

Creative Thesis: GREYSCALE

Exegesis: LIKE A MOTH TO A FLAME

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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, nor material which has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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## ETHICS APPROVAL

As creative work, this thesis and exegesis does not report on research involving humans or human biological materials, or involving animals, and therefore did not require ethics approval by the relevant ethics committee(s).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

The creative thesis *Greyscale* is, at its heart, an exploration of a conflicted marriage. The novel is set in 2036, when climate change has made conventional farming untenable and the New Zealand food supply is controlled by twin foreign conglomerates: Agranta in the north and Synfresco in the south. The protagonist and antagonist of *Greyscale* are executive managers at Agranta. Their character arcs therefore have ramifications for the entire country. Themes include environmental degradation, corporate fascism, human migration, fertility and eugenics. As such, *Greyscale* lands in the genre of future dystopian fiction, with the pace and tone of a psychological thriller. Colour – and its absence – is a primary motif. Will the future be brighter, or is our humanity fading away?

The preceding exegesis, *Like a Moth to a Flame*, extrapolates on these features of the novel, with reference to literary theory and other creative works. The exegesis serves an additional purpose of providing insight into the author's background and future intentions. The title is a reference to detrimental addictive behaviour. Some people stay in relationships that don't serve them; many eat food that lacks nutrition and is damaging to their health. Moreover, insects such as butterflies are dying out at an alarming rate, while rainforests are burnt to make way for farms.

Please note: in many instances references are to e-publications or online articles, rather than hardcopy books; page numbers are arbitrary in the electronic format and therefore only chapter numbers or web addresses are cited.

## LIKE A MOTH TO A FLAME

An exegesis of *Greyscale*.



## PART ONE: WORLD TO TEXT

Whatever else remained the same, the light had changed, and you cannot find the pearly dawn at noonday.

— George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (ch.8)

An aim of this exegesis is to provide a lens through which to view my creative thesis, *Greyscale*. In part one, I will outline the chain of personal events that formed the building blocks of the novel. In part two, I intend to make a contribution to literary theory through my exploration of the following aspects of theme, structure and genre, respectively:

- Psychological entrapment in female characters, drawing on the psychological depths of certain nineteenth century literature, the social realism of contemporary works, and the foreboding tone of future dystopian fiction.
- The three-act classical narrative structure, as recommended by a screenwriting manual, with consideration of the Hero versus Heroine's Journey.
- The geopolitical backdrop that placed my novel in the genre of future dystopian fiction, and similarities and differences with other works in the genre.

Finally, in part three, I will discuss *Greyscale* in terms of further drafts, message, market and an overall sense of achievement.

### Synopsis

She had an infinite hope that that she should never do anything wrong.

— Henry James (p.51) *The Portrait of a Lady*

Beatrice 'Bee' Talbot is a high-ranking pathologist at Agranta Inc, a corporation that produces genetically modified and synthetic food. Bee also has the paranormal ability to see auras. With her own eyes, she can gauge the negative impact the company's food is

having on consumer health and she backs this up with statistics from trial groups. But the latest reports have been doctored. After Bee rallies a protest, the company forces her into an operation that leaves her colour blind and unable to see auras. Her husband David appears to have signed off on the surgery. When confronted, he argues privilege had already rendered Bee blind to the plight of wider society. A toxic marriage and impotent career leave her no choice but to embark on a quest to see the full picture. The dismal state of the nation mirrors revelations about David, her parents' death – and the nature of the life growing inside her.

### Motivations

People talk of their motives in a cut and dried way. Every woman is supposed to have the same set of motives, or else to be a monster. I am not a monster but I have not felt exactly what other women feel, or say they feel, for fear of being thought unlike others.

— George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (p.374)

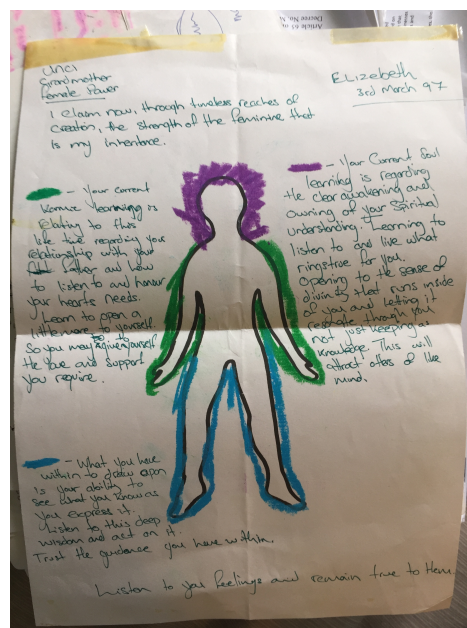
As a teenage girl I was much affected by Victorian novels in which feisty female protagonists are crushed by a poor choice of husband, and art house movies in which the female lead can never catch a break. I've always wanted to capture that devastated feeling in my prose by bringing it to bear on character development. At the start of the year I gained a black belt in emotional conflict following the dissolution of a dead-end engagement, and the reignition of an ancient romance; the change in my circumstances produced a bounty of emotions to harvest for a psychologically driven work.

