THESIS:

Tree Spirit

EXEGESIS:

The Place of Trees in our Psyche

by Katie Furze

A thesis and exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Writing.
Centre for Creative Writing, School of Language and Culture, 2018

Primary supervisor: James George

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Katie Furze, 30 November 2018

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ABSTRACT

Tree Spirit is novel for children aged 8-12 years (middle grade), set in contemporary Aotearoa, that weaves threads of Māori and Greek mythology, with current ecological and social concerns and explores the universal themes of family relationships, friendship, and the cycle of life and death.

The Place of Trees in our Psyche is an exegesis which investigates trees in mythology, religion, and in the physical world, and examines the critical ground on which *Tree Spirit* and similar contemporary children's fiction sits.

EXEGESIS:

The Place of Trees in our Psyche

the mythical and the physical

by Katie Furze

An exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Writing.
Centre for Creative Writing, School of Language and Culture, 2018

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Eva never knew her mother, who died when she was a baby, or so she thought. When Eva and her father move to a house on the edge of the Great Forest of Tiriwā, Eva hears a voice calling her name, and follows it into the trees. There she finds her mother, not dead, but living on as a kowhai tree. In that instant, everything Eva knew is tipped upside down — she has found her mother — and she has glimpsed the supernatural realm of the tree spirits, known as tūrehu by local iwi. In the midst of this, Eva meets a boy named Tai, who also has a connection with the forest.

Eva learns her mother originally transformed to escape terminal illness, and now her life is in danger again — her kōwhai is threatened — she needs help from Eva and her dad. At the same time, Eva faces real world struggles: she is being bullied at her new school, and Tai is her only friend. On the night of the full moon, Tai and Eva call on Tai's pounamu manaia, to guide Eva's mother back to the human world, but all is not well. While Eva is preoccupied with family concerns, something devastating happens, dragging them all to a place where Eva is forced to make a heart-breaking decision.

Tree Spirit is a novel for children aged 8-12 years (middle grade)[1], set in contemporary Aotearoa, that weaves threads of Māori and Greek mythology, with current ecological and social concerns and explores the universal themes of family relationships, friendship, and the cycle of life and death, including rebirth.

Motivation

The Seed

I have always been fascinated by the dryads, or tree nymphs, of ancient Greek mythology, who sang and danced in forest clearings in the moonlight. The first time I encountered the dryad myth was in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C S Lewis (Lewis, 2000), a book I read and reread many times as a child. In addition, trees

[1] Middle grade readers age bracket 8 – 12 years, The Book: Essential Guide to Publishing for Children, SWBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators), 2018

are living entities I care deeply about, and for this reason I chose a Bachelor of Horticulture Science as my undergraduate degree. My original idea stemmed from these two things: the rich arboreal mythology that has surrounded me since childhood; in legends, fairy tales and children's literature, and my love of trees and forests in the real world.

Nurturing the Seed

For me, a middle grade audience was an automatic choice. Since 2010, I have been writing children's fiction, and this is the age range I enjoy writing for most, because of their willingness to believe in possibilities most adults discount as unrealistic. I decided the protagonist should be a child aged at the upper end of the middle grade bracket, with a tree as a mother, who lived on the edge of a forest.

From these buds the supporting characters and the plot sprouted and grew. I planted my story in contemporary Aotearoa, to bring it to life for children living in this country in the present day. Immediately, I imagined Te Wao Nui ā Tiriwā[2], also known as Auckland's Waitākere Ranges, as the setting because it is the forest I know best. Due to the local landscape and native flora and fauna, a link to Māori mythology and Māori forest lore became an obvious and necessary dimension.

In writing the first draft, loosely and intuitively, with pen on paper, three interesting things happened unintentionally. The first was my story developed a close approximation of the mythic structure described by Joseph Campbell as the monomyth (Campbell, 1993). The second was my work contained many symbols or motifs of universal archetypes, particularly the *tree* and the *mother*, first described by Carl Jung (Jung, 1964), and later studied by Joseph Campbell. Both the mythic structure and the symbolism seemed to suit the story, since essentially *Tree Spirit* is a modern-day myth. The third interesting thing; current concerns about forest ecology emerged in the text. These concerns linked the traditional Māori understanding of the world as a pantheistic[3] totality where all living things are related, to the mythology, and also to the contemporary threads in the narrative.

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[2] The Great Forest of Tiriwā

[3] Definition of Pantheism from www:collinsdictionary.com: Pantheism is the religious belief that God is in everything in nature and the universe.

It seemed these three things happened without conscious decision or control on my part, which suggests they arise from what is known as collective unconscious[4] which exists in the minds of all of us. Carl Jung believed that whenever archetypes appear, they bring with them a certain influence.

> When an archetype appears in a dream, in a fantasy, or in life, it always brings with it a certain influence or power by virtue of which it either exercises a numinous or a fascinating effect, or impels to action. (Jung, 1983, p. 71)

When reviewing my first draft from a critical perspective, I decided the influence of the tree and mother archetypes universalized the key themes in the book, and additionally I realised that the appearance of these archetypes in mythology, religion and creative works were subjects I wanted to explore further.

Research Aims

To weave threads of Māori and Greek mythology, and current ecological and social concerns into a middle grade novel set in contemporary Aotearoa, effectively, with originality, and understanding.

