

**STRINGS OF TIME
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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Stephanie Wilkin

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EXEGESIS

Introduction.

Stories are powerful, we are our own stories, and it is through the formalizing of our stories that history is created. Within stories there are cycles and within cycles are the components that make up the cycles. Involved in the cycle of life and death, birth and rebirth, the novel 'Strings of Time' was conceived as an exploration of universal patterns and cycles for the individual within history. In this exegesis the symbiotic nature of life, story and history is explored as the support network behind the novel. Freedom to acknowledge our individual perceptions, in the modern timeframe of both the novel and the times in which we live, allows us to broaden our capacity to entertain views initially restricted. Advances in technology now grant us easier access to knowledge previously limited by geographical, societal, political, religious and cultural impediments. Much of the structure is based on the collective number three, and I discuss the reasons for this and the symbology of the Trinity. There are three major characters and three major narratives. The stories intersect through their past and present, which ultimately affects their future. My exegesis begins much like my book, with a birth. T, arriving at birth, is also the narrator telling her own story through time combined with the revelations of other characters, whose stories affect her world. The birth of the project began as a concept conceived over a year ago through thoughts, concepts and ideas influenced by my past. This influenced the desire to attend the course, where fellow students and mentors further influenced me, in addition to films, television, art and books I was drawn to. This resulted in a work that grew; reflecting everything I have been, thought or participated in. The blank page, virgin territory pre-conception, was waiting to be actualized with the fullness of all that was around me, in the past, the present, and consequently the future. The end of the project, the future, produced a book conceived in the past; its construction in the recent past culminated in the moment that is the present: the exegesis. I must emphasise the ending is really the beginning; the book begins in apparent innocence, and yet, all that has gone before fills this innocence with the essence that propels it. By the end of the story, the reader has witnessed the unfolding of time; and the acquired knowledge informing the actions of the characters in the present. It is the beginning, after all, and yet, by the end, the story is set, only to begin again.

Story as history. 'The World Is Made Of Stories' (Loy, 2010, title page)

History confirms to us certain beliefs that the leaders or winners of each epoch wish us to accept as fact, and, as with any story, the dominant one is validated by those in charge. As an author I am in charge of my stories, and I have chosen to string three narratives together with the hope of exposing different perspectives regarding similar themes. In life we can choose between a myriad of viewpoints, every single one of us has a perspective just slightly different to our neighbour because our view is shaped through our pasts and present, leading to how we approach the future.

I was educated in the 70's and 80's; we learnt fact and little speculation. We were taught the status quo of the time; sometimes it was dated, dependent on the financial ability of the school to update school syllabuses. It was the hegemony of the dominant belief system of our decision-makers; as an innocent learner I believed what I was taught; there being only one version. Christianity proclaims that God has given us free will but somehow man places restrictions on this free will by believing in only one way, one religion or one belief system. The characters in 'Strings of Time' face this challenge, each searching for their own truth within the confines of their environment.

Knowledge. Free Will.

Knowledge is power: history has shown us many times that, when knowledge is withheld or designed to control, rather than empower, man becomes the least godlike he can be. However, without restriction we experience the liberation of free choice, which enables inner knowledge, the power to learn; we are ourselves God, and master of our own destinies. Each of my major characters stands on the outside of their particular society and must, in their own way, find their salvation, and thus their freedom. In each instance knowledge is shown to be power and therefore the path to freedom. Mary has gifts which initially propel her towards the convent, yet these same gifts eventually expel her, as she cannot reconcile them with the doctrine to which she has committed herself. Her inner knowledge and experiences now make her an outsider to Catholicism. T, similarly, must accept her differences. Traditionally she may have been medicated, or encouraged to deny what happens to her, and not so long ago, she may even have been institutionalized, but here, she is mentored by Alison and eventually by her own inner guidance. Through acquired knowledge she gains her freedom and in doing so she may

begin her adult life embracing all that she is. This is directly contrasted with Mary who must graduate from her chosen institution. And the third character, Joe, must address the persona he has created. He has denied who he really is to be who he wishes to be seen to be, culminating in the overuse of drugs and alcohol to control the callings of his ancestors and thus his true self.