Writing the novel in 2017 I chose not to ignore current social, political and environmental issues when choosing a context for my protagonist's journey. I have become increasingly concerned about the interaction between the environment and our health, as well as the insidious influence of major corporations on government policy – primarily in the USA. I consider *Greyscale* to be a satire of capitalism gone wrong. My intention was for it to be a cautionary tale about an absolute worst-case scenario, not a speculative theory of what I think will happen.

The novel is not a work of science fiction or magical realism yet I decided to give my protagonist the ability to see auras, otherwise known as bio-radiation vision, by which it is said one can see the colours emanating from a person's energetic field. I was an unsettled teenager, having moved towns five times, and my mother encouraged me to try

alternative therapies to increase my self-awareness. An auric reading was one such treatment. When the practitioner noted I had holes in my field and queried what I thought may have caused them, I confessed I had tried LSD. The lady then explained that different drugs have specific effects on our bio-field, but all of them weaken our psychological defences. Images below from Wellness111.com, and my own reading:

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In 2015 I taught English in Saudi Arabia, where many students subsisted on a diet of coffee, sugar and processed carbs. Diabetes and obesity were commonplace, and the ladies were voraciously addicted to their phones. In writing *Greyscale*, I posited that such conditions would also take a toll on a person's aura. By taking Bee's gift away in an inciting incident of act one, the question of sight, insight and blindness then emerged as a theme.

To conclude, I must mention I have completed five previous works of fiction, between the ages of 17 and 35. Writing *Greyscale* under tutorial supervision, I aimed to devise a page-turning plot for a novel that has literary qualities, in terms of the depth of its themes and scope of its language.

## PART TWO: TEXT TO TEXT

### Women as Chattel

‘Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life.’

— Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (p.300)

The trope of the miserable heroine dates from the earliest examples of narrative and dramatic story. For much of literary history, the relative happiness of women characters seemed to be determined by the success of their match. Could she be with the boy she liked? If married, was her husband kind and faithful? Writing in the twenty-first century, the question of female fulfilment has become more complex. Women today must negotiate a slippery path between motherhood, marriage and career – all of which are optional. They may then be haunted by the opportunity cost of their life choices, while unable or unwilling to break out of their situation.

In exploring this quandary, I take as my starting point Isabel Archer in Henry James’ *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881, ed.1964) and Dorothea Brook in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871, e-pub). Hermione Lee, reviewing Michael Gorra’s *Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece* for *The Guardian* (online) wrote: ‘Isabel Archer starts out full of hope, independence and ambition, and becomes “*ground in the mill*”, entrapped and disillusioned.’ This description applies equally to Dorothea. Despite the fact the authors gave their characters financial means, affording them the freedom to choose their match, they find themselves trapped in an awful marriage:

It seemed to her that only now she fully measured the great undertaking of matrimony. Marriage meant that in such a case as this, when one has to choose, one chose as a matter of course for one’s husband. (James, 1881, p.540)

How was it that in the weeks since her marriage, Dorothea had not distinctly observed but felt with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither. (Eliot, 1871, ch.8)

In *Greyscale*, Bee wonders if she too made a bad call:

Bee had been duped: thought he was a gentlemen and she a lady, he a husband and she a wife, when all along she had been trained up for a few showy wins before being put out to pasture to breed. (*Greyscale*, ch.9)

The authors provide various justifications as to why their characters married these men. In my case, I contrived for Bee to meet David at a vulnerable time, after her parents had died. Thus he came as part of a package she no longer had: 'David already had Bee bewitched; at that moment she fell for his family.' (ch.15) Like Bee, Isabel was struck by Osmond's point of difference: 'It was not so much what he said and did but rather what he withheld... She had never met a person of so fine a grain.' (James, 1881, p.261). Meanwhile, according to an unattributed article on ClassicsNetwork.com:

Dorothea was thirsty for knowledge and for an essential education denied to her on the grounds of her femininity. She therefore saw in Casaubon not only a 'great soul' but also a great intellectual, a marriage with whom would enlighten her vision and bring about an emotional and intellectual bond stronger than any other: '*There would be nothing trivial about our lives.*' (Eliot, 1871, ch.3)

In the same article, the author points out that Dorothea – and by extension Isabel, and even Bee – were not as free in choosing their husband as it may appear:

It was Dorothea who chose Casaubon. It was not an arranged marriage, but a result of free will. However, in the Victorian era even free will is adulterated by subconscious dictates nurtured by years of female submission. (ClassicsNetwork.com)

*Portrait of a Lady* and *Middlemarch* are tragedies; Isabel and Dorothea start out headstrong and high-spirited and end up submissive and downcast. Excluding the

possibility of literary sadomasochism, why do readers enjoy such novels? In the same *Guardian* article, Lee wrote:

James radically alters what fiction can do by giving us, not just a story of a young woman with a high sense of herself who makes a disastrous mistake, but an illustration of how '*the life within has a drama of its own*'. (Lee, 2012)

