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Reegan Finnigan

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Abstract

Crown of Queens is a draft of a Young Adult novel, intended for those aged between 12 and 17. The story follows a protagonist with no memory of who she really is. She journeys through realms and dimensions, trying her best to find the memories and magic taken from her by a woman who she doesn't remember. *Crown of Queens* is written to comment on making mistakes, perceptions, and ideas of right and wrong. While also highlighting love, support, and forgiveness.

The companion exegesis, *Magic, Morality, and Madness* explore the evolution of fairy literature, highlighting the way it has branched out, but also the circular, yet innovative nature of fairy stories. It comments on how readers interact with stories and how that helps to develop personality, empathy, and morality. The exegesis draws attention to how parasocial relationships engage and influence readers beyond the page.

Exegesis: Magic, Morality, and Madness.

Synopsis

Peyton is happy living her mundane life, getting ready to finish school and move out into the world - the human world, where she thinks she belongs. Except, she lives in a Haven for magical creatures, disguised as a small logging town, hidden away in the middle of nowhere. Her normal is pretending that she has a place there, even though she has no magic of her own. That is, until she meets a strange boy in an abandoned playground. There's something familiar about him, and she knows he didn't grow up in her small town.

The boy, Alex, a Fae Prince who can control dreams, helps Peyton figure out that she's not really the daughter of the two Mages who raised her. She's the missing Princess of Time, lost hundreds of year ago. Her biological brother has taken the human realm back in time a year to help Peyton fight Marion the Dark Mage. The mage who killed her father, stole her magic and memories before taking the Time Kingdom for herself, imprisoning Peyton's younger brother. Marion's grip on the Fae realm has reached the entire 300 years Peyton's been missing. News of her brother's execution spurs Peyton into action, sending her out to search for a nemesis she can't quite remember, and no one has actually seen in person.

Evelyn, Peyton's best friend of a decade, is a half fortune teller, half Djinn. Able to see the future she's been waiting for Peyton and Alex to meet, getting ready to help Peyton navigate a world she knows nothing of. Djinn are powerful but limited by laws, known for bending everything to their advantage, they're crafty, but manageable. In most magical communities, Djinn half-breeds are illegal. This is due to having none of the limitations of a Djinn and their ability to develop their magic into something stronger than both their parents combined; it doesn't help their case that Djinn used halflings to kidnap Fae royalty for a macabre zoo of the Djinn King's design. If the wrong person found out Evelyn is his daughter, it'd be worse than a jail cell for her.

The three work their way towards retrieving Peyton's magic and returning her to the throne of her birth kingdom. After being captured by the Djinn king for his Zoo, battling an apparition of Marion and escaping an alternate reality, Peyton recovers her magic and memories. She learns she wasn't a kind person; instead, she was selfish, cruel, and greedy. Marion, who they'd thought to be a dark mage, ready to destroy the world, is actually the woman who raised Peyton, teaching her kindness and to care for others. They learn of the carefully orchestrated plan to restore the fae realm to its

former glory by rewriting who Peyton really is.

The story follows Peyton's character arc, in a coming-of-age story written as a quest narrative. She and her friends find that the answers they're seeking aren't what they hoped. Finding that Marion isn't the villain and worked to fix the wrongs Peyton's family created changes their entire perception of who Marion and Peyton really are. Peyton's moment of revelation comes late in the story, in chapter seventeen in the form of regaining her memory. Finding out who she was changes how she feels about herself and in turn, it draws her and Marion closer as a family.

Introduction

When I was a kid in intermediate, I watched the movie *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates, 2007). I didn't know anything about Harry Potter nor had I watched or read the stories beforehand, but I needed to know the end of the story. I was hooked, so I ran off to the nearest bookstore to buy my first ever novel, *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (Rowling, 2006). What started as just wanting to know a story before it became a movie turned into a fascination and passion for all forms of stories. My parents wouldn't allow me to sit in front of a TV watching movies all day, but I could sit with a book and read all day, so that's what I did. Young Adult (YA) fantasy became a significant part of my life, and when I began to write, I instinctually placed my stories within the same genre.

Part of what drew me into YA fantasy was the lessons I seemed to learn. In *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 2006), I learnt about friendship, trust, and resilience. When I progressed onto other less famous books such as *Blood and Chocolate* (Klause, 1999), I learnt to have faith in myself, and from reading the *Nightshade Series* by Andrea Cremer (2010), I learnt that you could say no and follow your own journey.