As I wrote my first draft, I began re-reading and studying comparative titles to my creative work, namely children's fiction that incorporates myth into a contemporary narrative, such as *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness (Ness, 2011), *The Ingo* series by Helen Dunmore (Dunmore, 2005-2012), *Lob* by Linda Newberry (Newberry, 2010), and *Red Rocks* by Rachael King (King, 2012). These exemplars are works of middle grade fiction that I greatly enjoy, admire and aim to emulate. While these novels are similar in nature and intent to my creative work, they are based on Celtic, or British mythology, whereas my work draws on Māori and Greek myth.

This led me to investigate contemporary children's fiction that features Māori mythology such as *The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera (Ihimaera, 2007), *The Bone Tiki*, and *The Taniwha's Tear* by David Hair (Hair, 2009 & 2010), and *Tui Street Tales* by Anne Kayes (Kayes, 2017) amongst other titles; and also contemporary

[4] Collective unconscious is also called inherited knowledge

children's fiction that contains Greek mythology, such as the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* pentalogy by Rick Riordan (Riordan, 2010).

These titles, and others I uncovered along the way, are discussed in terms of effectiveness, originality, and understanding in the theoretical section.

From contemporary fiction, I ventured into an exploration of the original sources of stories: traditional Māori folklore, and non-fiction texts about Māori mythology; and ancient Greek myths: *The Fable of Dryope* from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Raeburn, 2004), and other classical stories containing the dryad myth, such as *The Dryad* written by Hans Christian Andersen in 1868 (Andersen, 2008).

Tree Spirit draws on traditional tales from (at least) two cultures. As well as using the source material effectively and with originality, I aim to ensure it is used with understanding. The issue of cultural appropriation is touched upon in the Discussion section.

Structure of Exegesis

While conducting early research for *Tree Spirit*, my thoughts kept leading back to one thing: trees. It occurred to me that trees have a unique and special place in the human psyche, and that this was a potent theme to develop in my creative work, in concrete, metaphorical, and metaphysical terms.

In the theoretical section of this exegesis I explore *The Place of Trees in our Psyche* under the following subsections:

1) The Mythical Tree, which investigates the depiction of trees in religion, mythology and more recently, in contemporary children's fiction;

2) The Physical Tree, which considers the biological role of trees, current environmental concerns, and the changing scientific understanding of trees;[5]

[5] The body of information available about mythical and physical aspects of trees is large and I have concentrated on the areas that have the biggest impact on my creative work.

3) Shaping Tree Spirit, which reviews difficulties and successes encountered in writing and editing my novel.

In the discussion/conclusion section I examine the themes of my creative work, its place on the shelf of contemporary children's literature, comparative titles, and the important issue of cultural appropriation.

SECTION 2: THEORETICAL SECTION

The Mythical Tree

Trees appear throughout the world in art, religious texts, myths, and folk tales, as a symbol or motif representing life, immortality, the cycle of life/death, or fertility[6]. What is particularly interesting is the commonality in how trees are depicted, in all cultures, and from very early human history through to the present day.

> For the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous products of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source. (Campbell, 1993, p. 4)

Tree symbolism dates back to the earliest human civilisations in the fertile crescent — Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians and Assyrians all depicted sacred trees which grew in the centre of paradise (Lima, 2014). In the world's oldest work of literature, which dates back to 3000 BC, epic hero Gilgamesh defeats the guardian of the cedar forest of Mount Lebanon, then destroys the forest and lives to regret it (Carey, 2012 & Caldecott, 1993). The story of Gilgamesh and the cedar forest has a strong ecological message — destroy the forest and pay the price.

The concept of a tree of life is one of the most widespread manifestations of the tree archetype. Esoteric Judaism tells of a divine Kabbalah tree, which grows through four worlds or realms (Caldecott, 1993). In Buddhism, the Bodhi tree is the sacred tree of wisdom under which Gautama Buddha sat for forty-nine days to gain enlightenment (Caldecott, 2005). In Christian religion, two trees are found in the Garden of Eden; the

[6] In Jungian theory the Mother archetype also represents life/death and fertility

Tree of Life is a source of eternal life, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil from which Eve took an apple (Leeming, 2005). In the Quran, the tree of immortality is found in the Garden of Eden and is forbidden to Adam and Eve. In Norse mythology, Yggdrasill was a huge ash tree that connected the nine worlds of the universe and had two springs at its feet; one life giving, one wisdom giving, similar to the two trees in the garden of Eden (Caldecott, 1993). Persian mythology speaks of a Gaokerena Tree that has healing powers and can bring the dead back to life (Campbell, 1993). Throughout Southeast Asia, a cosmic tree is found that symbolises wholeness and unites the sky with the earth (Leeming, 2005). In addition, Mayan, Aztec, Izapan, Olmec and other Mesoamerican cultures produces numerous depictions of the tree of life (Lima, 2014).

Greek Mythology

In Greek mythology tree nymphs were called dryads, or hamadryads, and different types of dryads were associated with different tree species. There was a belief amongst ancient Greeks that all living things were infused with a life force, which could not be lost or destroyed, but could change or transform into a different life form (Caldecott, 1993). (A similar belief was commonly held in traditional Māori lore, and this relationship is covered in more detail later in this section.) Many Greek myths and legends are about humans transforming into other life forms, and Ovid[7] wrote an entire work, fifteen volumes in epic verse, called *Metamorphoses*, in which many of the tales are about humans turning into trees. Ovid's *Fable of Dryope* tells the tragic tale of a young mother who plucks a lotus blossom to amuse her baby, the blood of the lotus falls onto her skin causing her to transform into a black poplar tree (Raeburn, 2004).