Writing *Greyscale* I sought to capture Bee's 'life within', whilst considering how the narrative could bring about catharsis for her as a character, myself as the author (in the midst of my own relationship turmoil) and, crucially, my readership. I believe catharsis, defined as 'a purification or purgation that brings about spiritual renewal or release from tension' (Merriam-Webster.com) is the reason we read – and indeed watch – such emotional works. In *The Art of Fiction* (1991), John Gardner writes: 'Not even Aristotle would argue that fiction *ought* to be cathartic; he says only that such fiction is most satisfying.' (p.54)

Although Isabel and Dorothea do not escape their circumstances at the end of the novel, transformation comes in understanding they made their own bed and now they will indeed lie in it. For Isabel, at least, divorce does not appear to be an option: 'I don't know whether I'm too proud. But I can't publish my mistake. I don't think that decent. I'd much rather die.' (James, 1881, p.488) Meanwhile, readers might cluck, sympathise, and feel better about their own questionable life choices as they follow the trajectory of these intelligent characters into traps of their own making.

In *Greyscale*, I muddied the waters by calling Bee's degree of mental stability into question. Through subtle shifts in point of view, I left it to readers to decide if she is a victim or aggressor in her relationship. Third-person subjective gives insight into her interior world, third-person limited allows readers to see her actions from a bird's eye view, while Bee can be seen through David's lens in the stand-alone scenes where he appears at home, while she is away. David's methods are clinical to the extreme but Bee ultimately experiences catharsis in surrendering to his logic: 'Praying for a way out, her husband provoked an escape... Anything less than an odyssey would have been a Band-Aid on a bullet wound.' (ch.28)

The conflict is less acute in Zadie Smith's novels *NW* (2012) and *Swingtime* (2016), in which the issue is not fulfilment in marriage, but envy between friends. Nonetheless, the central characters seem just as psychologically trapped as Isabel,

Dorothea and Bee. Set in contemporary London, Smith digs her female protagonists into various discontented holes, and a combination of ennui, jealousy and apathy looks set to keep them there. In *NW* Leah Hanwell reflects on her childhood friend, Natalie Blake:

Leah watches Natalie stride over to her beautiful kitchen with her beautiful child. Everything behind those French doors is full and meaningful. The gestures, the glances, the conversations that can't be heard. How do you get to be so full? And so full of only meaningful things? (Smith, 2012, ch.16)

But later it emerges Natalie has a troubling sex addiction. Are readers, like Leah, supposed to feel relief something is wrong with the woman who appears to have it all? Is Smith saying that women can't, in fact, have it all? Writing for *Anglozine.com*, Sanja Gligoric says:

[Smith is a writer] known to possess the ability to find the echo of her time and document some of its big questions, such as monotonous everyday life, boredom, contempt in marriage and the tedium that covers everything like thick fog and there is simply no escape from it... When things become complicated it is not immediately evident if there is an escape route. Some never manage to leave the cages they inhabit, but get stuck repeating the same things over and over again. (Gligoric, 2016)

In *Swingtime* the protagonist is unnamed (Why? Is she Nobody? Anybody?). By traditional barometers of success, she should be happy – gliding along as a personal assistant in the gilded world of a famous singer. But, her mother argues:

'You don't have a life. *She* has a life. She has her men and her children and her career – *she* has the life... You *service* her life... She's the reason I won't be having any grandchildren.' (Smith, 2016, ch.4)

Moreover, the protagonist cannot escape the clutches of her childhood friend, Tracey, an unstable, welfare-dependent mother of children with different fathers. Despite Tracey's less fortunate material circumstances, the protagonist believes her friend has found success and happiness as a dancer:

Even when I heard, a little later on, from my mother and others in the neighbourhood, that she was having difficulties, more and more frequently in trouble, I couldn't imagine why that would be, her life was perfect as far as I

was concerned and this is one side-effect of envy, maybe, this failure of imagination. In my mind, her struggles were over. (Smith, 2016, ch.10)

In the closing scene, Smith leaves the question of who is happier on the table, when the protagonist pays Tracey a visit:

I was about to enter the stairwell when I heard music, stopped and looked up. She was right above me, on her balcony, in a dressing gown and slippers, her hands in the air, turning, turning, her children around her, everybody dancing. (Smith, 2016, epilogue)

Neither novel is particularly uplifting but their cathartic quality may lie in Smith's ability to strike an emotional chord in the tenor of a warning: *Be happy with what you've got! What looks like heaven might be hell!* In *Greyscale*, I aimed to make a similar point when a woman talks to David about her sister's arrangement with Bee, not knowing Bee is his wife: 'She's selling this baby. Some rich scientist lady asked her to carry it for her... Some people, eh! More money than sense.' (ch.29)

Infertility and eugenics are themes in *Greyscale* that recur in dystopian future fiction, where female entrapment is taken much further than marital or psychological constraints; characters in these novels may be physically and politically constrained also. In Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale* (1986) fertile women are rare but rather than being held up as prizes, they are subject to state-sanctioned rape as breeders for infertile wealthy couples. Then in PD James' *Children of Men* (1992), the entire race is infertile and must undergo regular invasive testing. In both books, women's personal identity is secondary to the issue of their biological purpose. In her thesis *Sexuality and Reproduction in Dystopian Fiction*, Marie Louise Davis quotes Marleen S. Barr:

The writing of women's dystopian . . . fiction is intimately related to the realities of reproductive technologies and their threat to women's autonomy. The battle between the sexes over the control of women's fertility and, correspondingly, infertility ... should serve as a warning. These texts are not only stories. (Barr, 1993)

In *Greyscale*, such issues are personalized through Bee's character arc. She longs for a baby but David has been stalling on the grounds they're too busy with



their careers. However, it turns out he has been waiting until he was satisfied with his seed's modified DNA.