With *Crown of Queens*, I wanted to bring in themes that were going to give the reader something to mull over and that would help the reader learn something worth knowing. The biggest thing I wanted to bring in was that there is always more to a story than what you see, that even if you believe someone is the villain, that may not actually be true.

The Evolution of Fairies

While looking into other YA fantasy works, I found that YA takes a lot of liberties with Fairy lore. In *Wings* by Aprilynn Pike (Pike, 2010) her version of Fae is of plant life, where women grow a flower on their back in the season they were born, and the men create pollen on their hands. Their race is split into communities according to the season they're born in, with a class system to match. Giving all power and control to those born in Winter, those born in autumn are revered for their skills of potion-making, and while Summer fairies are entertainers, Spring are relegated to being the worker bees. Residing in Avalon, the series follows an Autumn Fairy, who lives with humans and grew up as one. Having human ideals and morals clashes with her fairy heritage, she doesn't understand why a spring Fae can't walk beside her, or why even being friends with one is strange.

The *Paranormalcy* series by Kirsten White (White, 2010) takes the idea of fairies in another direction, using the concept of the Fairy courts, and developed a story of soul-stealing half-fae, made for the purpose of returning the fairy race to their realm. Though there is a myriad of supernatural characters within the series, the main character is one of such half-fae unaware of her heritage. The fairies she deals with are secretive and manipulative, they've carved out their own dimension, but are really trying to get back to their real home. Along her journey, she meets changelings who can now only live in the world created by fairies.

While in Jennifer Lynn Barnes' *Tattoo* series (Barnes, 2007) the Fae are called Sidhe, named as such from Irish Mythology (Nutt, 1897) and have blue blood instead of red. Barnes writes them as the beings that inspired the Greek Pantheon, with the powers to compliment. Like the Greek Pantheon, her characters are written as almost un-ageing. The Fae courts are divided in much the same way as the Greeks did between Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades - light, dark, and water. When they're left without a third fate, the main character steps in. She journeys to the fairy realm every night while she sleeps, to work as the fate of life. In doing so, the leaders of the courts find an opportunity to manipulate her into choosing between them.

Rachel Vincent in her *Soul Screamers* Series (Vincent, 2009) uses the same Irish myth of the Sidhe, focusing on the Banshee, or Bean Sidhe. With this, she has put her own spin on the Celtic folklore, adding to what a banshee can do, all while keeping the quintessential 'wailing woman' that is the Banshee ("Banshee | Celtic folklore," 2019). She brings in a male companion for the Banshee, giving him complimenting abilities so that as a team, as someone is dying, they could save them by suspending their soul, then guiding it back to their body. The main characters deal more with demons than

other Banshee.

In *Wicked Lovely* by Melissa Marr (Marr, 2007) her version of Fae are far closer to the iron hating creatures common lore suggests Fairies to be. These Fae have also been split into courts according to seasons, Winter and Summer. Residing in the same world as humans, fairies are invisible, except to the main character - who can see through their disguises and knows that iron is an effective deterrent of Fae. While she struggles to make a decision about her future, the Fae are trying their best to manipulate her decision to their advantage.

What these stories show me, is that fresh retellings are almost expected in not just YA but in other forms of fiction. This is evident in older tales of fairies. Though when trying to find a specific origin of what is widely thought of to be traditional lore - unable to touch iron, having to count salt when spilt and being unable to lie - there seems to be a no precise outline of where those Fairy-stories started. When trying to find anything historically accurate, all I mostly found were personal blogs and speculation, nothing that had a basis in history, other than one mention of a suggested way iron became part of Fairy lore. Dean (2017) suggests that between the Bronze and Iron ages, when weapons were being developed, intruders of the British Isles saw the people already living there disappear into thin air during battle. He goes on to state, "These 'fairy folk' who used 'magical' tactics were armed with bronze, which was no match for the iron blades of the invaders. Therefore, iron became known as the enemy of the 'fairy folk'" (Dean, 2017).

Having scoured *The Ashgate Encyclopaedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters* (Weinstock, 2014) a book written specifically for the academic research of "monsters" and finding no mention of iron relating to fairies, I take Dean's (2017) statement as speculation. It may be that there is very little written history on iron and fairies as it could have been passed down as oral stories. Focussing elsewhere, I did find a rough evolution of how fairies morphed into what's told today.