The Greek dryad myth was the seed for my creative work *Tree Spirit*. The idea of Eva's mother existing inside a tree is directly connected to this myth, and Eva's reoccurring dream mirrors Ovid's description of Dryope turning into a tree.

> Her skin felt rough under her fingers. Glancing down, she saw it was peeling back, but there was no blood, just a dry, bark-like layer. Her fingertips tingled. She stared at them. Something small and bright green emerged from the nail bed of her middle finger. Like a shoot. (Tree Spirit, p. 30)

[7] Ovid was a Roman poet who lived from around 43BC – 17AD

This was something that happened subconsciously, as I had not read *The Fable of Dryope* before my first draft was written, however Carl Jung's theory of collective unconscious posits an archetypal influence on thought and perception. Once I saw this parallel, I chose to include the original Greek myth in my creative work to reflect and add extra meaning to Eva's dream. In *Tree Spirit* Eva's Nana retells *The Fable of Dryope*, as a hint to her granddaughter.

Māori Mythology

In Māori mythology, the god Tāne created forests, birds, and humans, which as children of Tāne, were related. In fact, all living things were related, meaning the natural world and the human world were connected, not separated, as in much of traditional Western thought.

> There is magic in the trees, strong magic in all the children of Tāne since the god of nature claimed them for his children, nurturing them with water and the dark soil of Mother Earth and peopling them with his other, best-loved creation, the birds. (Reed, 1999, p. 233)

Scientific research increasingly demonstrates humans are simply a single species in a vast ecological equation, echoing this intuitive understanding of Māori. (This point is examined further in the section on the physical tree.) My intention in *Tree Spirit* is to interweave the natural and human worlds, both physically and metaphysically.

Similarly, Māori lore positioned the real and the spiritual worlds as intertwined, rather than separate, an idea held by many people from many different cultures around the globe. In my creative work I wanted the real and the spiritual (or magical) to coexist, in the same way as held in Māori traditional world view. Hence in my novel, the tree spirits live in the real world, but they cannot be seen or heard by everyone. This is partly an aesthetic choice, but also while studying contemporary fiction which included Māori myth, I observed Māori authors did not usually separate the magical or spiritual from the real in the way Pākehā authors tended to. This interesting distinction is raised by Anna Jackson and Geoffrey Miles in a collection of essays about the depiction of Aotearoa in contemporary New Zealand children's fiction. In an essay discussing the term Māori gothic, Geoffrey Miles claims Māori writers believe the

supernatural and natural coexist in one world, whereas Pākehā writers often separate the two with a door or portal (Jackson et al, 2011).

The Māori god Tāne has many names, depending on his different roles; as god of the forest he is known as Tāne-mahuta. Tāne is probably most famous in Māori mythology for separating the sky father, Ranginui and the earth mother, Papatūānuku. In this role, Tāne carries several archetypal energies: 1) the tree: standing up straight, stretching for the sky; 2) the child: on a quest of self-discovery; and 3) the father: making a new reality, and imposing it. In *Tree Spirit* Eva and Tai feature Tāne-mahuta in a mural they paint at school. This is another example of archetypal influence that emerged unplanned in my first draft.

Papatūānuku, the land, gives birth to and nurtures all living things, and can be framed in Jungian archetypal theory as the mother. As mentioned earlier the mother archetype is strongly associated with the tree archetype, and as such, the mother is expressed in a number of characters in *Tree Spirit*: the land itself — the Waitākere Ranges; the three human mothers: Danielle, Nana and Huia; and the moon, Marama, is also a symbol of the mother.

Another manifestation of the tree archetype in Māori mythology is rākau tipua which were enchanted trees or logs. In *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Maori Myth and Legend*, Margaret Orbell describes tipua as supernatural presences that had mana and were tapu and goes on to claim describing them as 'goblins' or 'demons' is generally misleading (Orbell, 1995). In the tale of Parikaoritawa a half man — half atua[8] emerges from a tawa tree, makes love to a woman and when her boy child is born, he emerges between shoulders on her back, like a cicada, killing the woman (Orbell, 1995). According to Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand rākau tipua or enchanted logs were thought to be taniwha (Te Ara, 2010). In *When the Kehua Calls*, a middle grade novel by Kingi McKinnon, Rewi's friend Pauly explains how spirits may possess another life form:

> "You know, when I said our spirits go back to Hawaiiki when we die …" he continued, propping himself up on an elbow. "…well, I forgot to tell you that not all of them do.

[8] spirit

> Nanny Hiko reckons some go into animals, some into birds … some even go into rocks and trees. Everything has a spirit, she says." (McKinnon, 2002, p. 35)

The tree spirits in my creative work are more closely aligned to tūrehu than rākau tipua, although I think the two spiritual entities are complementary rather than opposed ideas, since many traditional Māori tales include both, or combine tipua and tūrehu.

Tūrehu[9] were supernatural beings of Māori myth who inhabited dense forests and misty mountain tops, such as Te Wao Nui ā Tiriwā. They were described as beings of human height, and of light skin, who enjoyed music and dancing, and sometimes played flutes. They ate raw food only, were active only after dark or in heavy mist, had magical powers and often kidnapped or stole humans. Tūrehu feature in many tales, from different iwi and regions around Aotearoa. In the bibliography I have included a separate list of some of the most well-known tales.