Bolstered by alcohol and adrenaline, synapses sparked inside Bee's brain, while David sat and watched the fireworks, an expectant look on his face. What *kind* of child was growing inside her? (*Greyscale*, ch.28)

Dystopian fiction paints an indubitably disturbing future for women. However, it seems to me that state incarceration is different to the marital bonds of the nineteenth-century by degree, and on principle, only. The article on ClassicsNetwork.com relates Dorothea's situation after marriage:

She gives him her person, virginity and a rigorous fidelity [is] required. She loses some of the rights legally belonging to the unmarried woman. Roman law placed the wife in the husband's hands *loco filiae*, in the position of a daughter; early in the nineteenth century the conservative writer Bonald pronounced the wife to be to her husband as the child is to its mother.

In this context, it appears that literary representations of females in society stand at a crossroads between two forms of prison. What, then, should a female author writing in 2017 do? It seems prudent to keep readers on guard by hinting at imminent darkness, but also feels necessary to cast a ray of light through the ominous present. I leave the last word on this subject to Caroline Spector in an article in *Beyond the Wall: Exploring George RR Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire* (2012). My aim was for readers to take a similar view of my treatment of Bee, and other female characters, in *Greyscale*:

In the midst of what appears to be a traditional male-power fantasy about war and politics, he serves up a grim, realistic, and harrowing depiction of what happens when women aren't fully empowered in a society. In doing so, by creating such diverse and fully rendered female characters and thrusting them into this grim and bitter world, Martin has created a subversively feminist tale. (Spector, 2012, ch.13)

### The Construction of a Spider's Web

Given my circumstances, I guess it doesn't matter what type of wasp's nest it is. I'm wounded and trapped.

— Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (ch.14)

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I wanted to corner my protagonist and to do that I needed a plan. In my five previous novels, I experimented with a variety of structures and points of view; some were carefully conceived but none were considered through the prism of literary criticism. As a master's candidate I wanted to lean on proven technique. Three sources proved useful: Linda Aronson's *The Twenty First Century Screenplay* (2010), John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction* (1991), and the features of classical narrative, as illustrated by Gustav Freytag's pyramid in *Technique of Drama* (1895, ed: 2015), and interpreted by 12writing.com in the diagram above.

I turned to *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins to analyse an author's employment of Freytag's pyramid, and considered this in conjunction with Aronson's advice on writing a compelling screenplay:

- Movement on the Relationship Line should be tied closely to movement of the Action Line. (Aronson, p.76)

- The second-act turning point should be the protagonist's worst possible moment, physically or emotionally. (Aronson, p.110)
- Make the climax answer the problem posed by issues arising from the first-act turning point, or find the first-act turning point via the climax. (Aronson, p.114)

At the end of act one in *The Hunger Games* (ch.9), Peeta and Katniss have arrived in the capitol to begin prep for the games. Katniss thinks Peeta looks down on her and initially felt 'betrayed' when he asked to be coached separately. But then, in front of the world, he says about her: 'Well, there is this one girl. I've had a crush on her since I can remember. But I'm pretty sure she didn't know I was alive until the reaping.' (Collins, 2008, ch.9) At the same point in *Greyscale* Bee discovers David authorized the surgery to remove her colour vision – for her own sake – and flees town, with his tacit consent.

'I was *going* to do something,' said Bee. 'But I didn't. I'm free to go home. But... my husband says I'm sheltered, that I need to get out and see the country.'

'Your information says your husband put you here,' Celia said, eyes narrowed. 'Why do you care what he thinks?' (*Greyscale*, ch.10)

In both novels, act one has set up an ambiguous relationship between the female protagonist and male antagonist, driving their decisions on the action line and charging events with emotional weight. In act two of *The Hunger Games*, Peeta and Katniss have been competing separately. He is nearly dead and she is badly injured when the gamemakers announce a new rule: there can be two winners, if they are in love. Katniss narrates: 'Before I can stop myself, I call out Peeta's name.' (Collins, 2008, ch.18) At the end of act two in *Greyscale*, Bee has narrowly escaped being gassed to death and blames herself for others being killed; she still doubts whether she can trust her husband.

