *“Trust not yourself to waging a war. Many have felt downtrodden as you do, yet vengeance born out of hurt does not bring freedom, only further harm. You will need to find a deeper, truer power within born of creative love.”* The kind of fire the Returning Woman will need is what Teilhard de Chardin speaks of, saying, *“after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, humans will have discovered fire.”*³⁰ Harnessing the energies of love, discovering fire again, will be an imperative part of this Returning quest. Starting with loving the seemingly unlovable Girl Behind the Door.

This journey is a more complex undertaking than simply returning to hold up a mirror to show another or a community how the wounding of a relationship, family, or society has impacted on one or more of its members. Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Jungian analyst, psychotherapist, storyteller, and poet, uses mythologies and old oral cultural stories as part of her psychotherapy work with women. She notes that where there are secrets to be revealed, a citizen has often been trained or conditioned to keep the shame secret and become self-punishing.³¹ There are tight knots of silence and complicity to unravel.³² Edith Eger, Auschwitz survivor and psychologist, writer of *The Choice*, says that *“when we force our truths and stories into hiding, secrets can become their own trauma, their own prison.”*³³ We keep secrets and they imprison us. Complicating matters further for the individual, an unaddressed wound bound up by shame that is kept secret becomes a repelling darkness or *“dead zone”*³⁴ in the psyche. This is often something we feel must be avoided at all costs. One can feel *“buried by shame”*³⁵ or, as in the novella, locked behind a door in a room with a concrete floor.

Facing the trauma of being man-made

Being man-made (manufactured), framed and named, or caged by a shame narrative authored by another/others, is described in the novella as the *“cold stone floor”* or *“concrete”* and its variations. Shame and trauma are not always obvious or expressed as overt abuse. Subtle forms can be insidious. The metaphor and imagery I chose was to convey the loss of an original image. By ‘original’ I do not necessarily mean going back to the beginning before events in our lives began to shape us. What I am touching on has more to do with the nature

30 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future* (USA: Mariner Books, 2002) page number unknown.

31 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 411.

32 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 404.

33 Edith Eger, *The Choice*, (London: Rider, 2017), 8.

34 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 408.

35 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 406.

or naturalness of self as a seed. In Returning we recover our essence as evolving, husk-shedding beings.

The references to being “*man-made*” are not strictly used to refer to patriarchy and its effect upon women and men, however, the phrase does include that reality. The invitation is to reflect and inquire how we may have lost our original seed-like nature by being either forcefully or incrementally formed in ways that do not reveal and affirm our unique identity or quintessence through social and institutional conformity.

For so many people trauma and shame can simply mean that we live divided from our wild/true self. Educator, writer, and founder of the “Centre for Courage & Renewal,” Parker Palmer says that a “*divided life may be endemic, but wholeness is always a choice.*”³⁶ The state of belonging in restrictive, prescriptive, or destructive ways leaves a person divided. Choosing and regaining wholeness despite the push and pull towards dividedness is an essential key in transforming one’s felt shame within the Return journey.

This choosing does not need to be a solo venture or struggle. The Phoenix Woman names inner allies that she sees in the Returning Woman. Living forces such as; tree-like wild roots, the seed within, warmth (inner fire, ‘purer flame’).



36 Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 17.

Scene Two - THE WILD SEED DREAM

"...I have been astonished to see how nature uses devastation to stimulate new growth, slowly but persistently healing her own wounds. Wholeness does not mean perfection: it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life. Knowing this gives me hope that human wholeness – mine, yours, ours – need not be a utopian dream, if we can use devastation as a seedbed for new life."

Parker J. Palmer - *A Hidden Wholeness*³⁷

The Woman With Renewed Wings is experiencing an unexpected crisis. Scene Two begins with the Phoenix tethering together the wrists of the Girl Behind the Door and the reluctant soon to be Returning Woman. The woman meets her own coldness again through the touch of the Girl Behind the Door.

Philosopher and theologian, Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks says the following of crisis, *"Crisis forces us to make difficult but necessary decisions. It makes us ask, 'Who am I and what really matters to me?' It plunges us from the surface to the depths, where we discover strengths we didn't know we had, and a clarity of purpose we had hitherto lacked. So you have to say to every crisis, 'I will not let you go until you bless me.'"*³⁸

What really matters to the woman who is reluctantly Returning is yet to be understood. But it is tied up with what she fears being marked by again: objectification. It's a risk at the forefront of her mind.

"I could only imagine dark scenes. It would be as if I were walking back into that dilapidated history, marching to the tune of the Shadow People's lullaby. I shuddered as my childhood fears stirred. Would my community of derelict-dwelling women rejoice, let alone the Matriarch, as I dragged this child behind me?"

Yet the crisis is plunging her into a journey where she will discover her strengths and a clear purpose that will empower her to deal with others who might treat her as an object. She just doesn't know it yet, nor does she understand the crucial role the Girl Behind the Door will play. Until she experiences how to befriend or reframe her buried sense of shame, she can hardly imagine herself not cowering to her community of origin and meet *"the frozen heart of their frigid unwelcome"* with fire.

Befriending and reframing shame

The invitation offered to the Returning Woman being tethered to the Girl Behind the Door is to learn to connect deeply in compassionate companioning with a discarded and painful part of herself, the collective history and 'herstory'. To learn to companion what seems so

³⁷ Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 5.

³⁸ Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, *Letters to the Next Generation: Reflections for Yom Kippur* (London: Office of the Chief Rabbi, 2009), 30.

undesirable about us, we enter a process of truly welcoming those parts as a long-lost beloved. This is difficult, because as Brown points out, *“when we experience something in the present that triggers an old trauma memory, we reexperience the sense of the original trauma. So, rather than remembering the wound, we become the wound.”*³⁹

Rather than reject or objectify ourselves as “the wound” we can learn to receive and lovingly accept the shame we feel as a vital aspect of ourselves. Benner refers to the Sufi poet Rumi’s “Guesthouse”⁴⁰ poem regarding the differing and sometimes difficult feelings that visit us uninvited. He says that welcoming all visitors, even the disturbing ones, deepens us beyond living *“under the illusion of being in control over who gets access to our house and who does not.”* We can choose not to receive such guests, but Benner warns, this *“does not drive unwelcome guests away; it merely keeps us from embracing the reality that is our life.”*⁴¹ So much of the silencing of shame generally is the inability to host well our own internal guesthouse in receiving our own prodigal shame stories seeking welcome. When we can be present to our own shame, we can be present to others without inflicting further shame or blame upon them. Brown says that in learning to *“move through [shame] in a constructive way”* we are enabled to *“maintain our authenticity and grow from our experiences. And in this process of consciously moving through our shame, we can build stronger and more meaningful connections with the people in our lives.”*⁴²

However, this isn’t so easy without a vision that questions the old narrative that is bound to the damaging experience of being objectified. This is understood by the Phoenix Woman as she binds the woman and girl together, *“you will learn that you need this cold child as she needs you. For in the story told you are both cast. You are both framed. You see now as one man-made.”* She assures the woman that the child isn’t a liability and that she’ll be instrumental in breaking up the ‘concreted’ image of self, but it does require for the woman to see her truer identity beyond the man-made or manufactured bias held against the girl.

The woman knows this is no easy feat, and instinctively and calls upon a power beyond her own to do the seeing and dreaming for her.

Dream me free of the concrete floor on which I was man-made.

Dream me free of the Shadow people of whom I am afraid.

Dream me braver than I am, to outgrow how very small I feel.

Dream me a Returning Woman even though I fear I will keel and fall.

Dream me a creation hymn, a Gloria, to be reborn.

39 Brown, *I Thought it Was Just Me (But it Isn’t)* (New York: Gotham Books, 2008), 88.

40 Jelaluddin Rumi, *Selected Poems: Rumi*, trans. Coleman Banks (Baltimore: Penguin, 2004), 109.

41 Benner, *Soulful Spirituality*, 137.

42 Brown, *I Thought it Was Just Me*, 20-21.

Once more she is supported, there are other unspecified witnesses in the room with her, that while she sleeps and dreams, they watch and wait, willing for a crack in the 'stone-cold floor' of the woman's understanding.

The 'wild seed dream' came to me when I was practicing some active visualisation in a group setting prior to writing this chapter. I saw it clearly; the girl that had been rejected, became the wild hope in the form of a seed that grew into a tree. There was a visceral sensation in my body of the wildness of nature, of life itself unleashed, making ruins of the 'man-made,' liberating the imprisoned girl who had been forgotten, rendered silent and invisible.

Within the dream the woman can feel beyond what is numb in her waking life. She encounters her anger, her languishing sense of defeat, tears for the buried child, feeling the loss of her, resulting broken-hearted compassion. Her ears are unblocked to hear a brave voice that wavers with fear. The silent girl sings her own 'creation hymn' revealing the underground identity, *"the seed left to die," "the promise,"* and *"the living tree,"* a regenerative force much needed by the trauma bound living and lineage.



Shame is reframed as a transformable co-heroine in the story. Paradoxically the Girl Behind the Door is the *"wild seed,"* the source of wild/true self and new life/new ways of being. Before any dialogue or interaction with community takes place, there is a need for the concrete floor to be cracked open in the psyche of the Returning Woman herself. Shame transformed, the wild seed, is her unlikely liberator. Brown says that we tend to view shame through the lenses of *"Individualizing (I am the only one); Pathologizing (something is wrong*

with me); and *Reinforcing (I should be ashamed)*.”⁴³ These form part of the concrete floor and make it desirable to keep shame hidden behind a door. These perspectives make returning to her community/family of origin undesirable.

However, Brown points out that if we “*Contextualize (I see the big picture)*; *Normalize (I’m not the only one)*; and *Demystify (I’ll share what I know with others)*”⁴⁴ we can lean into shame as a learning and liberating experience. Every story of shame is a wild seed, if nurtured to open, it will release the new life. This is liberation.