'Fairy' is the usual English translation of tūrehu, but this is possibly misleading, in a similar way that Orbell noted that 'demon' and 'goblin' were not ideal translations of 'tipua.' Because many Māori stories were oral only, early written collections were subject to colonial bias, a fascinating topic in its own right. Elsdon Best, an ethnographer who lived among Māori in the late 1800s and early 1900s recorded some fascinating oral traditions about tūrehu (amongst other topics).

> Wiremu Hoete Riu-kakara of Waiheke stated that the turehu folk live on hills and mountains and are never seen alone, but only in companies, and are fond of talking, singing and playing on the flute. These folk are of a very light skin colour and dress in white garments. When caught sight of by ordinary people, they vanish, but matakite (seers) can see them. (Best, 1995, p. 547)

> Some have told me only seers could really see the turehu, they were merely heard by less gifted people. (Best, 1995, p. 547)

I have endeavoured to closely align the tree spirits in my novel with the tūrehu of Māori myth. Like tūrehu, the tree sprits in my creative work live deep in the forest, enjoy singing and dancing at night time, resemble humans, and cannot be seen by

[9] also known as patupaiarehe, and pakepakehā

everyone. Eva and Tai can see and hear the tree spirits, and understand their language, while Eva's father, Gavin, can only hear them.

Parallels between Greek and Māori Mythology

There are many similarities between ancient Greek and Māori mythology. In his memoir, *Māori Boy*, Witi Ihimaera mentions such parallels in his own work and specifically discusses the likeness of the *Perseus* and *Maui* myths (Ihimaera, 2014). Classicist, Agathe Thornton, suggests the Māori creation myth, where Ranginui and Papatūānuku are separated by Tāne-mahuta, and the Greek legend of *Uranus and Gaea* are very alike (Thornton, 1987). In view of the ideas of collective unconscious raised by Jung, and the monomyth by Joseph Campbell, these findings are not unexpected, and Thornton comes to a similar conclusion as Campbell.

> The similarities have probably arisen out of the generally human experience of day coming out of night, light out of darkness, or again of the weight of a leaden, oppressive sky, or the very ancient dread that the light of morning may never come. (Thornton, 1987, p. 54-55)

One of the most noteworthy parallels, which I was conscious of in my creative work, is the view a spirit or life force is found in all living things, and this spirit or life force can sometimes transfer into a different form, often a tree.

In an essay titled *The Meaning of Fairy Tale within the Evolution of Culture*, Jack Zipes explains how 'fairy tales', a term first coined in 1697, evolved from Greco-Roman myths and could possibly have even more ancient roots.

> We must remember that a supernatural creature like a fairy may have been called something else and may have existed in the minds and ritual practices of humans as well as stories for thousands of years. (Zipes, 2011, p. 239)

Following this train of thought, I suspect that tūrehu are more closely aligned to the tree-spirits of Greek myth than traditional European fairies.

Related Archetypes

In Britain and throughout North Western Europe, the tree archetype manifests in *the green man* — a symbol found in sculpture and other art from the dark ages to the

present. Like the tree, the green man symbolises regeneration, and rebirth, and is often seen as a survivor of pagan beliefs. William Anderson was fascinated by the way the green man came and went in the course of history, and believed his appearance contained an ecological message. He describes the green man thus:

> From the union of the two opposites, the sky god and the earth mother, is born a young god who is perpetually sacrificed, who descends to the underworld, and perpetually is reborn. This young god is the archetype of the green man. He is the son, the lover, and the guardian of the great goddess. (Anderson, 1990, p. 21)

Unfortunately, Anderson doesn't reference where this observation of the green man came from, but the parallel with Tāne-mahuta of Māori mythology is unmistakable.

Anderson noticed that whenever in history the mother archetype appears, the green man follows, and he posited that this happens when nature is calling on humans to act (Anderson, 1990). This seems to suggest that not only are the tree, the mother and the green man linked, but echoes the Jungian sentiment that archetypes carry a certain influence, and/or power.

According to Anderson the *serpent* is a third archetype associated with the tree and the mother (Anderson, 1990). Certainly, in art and literature, the tree of life is often found with either a snake or dragon associated, but there is much debate about what the serpent means, and in fact, there may not be a universal meaning.

In my creative work the serpent takes the form of a manaia[10]. In *Tree Spirit*, Tai calls on his pounamu manaia pendant, a gift from his brother, to help Eva's mother resume her human form.

Contemporary Children's Fiction

In the remainder of this section on the mythical tree, I focus on children's fiction that weaves the tree archetype and/or Māori or Greek mythology into a contemporary context. Specifically, I evaluate the way the mythology is used in terms of

[10] A mythological creature in Māori art which is usually depicted with the body of a snake or a fish and the head of a bird. It is thought to be a spiritual guardian.

effectiveness, originality, and understanding, and look for similarities to my own creative work.

In *A Monster Calls* thirteen-year-old Conor is visited by a monstrous yew tree who helps him come to terms with his mother's impending death from cancer. The monster says he has many names including Herne the Hunter, Cernunnos (a Celtic horned god) and the green man — a link to traditional British and Celtic myth (Ness, 2011). The monster is a metaphor of the book's themes: life, death and truth, and also highlights their timelessness. Conor hopes the yew tree monster will save his mother, but eventually discovers the monster's real purpose is to uncover the truth — his mother is dying, and Conor must let her go. Ness is an expert storyteller and there is much to admire in how he draws on traditional myth, in a present-day setting, to tackle dark and difficult themes. The book's effect on the reader is summed up eloquently by Meg Rosoff, who describes it as harrowing, lyrical and transcendent.[11]

Lob by Linda Newberry is a story about life, death and nature, for younger middle grade readers, set in present-day England. Only Lucy and her grandfather can see the green man, Lob, who helps Grandpa Will in his garden. When Grandpa Will dies, Lucy struggles to understand her loss, and Lob must find a new home. Newberry uses poetic techniques to infuse her writing with the mystic of the green man, and at the same time, brings an ecological message to life.