But if the board had ordered the eye op, why had David looked so shifty? His motivation was like dark matter – Bee knew it had bearing on her existence but did not know how. (*Greyscale*, ch.23)

In both books, the protagonists are certainly at their worst possible moment yet they differ in that Katniss decides to fight back at that stage, whereas Bee gives up – but is rescued and forced to go on. The 'damsel getting rescued' is also one of the oldest tropes

in storytelling – going back to folk tales and myths – and is still widely deployed in popular genre fiction. However, readers may start to see that *Greyscale* does not conform to a typical Hollywood script. Katniss could be construed as a hero in female form:

‘You’re so fast and brave. Maybe you can win,’ says her sister, Prim (Collins, 2008, ch.1).

But Bee is still on the back foot: a heroine weighed down in a masculine world:

Bee had thrown away her career on a spiel that offered no solutions... David had been right: the public accepted fascist rule and fake food because it was better than starving. Justin had been right: Bee had been searching for a panacea, hoping she could ingratiate herself with a mutinous family and pretend the clock had stopped in her teens. (*Greyscale*, ch.23)

The movement of act three also differs. In *The Hunger Games* Collins appears to have staged two climaxes in accordance with Aronson’s differentiated Relationship and Action Lines. On the action line, Katniss and Peeta win the games after a harrowing battle. On the relationship line, Katniss discovers Peeta genuinely loves her, while she had been coached to show affection. Thus only one of the questions posed by the act one turning point was answered: yes, they won, but their relationship is still ambiguous, paving the way for the trilogy.

In the climax of *Greyscale*, a shell-shocked Bee is sent to an even lower point on both the action line and relationship line, when she is forced to attend a glittery corporate gala and finds out David has betrayed her a second time. In response to the problems posed in the act one turning point, when Bee fled hospital without knowing the degree of her husband’s complicity, readers can now be in no doubt. David has always been a few steps ahead of his wife, *but* he was acting in their best interests, not against her. It is then up to readers to decide if David was the antagonist, or rather a kind of anti-hero in the story.

Aronson wrote: ‘There is no reason why the three-act model needs to be optimistic, nor why its protagonist needs to improve or be redeemed (although usually the protagonist does need to undergo change).’ (2010, p.47) While Gardner cautions: ‘Reading a piece of fiction that ends up nowhere – no win, no loss; life as a treadmill – is like discovering, after we have run our hearts out against the timekeeper’s clock, that the timekeeper forgot to switch the clock on.’ (1991, p.54) Bearing this in mind, and after

readers of an early draft of *Greyscale* came away deflated, I amended the ending to make it more cathartic than tragic, while also hinting at environmental repair.

Whether consciously or not, umpteen authors throughout the ages have produced stories that conform to classical narrative structure. But as Freytag said:

‘Even an elaborate system of specific rules, a certain limitation founded in popular custom, as to choice of material and structure of the piece, have been at different periods the best aid to creative power.’ (Freytag, 2015, introduction)

That is, given certain parameters, writers still have decisions to make. Movies and books that fit in the genre of Action might follow the stages of the Hero’s Journey, as popularised by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949); despite the female lead, I believe this would include *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2009). On the other hand, art house films and literary novels, by authors such as the aforementioned Zadie Smith, may conform more closely to *The Heroine’s Journey* (2013) by Maureen Murdock. Accordant diagrams are from TheWritersJourney.com and HeroineJourneys.com, respectively.

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On the action line of *Greyscale*, Bee appears to follow the hero’s journey. She is called to – or forced into – adventure by an abduction, she meets a mentor in the forest, crosses the corporate threshold into the South Island, is nearly killed by enemies, is rewarded with pregnancy and heads home to face the final challenges. But it is David

who will return with the magic elixir – addressing climate change and regenerating conventional crops. On the novel's relationship line, readers could look instead to the heroine's journey. In her book of the same name, Murdock describes the path many women take in real life, which may then be reflected in fiction:

Working as a therapist with women, particularly between the ages of thirty and fifty, I have heard a resounding cry of dissatisfaction with the successes won in the marketplace... a sense of sterility, emptiness, and dismemberment, even a sense of betrayal. These women have embraced the stereotypical male heroic journey and have attained academic, artistic, or financial success, yet for many the question remains, 'What is all of this for?' The boon of success leaves these women overscheduled, exhausted, suffering from stress-related ailments and wondering how they got off track. (Murdock, 2013, introduction)

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In particular, three phases of the heroine's journey ring true for Bee. Firstly, regarding the 'separation from the feminine', Murdock wrote: 'Women who have seen their mothers as superstitious, religious, or old-fashioned discard the murky, mysterious, magical aspect of the feminine for cool logic and analysis.' (Murdock, 2013, ch.1) And in *Greyscale*, I wrote: 'Bee didn't want to do drugs and she didn't want to spend her life surrounded by her mother's crystal balls. She decided to get

serious about science.’ (ch.6) The second overlap came in ‘healing the mother/daughter split’:

At this point, in a woman’s journey she may seek to heal the original split with her mother and to recover the mother/daughter relationship in its larger context. She will look for goddesses, heroines, contemporary creative women with whom she can identify and who will teach her about female power and beauty and enrich her experience if her own developing authority. (Murdock, 2013, ch.1)

At the lowest point in Bee’s journey, she meets Scarlett on Stewart Island. Scarlett is a fellow aura reader and used to handle worker’s litigation for Synfresco; she forces Bee to look further into her parents’ death. Although it is impossible for Bee to heal the relationship with her dead mother, resolution comes in learning her true enemy. Thirdly, readers may sense some ‘integration of the masculine and feminine’ when Bee uses her scientific skills to match adoptive families with babies: to nurture life, instead of tracking disease.