Just as a child matures and one day must leave their family, so too do we, as adults, mature and leave the nest of our limited beliefs, subscribed to by those who have gone before. The World Wide Web has created access to different versions of the same story; it has liberated us from the limitations of traditional media whose content is often manipulated to meet the needs of certain groups: certain stories told in certain ways. As readers we are becoming open to broader concepts; our ideas of time have expanded and become more flexible. ‘Strings of Time’ is a product of this generation; assuming that readers will freely accept time is no longer simply linear.

Perception

Suddenly we are open to different interpretations of the same story. If I were to tell my own personal story, as an example, it would only be my version of it, and while this would be truthful to my own perception, I could never really state that it was the whole truth, because I will never know or remember all of the circumstances that affected me. This is a fascination of mine that exists in ‘Strings of Time’, which I would like to explore more fully in further drafts. As the narrator, T will comment occasionally on the stories as they unfold, giving further perspective to what is happening. Initially I included this device, however, due to time restrictions, I have removed most of it. To illustrate the possibilities of expansive perspectives, I draw the reader’s attention to the following quote, which was removed from the section where Alison tells her version of the story of Sylvius’s birth (refer page 134). Even though she existed as Masha in that earlier timeframe, Alison describes his birth with only the knowledge she had at the time. But there is a bigger picture:

‘All form is filled by spirit, spirit in itself is neither good nor bad, it just is, and so the intention of whoever manipulates spirit into form, will tell the tale. Thus the form of the baby was created as has been described, but the essence was introduced wholly, just as Masha felt the tide turn, and the birth begin. The feeling of anguish

and anger came from the loss of the true baby, because even in form created on earth, the magician was not able to create from his physical form the desire to reinvent his brother this way. He was only able to lure the innocent soul from the baby that Masha had loved and carried to full term, through the transference of birth. Rarely achieved but not without precedent, possibility can be manipulated this way.'

The addition of this information would immediately inform the reader of the full truth of Sylvius's nature, thus allowing the reader, confidentially, to grasp the enormity of such an event. This action in the past has direct bearing on the present for both T and Alison and will also determine or deny T's future, which in turn would affect the other characters in the book. If Sylvius were to fulfil his desires, she would not become the guardian of Mary and both Mary and Joe's stories would be affected negatively. This layering within the narrative aims to emphasise the rippling circle of action and reaction.

Our own truths have been created over millennia, shaped by our family lines and the society into which we are born. I can only find my ultimate truth: based on my past experiences, cultural conditioning and family upbringing, by moving through them to claim my own version of history. The key character in each of the three narratives in 'Strings of Time' must look within themselves to discover their truths, and therefore find release from their conceived versions of themselves. They are guided and helped on the way, as in all quests [Campbell, 1993; Vogler, 1998], but ultimately it is their reaching for themselves that empowers them.

Structure and Genre.

In *Strings of Time* I demonstrate, through the use of narrative structure, the power of three. Already represented in the novel through the classically realized three-act structure, I challenge the traditional aesthetic of this narrative structure by engaging three protagonists in three, initially separate, stories. These three protagonists are also at different life stages, the three stages of man: the child, the adult and the elder.

Playing between the genres of Speculative Fiction, Esoteric Thriller and Contemporary Fiction I evoke a world in 'Strings of Time' much like the one in which we find ourselves daily. However, this everyday world is contrasted with the characters' inner journeys through mysticism, the occult, metaphysics, dreams and shamanism.

These characters are pitched from their worlds of ‘normality’ to worlds of overlapping and emerging beliefs and views, vying for attention in a world overloaded with philosophies and beliefs that should unite, but more often than not, separate. A world weighed down by selected histories that are limiting the growth of cultures and therefore civilizations. I know, a lofty ideal and very ambitious in its aspirations.