> "Lob?' said Grandpa Will in the summer garden. 'Oh, he's older than anyone can tell. Older than the trees. Older than anybody." (Newberry, 2010, p. 13)

A Monster Calls and *Lob* have similar themes and employ similar imagery to *Tree Spirit*, but draw on British and Celtic mythology, rather than Māori mythology.

In *The Bone Tiki* David Hair develops the Māori myth of *The Wooden Head* (Reed, 1999) into a fast paced novel featuring the darker aspects of Māori mythology (tūrehu, kehua, taniwha, the underworld, shapeshifters, and black magic). (Hair, 2009). The tale ricochets between two parallel worlds — present day New Zealand, and a myth-world named Aotearoa. (Note the myth world and the real world exist as separate

[11] Rosoff, 2011: back cover quote from Ness, P (2011). *A Monster Calls*. London,UK: Walker Books.

realms.) Hair also includes Māori tikanga and cultural aspects with sensitivity and understanding. *The Bone Tiki* reads similarly to Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* pentalogy (Riordan, 2010) which is based on Greek myth. Hair's book is for an older audience than *Tree Spirit*[12] and has been written to appeal specifically to boys, making it quite a different work to mine.

In *Tui Street Tales* Anne Kayes transfigures European fairy tales to modern New Zealand by incorporating local elements such as landscape, flora, fauna, Māori mythology and language. Kayes also subverts many of the tales to reflect current social issues including blended families, bullying, gender stereotypes, the environment, and social media (Kayes, 2017). *Tui Street Tales* is written for a middle grade audience, and since the basis of Kayes work is fairy tale, each story has an individual tone and message, while *Tree Spirit* has a single tone, single narrative, and is myth based.

In *The Whale Rider* Witi Ihimaera seamlessly blends the natural and the supernatural, the real and unreal — it is a myth come to life in a contemporary setting. It delivers an ecological message interwoven with current social concerns, such as sexism, and racism. Ihimaera makes us believe the mythical scenes are real, since they occur in an otherwise realistic narrative (Ihimaera, 2007). Also interesting is the strong presence of the Mother archetype, in the characters of Kahu, Nanny Flowers, and the old mother whale who appears at the end of the book.

Set in a derelict house in Northland, *When the Kehua Calls*, is a middle grade novel about the ghost (kehua) of an old man who died without a tangi and so cannot return to Hawaiiki. Stuck in limbo, the kehua haunts thirteen-year-old Rewi with nightmares, inhabits a ruru, and makes his little sister seriously ill, until Rewi tells his father, and the family recover the old man's remains, and give him a proper burial. (McKinnon, 2002). The author explains 'this was written from his own experience, with the intention of giving non-Māori an insight into various aspects of Māori culture.' (McKinnon, 2002, p. 1). As such, it is less about mythology than my other exemplars and more about tikanga[13] and culture.

[12] David Hair's Aotearoa Series is classified as young adult fiction.
[13] Māori customs.

Guardian of the Dead by Karen Healey is a young adult novel that contains global stakes, and fast paced action. Terrifying vampire-like patupaiarehe attack magicians and plan to distract Hine Nui Te Pō[14] by sinking the North Island of New Zealand, and so regain their immortality. Healey employs Māori mythology in a contemporary setting, where the patupaiarehe inhabit a separate world to humans, which is called the mists (Healey, 2010). *Guardian of the Dead* uses the patupaiarehe/tūrehu myth in a different way to *Tree Spirit* and for an older audience.

Owl by Joanna Orwin is a middle grade adventure based on the Waitaha legend of Pouākai[15], with a mixture of Māori and Pākehā characters (Orwin, 2001). The mythic eagle appears in the real world and must be conquered by two boys. Orwin incorporates a Māori myth effectively and authentically but misses an opportunity for an ecological message — in the climax the giant eagle and its babies are slaughtered by the boys.

Hunter by Joy Cowley is a duel point of view middle grade narrative set in Fiordland, featuring two characters in different time zones, with the connection of place and genetics — it turns out Hunter, a Māori slave in 1805, is an ancestor of the present-day character, Jordan (Cowley, 2004). Cowley's recreation of a slave's life including traditional Māori beliefs, knowledge and cultural practices is fascinating. *Hunter* however does not delve into mythology and so is has little similarity to *Tree Spirit*.

Kaitangata Twitch by Margaret Mahy is a mystical tale, with a 12-year-old female protagonist, which blends fantasy and reality. Mahy presents the land (Kaitangata Island) as a character — it twitches with earthquakes when upset and consumes people who threaten it (Mahy, 2005). The fantasy elements occur in the real world, but in a dream state that only some people can enter. This was Mahy's first cross-cultural story, and Māori elements were expanded in the television adaption which debuted on Māori Television in 2010.[16] The style and content of *Kaitangata Twitch* is similar to *Tree Spirit*, although *Kaitangata Twitch* has a horror bent, and draws on different aspects of Māori mythology to *Tree Spirit*.