Once the woman has experienced this liberation in dream form, the Dark Mother allows herself to be found. She enters the dreamscape to be with the woman and the living-tree girl, stating, “*Now you know.*”



43 Brown, *I Thought it Was Just Me*, 99.

44 Brown, *I Thought it Was Just Me*, 94.

Entr'acte (between the acts) - THE DARK MOTHER'S DIVINING

*"In nature, there is a name for these in between places: **ecotones**, the space between two distinct ecosystems. An ecotone is the threshold space where ocean meets sand, where forest meets meadow. New life springs up along the ecotone, at the point where two ecological communities meet. The term comes from the Greek word **tonos**, which means 'tension'. Something new comes out of tension; a beginning is born in these in between spaces... For an ecotone to begin to burst with new life, a person must choose to sit in the tension of what might be before they can see it or smell it.*

This takes tremendous courage."

Steve Wiens – Beginnings⁴⁵

"...we all have in ourselves everything we need to reconfigure the pieces of our soul. It is simply a matter of having the courage to be everything that God has given us the gifts to be."

Joan Chittister – The Story of Ruth: Twelve Moments in Every Woman's Life⁴⁶

Julia Cameron, American teacher, author, artist, poet, playwright, novelist, filmmaker, composer, and journalist says,

"For all of us, by claiming our own memories, we gain access to the creative energy that they contain. Memories become a source, not only of inspiration, but of fuel. In other words, they give us not only ideas but also the power to carry them out. Real art is made from the inside out, not the outside in. For this reason, self-disclosure must begin with the disclosure of self to self. This self-initiated self-disclosure requires privacy and attention."⁴⁷

The Wild Seed Dream opens a place of privacy in the non-waking world. Yet this privacy is uncomfortable, full of tension, as it is so when we find ourselves in the places/spaces called 'between', 'limbo' or 'liminality'. Just before the egg hatches, the cocoon is torn open, the seed germinates, and the frond breaks into the light, there is tension in the form of resistance. Tension and resistance are birth places, thresholds, rare and life changing. Into this ecotone the dream walking Dark Mother steps in to continue reframing the alternate reality the Returning Woman finds herself in. The Dark Mother reminds her, saying the *"cold child tethered to you is not your torturer, or a punishment but a wild seed. The seed of true life is not always what you expect it to be. Sometimes it is what you least expect, like the cold and uncared for parts of your soul."*

The difficulty is when we have 'uncared for parts' of our soul or the 'dark parts of our own personality' become obvious, we do not necessarily know how to receive or nurture them.

45 Steve Wiens, *Beginnings: The First Day of the Rest of Your Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2015), 118.

46 Chittister, *The Story of Ruth*, 77-78.

47 Julia Cameron, *The Vein of Gold: A Journey to Your Creative Heart* (London: Souvenir Press Ltd, 2013), 56.

We are possibly more afraid of our lack of capacity to care for what we have deemed (what others have instructed us) is unlovable. The Dark Mother reminds the Returning Woman, *"You created this dream. It is a scene you replayed over and over in your younger days. A wild hope, a wild dream about someone small growing large enough to break through the floor that the decrepit lullaby told her to lay still under."*

The Dark Mother is pointing the Returning Woman towards an instinct to receive and care for the so-called unlovable that is buried deep within. There under her own mental concrete floor is a wild seed. Estes says that *"the soul and the spirit have resources that are astonishing... able to thrive on very little, and sometimes for a long time on nothing."*⁴⁸ With the lack of mothering in her community of origin, a traumatised family tree of mothers who learned neglect rather than nurture, the woman is at a disadvantage from the get-go. However, Estes assures us that what has been lost *"can be rebuilt, strongly, and properly, now."* Often the greater fear is that *"something essential has died... that can never come back to life, something that received no nourishment, for psychically one's own mother was dead herself."*⁴⁹

The Dark Mother reminds, putting it this way,

"Everything and I mean everything, can be re-made. What matters most is whether you create from self-fear or from self-love. What you create will take on the feeling, the spirit with which you infuse into its making. Risk creating with self-love on your Return, and you will be surprised how different it can be."

This first entr'acte includes a poem, 'Unmade Making.' One of the central themes throughout this story; question and put your hands (effort) to what needs to be unmade before a re-making.



48 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 194.

49 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 194.

Scene Three - THE CROSSING

*Be taught now, among the trees and rocks, how
the discarded is woven into shelter...
apprentice yourself to yourself, begin to welcome back
all you sent away, be a new annunciation...
and be hospitable, even to the stranger in you.*
David Whyte – “Coleman’s Bed” - River Flow⁵⁰

The Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door are led to The Crossing where they will be given to the care of the Guardian. Here the Phoenix Woman gives the Returning Woman fire feathers, to warm her cold heart. She has no knowledge of how to let go of her frigid feelings and frozen values (those that she learned in her community of origin) and become nurturing. Estes says, *“Freezing up is the worst thing a person can do. Coldness is the kiss of death to creativity, relationship, life itself.”* Estes names coldness as *“an act of defensive anger.”*⁵¹

The Phoenix Woman’s gift of her enduring warmth, her inexhaustible fire, is to acknowledge this lack of knowing how to become nurturing. We need help to unfreeze, thaw and learn to be warm. She says of her offered feathers,

“Like the most attentive winged mother, may they brood over what needs to be incubated and nurtured to life in your nest made of flesh. May they help your earthy heart become a warm womb, heat the seed out of its tomb-like fossilised state so it searches for its source and sprouts towards the light.”

The first task is to ask the Guardian’s permission to cross. The condition is to offer up a ‘twine,’ that is from *“the woman’s lineage inheritance, a blessing brought forth at The Crossing. This was to acknowledge her connection to ancestors and the repository of their wisdom.”* This is a challenge to the woman’s defensive anger which is set against the shadowy figures of her ancestry. She is asked to look beyond, see a larger vision, and from her mouth flows the request for blessing. She is invited to cross by the Guardian who will reveal the second healing twine, which is, *“the unique calling specific to the woman’s Returning and her community’s affliction.”*

The Returning Woman crosses over to begin the journey feeling like she has been felled. This reflects not only her own state, but also the felled condition of the community she was once part of. Its shame-based painful practices and the consequences of those practices are well known to her, yet she has been blind to how much those have become part of her own way of being. The Phoenix Woman reminds her that Returning is not going back, but a movement

50 David Whyte, from the poem “Coleman’s Bed”, *River Flow: New and Selected Poems (Revised)*, (Washington: Many Rivers Press, 2007) 228.

51 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 197.

forward (a departure from those familiar practices and their consequences), for as John O'Donohue, Irish poet, author, priest, and Hegelian philosopher says "*Once the soul awakens, the search begins and you can never go back.*"⁵² Nor does it mean that she will Return a finally finished version of herself on some egotistical mission to save others. The felling experienced, if embraced, will humble and reshape her.

Falling

The Guardian Pōhutukawa tree is a living parable revealing that falling is not a fatal finality. She reframes "the fall" as a process of being twisted beautifully strange. To fall, to tumble, and to be uprooted from your place of belonging is not an end. It is a beginning. However, a fall does feel like a humiliation and humiliation can irritate shame and defensive resentment. This is the state of the woman when she meets the Guardian, yet she can admire the Guardian's flourishing regrowth from having fallen and experienced a tragedy. This is something her community was unable to achieve.

Richard Rohr, Franciscan priest, speaker, writer and the founder of the Centre for Action and Contemplation says, "*you will and you must 'lose' at something. This is the only way that Life-Fate-God-Grace-Mystery can get you to change, let go of your egocentric preoccupations, and go on the further and larger journey.*"⁵³ We cannot find or be found until we have lost or been lost. Taken to the edge we discover what Rohr calls, "*the real source, the deep well, or the constantly flowing stream.*"⁵⁴ The Guardian Pōhutukawa has discovered a source she needed to cultivate from within herself, it was birthed from losing, from falling, from being broken.

James Hillman, psychologist, and scholar, authored *The Soul's Code* outlining his "acorn theory".⁵⁵ He championed the idea that within the soul was one's calling or destiny, just as "*acorns are pregnant with oaks.*"⁵⁶ In order for acorns to grow into the tree that is within, just like any seed, they must fall.

Hillman says we tend to focus on metaphors of upward motion.⁵⁷ Hebrew, Greek, and Christian thought value spiritual height. Falling is resisted and portrayed as a disaster.

52 O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World* (Great Britain: Bantam Press, 1997) 28.

53 Richard Rohr, *Falling Upwards: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 65-66.

54 Rohr, *Falling Upward*, 67.

55 James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, (Australia: Random House, 1996), 7.

56 Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, 27.

57 Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, 41.

Hillman asks, *"Hasn't something critical been omitted in the ascensionist model?"*⁵⁸ Our birthing takes the opposite direction. *"Normally we come into the world headfirst, like divers into the pool of humanity. Descent takes a while. We grow down."*⁵⁹ The fall or growing down is necessary for life because it is *"the darkening and despairing that the soul requires to deepen"*⁶⁰ for rising and falling are *"one of the archetypal patterns of life, and one of its most ancient, cosmic lessons."*⁶¹

One moment that influenced the writing of this third chapter called THE CROSSING happened when I was just on the cusp of everything being turned upside down in my own life. At a favourite beach I came across a pōhutukawa tree that had fallen down a bank, dragging earth with it in its root ball, which was awkwardly held up above itself. It had regrown, its trunk lay horizontally stretched out over the tidal ecotone, and all its branches had twisted upright so the tree could regrow somewhat vertically. I couldn't stop marvelling at it, so sat with the tree and asked how long it took for it to recover from its fall and regrow. I felt the response, the tree inside of me speak some truths that I penned in a journal. These poignant thoughts became the conversation between the Returning Woman and the Guardian Pōhutukawa tree, at a point in the story where the difficult part of return journey really begins.