As a final thought on the topic, a gender-neutral Journey of Re-enchantment is proposed by Craig Chalquist in his article, ‘Why I Seldom Teach the Hero’s Journey Anymore’ (Huffingtonpost.com). He says the perpetuation of the heroic myth is harming society:

We Americans have a troubling history of over-identification with this archetype. We don’t have it: it has us. Psychological possession. Look at the violence-spreading bullies we put into public office...[who] send in the boots on the ground so they can save the world, or at least the profit. The oil must flow. (Chalquist, 2015)

In hope that life does not imitate art

The killer sun charged the pollution in the skies into a smoggy cocktail.

— Michelle Tea, *Black Wave* (ch.1)

*Greyscale* did not start life as a dystopian novel but my writing has always reflected contemporary concerns, and right now I’m worried about economic disparity and dairy farming in New Zealand In *The New Yorker* (online), Jill Lepore wrote:

In its modern definition, a dystopia can be apocalyptic, or post-apocalyptic, or neither, but it has to be anti-utopian, a utopia turned upside down, a world in which people tried to build a republic of perfection only to find that they had created a republic of misery. (Lepore, 2017)

As a young country, it was hoped New Zealand might avoid some of the social discord of Britain and Europe but, in an opinion piece for *The Guardian* (online), Max Rashbrooke argued we have failed:

Many people still think of New Zealand as an egalitarian paradise, a friendly and accommodating country where ‘a fair go’ is the national phrase.

[But, following reforms in the 1980s] Thousands of people lost their jobs as manufacturing work went overseas, and there was no significant response with increased trade training or skills programmes, a policy failure that is ongoing. At the same time, New Zealand stopped building affordable houses in any serious quantity, forcing poorer households to spend ever-increasing amounts on rent and mortgages.

None of this implies that New Zealand citizens enjoyed a halcyon existence before the 1980s; they didn’t. However, it does imply that an alternative path towards a modern economy, one in which the benefits of growth were shared evenly, was ignored. (Rashbrook, 2014).

Equally, we have reason to be concerned about the environment. In an article for Stuff.co.nz, Gerald Piddock quotes Nuffield scholar, Dan Steele:

‘New Zealand’s 100 per cent pure brand marketed it as a destination and extended to its agriculture products. Agriculture and tourism, New Zealand’s two main export industries, are inherently linked and both will live or die on our environmental health and reputation, but our environment is regressing and unless this is addressed now, our economy will regress.’ (Piddock, 2016)

Economic collapse and environmental degradation are certain features in the worlds of anti-utopian fiction. At the softer end of the spectrum, Barbara Kingsolver chips away at ecological concerns in her novels. In *Flight Behaviour* (2012), she wrote of monarch butterflies that have aborted their migration to Mexico, and instead stopped off in the Appalachian Mountains; flood, mudslides and drought are normal events.

After so much rain upon rain this was happening all over the county, she’d seen it in the paper, massive trees keeling over in the night to ravage a family’s



roofline or flatten the car in the drive. The ground took water until it was nothing but soft sponge, and the trees fell out of it. Near Great Lick a whole hillside of mature timber had plummeted together... People were shocked. (Kingsolver, 2012, ch.1)

While, across the country in California, Michelle Tea describes the opposite problem – drought – in *Black Wave* (2015):

The water was too ruined for effective farming and the animals were out of whack, the bugs and the birds, the pests and pollinators. They drove past wide plowed fields whose sickly crops had been abandoned. (Tea, 2015, ch.15)

In both these novels, the environment serves as a backdrop for a narrative that is not in itself dystopian, but rather one character's story about being in an unfulfilling marriage (*Flight Behaviour*) and being single and gay (*Black Wave*). By comparison, Bee's character arc in *Greyscale* is inseparable from the geopolitical context because she and her husband David are high-ranking employees at one of the corporations that are feeding, and effectively governing, the nation.

That same year, drought and topsoil degradation pushed the cost of conventional farming methods to prohibitive levels... Agranta got carte blanche to produce genetically modified food ... When the cattle herds fell to infection, Agranta switched its focus to synthetics, flooding the market with lab meat priced at a fraction of real meat and dairy, whether imported or raised on the few organic farms that had survived in isolation. (*Greyscale*, ch.8)

The real life issue of intensive farming in New Zealand came to a head in October when it was reported that 4000 cattle would be culled in the South Island, following an outbreak of *Mycoplasma Bovis* (*Otago Daily Times*, 2017).

