

The Garden Wings

Undergraduate dissertation: creative and analytical pieces

Blues, pinks, greens, and browns ran together on the wet pottery and ten-year-old hands surrounding Nessa at the workstation.

“Carefully move them all to the back when the kids are done,” Nessa’s boss Helen instructed, as though Nessa hadn’t been doing this for months.

“Got it.”

Nessa gently asked each child if they were done with their masterpiece and congratulated them on what wonderful artists they all were. She collected their speckled frogs, multi-colored flowers, dripping fairies, and rainbow owls in a neat array in the back room of the pottery shop. Her job was not the highlight of her life, but she was happy to be saving money for college. Having just started her junior year of high school, she had to cut back on her working hours. Still, she enjoyed spending her time with other people’s creations, no matter how childish or professional. Seeing people focus and have fun painting brought a smile to her face.

“You’re pretty,” she whispered to a flower brushed with red and white. “You’re... unique,” she giggled to herself while looking at a pink and brown frog with a crooked smile. As she turned to leave, a shimmer of gold caught her eye. She squinted at it, furrowing her brow. At the end of the row of newly painted pieces was a finished butterfly statue. The wings had black edges, centers splotted with purple, and a spray paint line of white down each one. It seemed the butterfly might take flight at any moment. Puzzled, she walked over to investigate it. “Why are you here?” She tentatively reached for it but pulled away as the shimmering aura gave her hand a slight shock. The

piece wobbled. A small slip of paper floated down from the shelf next to it. Nessa bent over and, with her shaking hand, plucked it from the ground. Unfolding it, she discovered a message in graceful, tiny script:

Nessa: Town Garden. Monday. 5pm.

Small botanical doodles surrounded the words and bled onto the back of the paper.

Nessa's face flushed, and her pulse quickened. She spun around, searching the shadows. Who wrote this? Why was it addressed to her?

"Nessa? Why are you still back here?" Helen stood in the doorway.

"Oh, sorry, I..." She slipped the paper into her pocket. "I got distracted. Did you see anyone come back here?"

"What are you talking about? It's just us."

"Right, sorry." Nessa shook her head to clear her thoughts and settle the goosebumps running across her body. "I'm coming now, and I'll clean up."

"Good. I need to get going."

Nessa spent the next hour going through the motions of cleaning and reorganizing the studio, tasks whose repetition usually calmed her. But today her mind was elsewhere. Tomorrow was going to be a long day. She'd have to get through the school day and pretend she had work in the evening again. Instead, she'd have to kill time before walking to the garden. Perfect plan. She'd have her phone on her, and nothing bad ever happened in her town. If she didn't go, then she'd never have answers. This would work.

The next day, Nessa couldn't pay attention in any of her classes. It was early in the year, so she needed to get used to the routine and each of her teachers, but her brain was still somewhere far away. Other students kept shooting her glares as she clicked her pen to release her nervous energy.

At lunch, Mel monologued for quite a while before commenting on Nessa's lack of engagement with the conversation.

Mel had been Nessa's best friend since kindergarten. They did everything together as kids, and they stayed close in high school even as their interests changed. Mel always needed to excel at what she did, so it came as no surprise when she became a decorated violinist and the student body president as a junior, though the position was usually reserved for a senior. She also needed to sit at the biggest lunch table surrounded by the most people. Nessa hated the crowd, but she was attached to her friend. It was a fact of her life that she avoided analyzing for fear of losing what had become normal.

"Why are you extra quiet today?" Mel eventually asked.

"Oh, just tired." She forced a half-smile. "There was an extra birthday party yesterday, and the kids made a mess."

Mel laughed, a bit too harshly. "Right, your little job. I'm sure it's fun to spend your weekends with kids. I prefer to spend mine shadowing real jobs." It was all about her again.

Nessa stopped pretending to listen, knowing Mel could carry on without her input. When she reached into her pocket for reassurance, the paper was gone. She was wearing the same jeans as yesterday, but it had disappeared. Was it even real to begin with? It had to be real.

She spoke little for the rest of the day and slipped away to the library after the last bell, when Mel was occupied with her other friends. Nessa's homework list was plenty long, but her attention span was the opposite. Every time she looked at her history textbook, she found herself rereading the same lines over and over again, absorbing nothing. She resigned herself to sitting anxiously and watching the clock for the next hour. When the clock showed 4:30, she packed up her bag and started her walk toward the garden.

Lily Glen was a small suburb full of picket fences and carbon-copy families. The red brick high school stood in the northeast area of town, surrounded by a well-manicured lawn and fields. As Nessa strolled down the sidewalk on her way to the garden in the center of town, she felt particularly struck by the beauty of the tree-lined street. It was easy to find herself lulled into boredom by the sameness of her life when she wasn't careful. But the color palette of autumn always uplifted her as the brisk air filled her nose and lungs with energy. While spring meant new life for many flora and fauna, Nessa found herself awakened in the fall. She loved seeing the flowers and trees transform. Early signs of the rubies, ambers, and tans that would come to dominate the greens in a few weeks drew her attention. Through the unusually bright sunlight that day, she could have sworn she saw streaks of sparkly color in the air around the plants, but it must have been a trick of the light. She continued on her way wearing one earbud, and several minutes passed before any people did.

"...should've been there. He needed his dad!"

"Well, I needed to get something done!"

Nessa heard a couple arguing as she rounded a curve in the path.