The Guardian Pōhutukawa does not sugar coat the pain of falling, the deaths, the despair, the misbeliefs, and the slow arduous recovery. As she shares her wisdom story and invokes the last few lines of 'The Lore of Being Beautifully Torn,' the Guardian helps the woman to shift the focus from her own healing (her own roots) being a singular concern, to consider and name what ails her community (the roots of the family tree). Rather than overtly tell the woman what healing twine she could offer her community, the Guardian asks questions to frame the quest the woman must take with the Girl Behind the Door.

"Who will you tell your stories, your offerings of truth to? Are they only for your ears alone? What of your journey of not being silenced? What silences have you kept, yet to be spoken of? What has happened to your family tree, what ails it?"

To offer hope, the woman is asked to look again at the Guardian's roots, and there is found a gift (pāua shell). She is encouraged to take several shells that had lain unnoticed, scattered near the Guardian, and told these were to be carried for an unspecified sacred work. The Guardian reminds the woman that cutting *"the cord that bound us to whatever seemed secure and yet increasingly constricting, even if that leaves us with a gaping sacred wound, ushers us into a new way of being,"* is not a one-time event. The Guardian herself may one day undergo another need to fall and regrow while not resenting the uprooting. She advises the woman,

58 Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, 42.

59 Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, 42.

60 Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, 43.

61 Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, 61.

“Choose not bitterness for yourself, seek the gift in the tangle of the deranged roots of your family tree, and it will be found if you only look.”

Towards the end of the chapter, the Guardian sings to the Girl Behind the Door about all she had suffered, acknowledging the despair she’s felt for the lack of responsiveness from her trauma-blind community. Woven through the lyrics are references to a yet to be understood connection between the girl and her ‘sea-ness.’ There is more to the Girl Behind the Door than the woman can conceive, something about her is hidden in plain sight at this point. She is just as blind to the girl’s nature just as that past objectifying community was. Though the song somewhat softens the hard icy edges of the woman’s heart toward the girl, the woman is not yet ready to concede. Nonetheless, she asks for help beyond herself, that she too will become the ‘beautifully twisted strange.’



ACT TWO

THE SECOND LESSON - To return is to speak the first words of creation

Returning Involves calling the wild and singing to the valley of bones,

“LET THERE BE ROOM TO THRIVE”

“...I began to formulate a new relationship with my own trauma. It wasn’t something to silence, suppress, avoid or negate. It was a well I could draw on, a deep source of understanding and intuition... the path to healing... to reframe my wound as something necessary and useful...”

Edith Eger – *The Choice*⁶²

Brehony describes this stage of the alchemical process, the ‘albedo,’ as *“a purification of all the constituent elements mixed together.”*⁶³ We may catch glimpses of *“the true potentialities of the **prima material**”*⁶⁴ just as we begin to see the butterfly through the eventual transparency of the cocoon.

The Returning Woman begins to take hold of the opportunities to resolve her own dividedness and the issues that have repressed her.⁶⁵ As Brehony says of this stage it is *“a washing clean, a baptism... spiritual and psychological awakening.”* We are afforded a new perspective, *“a new light.”*⁶⁶ After mourning the painful fall, the Girl Behind the Door is seen with more sensitivity, with less projection of self-punishing blame. This is noticing *“the first green shoots, tiny and barely seen tendrils, push their way through the scorched earth following a raging forest fire.”*⁶⁷ There is a growing freedom to respond differently to what have been the normal conditioned relational habits. Suffering may be an unavoidable reality,⁶⁸ yet one does not have to remain in what Eger calls *“a victim’s mind”* which is *“rigid, blaming, pessimistic, stuck in the past, unforgiving, punitive, and without healthy limits or boundaries.”* Such confinement leads us to *“become our own jailors.”*⁶⁹ The Returning Woman is gaining a fuller awareness of the shadow, the disconnection, and the remedies involved in reclamation.

62 Eger, *The Choice*, 239.

63 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 83.

64 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 83.

65 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 83.

66 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 83.

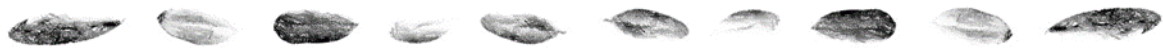
67 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 83.

68 Brehony, *After the Darkest Hour*, 84-85.

69 Eger, *The Choice*, 9.

Handmade

Brehony's "constituent elements" and the "prima material" refer to the composition of our original raw state. In the novella the second lesson of return says, "*You were the first words of creation.*" Naturalist and author Terry Tempest Williams in her book *When Women were Birds* writes of the union that results in creation and birth. She says that the "*world begins with yes.*"⁷⁰ The tomb of lifelessness becomes a womb, or a space for life to thrive in. Yet if it is union that makes creation possible, the willing "yes" is the spark required to light the fuse of life. Palmer says of creativity that it is "*driven more by inner choice than outer demand. An act cannot be creative if it is not born of freedom.*"⁷¹ The necessary element required for life, for the handmade, is room to thrive. For thriving to happen space must be made in which the psychology or ideology of the man-made is being undone or undermined and in that same space the remaking begins to take shape.



70 Terry Tempest Williams, *When Women Were Birds: Fifty-Four Variations on Voice*, (New York: Picador, 2012), 99.

71 Parker J. Palmer, *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 9.

Scene Four - THE FORCED MARCH

*“When you believe in that particular lie, you are living **as if** instead of **as is**. As if the misery of the forced march will be contrasted by the exhilaration of reaching the destination.*

*Your life is not firm and fixed. And you cannot find it by submitting
to a forced march.*

You are not a noun. You are a verb. You are endlessly becoming.”

Steve Weins - *Beginnings*⁷²

Pathfinding

Navigating a Return with soulful sensitivity is encouraged by the Guardian Pohutukawa tree who instructs the woman through the ‘Lore of Pathfinding.’ There is no direct path to Returning, the way is offered up by paying attention to the signs embedded in the landscape (or soul-scape). This requires patience, which at this point, the woman doesn’t have a surplus of.

Still smouldering with resentment, she becomes determined to either free herself from being tethered to the girl and return alone, or to return as quickly as possible to get the imagined painful outcome over and done with. The woman does not notice the girl’s happiness to be in her company, but she is acutely aware of not feeling capable enough to care for the child and wishing to avoid having to do so. This leaves the woman open to a ‘short cut’ mentality, she is not yet fully committed to the idea of the unfolding process that Returning is.

The pair reach the crossroads where the woman cannot choose which way to go. In that state of indecision, harbouring resentful resignation, avoidance, and a willingness to once more hand the girl over to someone else to care for, she is forced into a choice. The women who trickle by them are reflections of the state the woman is in; regretful, self-loathing and fearful. The girl is snatched into the marching crowd, and the woman must follow.

Unmaking the man-made in self

The unmaking of the man-made, which opens *“cracks and slivers where honesty can be found,”*⁷³ happens on the ‘Forced March.’ The initial choice the woman makes in her shock is to passively submit to force, fear and exhaustion. However, Wiens points out that even *“exhaustion is a beginning”* albeit a hidden one, to *“pursuing the endless adventure of becoming.”*⁷⁴ Though she has unwittingly drawn herself and the girl into the Forced March, it is here that she begins to openly express and realise the truth of her own learned cruelty.

72 Weins, *Beginnings*, xv.

73 Wiens, *Beginnings*, xv.

74 Wiens, *Beginnings*, xv.

Though she hopes the tether that binds herself to the girl will snap, it holds. As the situation begins to draw the poison of the 'man-made' out of her system, the woman's resentment towards the girl, her own orphaned story, flows unbridled.

"Each footfall reminded me of the deep smouldering resentment I felt. I let it burn so much I almost took delight in the fact that the bedraggled imp was forced to march like me. It had not occurred to me that I needed to face my own cruelty. I was given over to it. There was an estrangement I had not welcomed, an orphan I wished to erase, and a humiliation I could not reconcile with."



Night falls, the woman tries once more to undo the tether and using a pāua shell to try to cut the bindings, she only manages to nick her own skin. The woman gives up. Exhausted she falls into dreaming. She is free to walk away from the girl. Yet in her freedom she chooses to go where she has been told there are monsters. Into the Labyrinth she descends. There the woman meets a hooded stranger and is offered a creation story *"about a fearful woman who tries to rid herself of a monster."*

"I listened as one does in a dream, the details vivid, like the wind blowing in your face catching away your breath. Yet all the words running past me were like a voice caught in the moving dreaming slipstream and then gone. Yet no one can hear such a fable without being altered in some way."

The Returning Woman falls out of the dreaming labyrinth space to integrate her *"experience into consciousness."*⁷⁵ Initially she is spellbound, she knows something, but what it is or what it means, she has not woken up to yet. The key that turns the lock is the word 'monster' she

75 Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon*, 34.

directs at the girl as she continues to blame her for the forced march. The mystery of the dreaming lesson finally opens to her. She recognises her own self in the behaviour of another determined woman who is dragging the Girl Behind the Door along on the march. The woman feels the forceful reality of primal protection within herself ignite, and takes responsibility for her abandoning, neglectful, and blame shifting behaviour.

It is not until the Returning Woman claims the child as her own, belonging to herself, that the determined other woman yields and lets the Girl Behind the Door go. The Returning Woman's internal persecutor has loosened its grip. Her cold heart is warmed by Phoenix feathers that aid the frozen values within her to thaw. These values being learned over a lifetime in her former community are giving way for new emerging values, new sources as the Guardian Pōhutukawa described, particularly the source of self-compassion. The frozen value of neglect is thawing.