Utilising my experience and familiarity with film structure, I have worked with scenes, rather than chapters, paying homage to the media in which I have worked and grown up and one that the reader is also now familiar with. We no longer need the long establishing shots of the past; we now cut efficiently between scenes. As readers, we have translated this to written text via our collective media knowledge and are more readily able to jump into scenes or story. The titles of the scenes nod to the use of scene establishers in screenplays. I have also used this to truncate the need to write detailed scene descriptions into the narration. This aids in immediately allowing the reader to access the next character’s scene, without the disorientation of simply numbering the chapters, and at the same time avoiding confusion with times-lines etc.

Outside Influences.

‘Strings of Time’ is influenced by the cross-fertilization apparent in today’s media, where stories overlap and worlds meet. Reality TV tells everyday stories – somewhat staged – in their most basic form. Fast turn-around soap, although a more expensive and more satisfying construction, does the same. Films reference other films. TV has broken its fourth wall by allowing characters from one program to exist in others, clearly exhibiting how our constructed worlds intersect with each other. ‘Grey’s Anatomy’, created by Shonda Rhimes (2005), is a good example of intertextualism, [I am referencing any form of story as text] in which a major character, Addison, has a back story from another clinic and after she had featured heavily in ‘Grey’s Anatomy’, returns to that earlier clinic, which now has its very own television programme, ‘Private Practice’ (Shonda Rhimes, 2007). Intertextual conversations are popular and becoming more varied across different forms of media. For some time we have had remakes on television of comic book heroes, then, in programmes such as ‘Heroes’ (Tim Kring, 2006), one of the main characters draws cartoon-like images foreshadowing upcoming events in the series. In ‘Strings of Time’ the three major characters connect in the present and through time. Each character has otherworldly experiences, and each of these characters have incidences in common. For example, objects appear through time,

known as *apports*, a term used in the nineteenth century to name an object brought forth in *séances*. Stealing from all sorts of belief systems, I have intertextualized the philosophies of occult practices with religions, mysticism with shamanic practice and faith with sex magic; not necessarily in that order!

Alternative worlds play a large role in the construction of ‘Strings of Time’; challenging how we see reality and reflecting the explosion of interest amongst the general public to go beyond our perceived realities, reinventing myth to allow us to define who we are today. The world of dreams has become almost a genre of its own, or at the very least, dream imagery is taking centre stage. Christopher Nolan’s film ‘Inception’ (2010), takes this to new levels, where the audience must also work to discover whether they are in ‘reality’ or in yet another layer, or a dream. ‘What Dreams May Come’, initially directed by Vincent Ward, captures a terrain that may be actively compared to such mythic stories as ‘The Inferno of Dante’ (Dante Alighieri, 14th century), and ‘Dreamhunter’ and ‘Dreamquake’, novels by Elizabeth Knox (2005, 2007), deliberately play with the control of dreams. In the movie ‘Avatar’ (James Cameron, 2009), the world is another planet, and for humans to exist they must adopt a body or an avatar into which they step, as one does when entering the dream world.

I cite these films and books as examples where the dream world is as significant a reality as that in which the characters really exist. It is this crossing between worlds that interests me and has influenced my own work. In art there have been many representations of the subconscious, but of particular influence on the ‘art’ of today’s films and books, and myself, is the visual exploration of the subconscious by Dali and the theoretical approach to symbol by Carl Jung. Dali’s ‘The Persistence of Memory’ (1931), has remained etched in my memory; symbolizing changing times, time slipping away, what has been and is now past, but enduring. The representation of the clock face paints time as circular and not linear.

Dali’s painting ‘Galatea of the Spheres’ (1952) is the visual representation of the narrator T as her older self, as time-keeper and story teller. But I also see Sister Mary in this painting as the counter balance to T, much like the image of the moon as embodying the three stages of women, the virgin, the mother and the whore who is represented in this story initially by Joe. Joe is represented for me in Dali’s painting ‘Poetry of America’ (The Cosmic Athlete, 1960). His journey is almost the reverse of T

and Mary, he travels from the outside form or representation of himself to who he really is. His physique is important, his appearance defining who he is, is influenced by the world in which he lives, as represented here by the coke bottle emptying its contents, the label remains. Fads are transient as he himself nearly becomes through his attachment to his outside self, and yet the past, through time, the clock reference, calls him to account to own who he is meant to be.

Symbology of the number three.