[14] Māori goddess of death.
[15] Giant eagle, or Haast's eagle *Harpagornis moorei,* extinct for five hundred years.
[16] https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/kaitangata-twitch-episode-one-2010

The Physical Tree

Trees are essential for life in a biological sense, since they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, produce oxygen for animals to breathe, store carbon in their cells, and provide food and shelter for numerous species.[17] Climate moderation and erosion prevention are other important environmental functions of trees.

> Forests and trees make vital contributions both to people and the planet, bolstering livelihoods, providing clean air and water, conserving biodiversity and responding to climate change. (FAO, 2018, pg x)

Considering these critical biological roles, it is not surprising the tree has been a symbol of life in all cultures around the world stretching back for millennia.

Forest Loss

Unfortunately, since the agricultural revolution that began roughly ten thousand years ago, the total area of forest worldwide has steadily decreased, and *Homo sapiens* are directly responsible for this — wherever we settled we destroyed forests to free up land for agriculture (Harari, 2011). In recent decades the pace of loss has slowed, but not halted. 'Between 1990 and 2015, the world's forest area decreased from 31.6 percent of global land area to 30.6 percent' (FAO, 2018, p. xi). Now, more than ever before, there is significant concern about the effect of forest loss on Earth's environment particularly in view of the changing climate.

> The world's response to climate change – in terms of adaptation, mitigation and resilience – must focus more on forests. (FAO, 2018, pg xi)

Before humans arrived, about eighty percent of New Zealand was covered in forest. Between 1250 – 1300 AD Māori burned down around 6.7 million hectares of trees, mainly on the coast and eastern sides of the two main islands. Then from the early 1840s European settlers cleared another 8 million hectares. By the year 2000, only 6.2 million hectares of indigenous forest remained, most of it on mountainous land (Dawson, 2007).

[17] Of special note are tropical rainforests which are amongst the most biodiverse habitats on Earth.

> Botanists tell us that a dense, dripping, impenetrable rainforest covered most of the steep ridges and broad valleys of the deeply dissected hill country of the warmer, wetter North Island. (Clarke, 2007, p. 38)

Te Wao Nui ā Tiriwā fared no differently. The forest cover of Auckland's Waitākere Ranges has been irreversibly changed by four groups: first Māori, who burned patches for habitation and cultivation, then European settlers, who cleared land for farms, then gum diggers and loggers, who profited from the valuable kauri gum and timber industries. By the 1920s very little of the original forest remained. Most of the forest has been cut-over by loggers who took the most favoured trees, and today only small areas have not been felled or burned in some way (Waitakere Ranges Protection Society, 2006).

Tree Disease

Te Wao Nui ā Tiriwā is regenerating from the ravages of the nineteen century and now it faces a new threat — kauri dieback, a disease caused by a fungus-like organism named *Phytophthora agathidicida* which damages the tree's nutrient carrying tissues and so slowly kills it (Kauri Dieback Programme, n.d.). With an infection rate of nearly twenty percent, Te Wao Nui ā Tiriwā is the most heavily infected forest in the country. As guardians of the forest, local iwi Te Kawerau ā Maki placed a rahui[18] on the forest in 2017 (Te Kawerau ā Maki, 2017). Unfortunately, many members of the public did not respect the rahui, and in early 2018 Auckland Council closed most forest tracks to prevent further spread of the disease.[19]

Ecological concern about forest loss is an important theme in *Tree Spirit*, although as mentioned in the motivations section, I did not specifically plan this, nor did I plan to include a tree disease. The idea appeared on the page in my free-flowing first draft. I do not know whether my concern over the plight of forests filtered through into my creative work, whether the tree archetype guided my hand, or whether a tree disease emerged because of the need to include a broader conflict in the narrative. Quite possibly, it was a combination of these three influences.

[18] Māori customary prohibition or closure.
[19] https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/environment/plants-animals/pests-weeds/Pages/protect-our-kauri-trees.aspx

Featuring kauri dieback in my creative work could be problematic, since the status of the disease is likely to change. For this reason, I invented a fictitious disease, which I named kōwhai rapid dieback. Kōwhai rapid dieback is modelled on a devastating disease of ōhi‘a trees in Hawaii known as rapid ōhi‘a death (College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawaii, n.d.). Incidentally, ōhi‘a are closely related to pōhutukawa and rātā and should this pathogen reach New Zealand, these species will be seriously threatened. In *Tree Spirit* concern about forests is also highlighted by the character, Gavin Murphy, Eva’s father, who is a forest ranger. In *Tree Spirit* he tells Eva’s class about in Te Wao Nui ā Tiriwā:

> “It’s an amazing place — thirty thousand hectares of regenerating rainforest, with peaks of over three hundred metres, edged by the black sand beaches of the west coast, and below that, the Manukau Harbour. We’re very lucky to have a forest like this, right in our backyard.” (Tree Spirit, p. 91)

Mother Trees

Another strong argument for protecting and retaining the world’s forests is recent scientific research that changes our understanding of trees and challenges the way we think of them. While trees were previously viewed as individuals that compete against each other for water, nutrients and light, scientists now believe trees of the same species are communal, co-operating to help each other survive, by sharing water and nutrients, and emitting hormones and distress signals. Trees can also share resources and information with other tree species as well. These intra and inter species alliances take place through underground fungal networks called mycorrhizal networks — a symbiotic relationship between trees and fungi (Smithsonian, 2018).

In Western Canada, forest ecologist Suzanne Simard has studied symbiotic tree networks for thirty years. Simard found the biggest, oldest trees in the forest had the most fungal connections. Her research demonstrates these hub trees, or mother trees, support the younger trees, and are often connected to hundreds of other trees in the forest.