Early Irish mythology has the Tuatha Dé Danann. A race of beings ousted from Haven because of the knowledge they possessed (Nutt, 1897). The story *The Trooping Fairies* by W. B. Yeats in the collection *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (Yeats, 1888, p. 11, Kindle Edition) says:

"Who are they? "Fallen angels who were not good enough to be saved, nor bad enough to be lost," say the peasantry. "The gods of the earth," says the Book of Armagh. "The gods of pagan Ireland," say the Irish antiquarians, "the Tuatha De Danān, who, when no longer worshipped and fed with offerings, dwindled away in the popular imagination, and now are only a few

spans high."

This is an idea of where the Irish fairies started out. When the ancestors of the modern Irish, the Milesians arrived in Ireland, the Tuatha De Danann were forced to retreat into the hills ("Tuatha Dé Danann | Celtic mythology," n.d.). This is where another Irish and Scottish legend the 'people of the mound' or Aos Si, could come from. The Aos Si, known later as the Shide are beings that supposedly lived underground, though, it was also believed they lived in another world, shielded from ours by a veil. ("Aos Si - Mythical Creatures Guide," n.d.). This could explain why many modern stories of fairies have them dwelling in another world. In the article, *Presidential Address: The Fairy Mythology of English literature: It's origins and Nature*, Alfred Nutt wrote:

"To cite one marked trait, the Irish fairies are by no means necessarily or universally regarded as minute in stature. Two recent and thoroughly competent observers, one, Mr. Leland Duncan of our Society working in North Ireland, the other, Mr. Jeremiah Curtin, in South Ireland agree decisively as to this; fairy and mortal are not thought of as different in size." (Nutt, 1897, p.39)

Nutt goes on to explain there are similarities between the origin of Irish and German fairies, even suggesting the two could have a common background:

"The fairy belief of the modern German peasant is closely akin to that of the modern Irish peasant, not because one has borrowed from the other, but because both go back to a common creed expressing itself in similar ceremonies." (Nutt, 1897, p.45)

This refers to the belief that fairies had influence over agriculture, weather and the everyday life of humans (Nutt, 1897). Nutt does highlight one difference between the Irish and German or Teutonic, fairies. Stating:

"I will only say that, possibly, the diminutive size of the fairy races belongs more especially to Teutonic tradition as developed within the last 2,000 years, and that in so far the popular element in Shakespeare's fairy world is, possibly, Teutonic rather than Celtic." (Nutt, 1897, p.45)

Green (1962, p.89) claimed there was no 'great' fairy work before Shakespeare. Saying:

"Fairies in literature were scarce and scattered. We recognise them in one form or another in unexpected places."

With Shakespeare bridging that space, the idea of a fairy began to morph into something different from Irish myth. In a *Midsummer Nights Dream* by Shakespeare (Shakespeare, 1595) his fairies aren't just small in stature, they're tiny - able to fit inside an acorn, as seen in Act two Scene one, puck says:

“But, they do square, that all their elves for fear
Creep into acorn-cups and hide them there.” (Shakespeare, 1595, p.273 Kindle Edition)

This is where the idea of the small, winged creature, flying around the garden began to develop. Between Shakespeare’s characters of Oberon and Titania in 1595 (Shakespeare, 1595) and the Cottingley Fairies of 1917 (Bibby, 2019), the idea of a fairy being an alternate version of a human changed within English literature to a minuscule humanoid with butterfly-like wings.

The earliest account of fairies with wings that I could find was the 1714 Alexander Pope poem, *Rape of the Lock* (Pope, 1714, p.8). In this poem, we have the lines:

“Some to the sun their insect-wings unfold,
Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold;”

And;

“Ye Sylphs and Sylphids, to your chief give ear!
Fays, Fairies, Genii, Elves, and Dæmons, hear!”