The importance of symbology has very much influenced my thinking in the seeding of ideas in 'Strings of Time'. Specifically I now turn to the use and importance of the symbology of the number three. I have three major characters, involved in three distinct narratives, interwoven through the use of the three states of time; past, present and future. The past affects the present and it is thus the past and the present that determine the future. Significant in many belief systems, but of particular interest here – due to Mary's Christian faith – is the importance of the symbology of the number three, representing the holy trinity, divine completion. The triangle is the geometric representation of the number three and thus it easily defines for us the impact of one on another. The triangle stands in for the circle but achieves the same end, it completes a cycle to return to the beginning.

Until we notice the cycles in which we live and play, we are doomed to continue the birth, life, and death cycle. It is only through our awareness of such a cycle that we might alter; in other words, transcend the duality in which we live to a wholeness, which might suggest one being at first glance but on closer inspection suggests the completion of the three. One stands alone, meets two and duality is created, reflection, two joins with one and makes three, the number of completion, unity and so we have the beginning of the Fibonacci sequence.

The number three is highly significant in many of the major religions of the world: 'Christian Holy Trinity, Hindu, Trimurti and Tridevi, Three Jewels of Buddhism, Three Pure ones of Taoism, Triple Goddess of Wicca. The three main Abrahamic religions, Islam, Christianity and Judaism.' [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3_\(number\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3_(number)), retrieved 210311 3 (number)

‘The most positive number in symbolism, in Christian thought, it has a central importance as the doctrine of the Trinity, *God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit*. Number three expresses all aspects of creation, including birth life and death, past, present and future, and mind body and soul and man, woman and child. The symbolism of three is also linked with the triangle. The number 3 is also a very mystical and spiritual number featured in many folktales, (three wishes, three guesses, three little pigs, three bears)’. <http://hubpages.com/hub/numbers>. Number Symbolism by MM Del Rosario, accessed 210311

‘Strings of Time’ explores the mystery of the present, through the revelations of the past. To break from the whole or three, the individual must come to understand himself and return to the one, before he can reunite with his soul to make two, to be reborn on earth as whole or three. Much of the Eastern world believes in reincarnation, the Western world, through the Christian belief system, does not, and yet it references the same, but with different terminology: the belief that Christ died on the cross that we might be reborn. However the interpretation of this rebirth is not concerned with returning to earth, to learn life lessons like our Eastern counterparts, but reborn in Christ so that we might enter the kingdom of heaven, long interpreted as some place beyond earth. I state through the exploration of the three protagonists’ journeys that this cycle exists on earth. We are born to a life apparently unaware of whence we come. As a general rule our minds, through the rebirth of the soul, enter this world with no identifiable memory, although there have been exceptions. It is the awareness of the past that can explain and define where these characters have come from and what it is they seek in their futures.

Summary

‘Strings of Time’ is a book exploring the essential search and quest of who we are and how each of us individually perceives the world, while asserting that each individual journey in the end is the same, only our limited expectations and perceptions are really what set us apart. Yearning to understand their present conditions the three main characters must unite the past with their current reality. I hope that Strings of Time is an uplifting and possibly challenging attempt to review who we think we are and who we hope to be.

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ABSTRACT

‘Strings of Time’ is a novel taken to second draft which plays within the genres of Speculative Fiction, Esoteric Thriller and Contemporary Fiction.

The present day collides with the strings of times past and future. The past is present, it’s brought forward to now, and the choices of each of the major characters decide who’ll they be in their own futures. Set primarily in New Zealand, alternate worlds are present in real and imagined times, travelled through in time, dream or vision.

Three apparently random people – Christina, Joe and Mary, the names are significant – in three apparently random narratives, undertake modern-day quests, resulting in each, idiosyncratically, exploring their worlds for self-knowledge and understanding of their place in the world. Unlocking the secrets of past lives, that concurrently run alongside their present-day selves, these characters will learn how to reunite with their true selves, and therefore alter their current reality. A connection snakes through the novel, culminating in the characters meeting themselves through the veil, and so each may choose whether to be released, or remain bound by their knowledge. We are our own stories.