Leibrich says that it was a chasm to cross to learn how to bring *"closer to the warmth of [her] fire"* or sanctuary the unwanted or feared parts of herself *"so that they too [were] not afraid."*⁷⁶ The old familiar response to the shame-filled trauma of being man-made is lifted to reveal the new life underneath. Rather than practice *"spiritual escapism"*⁷⁷ to avoid questioning what has been set in concrete, the movement is downward, to dig root-deep, as a tree's root will do in order to undermine concreted surfaces above. Benner advises against avoiding *"the experience of these dark places"* or *"we will lose contact with important dimensions of our being"* that will deny us *"access to vast regions of our soul."*⁷⁸

The Retuning Woman can now allow for the possibility that the Girl Behind the Door is not a burden. Instead, the girl is a guide she must walk with to Return, to undertake the needed deeds of dealing with the learned communal practices of shame-making and neglect. Warmth towards the girl can now grow. The woman is more willing to path find, to handmake their way onwards. She is also more willing to consider how she might Return and stand before her community with truth-telling. To begin this practice, she writes an honest letter, referencing the shame-making culture, to the Matriarch of her community/family of origin.

"The time has come to return... I bring a long-forgotten companion with me. And yet how many of us became faceless to you as you bound us to the lullaby, singing us into silence? You may not recognise me, I am no longer a woman with tattered wings... All I ask for is a communion to speak of the untameable wild seed of hope."

76 Leibrich, Sanctuary, 113.

77 Benner, Soulful Spirituality, 135.

78 Benner, Soulful Spirituality, 136.

Entr'acte (between the acts) - THE WIZENED ONE'S CREATION STORY

"In the deeps are the violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters deeper down, if you drop with them farther over the world's rim, you find what our sciences cannot locate or name, the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether which buoys the rest, which gives goodness its power for good and evil its power for evil, the unified field; our complex and inexplicable caring for one another, and for our life together here. This is a given. It is not learned."

Annie Dillard – *Teaching a Stone to Talk*⁷⁹

"...conventional wisdom warns us to flee monsters lest we lose our lives... those monsters are the only reliable guides to the deeper reaches of our lives. Only by riding them down, despite the risks, will we be able to find the primal source of ourselves and our world... we must cultivate the hope that they can become the companions to be embraced, guides to be followed, albeit with caution and respect. For only our monsters know the way down to that inner place of unity and wholeness; only these creatures of the night know how to travel where there is no light."

Parker J. Palmer - *The Active Life*⁸⁰

Author and poet Annie Dillard wrote about riding our "monsters deeper down" to discover "the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether," which she called "the unified field."⁸¹ Palmer picking up on Dillard's thoughts says that in plumbing "the depths of full aliveness" and touching on its power there is "not only grace but danger, not only healing but wounding, not only life but death."⁸²

Through the darker places, the Returning Woman travels exploring her own inner shadowy terrain. Revaluing, or the forming new values is birthed out of Returning to the way of handmade-ness. This birthing involves a readiness to be hatched, and to break our "only shelter"⁸³ destroying what protection we previously had. O'Donohue says the danger of staying sealed in our shell or if we resist a rebirth, is that we may develop a deafening inability "to hear our own life."⁸⁴

This Entr'acte reveals the story told in the dreaming Labyrinth. In her forced march, the woman is obviously deaf to the girl's plight, perversely delighting in her suffering. The

79 Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 94-95.

80 Palmer, *The Active Life*, 29-31.

81 Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, 94-95.

82 Palmer, *The Active Life*, 30.

83 John O'Donohue, *Divine Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (Great Britain: Bantam Press, 2003), 188.

84 O'Donohue, *Divine Beauty*, 189.

Wizened One, wisest of wise, oldest of old, enters the story. She is a teacher of sorts, likely to be met with in betwixt places when her stories and lessons are most needed. Because of her great age, she's a watcher, historian, witness, and a celebrant of vow making.

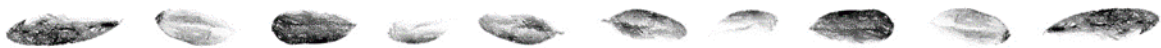
Two years before I wrote *Letters to a Missing Woman*, I encountered Dillard's and Palmer's quotes at a time in my life where I was struggling to make peace with my own shadow. To experience the quotes, rather than intellectualise them, I wrote a story about meeting my 'monster' which included my avoidance, rage and desire to obliterate, bury, and to live without my shadow and shame. As I wrote on, I found my way into reconnecting with my 'monster' as a nurturer, as an act of radical self-acceptance and care. But it didn't end there. The challenge was if I could surrender and 'ride' my monster as a guide down into that 'unified field.' This short creative exercise became the foundation for the story told by the Wizened One in this story.



It is because of fear that 'monsters' are run from. Ironically it is friendship with one's monster that thwarts the barriers to love that fear throws up. Eger notes that her own trauma underwent a transformation because she reframed her relationship to it. Eger learned to care for and draw upon the wisdom of her wound. In the Labyrinthine story the woman nurses her monster and comes to recognise this is self-care and love. The shunned self or 'monster' is her guide rather the problem that needs eradication.

While the story is directed at the Returning Woman as a personal parable, it also counters the learned collective practice of shunning so called 'monsters.' The collective of women on the forced march are warned not to sleep too deeply near the entrance of the labyrinth in case the monsters within come and steal them. This reflects what happens in *THE TURNING* at the beginning, when the woman's tranquillity is disrupted. She sleeps; the girl is the monster who comes out of the labyrinth of history and steals the woman out of her idyllic life.

In fact, since THE TURNING, the girl has been acting as the Returning Woman's guide, drawing her away from the surface of self-centredness, reclusiveness and stagnation, and leading her in the opposite direction of the status quo an adaptive survival; ignore the community of origin and hopefully they'll ignore her. The girl allows herself to be pulled into the forced march as a symbol of surrendering to the descent. The movement is downwards, the woman's deeply held resentment and blame is exposed. It is an opportunity for the woman to understand how deadly her fear is, vicious enough to bury the child in the march and delight in her suffering. The turning point in THE FORCED MARCH is when the woman recognises that she is the fearful woman in the Wizenred One's story, and the metaphorical spade is in her hands.



Scene Five - BONE VALLEY

"We all begin as a bundle of bones lost somewhere in a desert, a dismantled skeleton that lies under the sand. It is our work to recover the parts. It is a painstaking process best done when the shadows are just right, for it takes much looking... what we are to look for – the indestructible life force, the bones."

Clarissa Pinkola Estes – *Women Who Run with the Wolves*

Brown says of the wilderness that it is the metaphor that *"theologians, writers, poets, and musicians"* use to depict an *"environment where we are forced to navigate difficult trials"* and *"a refuge of nature and beauty where we seek space for contemplation."*⁸⁵ In the novella the question faced is whether emptiness, aridness, and death are Godforsaken or *"can these bones live?"*

Estes says that the bones are the *"indestructible life force"* and that *"we all begin as a bundle of bones somewhere in a desert."* She encourages us to *"work to recover the parts."*⁸⁶ This, says Estes, is the *"labor of finding and singing the creation hymn,"* which, she calls *"a solitary work... carried out in the desert of the psyche."*⁸⁷ Here we walk amongst the bones in *"the ancient pattern of all nature,"* the *"the Life/Death/Life cycle"* that Estes refers to as a circle of *"animation, development, decline, and death that is always followed by re-animation."*⁸⁸ She says that everything from celestial beings, humans, to the tiniest entities or particles of creation *"have this fluttering, then faltering, then fluttering again."*⁸⁹ The song in the wilderness is *"Let there be room to thrive."* The letters to the Matriarch or to the established community asks for a *"shared sky"* or an ecotone.

After giving up the Forced March, the travelling companions engage in Pathfinding, as the Guardian Pōhutukawa had instructed them. This brings them closer together.

The path leads them to BONE VALLEY. This is where it is fabled in old stories, previously heard by the woman, that the remains of missing women were laid. The girl turned guide collects a few of the scattered bones. The Returning Woman feels the weighty grief of something that has ailed her and the community she once lived amongst. Prayerfully she wonders how her own deadness might live, how to gather the scattered pieces of self and community.

She is answered. The Wizen One joins the pair noting that this wasteland is the end of the road for those who remain in the Forced March, believing themselves godforsaken and

85 Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone* (USA: Random House, 2017), 36.

86 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 26.

87 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 27.

88 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 137.

89 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 137. A

cursed. She asks the woman and girl if the bones can live again as a precursor to whether there is hope for the community that is being returned to. The Returning Woman is doubtful.

Before the question is asked again, the Wizen One sings to the Girl Behind the Door, revealing that they have met before. The girl's story is known, she is remembered, and her spirit is *"like the winds."* Being so, she is the one invited to call for the wild four winds. The girl becomes the unexpected regenerative songstress. A foreshadow of her creative expressive actions that will later be undertaken at the Matriarch's house. The bones are gathered by the four winds, re-joined and re-spirited (or reanimated) as restored women, who are then commanded to Return by the Wizen One.

The second lesson of return is offered by the Wizen One; *"To Return is to speak the first words of creation."* This lesson echoes and develops further comments made by the Phoenix Woman in THE GIRL BEHIND THE DOOR and the dream in THE WILD SEED, *"Understand there are natural forces buried in you that are more powerful than the oppressive weight of concrete."* We are a powerful creation; we are also creators. Though we might suffer being transgressed against, we might be felled, we can also rise newly created, creating as we grow again, speaking the creative words, 'let there be room to thrive.' The answer will be yes.

With this vision and lesson, the scattered bones of the relationship between the Girl Behind the Door and the Returning Woman are gathered and brought together. They dance under a 'shared sky,' where wholeness or integration is possible, and there is room to thrive.

Vows in the Wilderness to the Unsanctioned Child

If the Returning Woman thought that returning to her community of origin was intimidating enough, she felt the task of walking amongst the haunted grounds of the Shadow People, the birthplace of the Binding Lullaby, was ludicrous for her to undertake. But the Wizen One knows that before she can re-create addressing her community, she needs to understand the buried past and bear up under the strain of being pulled in many directions to choose the girl that was rejected. Before moving forwards, she must undermine the historical foundation by straddling two worlds, past and present.