Though their size is not made entirely clear by reading the poem itself, when looking at the illustrations by Thomas Stothard in the 1798 preprint (“print; book-illustration | British Museum,” n.d.) it’s seen that the fairies are portrayed as a similar size to that of small children, taking influence from cherubs. Though through reading the original 1714 poem, it is easy to imagine the fairies to be of similar size to that of Shakespeare’s, or Tinkerbell, due to lines like, “A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair;” and referring to their wings as “insect-wings” (Pope, 1714, p8). To me, these solidify in my mind, the size of the fairy Pope wrote about. Assuming most people would think of a butterfly or a dragonfly as the type of wings a fairy would have, and saying a thousand wings to blow back a hair, each proves to me that Pope (1714) was writing about fairies much smaller than Stothard (1798) illustrated.

The Cottingley Fairies of 1917-20, were a series of photos, thought to have been real (Bibby, 2019). These photos were taken by two young girls, who by using cardboard cutouts, posed to create the first visually documented encounter with “real” fairies. These photos caused much debate and weren’t established as fake until the 1980s. What they did do, however, was establish in the minds of many, the minute size of fairies. Over the forty years where the photos were thought to be real, a fairy ‘craze’ developed, giving birth to fairy themed ornaments, pottery, and prints made on mass (Bibby, 2019). Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, was one such person to believe the Cottingley Fairies to be real, eventually including them in his

book *The Coming of Fairies* ("Biography," 2019; Silver, 1986).

Since then, fairy stories have developed in two directions. One branch is expanding upon the winged fairy of the garden, such as seen in the 1953 Disney film *Peter Pan* (Luske, Jackson, & Geronimi, 1953). Tinkerbell has developed from a companion to her own entity (Raymond, 2008), with a world to go with her. Disney has cemented the winged garden fairy in the minds of generations. While the other branch has circled back to base their stories in the older retellings, such as the previously mentioned novels. Each taking snippets and reworking the idea of what it means to write about Fairies.

What this means to me is that especially for those who will read YA fantasy, when they see the word fairy or Fae, there isn't as much of an expectation to fit entirely into a mould. This gives room to write a new type of fairy, though some rules will still have to apply. As seen in previously mentioned novels, each has maintained some influence from previous works and carried that through. With *Crown of Queens*, I hope to illustrate a fairy that feels far more human. Almost as if, if you hadn't been told the character was a Fae, you'd read them as a human with powers.

Fairy Lore and Crown of Queens

What I decided to do in *Crown of Queens* was to see how far I could push the idea of what a fairy is. Building off of the assumption that most readers will have a predetermined idea of a fairy I haven't explicitly stated if Fae can lie or not, or if iron will cause them harm, nor do they have wings. As *Crown of Queens* is intended to be part of a three-book series – one of which is Marion's story leading up to the events seen in *Crown of Queens*, worldbuilding will be heavily dependent on the other two works, though I'm unsure if Peyton's story be placed as the first or second book. Due to *Crown of Queens* being set in Peyton's point of view, there is a sparsity to the description of the world around her. As Peyton is so focused on what she needs to do, how she needs to do it, and isn't interested in seeing the world around her, the work is written with little worldly observations.

My fairies have come across as human, but with extra abilities. I did, however, keep to the idea of Kingdoms, or Courts based around power types, which by looking at the above-stated novels, seems to be an integral part of what develops a fairy world. What also came across to me as an essential part of creating a modern Fairy story was that there was almost always a ruling class of Fae. These Fae seemed to do what is in

their best interest, but not necessarily the interest of those around them or in the world.

I wanted to explore this, as a sort of 'power corrupts' theme. If we look back at the novels above, *Wings* by Aprilynn Pike (Pike, 2010) has fairies with Winter abilities as the ruling class. Some of these Fairies are disjointed, separate from their world, unable to see what is needed for fairies to thrive. The series culminates into a war for Avalon, orchestrated by a previously exiled Autumn Fae.

In *Paranormalcy* by Kirsten White (White, 2010) the ruling class of fairies created half-fairies at the expense of human lives, with one goal in mind – getting back to their world. They had little regard for anyone who they thought of as an obstacle or for those they created.

Tattoo, the Jennifer Lynn Barnes series, (Barnes, 2007) has the ruling class of fairies seek to control the next generation, all the while using them to manipulate the protagonist so they can control the third fate.