> Forests aren't simply collections of trees, they're complex systems with hubs and networks that overlap and connect trees and allow them to communicate. (Simard, 2016, 13.11)

This emerging research proves that trees are complex organisms, and more connected to each other than previously thought. It also echoes the traditional knowledge of Māori and other cultures who view the forest is a single entity rather than a group of individuals.

The importance of trees was understood inherently by early humans, hence the appearance of the tree archetype throughout mythologies, religions and creative works of many cultures. Considering the crucial biological functions trees carry out, and the growing body of evidence that trees communicate with each other, perhaps the mythology and the biology actually contain the same message — the metaphorical and metaphysical depictions of trees, in art and literature throughout the world, may be closer to the truth than most people realise.

Given the large quantity of information available about mythical and physical aspects of trees I concentrated on the areas that impact most on my creative work. Deciding how to best incorporate these findings into my novel posed a significant challenge. In the following section I discuss some of the difficulties and successes encountered in shaping *Tree Spirit*.

Shaping Tree Spirit

Before any writing began, I brainstormed characters, settings, and major plot points. Following this, my first draft was written quickly, in a loose free-flowing style, without editing. I wrote with pen on paper, because my ideas flow better this way, and because no ‘delete’ key was available. The first draft was written in six weeks, in chunks of roughly one thousand words, with little momentum lost between writing sessions. As I wrote, archetypal energies and tropes informed and perhaps guided my decision making. This method allowed the writing to be both structured and fluid at the same time.

The first draft took the form of scenes, not chapters, written in chronological order, with few transitions. Almost all scenes required fleshing out, some new scenes were added in the second or third draft, and some were shortened or cut. The structural edit identified where pacing could be improved, and transitionary scenes, section breaks, and chapter breaks were inserted to control the flow of the narrative. The technique of

writing scenes rather than chapters worked well — it led to increased variety in the length and structure of the resulting chapters and added fluidity to the manuscript.

The initial method of focalisation was first person. This perspective feels most natural to me: it enables me to view the world subjectively through my protagonist's eyes and to clearly hear their vernacular voice in my head. However, when working on the second draft, I wondered if a third person perspective might be a better choice for *Tree Spirit*, for two reasons: 1) Genre convention: except the *Ingo* series by Helen Dunmore, the contemporary middle grade fiction reviewed (see previous section) uses third person. 2) I wondered if first person was warranted — common reasons for selecting this focalisation are a distinctive or unusual protagonist's voice, or in order to use an unreliable narrator — neither of these applied for *Tree Spirit*. As an experiment, the next draft was changed to third person. With this broader focus, my ability to visualise and empathise with supporting characters improved. Third person gave me flexibility to colour the narrative through Eva's eyes where I wanted to using free indirect speech, but I could also render it less subjectively when required. For instance, I used a third person limited narrator for scenes including Tai, or Eva's dad, I zoomed out to a limited perspective for a more detailed description of setting, or when a subjective account would be superfluous. Therefore, changing the focalisation from first to third person, added a layer of richness and detail to *Tree Spiri*t, and gave me more flexibility when writing. Converting the manuscript was a useful exercise because I learned from the process, however, in the future I will aim to select the most suitable perspective before embarking on the first draft.

SECTION 3: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

Themes

Tree Spirit explores the universal themes of family relationships, friendship, and the cycle of life and death, including rebirth. It also touches on bullying and marginalisation and has a subtle environmental message.

While I did not consciously ponder themes as I wrote, from past reading and writing I understand family relationships and friendship are important themes in middle grade literature, since family and friends are usually the most influential people in the life of an 8 – 12 year old.

The cycle of life and death is a harsh reality that many middle grade readers are only beginning to understand. Many children of this age have not experienced death first hand. Some gatekeepers[20] of children's literature believe content concerning the death of a family member is too dark, or too mature, for this age group. Yet, many children face the loss of a parent, or sibling either through death or separation, and reading about a character's problems helps children to rationalise and process their own emotional hurdles, and to empathise with others.

Bullying and marginalisation are minor themes in *Tree Spirit*. Eva is bullied by Imogen, and both Eva and Tai are viewed as outsiders, at some point in the novel. Unfortunately, bullying is an obstacle that most children encounter at some stage, either directly or indirectly. Including content about bullying and marginalisation adds authenticity to the school scenes. Also, I believe reading about unpleasant experiences in fiction helps children to cope when they face such experiences in real life. Since the main antagonistic force in *Tree Spirit* is the abstract concept of disease/death, including an antagonistic character in the real world adds strength to the story. As an antagonist, Imogen represents not only a bully, but also (when she refuses to disinfect her shoes) people in our society who don't care about the plight of the forests.

Tree Spirit also delivers a subtle environmental message. I think subtly is important with any message in children's fiction. Some children will understand the environmental significance, and other will not. That is how it should be — ultimately readers must make their own decision about what they believe.

Comparative Titles

Revisiting the body of contemporary children's literature that is similar in style, theme and content to my creative work, *Tree Spirit* is closest to *A Monster Calls* by Patrick

[20] Gatekeepers of children's literature include publishers, teachers, parents and librarians.

Ness, and *Lob* by Lynda Newberry which both utilise the tree archetype and encompass themes of family relationships and life/death. *Lob* also contains an environmental message, and *A Monster Calls* features bullying, but these exemplars differ from my creative work in that they use Celtic or British myth rather than Greek and Māori myth.