In BONE VALLEY vows are made in preparation to face the shadowy villainous village, in the Shadow People's realm. The tethering will not be enough, a clear, solemn and oath must be made. The vows are a promise to no longer abandon the *"unsanctioned child,"*⁹⁰ the outcast or the exile. Estes describes in length the old, old story of *"the village"* and its attitude to the unsanctioned, saying *"in punitive cultures"* there is a tearing *"between being accepted"* by the

90 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 187.

established community and loving whatever the child represents. Punishments of various kinds can follow for *“defying the village proscriptions and sheltering the unsanctioned child.”*⁹¹



The vows made are commitments to true belonging which Brown defines as a *“spiritual practice.”* In learning to belong *“to yourself... you can share your most authentic self”* and *“find sacredness”* in both participation and *“standing alone.”*⁹²

This is a commitment to not only *“brave the wilderness,”* or ecotone, but to live bravely *“becoming the wilderness.”* Becoming liminality or a betweenum is to break *“down the walls, abandoning our ideological bunkers, and living from our wild heart rather than our weary hurt,”*⁹³ as Brown says. These walls keep us inwardly divided and at the mercy of our shadows, our darkness and perpetual abandonment/orphaning of our unsanctioned children.⁹⁴ The Returning Woman writes to the Matriarch addressing these false walls, advocating for a shared conversation, as she and the girl bring back to the community the lost knowledge buried in history.

As the vows are made a witness is being called for. From generations past an apparition joins the gathering, a mother and daughter. For time unknown vows between mothers and daughters were bound up in the ruining phrases of the Binding Lullaby that advocated silence,

91 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 187.

92 Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 40.

93 Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 36.

94 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 187. Estes names examples of unsanctioned children as; *“a symbolic child, creative child, or biological child. This is an old, old story. Women have died psychically and spiritually for trying to protect the unsanctioned child, whether it be their art, their lover, their politics, their offspring, or their soul life.”*

secrets and denial. The vows made are ones of listening and heeding the voice crying for acknowledgment, promises are made to no longer abandon, but to search, find and recover the missing and forgotten.

The Wizedned One sends her ravens ahead of the trio, to watch and care on her behalf in the realm where the woman and girl must go alone. In spirit the Wizedned One will be there, but the test of the vows between woman and girl are theirs alone to face.



Scene Six - **BETWIX AND BETWEEN THE SHADOW PEOPLE**

“Archetypally, to untangle something requires a descent, the following of a labyrinth down into the underworld or to the place where matters are revealed in entirely new ways. One must follow what at first appears to be a convoluted process, but in effect is a profound pattern for renewal. In fairy tales, to loosen the girdle, undo the knot, untie, and untangle means to begin to understand something previously closed to us, to understand its applications and uses, to become mage-like, a knowing soul.”

Clarissa Pinkola Estes – *Women Who Run With the Wolves*⁹⁵

Having made vows to one another, the girl and the woman are untethered by the Wized One. The tether had accomplished its work, having been instrumental in restoring the relationship between the two returners, and was no longer needed.

“We had both been thawed. The concrete floor between us had been broken up and she had grown towards me, reclaiming something of my ruins like the wild seed tree of my dream.”

Liberating the Shadow

To liberate a shadow requires understanding of how it came to be. In this part of the quest the Returning woman encounters the history of decline and decay in the “*dangerous*” burning book handed to her, written by the Wized One, “*This is what I saw and what I know.*” Trauma has become the source. This history reveals how the values became frozen/fixed/concreted, where life disrupted by pain and grief has turned into the stagnant suffocating swamp and the traumatised memorial tree. However, it also reveals an alternative ‘herstory’ about the Sacred Root of this village, a forgotten flourishing Matriarch, the spiritual source that was abandoned.

The preservation of shadow requires a perverse loyalty to the “*villainous village,*” which is to forget and abandon. Forget and abandon the unsanctioned child, who is a painful reminder of a once cherished dream that became grief. Forget the vows made in the wilderness and succumb to a psycho-spiritual amnesia. Forget the history and allow the shadow to grow in strength. The woman commits the testament to memory, feeling the importance that this is what she must tell her community of origin.

The pair are overcome by the Shadow People and separated. The woman experiences what all in her community have, the loss of what should not be forgotten. The ravens, emissaries of the Wized One speak another language different the dirge of the Shadow People, under whose spell the woman wanders in confusion. The voice of raven, is heard as the voice of the Wized One who urges, “*Remember your vows.*” The Returning Woman’s recall and

⁹⁵ Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 156.

speaking of the vows, drives the shadow back. She ultimately cannot be separated from her new set of values; she initiates a values-based “*heroic response at a juncture*” of “*exceptional circumstances*.”⁹⁶ The vows made to the Girl Behind the Door are remembered, the fire feathers drive out the numbing cold, and the cries of the girl are finally heard.

Meanwhile, the girl (who has been contained in a box, lowered into the stagnating swamp) offers her own revolutionary words, declaring that she is the sea (which is impossible to restrain forever). The words become the messaged preached by the woman to the Shadow People, a sermon about remembering one’s true nature. Both the Returning Woman and the girl defy the village and its frozen values, and their defiance becomes liberation. The Girl Behind the Door reveals her sea-nature once more, and the woman glimpses who she really is.



In response to this defiance the Sacred Root sings a creation hymn to her wayward offspring (the Shadow People), offering them an unexpected homecoming. She has not forgotten them, though they have lived frozen in time, clinging to grief, without remembrance of her wild vitality. At this point, the woman recognises the Sacred Root as ‘ours,’ and she is a recovered source that had been buried in the roots of the family tree, just as the pāua had been found and retrieved from the roots of the Guardian Pōhutukawa in THE CROSSING.

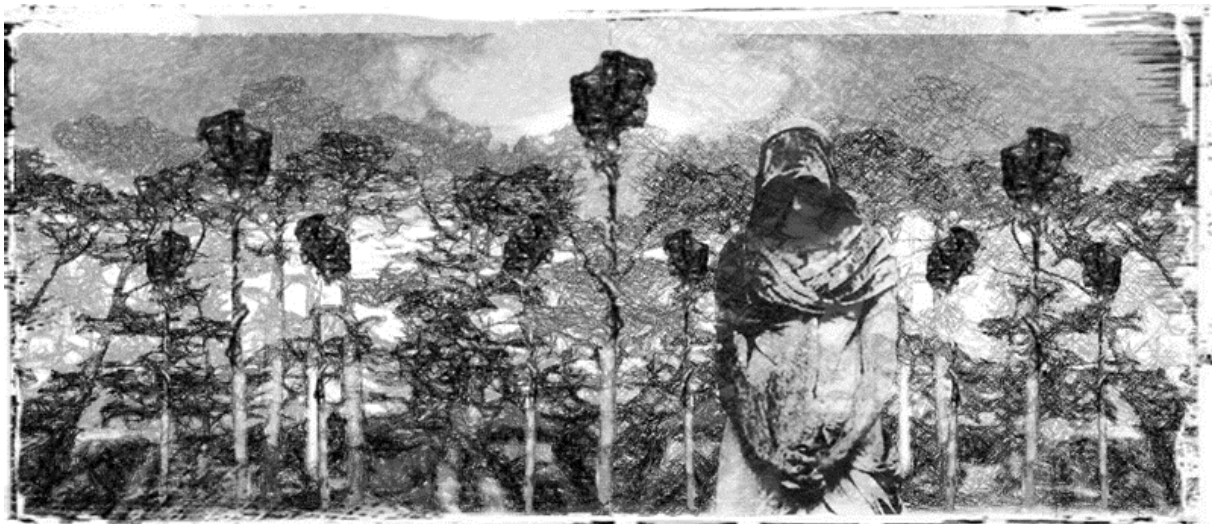
The Returning woman preaches to the Shadow People as they sit stunned by the creation hymn, “*Let the wild seed child become a thriving tree. Let the Sacred Root grow again.*” There are always deeper origins than frozen values. The Shadow People let go, because the Returning Woman has let go of her own neglect, and the habitual enculturated pattern of abandonment. She has embraced what O’Donohue points out, that no “*person is a finished*

96 Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon*, 6.

thing, regardless of how frozen or paralysed their self-image might be. Each one of us is in a state of perennial formation."⁹⁷

The power of shadow, the sky of illusion has fallen, and the Scared Root is claimed as a bone-deep part of the woman. The memorial tree is broken, the slab of stone engraved with the words of the Binding Lullaby has been cracked in two.

Now the stage is set for regrowth, not just for the Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door, but for all those tangled up in the knotted roots of the familial trauma. Another letter is written to the Matriarch, *"The Return is not a submission to the life sentence you dictated. I will yield to renewal but not to the drought that gnaws for fealty. Yet all could thrive if you would only let go."*



97 O'Donohue, *Divine Beauty*, 146.

Act Three

THE THIRD LESSON - To return is to heal the home of your Sacred Root

Returning involves discovering the **NEW ORDER** of things

"To be initiated into a mystery psychologically is to have a mystical experience that changes you. You no longer are who you were before. You have undergone something that sets you apart from those who have not had the experience. Often an initiation involves an element of isolation, of facing fear or undergoing an ordeal. But perhaps just as often, the initiatory experience comes as a gift of grace, when mystery and profound beauty come together in a numinous moment of which we are a part. The new initiate feels archetypally twice-born: into life at birth, and now through a mystery, into a new state of being or new consciousness."

Jean Shinoda Bolen – *Crossing to Avalon*⁹⁸

The last stage of the alchemical process, the 'rubedo,' represents the renewal of spirit.⁹⁹ The outcome is individuation. One may feel they have *"connected with some deep, wise, healing part of the unconscious psyche"* which Brehony calls a *"chemical marriage between the conscious and unconscious."*¹⁰⁰ However, this has not been achieved without some kind of battle and sheer hard work.¹⁰¹ The transforming symbols she speaks of are the emerging butterfly, once isolated in the tomb of its chrysalis, or the phoenix rising from the ashes ready to fly.¹⁰²

Brehony says this is the experience of *"rebirth"* and *"resurrection,"* touching on *"the deeper meaning of our existence"*¹⁰³ that has been *"wrung out"* from tragedy.¹⁰⁴ The Returning Woman experiences a new sight and clarity about her context or family of origin without returning to *"the same place from which [she] started."*¹⁰⁵ She is healing the home of her Sacred Root.