Control, manipulation, and power are central themes in modern fairy stories, as the above examples demonstrate which I believe is something integral to the idea of a fairy. Working off this, I decided to flip this on its head. Control, manipulation and power are central themes of *Crown of Queens*, but not for the gain of one individual or a ruling class. To do this, I also flipped the 'evil stepmother' trope on its head. I created an unreliable first-person narrator and an 'evil' stepmother who was working to fix the evil of the stepdaughter. The Peyton followed through the story has no recollection of who she was. Marion, her stepmother, stole away her powers and memories in the hopes of helping Peyton create a new, good version of herself. The original version of Peyton was a shallow, vapid girl who was so self-centred she didn't care about others. She would have done anything to get her way, as her only want in life was power; she didn't care about those who got in her way. For example, Marion, as seen in the extract from *Crown of Queens* (p.96) below.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Marion talking with that nasty Djinn she loved so much, he scowled at her and poofed away somewhere as I made my way towards her.
"I know what you've done, you witch," I whispered to her. She gave me a sweet smile and shrugged.
"Peyton, whatever you think is going on; it's not."
"I'm going to kill you," I giggled. "And no one will care."

In 1887 John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, said in a letter, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." (Engel De Janosi, 1940, p.316). This was in reference to the monarchy at the time,

but it still rings true for a *Crown of Queens*. I made Peyton's biological father, the King of Kings, someone who had absolute power. He was a tyrant who passed that mentality on to his daughter. Who, without any sort of intervention, was on her way to becoming another version of her father.

I wanted to write a work that told the readers it's okay to make mistakes, as long as you recognise them as Peyton does in *Crown of Queens*. I consider Peyton's journey as a form of personal growth, not as a redemption arc, because at the end of the story, Peyton still has a lot to do to make up for her past actions. With that, I wanted readers to know that whether it be now, or in the distant future, you will be held accountable for your actions. By creating an unreliable narrator, who had no clue about her heritage, or who she had been, I wanted to clearly show that you can choose to be a person who cares about others and the world around you or be a person who has little regard for anything other than their own selfish gain. I wanted to show that it's okay to struggle, and it's okay to ask for guidance. I hoped that with *Crown of Queens*, the unwavering friendships of Evelyn and Alex showed that the right people will accept you for who you are, the good and the bad.

As a young adult, when I first started reading, I always placed myself in the characters shoes, wondering: What if that were me? Would I make that choice? I would try my best to see how the character came to their conclusions, or why they decided to take one action rather than another that may have been easier. With this in mind, one of my key lines from *Crown of Queens* (p.99-100) is:

She'd made herself the villain in my story, to make sure I wasn't the villain in anyone else's, if that wasn't a sacrifice only a mother would make, then what is it?

I think this encompasses the entirety of what I'm trying to accomplish with *Crown of Queens*: love, support, and forgiveness.

Crown of Queens and Lessons of Life

In the introduction, I mentioned feeling as if I'd learnt valuable lessons from reading YA fiction. If this was true, I wanted to share that with those I wrote for. I wondered if there was any factual evidence of this, or if it was something others felt, so I looked into it. I found four papers that helped me to further understand what was happening when I read fiction.

These four are: *The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social*

Experience (Mar & Oatley, 2008), *Exploring the Link Between Reading Fiction and Empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes* (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009), *Fiction, Genre Exposure, and Moral Reality* (Black, Capps, & Barnes, 2018) and the last a paper detailing two studies titled *Fiction and Morality: Investigating the Associations Between Reading Exposure, Empathy, Morality, and Moral Judgement* (Black & Barnes, 2020).

In the 2008 study, *The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience*, Raymond A. Mar and Keith Oatley (2008) note that little research had previously been done on the impact of reading fiction, as narrative fiction had been somewhat disregarded by psychology. They argued that fiction offered "...models or stimulations of the social world via abstraction, simplification and compression. Narrative fiction also creates a deep and immersive simulative experience of social interaction for readers" (Mar & Oatley, 2008, p.173).

This suggests that anyone who experiences a narrative story, whether it be a novel, television show or movie, undergo a form of social simulation where they are offered insight into different possibilities of reality. Mar & Oatley (2008, p173) said "narrative fiction models life, comments on life and helps us to understand life in terms of how human intentions bear upon it."

When relating this back to how I felt as a young reader, experiencing fantasy worlds for the first time, it was easy to see how the two could relate. I was so engrossed in the stories I read that they were like another world, where the actions taken by the protagonist did have repercussions, that as the reader, I felt and learnt from. *Exploring the Link Between Reading Fiction and Empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes* (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009, p.408) wrote: "... our group has shown that frequent readers of narrative fiction perform better on two different empathy tasks, whereas frequent readers of expository non-fiction perform worse." The study explored the social lives of their participants and found that non-fiction readers reported feelings of loneliness and feelings of not belonging. In contrast, their fiction readers reported feelings of having readily available confidants.