The *Percy Jackson* pentalogy which draws on Greek myth is a high action adventure fantasy series written for a mainly male audience, and so quite different from *Tree Spirit.* Also, since my creative work ended up with a much stronger leaning towards Māori myth, than Greek, I did not study these books further.

There seemed to be no distinct pattern in contemporary middle grade fiction that draws on Māori mythology. The creative works I studied differed from each other in style, content and theme, and notably, none seemed particularly similar to *Tree Spirit.* Of the works studied, *Kaitangata Twitch* is possibly the closest in style and content.

In summary, my investigations suggest the closest comparative titles to *Tree Spirit* stem from Celtic or British mythology rather than Māori or Greek. This could point toward the originality of my creative work which was one of my aims at the outset.

Audience

In terms of audience, I wrote this novel with a specific age of reader in mind, but not a specific gender. If it goes on to be traditionally published, I suspect it will be marketed as a girl's book, since the protagonist is female, it contains strong mother energies, and the action is character driven rather than plot driven. Personally, I do not believe that boys read one sort of book, and girls read another sort of book, and my goal for *Tree Spirit* is to be enjoyable for any child who chooses to read it.

Aim Revisited

My aim, as stated at the outset, was:

To weave threads of Māori and Greek mythology, and current ecological and social concerns into a middle grade novel set in contemporary Aotearoa, effectively, with originality, and understanding.

While I intended *Tree Spirit* to blend ancient Greek and Māori myths, what I achieved was slightly different. My creative work stemmed from a Greek myth, which I planned to interweave with Māori mythology, without considering the proportion of the two. Something interesting and unintended happened as I worked — by the final version, the Greek myth had been almost completely eclipsed. It seemed the Māori mythology, combined with the potency of the native flora and fauna, and strong Māori characters, dominated. What resulted was not an equal blend — it was a work seeded from a Greek myth, that sprouted and grew in the dense forest of Māori mythology.

Authenticity versus Appropriation

However, using Māori whakapapa appropriately and with understanding is a challenge for individuals who come from outside of the culture. Given the local setting of *Tree Spirit*, I believe including Māori mythology and Māori characters, was an obvious and essential choice. Moving ahead on that principle, I consulted Māori Academic Equity Leader, at the AUT Faculty of Culture & Society, Herewini Easton, whose valuable input enabled me to more closely align my story with tikanga, and to strengthen the spiritual aspects of the manuscript. Also, I worked to expand my knowledge of Māori forest lore and mythology, studied te reo, and improved my understanding of Māori world view and culture, although I still have much to learn in all of these fields.

Zak Waipara argues that traditional stories are increasingly important in this era of globalisation, and claims homogenization of tales is an ever-growing danger. He expresses concern about ‘hybrid’ stories which blend tales from different cultures but as a result, belong to none of them. ‘Stories should be universal in appeal, but culturally specific’ (Waipara, 2017).

While my original draft was based on more generalised retellings of Māori forest myths along with knowledge of mythological tropes from other cultures I'd explored, researching Te Wao Nui ā Tiriwā led me to Te Kawerau ā Maki, the local iwi and guardians of the forest. In later drafts I added specificity by connecting the text to the local iwi. For instance, the original draft used the word 'patupaiarehe', later I changed this to 'tūrehu', as this is the word Te Kawerau ā Maki use. Similarly, I added references to their ancestor Tiriwā, the lord of the forest, who was tūrehu. I believe these changes add strength to the story by increasing authenticity and grounding it in a real place. In Tree Spirt Tai says to Eva:

> "My people call them tūrehu. They've always existed here. You know how this forest is called The Great Forest of Tiriwā?"
> Eva nodded.
> "Well, Tiriwā is my ancestor, he was tūrehu..." (Tree Spirit, pg 77)

Conclusion

In conclusion, I think I have achieved what I set out to do — I have created a middle grade novel set in contemporary Aotearoa, that draws on Māori, and (to a lesser extent) Greek mythological tropes, and interweaves current ecological concerns about the plight of forests, and social concerns such as bullying.

Also, I have endeavoured to achieve my aims effectively, originally and with understanding, and I may have written a creative work with few comparative titles.

But, the true measure of success lies with the reader; therefore, above all, I hope *Tree Spirit* grows into a book that is accessible to middle grade readers and sparks the imagination of its intended audience.

When Eva and her father move to a house on the edge of the Great Forest of Tiriwā, Eva hears a voice calling her name, and follows it into the trees.

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- The Stolen Wife, also known as Ruarangi and the Tūrehu (Andersen,1924; Tregear, 1999; Reed, 1970; Reed, 1999; Reed & Calman, 2008)
- Ihenga and the Naming of Ngongotaha (Reed, 1972; Reed & Calman, 2008)
- Ruru and the Tohunga (Reed, 1972; Reed & Calman 2008).
- The Fairy Fishermen, also known as Kahukura and the Net (Tregear, 1999; Reed & Calman, 2008)
- Mataora and Niwareka in the Underworld (Reed, 1999)
- Patupaiarehe of Takitimu Mountain (Reed & Calman, 2008)
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- The Parehe (Reed & Calman, 2008)
- The Tūrehu Wars (Orbell, 1995; Diamond & Hayward, 1979)
- Panuku and Nihotupu, variation of The Stolen Wife? (Diamond & Hayward, 1979)
- Karekare's Loss (Diamond & Hayward, 1979)