In writing *Greyscale*, I borrowed an idea from *The Hunger Games*, in which the government forces outlying districts to perform an assigned role, but this is background data only, along with the fact the government is preoccupied with national defence. *Greyscale* bears a more pertinent resemblance to Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) or Jeff Vandermeer's *Bourne* (2017) in which the government is scarcely mentioned; instead, the dominant force is a corporation. In *The Heart Goes Last*, Consilience offers frightened civilians a shot at security in exchange for civil liberty inside its walls. In *Bourne*, the unnamed Company self-imploded, leaving a toxic trail for survivors to pick over.

The giant agriculture company Monsanto served as inspiration for the corporations in *Greyscale*, and I turned to the USA as a model for a dystopian future of New Zealand. According to an article on WBEZ by Mariam Sobh, in the US state of Illinois, 89 per cent of corn and 92 per cent of soybeans are genetically modified. In her autobiographical book, *Modified* (2016), Caitlynn Shetterly went to see Dr. Mansmann, a third-generation allergist, after years of suffering from a malady that other doctors had failed to diagnose.

He said he thought these small genetic modifications that are made in the DNA of GMO corn can cause the immune system to overreact [which] causes the body to release an avalanche of eosinophils – a kind of white blood cell – from the bloodstream into the mucus membranes, muscles, fascial system, and bowels... In his opinion, my body had become ‘primed’, or in a state of constant reaction, and therefore it seemed to be allergic – or sensitive – to pretty much everything I ate or came into contact with. (Shetterly, 2016, ch.1)

Monsanto pioneered many genetically modified products and maintains rigorous control over their use. In an article ‘Monsanto’s Harvest of Fear’ in *Vanity Fair* (online), Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele wrote:

As interviews and reams of court documents reveal, Monsanto relies on a shadowy army of private investigators and agents in the American heartland to strike fear into farm country... Farmers call them the ‘seed police’ and use words such as ‘Gestapo’ and ‘Mafia’ to describe their tactics.

This kind of strong-arming has been happening for over a decade, so what tactics might seem acceptable in 2036, when *Greyscale* is set? By then, according to an unattributed UN.org report, the world population might have reached eight billion. Food and water are likely to be scarce. It therefore did not seem a stretch that the southern corporation in *Greyscale* would be exterminating self-sufficient communities, or forcing employees to sign waivers against suing the company for illness brought on by consuming its food. After all, in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), the state has even brainwashed people into believing the function of the fire brigade is to burn books.

‘Well, then, what if a fireman accidentally, really not intending anything, takes a book home with him?’...

‘We let the fireman keep the books twenty-four hours. If he hasn’t burned it by then, we simply come and burn it for him.’ (Bradbury, 1953, part 1)

Propaganda features prominently in dystopian future fiction. In Bradbury’s book, news is broadcast via a media system that encompasses whole walls, or even every wall, of a room in a person’s house.

...you can’t argue with the four-wall televisor. Why? The televisor is ‘real’. It is immediate, it has dimension. It tells you what to think and blasts it in. It *must* be right. It seems so right. It rushes you on so quickly to its own conclusions your mind hasn’t time to protest, ‘What nonsense!’ (Bradbury, 1953, part 2)

In *Greyscale*, I devised 4D panorama booths for a virtual reality media experience, while the situation is much worse in *The Hunger Games*. In echoes of the Roman empire when blood sport was entertainment, civilians are forced to watch heinous cruelty and listen to saccharine missives on huge screens mounted all over their towns. On the other hand, some dystopian movies, such as *Looper* (dir: Rian Johnson, 2012), show a regression in technology, following peak oil production, and in *Greyscale*, dissenting civilians eschew the latest tech and get their news via pirate radio.

It was important for me to show people resisting the agri-corps, and government, in my novel. As Lepore noted in the aforementioned article for *The New Yorker*:

Dystopia used to be a fiction of resistance; it’s become a fiction of submission, the fiction of an untrusting, lonely, and sullen twenty-first century, the fiction of fake news and infowars, the fiction of helplessness and hopelessness. It cannot imagine a better future, and it doesn’t ask anyone to bother to make one. It nurses grievances and indulges resentments; it doesn’t call for courage; it finds that cowardice suffices. Its only admonition is: Despair more. (Lepore, 2017)

I did not wish *Greyscale* to fit in with Lepore’s fiction of ‘helplessness and hopelessness’, which is why, as mentioned previously, I revised my denouement to end on a rosier note for Bee and her baby. At the end of *The Handmaid’s Tale* readers do not know if Offred is on her way to freedom, or death, but may hope for the former. In contrast, PD James sent out a clear signal of hope in *Children of Men* (1992) by finishing with the cry of the first baby born in decades – the type of Hollywood ending that inspires readers to imagine a better future, not ‘despair more’.