Further through the study (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009) expressed that those who read fiction and feel as if they have social support may be pulling their social support from fiction, particularly if the characters portrayed are perceived as real. This was labelled as "engaging in a form of parasocial relationship" (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009, p.422). This relates back to the previously mentioned paper (Mar & Oatley, 2008) as a form of social simulation. Tying these two studies together is the quote:

“Research has demonstrated that favourite TV characters can influence us in a manner similar to real peers, particularly if they are seen as 'real'” (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009, p.422)

As a self-proclaimed anti-social loner, I had few close friends, but I never felt alone, and I put that down to my exposure to books. I used to tell my family I didn't need friends because I had books instead. I now understand this is because I was engaging in parasocial relationships with the characters in the books I read.

This is something that I relate to deeply because it wasn't just me who had similar experiences with reading. As a teenager, I would often have long, engaging conversations with my sister or best friend about characters and worlds we'd both read about. While we logically knew they weren't real, we were very much influenced by what we read in these stories. One instance I can recall between my sister and I is when we'd talked so avidly and enthusiastically about specific worlds and characters that our mum thought we were talking about real people. In our hearts, they were real people.

By dividing a list of 105 authors into categories based on the genre they were known for, the study *Fiction, Genre Exposure, and Moral Reality* sought to find the impact each genre had on the reader's sense of morality (Black, Capps, & Barnes, 2018). These genres were Classics, Contemporary Literature, Fantasy, Horror, Mystery/Thriller, Romance, and Science Fiction. Of these, it was found that reading fiction does have an impact on moral judgement and the perception of possible realities stating:

“As we had hypothesized, greater familiarity with Science Fiction and Fantasy authors was associated with more futuristic scenarios believed possible. Also, in line with our hypotheses, greater familiarity with Contemporary Literary authors was related to more morally dubious scenarios deemed permissible” (Black, Capps, & Barnes, 2018, p.336).

Followed by:

“Strikingly, however, Sci-Fi and Fantasy exposure were also related to Moral Judgment, and Romance and Mystery/Thriller exposure were negatively related to moral and modal judgment respectively: the more Romance or Mystery authors participants recognized, the fewer morally dubious or physically unusual scenarios they believed permissible or possible” (Black, Capps, & Barnes, 2018, p.336).

Black, Capps, & Barnes (2018) found that reading Fantasy and Science Fiction allowed for more open mindedness towards different eventual scenarios, or realities, than those who read other genres. Perhaps this is why in YA Fantasy we see such a

range of Fairy portrayals, because suspending reality allows for other possibilities.

As a YA reader, I leant towards fantasy, reading about werewolves, vampires, and all things supernatural. It wasn't until I was in my late teens and early twenties that I branched out to read other genres. From my experience as a reader, I can safely say that I agree wholeheartedly with the findings of Black, Capps, & Barnes (2018). When I was reading only fantasy, anything was possible, and the idea of something being impossible wasn't possible to me. I was always enthusiastic about finding possibilities. While when I started reading romances and contemporary fiction, I found myself closing off to the idea of the impossible being possible. I found myself reading for the sake of entertainment, not for the sake of learning something new, or for questioning the impossible. I found fantasy worlds to be highly unrealistic after being exposed to stories based in the real world.

When looking into what I wanted to write, and how I wanted to portray my characters, I remembered how I felt reading about characters with a strong sense of moral integrity, and how that made me identify with the actions of the characters. This is why when reading *Fiction and Morality: Investigating the Associations Between Reading Exposure, Empathy, Morality, and Moral Judgement* (Black & Barnes, 2020) I found this quote to be very poignant:

“In both studies, YA fiction exposure was positively correlated with empathic concern, integrity, and moral agency; it was indirectly related to moral self via empathic concern” (Black & Barnes, 2020, p.12). To follow on from that, I found that my theory of learning valuable life lessons from what I read was further solidified by the following:

“Integrity was also directly and positively correlated with reading. In both studies, recognition of more YA authors meant higher scores on the Integrity scale” (Black & Barnes, 2020, p.12).