98 Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon*, 51.

99 Brehony, *After the Darkest Night*, 85.

100 Brehony, *After the Darkest Night*, 86.

101 Brehony, *After the Darkest Night*, 119.

102 Brehony, *After the Darkest Night*, 86.

103 Brehony, *After the Darkest Night*, 86.

104 Brehony, *After the Darkest Night*, 119.

105 Brehony, *After the Darkest Night*, 119.

Scene Seven - THE MATRIARCH'S HOUSE

"What is held over her head is condemnation, even damnation. We've been led to believe that leaving the circle of orthodoxy means leaving the realm of truth. It knows if we claim ultimate authority as something in ourselves, as some inchoate voice in our own souls, it has lost all power over us. We have rendered ourselves independent, outside its control. We have stepped out onto our own path. For some reason this scares people senseless."

Sue Monk Kidd – *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*¹⁰⁶

The Girl Behind the Door, in being freed from the box, suffers a broken a wing. As the Returning woman asked in THE GIRL BEHIND THE DOOR, *"Can concrete be dismembered without breaking something?"*

Traveling toward their community of origin, the mountain from which the woman and girl had descended, quaked and broke open. This catastrophic event is symbolic of the downfall of not only the Shadow People's oppressive presence, but of the ruling Matriarch whom the woman hopes to face. The old foundation is breaking open, and from the chasm left behind, a new mountainous strength is growing within the woman, a foundation that is sheltering, welcoming and unified.

When the woman and girl reach the place where the woman's house had once stood in *Letters to a Missing Woman*, there taking over the ruins is a pōhutukawa tree. It is here, that they are found and informed the Matriarch has died. They are led to her wake to grieve with the community.

The confrontation

At the wake the Matriarch's 'testimony of truth' is read, a belated recognition that the shame-making way of their community is a regret she will die with. The Matriarch signs off, counselling the community to not follow her path or ways. Rather than allow the truth of the Matriarch's confession to fell the man-made way of life, an elder in the community steps forward and picks up the cracked face mask in fealty to the status quo.

The heroine offers her *"ego-shattering, life redeeming elixir"* to her people who, as Campbell puts it, being *"fractions imagine themselves complete."*¹⁰⁷ She stands in the source of communal suffering with the Girl Behind the Door, what Brown calls *"the headwaters of the river"* and reveals *"the cradle of pain"* that has been affecting every member of her community.¹⁰⁸ Brown points out that the denial of individual or communal pain, or rescuing

106 Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (USA: HarperOne, 1996), 77.

107 Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 186.

108 Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 66.

drowning individuals from *"the river one by one"*¹⁰⁹ does not answer the communal need to face widespread damage among its members. This is a confrontation with objectification, dehumanisation, and secret painful shame. In turn the Returning Woman will *"take the return blow of reasonable queries, hard resentment, and good people at a loss to comprehend."*¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, she names *"the nature of neglect"* that is at the heart of the damaging objectification. And she calls the community to orientate itself towards a new bearing, *"There was always another way to be a woman in this life. She is a strong shelter; a death-defying dreamer and she is creatively wild. She is the Sacred Root we need to return to."*

Campbell says the hero/heroine's task in returning is to reveal the *"forgotten dimension"*¹¹¹ and is the *"ultimate difficult task,"* for as Campbell asks, how can one *"render back into light-world language the speech-defying pronouncements of the dark? How communicate to people who insist on the exclusive evidence of their senses the message of the all-generating void?"*¹¹² This becomes the Returning Woman's challenge as the Sacred Root has been long forgotten.

Because she sees the new order of things, the Returning Woman arrives as provocateur and truth teller. Estes says that *"telling and grieving resurrect us from the dead zone."*¹¹³ The remedy is not avoidance or silence, but rather to transform tragedy into heroism by engaging with shame in a counterintuitive manner. Estes recommends that the secret be opened, and all examine their part in *"enduring"* it. She says that these *"learnings are equal parts pain and wisdom. The having lived through it is a triumph of the deep and wild spirit."*¹¹⁴ The Returning Woman has preached to the captive Shadow People and learned how to summon *"her courage from the soul bones"* to tell *"the secret in her own strong voice"*¹¹⁵ in which there is a deliberate defiance aimed at *"the death cult of secrets."*¹¹⁶

The woman and the girl are summoned to the Matriarch's crumbling house and told they must help to save the house. The house represents all the ways in which the trauma and age-old survival strategies have infiltrated the domestic relationships of the community. To save the house is to keep all the unresolved grief and loss, being held in the sway of the Shadow People's trauma, and the practices of neglect and objectification in place. This proposition is met with the countering rationale based on what the woman has learned so far about Returning.

109 Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 66.

110 Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 186.

111 Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 188.

112 Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 188-189.

113 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 415.

114 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 406.

115 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 415.

116 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 416.

"If you want this house to live then you must tear it down or let it tumble. Life does not come without first a death. Cease all this labour and empty yourselves of this clinging to the man-made philosophy of the Matriarch and all those who came before her. Let go of the old story in a way that allows it to sprout new vital shoots."

The Girl Behind the Door sings a new rendition of her 'wild seed' creation hymn for all the long forgotten girls who were neglected and abandoned, *"a seed buried left to die."*

The task of prophetic imagination

Campbell says, *"As dreams that were momentous by night may seem simply silly in the light of day, so the poet and the prophet can discover themselves playing the idiot before a jury of sober eyes."*¹¹⁷ The prophetic acts or deeds that the Returning Woman gifts to the community concreted in shame demonstrate childlikeness and playfulness.

Walter Brueggemann, Old Testament scholar, says that the prophet uses poetry and lyric to imagine an alternative vision and a deepening of consciousness contrary to that of the powers that be. The prophets, the Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door, bring *"to public expression the dread of endings, the collapse of our self-madness"* through layers of *"numbness and denial"* using *"the language of grief"*. Brueggemann says that the language of grief *"engages the community in mourning for a funeral they do not want to admit... their own funeral."*¹¹⁸ The wake for the Matriarch is a fitting metaphorical context.

Brueggemann suggests that there are three parts to the task of prophetic imagination. Firstly, offering metaphors or symbols that *"confront the horror and massiveness of the experience that evokes numbness and requires denial."*¹¹⁹ Secondly, publicly opening up what harmful or pain-filled things *"that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we do not know they are there."*¹²⁰ Thirdly, speaking of the death/decay that governs and poisons *"with the candor born of anguish and passion."*¹²¹ The Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door enact each of these by sharing discoveries and truth-telling in the form of poetry, audacious questions, and song, drawing upon the symbolic epicentre of the community's wound. Evocatively these creative expressions voice what *"individual persons want so desperately to share and to own but are not permitted to do so."*¹²²

The confrontation is an invitation to *"true belonging."* It is a call to move beyond *"the barricades of self preservation,"* hiding behind *"ideological bunkers"* that dehumanise the

117 Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* 189.

118 Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 46.

119 Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 46.

120 Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 46.

121 Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 46.

122 Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 46.

'other', into *"authenticity and connection"* and courage to *"brave the wild."*¹²³ This invitation is refused. The counter challenge is to stay and rebuild the Matriarch's house, even though the Matriarch has declared in her last testimony to not follow her ways. The Returning Woman knows that she is being asked to choose between staying and assimilate into untruths while the Girl Behind the Door is sent away, or to leave with her companion and guide to see where their venturing will lead them.

When the new Matriarch attempts to shame the girl with her tattered and broken wings, the Girl Behind the Door does not remain silent and submissive. Rather she asks the most down the marrow questions before leaving the community that does not want her or the Returning Woman.

"Who is brave enough to stand here with me? Who said this was a place of dread and disfigurement? Who said? Who said? Whose voice is ringing in my head? Whose voice warns you to look away and take ten paces back? You think banishment is the remedy? Who said broken wings is a state of shame? Who said? Who said? Whose voice is in your head?"



123 Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 59.

Entr'acte (between the acts) - THE MATRIARCH'S VALEDICTION

"The shame-filled secrets women carry are old, old tales. Any person who has kept a secret to her own detriment has been buried by shame. In this universal plight, the pattern itself is archetypal; the heroine has either been forced to do something or, through the loss of instinct, has been trapped into something.

In the archetype of the secret, an enchantment of sorts is cast like a black net across part of a woman's psyche, and she is encouraged to believe that the secret must never be revealed... Where there is a shaming secret, there is always a dead zone in the woman's psyche, a place that does not feel or respond properly to her own continuing emotional life events or to the emotional life events of others."

Clarissa Pinkola Estes – *Women Who Run With the Wolves*¹²⁴

The Matriarch has revealed in her testament that she has regrets. This entr'acte reveals the last days of her life reading the irritating letters from the Returning Woman, and her dreams about the Girl Behind the Door who will not be subdued.

In the 'Return Story' written for my thesis, there was no cameo where the Matriarch told her side of the story, what she knew and witnessed. When it came to the rewrite, I wanted to explore how the letters sent by the Returning woman had influenced the change of heart that is woven into the Matriarch's Testament. The downfall of the mountain in the previous chapter, and the imminent downfall of the dying Matriarch's reign, made room for rewilding. I approached listening to the Matriarch's voice by keeping in mind Poet Muriel Rukeyser's wonderful question, *"What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open."*¹²⁵

It is easy to forget that those whom we feel subject to, or oppressed by, are in some way themselves subject to something entrapping and oppressed them. The Matriarch is part of a long lineage who have all reinforced fealty to the legacy passed down by the first family who chose to identify with trauma, who fell and did not rise to regrow, but instead curved in on themselves, embittered. The Matriarch has her own story of being objectified, treated as a thing. She found a power that gave her dominion over others by welding the oppression she had experienced herself. No one had really challenged this from a different power source before.