With their narratives ending at the birth of new life, both *Children of Men* and *Greyscale* tap into the embedded archetypal energy of the Mother – a storytelling trope that recurs in tales from Mary in *The Bible* to Persephone in Greek mythology and Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. One author describes the archetype as follows:

In literature, the role of the mother is to care for and guide her family. The archetypal mother figure doesn't have to literally be a mother, nor do those she cares for have to be her family. The fairy godmother from children's literature is a good example. The mother figure is sometimes a spiritual leader, or a source of life for the community. In most instances, the mother figure receives enormous love and respect from the characters in the story. (Trent, Penandpad.com)

In *Greyscale*, it may be said that Agranta, the agriculture corporation Bee works for, functions as an evil stepmother. Analogies may then be drawn between Agranta and Demeter, goddess of agriculture, grain and bread. According to one myth, 'when she learned that Zeus had conspired in her daughter's abduction, she was furious and refused to let the earth fruit until Persephone was returned' (Theoi.com). In *Greyscale*, Agranta has been producing toxic food, while David has forced Bee to remain childless and then conspired in her abduction. However, at the end of the novel, with the death of Agranta's founder, JP Palmer, Bee and David can not only bring a natural child into the world, but turn the company's resources to supplying the nation with organic food.

Thus, overwhelmingly, I am proposing in *Greyscale* that conscionable women need to be significantly involved in corporate activity. It strikes me as the most effective means of transforming exploitative conglomerates into benevolent brokers in a symbiotic global community: a utopia, not dystopia.

### PART THREE: TEXT TO WORLD

What one means by integrity, in the case of the novelist, is the conviction that he gives one that this is the truth. Yes, one feels, I should never have thought that this

could be so; I have never known people behaving like that. But you have convinced me that so it is, so it happens.

— Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (p.83)

The greatest challenge in writing *Greyscale* was time. After sketching the first scenes in February 2017, it was the case all year that my writing outpaced my planning. Possibly this reflected the fact I moved out of my home, stayed in spare rooms for six weeks, moved towns and visited the US twice within the nine months of the programme. By May I had a story down on paper but no way of justifying the whys and hows of Bee's journey, which therefore became the focus of semester two. In further drafts I may review some of Bee's movements, tweak the pivotal exchanges between her and David, and clarify aspects of her interior world.

The taut, sparse, dark story that emerged surprised even myself. Yet, as musician Nina Simone said in a video clip preceding her song 'Strange Fruit':

'We will shape and mould this country or it will not be moulded and shaped at all anymore. So I don't think you have a choice. How can you be an artist and NOT reflect the times? That to me is the definition of an artist.' (Simone, 1965)

I couldn't agree more and it is therefore my intention to contribute to the protest movement against corporate greed, environmental indifference and blinkered policy making. New Zealand may be fortunate to find itself with a fresh, female, Labour prime minister but the USA appears to be under control of a misogynist. In her autobiography about Donald Trump's presidential campaign, *Unbelievable* (2017), Katy Tur describes an incident in which Trump's campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, was accused of assaulting a female reporter: 'pulling her hard enough to bruise her arm'.

Two weeks later Lewandowski is arrested and charged with simple battery... Does Lewandowski apologise? He does not. Does Trump punish him? He does not. Does Trump keep on winning? He does. (Tur, 2017, ch: March 3 2016)

Since becoming president, Trump has reversed government subsidies for contraception under US health insurance plans (Pear, *NYT*, 2017), while also ceasing funding for international schemes concerned with 'contraception, family planning, unsustainable population growth and reproductive rights [and even the battle against]

HIV, tuberculosis and malaria.’ (Boseley, *The Guardian*, 2017) In this climate, women need to fight harder than ever to maintain the ground won by the suffragettes and later waves of feminism in the twentieth century. Those women fought for control over reproductive rights, and for political and societal equality, whilst campaigning against systemic patriarchy. If women today stop fighting, we risk regressing to the pre-twentieth century status of second-class citizenship, which is the true precursor of dystopian future narratives, such as *The Handmaid’s Tale*. In *Greyscale*, in 2036, my protagonist fought and – to some extent – lost. But hope is still glimmering on the horizon, as I believe it is for the whole world.

The market for *Greyscale* is likely to be female, aged 18 to 40, probably urban dwelling, with liberal leanings. Certainly the novel conforms in some respects to the genre of dystopian future fiction but, equally, I believe it could be marketed as a literary thriller in the vein of *Gone Girl* (Flynn, 2012), or *Girl on a Train* (Hawkins, 2015). However, I did not consciously consider any of this while writing the work. I am a strong believer in the zeitgeist. Artists do not create something out of nothing – *ex nihilo nihil fit* – but chisel away at the marble, as the story goes, to reveal something that was always there. Most artists do this when the time is right, though some disrupt society by delivering ahead of schedule, before the mass market is ready. Perhaps my other books were too late, or too early – or simply not good enough. Perhaps *Greyscale* is on time.

In terms of literary merit, my intention was to challenge classical notions of the happy ending. I aimed to illuminate one woman’s struggle to wake up and seize each day, knowing it may be worse, not better than the day before – until the tide turns. I aimed to capture the frustration felt when we have no control over our movements and schedule: we must sit tight and wait, as self-effacing as a new moon hanging in the sky. In dialogue I sought to capture the nuances of my characters’ personalities; in exposition and description, I eschewed familiar language. Above all, I hunted for alternate ways to say grey.

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