In the first of the two studies, the focus was to examine the “direct association between reading, empathy, and morality” (Black & Barnes, 2020, p.5). The first study found that YA Fiction influenced empathetic concern, but did not relate to perspective taking, while Adult Fiction was the reverse. While YA had an association with moral agency, Adult Fiction did not. However, both were shown to influence integrity. The second study focused on strengthening the results of study one. (Black & Barnes, 2020) found that YA fiction has positive influences on the development of morality, saying:

“Interestingly, in light of the famed tendency of teenagers to push boundaries, recognition of YA authors does not appear to be related to moral permissibility”

(Black & Barnes, 2020, p.13).

They later state that Adult fiction was correlated to moral permissibility. Having read both YA and adult fiction, it's clear to me how this could have happened. YA fiction, especially fantasy, generally deals in clear boundaries between the protagonist and the antagonist, giving the reader defined lines between what is right and wrong. While adult fiction often deals in morally grey areas, asking harder questions of the reader. In their closing remarks, (Black & Barnes, 2020) state:

“Interestingly, given the perennial worry that fiction may corrupt morals, to the extent that we did find a relationship between fiction and moral traits, reading (specifically YA fiction) was associated with greater integrity, moral agency, and moral self (via empathy), which are positively related to real-world moral behavior.” (Black & Barnes, 2020, p.13-14)

Tying these four papers together, I found that by experiencing a story, through simulation, regardless of how it's shown, has the ability to alter perceptions and morals (Black, Capps, & Barnes, 2018). YA fiction specifically, develops the sense of moral integrity and develops empathy. I believe that these four papers demonstrated exactly what I was looking for when undertaking the task to find out if learning valuable lessons from reading was something others experienced too.

Questions for the Next Draft

Because reading has been proven to impact how someone perceives the world, and how they make sense of what's going around them, I'm compelled to not only write within YA fiction, where the content seems to have the most impact on the reader, but to be aware of what I am putting in my stories.

Suppose my readers are to engage in a parasocial relationship with the characters I create. In that case, I hope they'd see my characters embodying traits that foster empathy and understanding, not only of oneself but of others also. While throughout *Crown of Queens*, I have my protagonist, Peyton, as someone forced into a role of leadership, she's also someone who won't compromise on her ethics for her own gain. Even though she does act selfishly when saving her brother. She does this out of love and under the impression that he was prosecuted for the power he possessed. I also hope that those who do read the final version of *Crown of Queens* see that Peyton is flawed.

Reading the above studies has solidified in my mind that, if I am going to continue writing YA fiction as I intend too, the people who read my work will be impressionable, and will be influenced by my work. So, in creating alternate worlds, and people of immense power, I need to be very aware of the messages and themes I put into the stories I write.

Consequentially, in the next draft of *Crown of Queens*, I need to look closely at the intentions behind the actions my characters take: Is Peyton looking for her powers and memories for the right reasons? Is Alex abdicating his position in the Dream Kingdom because of selfishness? Is Max's ambition causing Alex to feel like he doesn't have the choice but to abdicate? Is Evelyn's involvement in the scheme to rewrite who Peyton is, detrimental to her relationship with Peyton? And why does Marion compromise her integrity and reputation to save a world she doesn't belong to?

Another thing that might need clarifying in the next draft is how Peyton and her friends mature through the changing scope of time. I would like it to be evident that although they jump back and forward through moments in time, Peyton and her friends are on a linear journey. Which brings me to whether or not I need to clarify the development of fairy society and where their place in time is. In *Crown of Queens*, the Fae and Human timelines run in parallel, so although the Fae realm has castles and no cell phones, they don't need to develop modern technology because of their magic.

What I have learnt is that reading is vitally important. The content people read is especially important. As someone who has chosen to be a storyteller, I have a responsibility to ensure my stories are worth reading, but also aren't going to influence people in the wrong way. That doesn't mean I can't push boundaries similarly to how I wrote the Fae in *Crown of Queens*; it means I believe I need to have an intense awareness of what I put on the page and an understanding of how that could influence the readers. I intend to carry through what I have learnt here into the future and into all the YA fiction I'll write, making sure to keep in mind that those who will eventually read my work are impressionable and learn from what they read. I hope that this knowledge can help guide me to create valuable contributions to YA Fiction.

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