124 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 406.

125 Muriel Rukeyser, award winning poet, wrote "Kathe Kollwitz" 1968. This poem was a tribute to artist Kathe Kollwitz regarding the suppression of women's voices and the consequences of their liberation. More about Muriel Rukeyser can be read on the following website; Jewish Women's Archive, Sharing Stories Inspiring Change, "Poet Muriel Rukeyser receives important literary award", www.jwa.org/thisweek/may/08/1942/muriel-rukeyser (cited 8 October 2025).

At death's door, regret and the alternate ideas presented in the Returning Woman's letters dared her to hope that she might be freed from all she had been, all that she'd been shaped by, that caused her loss of instinct. Within the Matriarch's psyche there was 'a dead zone,' one which no feeling for herself or others' pain lived. The letters had thrown sparks into the darkness, and she began to understand that though her reign and life was at an end, there was one last thing she might try to help make way for the Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door to undermine the collective concrete floor, under which many wild seeds lay. This was a very different testament to the one she had planned to write.



Scene Eight - EXILES' ENCAMPMENT

"She may feel like a tormented outsider who belongs nowhere – which is relatively normal for the exile – but what is not normal is to sit down and cry about it and do nothing. One is supposed to get to one's feet and go off in search of what one belongs to. For the exile that is always the next step... it is the quintessential step."

Clarissa Pinkola Estes – *Women Who Run With the Wolves*¹²⁶

"Mythmaking is the evolutionary enterprise of translating truths. 'I am a woman with wings dancing with other women with wings.'"

Terry Tempest Williams – *When Women Were Birds*¹²⁷

Forging Fealty with True Self as an Exile

We can be shaped by our upbringing or social conditioning to belong tidily in society in ways that require our fealty and blind loyalty. Williams refers to relational ecotones as *"house-dwelling tension."*¹²⁸ Palmer asserts that *"dividedness,"* or our lack of inner and outer worlds in harmony, is *"the painful gap between who we most truly are and the role we play in the so-called real world."*¹²⁹ We grow towards the need to make a choice to end our contradictions before regaining wholeness. As Brown says, *"on this quest" we learn "how to navigate the tension of many paradoxes... including the importance of being with and being alone."*¹³⁰

The Returning Woman and the Girl Behind the Door are exiled. They could not swear fealty to the *"with us or against us"* mentality.¹³¹ They leave a sign of hope and prophetic imagination for new life in the form of a dreaming tree house, situation where the woman's own derelict house used to stand. This is the spot where the woman departed from in *Letters to a Missing Woman*. She prayed, *"may my orphaned dreams be like a planted seed and rise up through the fall... to become a living tree? And when it is grown, build a tree house of joy for child like imaginations to play in."* She answers her own prayer. The dreaming tree house has room for all the unsanctioned desires the women in the community have harboured to find a space to thrive. This last creative act for others left behind in the community is like a portal or a way out for those who might find their way to their deeper self because of spending time there. There is no illusion that the woman and girl can save the community from itself, but perhaps this playful offering of her healing twine might facilitate a jail break for a few. The white raven oversees this venture.

126 Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 190.

127 Williams, *When Women Were Birds*, 96.

128 Williams, *When Women Were Birds*, 17.

129 Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 15.

130 Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 40.

131 Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 51.

As exiles, the companions enter a forest. Bolen says that the forest is one of the *“poetic and symbolic descriptions of how we perceive the unconscious as a realm.”*¹³² Here the woman and girl are welcomed by jubilant wild children, women who were fellow exiles, and the Phoenix Woman.

The forest is a place of questioning and highlights *“the need to live from our own depths in an authentic and growing way.”*¹³³ This living from the depths and authenticity includes a sense of loss, disorientation, and regret. The Returning Woman’s hope that the message, the girl, the Sacred Root and her healing twine be accepted and received by her tattered winged community, seems dashed. She questions if she has failed. The Phoenix Woman reminds *“all is not lost.”* The outcomes of the Return are not ours to control. What we can do is to offer the gifts of Return as wild seeds and leave the rest for the natural forces of life and love to determine who might receive them and when. The Phoenix Woman consols, *“The grief you feel is not uncommon. You have given up fealty to what formed you and yet tore you in two for a long time. This is part of Returning, to forge fealty to your truest self, your much-loved handmade nature.”*

Reunions through ceremony take place in the forest; the choosing of the Returning Woman’s Claiming Name and her inaugural wisdom lesson. The third lesson of Return: *“To Return is to heal the home of your Sacred Root”* is an account of how the Returning Woman has learned that shame is not her origin, rather shame re-images and distorts identity, which is ground to reclaim. By hand, by labour, space is cleared, and loss is grieved. The soil is nurtured, a garden is brought forth that encompasses ancient memory and a reconnection to the ‘Genesis’ or beginnings, healing the home of the Sacred Root return after return.

The Phoenix Woman and Dark Mother mediate the necessary rituals of the removal of shame-based names and identities and mending what is broken through the healing work of women ministering and dancing together.

The Girl Behind the Door becomes a nameless changeling as her old, tattered wing is removed, and her broken wing-skeleton is tended to. She seeks solitude as her new wings regrow and her true identity slowly reemerges.

The white raven appears and delivers the last letter the Matriarch wrote before her death addressed to ‘The Long Forgotten Girl.’ It is a brief acknowledgement of harm and a hope that she might end up in the Sacred Root’s arms, just as the Shadow People did, inferring that through death the Matriarch’s old identity may yet be released and reformed from its servitude to the generations-old narrative.

132 Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon*, 147.

133 Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon*, 148.

The Returning Woman begins to recognise her own *“wellspring of creativity”* and what she can offer from her True Self. The dreaming tree house bears fruit, members from the tattered winged community arrive and share their own stories of desire and departure. She is finding *“the center of the labyrinth”* within herself and the *“task of integrating”*¹³⁴ this beyond the forest in fealty to her own soul and integrity. Even her words which were drawn from a truer source (the wellspring, the labyrinth, integration) than the narrative of the Binding Lullaby, must have had some effect on the Matriarch after all.

THE EXILES’ ENCAMPMENT offers a readying process for questing, to move with the new emerging life of those who have been held in waiting. The Returning Woman waits for the healing of the former Girl Behind the Door’s wings. These wings reveal their true colour or *“instinctual nature”* and *“spiritual connection with Nature.”*¹³⁵ The former Girl Behind the Door belongs to the sea not a room with a concrete floor. The reunion becomes complete when the Returning Woman has learned to truly love the girl and accepts that all along the girl has been the one she asked help of right at the beginning of this tale. The pāua shells found amongst the roots of the Guardian Pōhutukawa have been faithfully carried the entire time, waiting for the moment when the Mermaid Woman, who had taken on the guise of the banished girl, would be revealed.

Yet painfully, there is also an awareness of having to let go once more. The Wizen One arrives for this purpose, to return the former Girl Behind the Door to her natural terrain. The last night together in the Exiles Encampment, the Wizen One sings the final song for the girl before she is Returned. The string of pāua is handed over to the woman of the sea.



134 Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon*, 163.

135 Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon*, 157.

Scene Nine – RE-TURNINGS

“There is a secret energy in me... that yearns to be under sail and away beyond the horizon. I am not just a cog in the world’s wheel. I am a living cell in the thrilling dynamism of the evolution of life itself, both physical and spiritual. My own boat’s journey will – if I let it – open up some new part of the cosmic vision that only my personal voyage can reveal. It will, in some mysterious way, take me back to the source of my being, and take me forward to who I am truly meant to be. Yet I am one of a fleet of millions upon millions of human lives – those who have already sailed beyond the horizon, those who are struggling and rejoicing even now on the high seas of life, and those whose vessels are not yet built, yet wait in tomorrow’s secret places for their own tide to carry them into life. And each and every one of us has a voyage to make, a vision to discover, a new fragment of an old dream to give to creation.”

Margaret Silf - At Sea With God¹³⁶

Every Departure a New World and new order

Rather than a final returning moment, there is a new departure. With every departure there is a further journey and a new world to explore. The returning or re-turnings are continuous in the life as a betweenum, learning to surf the continuous currents of waves that fall and rise. With each evolution and new life lesson, room to thrive and new order is gained.

The Girl Behind the Door is transformed into her true image, the Mermaid Woman. Before she can be reunited with her oceanic belonging world, she lays down the stone called Banishment at the threshold. She has kept with her from the beginning of journey, until the needed deeds of the Returning Woman were completed. The larger living of authentic belonging that transforms/integrates the shamed or shunned self beyond the imprisonment of frozen values, has been entered. Though there are goodbyes there is no end to the vows made in BONE VALLEY and the realisation that both the liberation and destinies of the journey companions were dependent on each other. The shame story, rather than being discarded as useless, has been reseen as valuable, a wild seed, and a wild sea.

The Returning Woman is challenged by her mentors to courageously choose her apprenticeship - or ‘acorn purpose.’ Hillman states that *“the acorn is not embedded in me... but rather I am embedded in a mythical reality”* which the acorn is an expression of.¹³⁷ This mythic reality that the Returning Woman finds herself in, compels her choice to apprentice herself to the Dark Mother.

136 Margaret Silf, *At Sea With God: A Spiritual Guidebook to the Heart and Soul* (USA: Ave Maria Press, 2008). Page number unknown.

137 Hillman, *The Soul’s Code*, 97.

When I wrote “The Return” story for my thesis I allowed it to unfold and was open to the ending that felt most fitting towards the end of the writing. I decided in the last scene to let the Returning Woman loose. I was intending to return her to the Dark Mother’s cave. She would become the host of it when the Dark Mother was away on one of her many journeys. Ironically, I was casting the Returning Woman as the curator of the space of another artisan of soul. I was creating a frame for her that did not fit with her innate nature as a creator. “The Return” concluded with the woman taking a voyage with the Dark Mother and returning years later to widely spread her creative endeavours amongst struggling and stagnant communities, as she had done with her own.

Sue Monk Kidd, novelist and spiritual writer, tells in her book *Travelling with Pomegranates*¹³⁸ of an image/icon of Mary that is perched in a tree at Palianis Convent in Crete. The legend of the icon asserts that Mary repeatedly escaped the church and places herself in a tree in the courtyard, until all give up and leave her there. Kidd loves the story *“because it features Mary slipping out the back door of the church, shedding sectarianism and making off to the tree and the wide world.”*¹³⁹

The Returning Woman, soon to be Apprentice, makes her way back to the Dark Mother’s cave, stopping for a while with the Guardian Pōhutukawa tree. The Guardian shares her story about a time when she too desired to stay in a tranquility of sharing her flowering with only the moon. Too safe, just as the Woman With Renewed Wings had been. The Guardian says of this change in position, and the consequence of falling, *“I was deepened.”* The Apprentice is offered the way into further expansion.

“...the hidden source, my roots found their way into the hidden world below. What I draw up from that underworld is for the generous flowering that the moon, and the many, now see. One day you may climb down my roots to draw up what you will from the subterranean world to be shared with those that hunger for its generous depth. Do not fear the descent that may be asked of you. Your flowering will reflect how deeply rooted you become.”

Though the larger living of authentic belonging that transforms/integrates the shamed or shunned self beyond the imprisonment of frozen values has been entered, it is an expansive terrain, and deepening is necessary. The Dark Mother explains why the Returning Woman was offered an apprenticeship with one of the three wise women. She names her courageous and creative acts, and then what is still lacking.

“These are deeds that will ensure you grow fast, like a sapling reaching for the sky, outgrowing its own need to develop anchoring roots. You were chosen to be an apprentice so that when the first storm that comes along will not knock you down and drag you away as

138 Sue Monk Kidd, *Travelling with Pomegranates* (Great Britain: Headline Review, 2009).

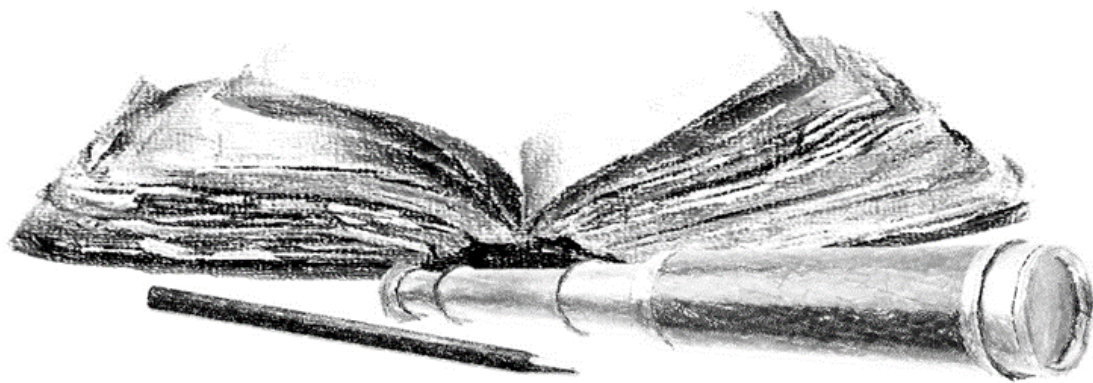
139 Kidd, *Travelling with Pomegranates*, 272.

it can do to an inexperienced wounded healer such as yourself... I must carry you away before you take on too much. Your roots need time to find their depth."

Talent and bravery are not enough. The woman's roots need to be more established and to learn from the Dark Mother the responsibilities of being a wounded healer. Though the voyage proposed, where the Apprentice will undertake her training, seems daunting and of an uncertain length of time, the desire to become a soulful alchemist is stronger than the fear of leaving the shore.

In the rewrite in 2021, I changed the ending of the story. I left it hanging with the woman about to embark upon her voyage. I freed the Returning Woman to the riskier unknown path, to become the apprentice, learning beside the Dark Mother in the wider world. At this point, I don't know what happens on that voyage or if she will even return from it. I imagine her out there being a betweenum, answering the creative quest that calls her to engage in the perpetual risk of the unknown, an ever-expanding horizon. Her vision of home, homecoming and true belonging, continuing to evolve.

This story ends with a blank book being put into the hands of the Apprentice. She has a new story to write; with the Returning lessons learned and the vows she made to the Girl Behind the Door still intact. We leave the woman on the cusp of beginning her apprenticeship.



Epilogue - HER RESOLUTION

"Whether we arrive at these between-places by design, by accident, or by the choices that others have made for us, the threshold can be a place of wonders. It can also be chaotic, discombobulating, and even terrifying. Yet a threshold, chosen or otherwise, is a place of wild possibility. A threshold invites and calls us to stop. To take a look around. To imagine. To dream. To question. To pray."

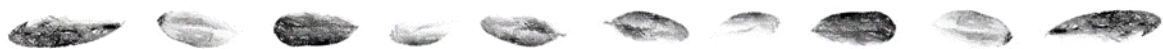
Jan L. Richardson – *Illuminating the Threshold*

"A threshold is not a simple boundary; it is a frontier that divides two different territories, rhythms and atmospheres. Indeed, it is a lovely testimony to the fullness and integrity of an experience or a stage of life that it intensifies towards the end into a real frontier that cannot be crossed without the heart being passionately engaged and woken up. At this threshold a great complexity of emotion comes alive: confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope. This is one reason why such vital crossings were always clothed in ritual. It is wise in your own life to be able to recognize and acknowledge the key thresholds: to take your time, to feel all the varieties of presence that accrue there, to listen inwards with complete attention until you hear the inner voice calling you forward. The time has come to cross."

John O'Donohue - *Benedictus*

The epilogue was added during 2021's rewrite of 'The Return.' The original story bound in my thesis ended with RETURNINGS. It felt important for the Mermaid Woman to have the last word. She tells us a little bit about where the voyage is taking the Apprentice; wild oceans and the lands of perpetual nightfall. *"Not all who sail here, crossing these seas, find their way back to shore and if they do they are altered, indelibly marked by the ocean and elements of those dark lands."*

There is a potential third story to tell, one about what happens on this voyage, and what the woman learns. My idea revolves around the ways ancient navigators would not only follow the natural signs but feel their way into the sign, being one with it. In 2019 I had a clear idea that the next book should be called, "The Dark Mother's Apprentice." There are several images already made, and draft chapters waiting to be tinkered with. One day, this story may evolve into the next installment. But until then, the Mermaid Woman resolves to follow wherever the voyage takes the one she shares vows with.



Story and art – an Exiles Encampment

Story and art have tremendous power to hold us in spaces where inner transformation can take place. These alchemic creative forms offer processes, experiences and quickening that can break down what has become rigid and inflexible in us. The psychospiritual alchemy cocoons us as we liquefy and reform. We are held until we have grown, then it is time to live beyond what has incubated us as a *“joyous and excited participant in the possibilities of... new life.”*¹⁴⁰

Moore says that the *“arts can do a better job than psychology of educating us in the archetypal realm, because the arts can portray the mysterious import of the archetype without reducing it to an explanation of a method.”*¹⁴¹ This mystery opens us to unquantifiable experiences that resist analysis; rather we are led to contemplate and what is evoked is our *“primary imagination, in a sense to our primary natures.”*¹⁴² This as Moore says, invites *“soul into the picture.”* This creative soul work is one of *“diversity, density, and subtlety.”*¹⁴³ Moore encourages that good art may lead us *“deeper into confusion and help us feel the chaos of life.”* Though disturbing, this does open spaces of honest engagement, introspection and conversation that can be hard to find elsewhere.¹⁴⁴

Going deeper into confusion and chaos may not be good news for us when we have become fixed in fundamentalism in some area of our life, beliefs, or worldview. However, any form of fundamentalism and the apparent security of rigid control will not save us when the sea of liminal change comes unexpectedly. Fundamentalism does not prepare us for when we enter an ecotone of neither here nor there.

Part of the path, as I discovered in writing my thesis “The Return Story” is to engage with the pain and shame-filled places in our lives and identity. These may be our own experiences or those of our family, community, society, or ancestors, combined. No transformation is possible when we avoid this uncomfortable terrain. Trauma, shame and, consequently, pain wounds us. In response to this wounding, we can decide to *“close up”* and *“grow a shell.”*¹⁴⁵ However, as O’Donohue points out, this controlled self-protection will *“rob life of all vitality and rhythm.”*¹⁴⁶ What we need is both *“the courage and vision at the points of deepest wounding to believe that new risk can take us into new life.”* Though this is incredibly difficult

140 O’Donohue, *Divine Beauty*, 188.

141 Thomas Moore, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* (New South Wales, Australia: Hodder Headline Australia Pty Limited, 1996), 197.

142 Moore, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*, 197-198.

143 Moore, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*, 198.

144 Moore, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*, 199.

145 O’Donohue, *Divine Beauty*, 187.

146 O’Donohue, *Divine Beauty*, 188.

to summon, O'Donohue warns that *"there is no alternative,"*¹⁴⁷ excepting the alternative of becoming like concrete, a fossilized shell.

The arts can make what has been unbearable, transmutable. Brown says of art that it *"has the power to render sorrow beautiful, make loneliness a shared experience, and transform despair into hope."*¹⁴⁸ In my own experience this has been very true in creating and sharing art. The art and story installations I have constructed previously have become ecotones. It is difficult to find the space for the solace and healing of our souls that may suffer in a world driven by logic. The idea of the EXILES' ENCAMPMENT in the novella was born out of my experiences in creating and working with participants within installation settings. In our own ways we are all potentially betweenums seeking space to discover our true name and belonging, and to heal broken wings and evolve our concept of what home/homecoming is. We need more EXILES' ENCAMPMENTS. Our world, our society, and our families need imaginative regeneration in which we can all flourish.



147 O'Donohue, *Divine Beauty*, 189.

148 Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 44.