"You won't even give me a specific excuse. Why should I believe you?"

"Honey, just trust me."

Nessa uncomfortably sidled around them, avoiding acknowledgement. She peeked over her shoulder once they'd passed, and saw—

"What..." she whispered to herself. She caught a glimpse of a little figure with tiny wings on the woman's shoulder. She shook her head as if to clear her eyesight and looked again, but this time she saw nothing. She resumed her walk, telling herself she'd imagined it, but she wasn't really listening to her music. Her brain felt odd, like a new lightness was suffusing her mind and confusing her. Overall, her thoughts were clearer and happier than they'd been in some time, but she couldn't

tell how much control she had over them. She reached for the note again, but it still wasn't there. Curling her empty hand in her pocket, she hurried onward.

As she reached the garden, her pulse quickened. Maybe it was just from the walking. Or maybe she didn't want to admit how nervous she was. But she needed answers, and this was the way to get them. She took three deep breaths, her heart lowering from her throat back into her chest, and walked through the gate.

The benches, paths, and grassy areas that she was used to seeing full of people were empty. The sun cut a perfect angle through the tree canopy, illuminating the space without being blinding. In the middle of the circle stood a white gazebo roofed with greenery that was impossibly perfect: flowers in a gradient from violet to jade to honey to crimson. Bursts of glowing colors dotted the trees and shrubs encircling the garden. As she squinted at a spot of light purple on a bush near her left hand, the face of a small, humanoid creature came into focus, but the being was too shy to step out from behind a leaf. Inspection of other dots revealed more tiny creatures with translucent wings half-hidden in the plants. Nessa tried to blink the images away, but this time she couldn't.

"Welcome." A sweet, warm voice seemed to float out of the gazebo.

Nessa's breath caught in her throat, and she slowly turned her gaze toward the sound. Is this her answer?

"I was hoping you would come to us." A beautiful woman stepped out from behind the gazebo. Except she wasn't a normal woman. She stood somewhere around five-foot-five, Nessa's height, and had long hair cascading around her shoulders and down her back. Other than that, she didn't look human. Pointed ears stuck out slightly from her sapphire hair, and her skin was a smooth cerulean that seemed to glisten when the sunlight caught it. A pattern of cobalt teardrops climbed her arms like a tattoo. She smiled sweetly at Nessa.

“Um, hi...” Nessa struggled to form a coherent thought. What’s going on? Who is she? *What* is she? “Wha—, uh, I guess...”

“My name is Ada,” she said. “I understand this must be overwhelming for you.”

“That’s an understatement.” Nessa stepped forward, tentatively closing the gap between them. She couldn’t stop staring.

“It’s alright,” Ada spoke gently, walking to meet her.

“What are you?” Nessa wished there were a kinder way to ask that, but she didn’t have the words.

“I’m a nymph,” Ada declared, as though it weren’t the most ridiculous answer she could have given.

“Like in the Greek myths?” Nessa wracked her brain for any information she’d retained about mythology and creatures.

“I do believe that’s what stories about us are called, yes.”

“And all these little colorful pixies around us—”

“Fairies, actually.”

“Great, thanks for the clarification.” Irritation crept into her voice as she desperately grasped at understanding. “That answers everything.”

“I understand your confusion, and I’m here to clear things up.”

“I think I’d like to sit down for this.” Sliding her backpack down her arms, she slumped a bit.

“Of course.” Ada led Nessa, dragging her backpack on the ground, to one of the benches as she began to explain. “Nymphs are spirits and guardians of nature. This garden is my home. It used

to be bigger, but with the expansion of the town, this is all I have left. The fairies you see all around here are stewards of this garden. I think you might say that they're the worker bees to my queen."

"Why do you look like me but..." she continued to stare at the unusually beautiful woman, "different?"

"Nymphs and humans come from the same people of the past, who were in communion with nature. While humans worked on 'developing civilization'" – a phrase she seemed to disdain – "nymphs deepened their relationship with nature. It didn't take long for these two ideologies to clash, turning those who were once the same into opponents. Our looks are a product of our values and practices."

"Right. This is neat and everything, but why am I here? Is this just a dream? Am I being pranked?" As questions spilled from her, two strong pangs of pain shot through her back, and she let out a small shout.

"Well, Nessa, you have been chosen to be an Ambassador, and it looks like your wings are coming in." Ada was speaking more quickly now, though maintaining her gentle, guiding tone.

"What?" Nessa shouted through her groans of pain.

"Here, let me help you." Ada hurried behind Nessa and cut two slits in her shirt.

"What are you doing?" Her back burned as though nails were being raked across it.

"Trust me, you'll need these."

"For wings? Why the hell am I getting wings!" She made no effort to suppress her shouts at this point. Whether she wanted townspeople to hear her or not, she was too distracted by her pain and questions to care.

"They are a sign that you have been chosen. The fairies and I have selected you to be an Ambassador, which means advocating for the earth among the humans who are destroying it."

“I can’t listen to you right now! It’s too much!” Nessa screamed, sticky with sweat.

Suddenly, the agony stopped. Her body heaved with every breath, exhausted from the transformation. She reached behind her to feel for blood since there surely must be some from her skin ripping apart, but her fingers came back clean. She shrugged and wriggled her shoulders and back, adjusting to what felt like sore muscles and new webs of connections under her skin.

“There you go, honey.” Ada soothed, stepping back in front of her.

“Don’t call me that.” The pain might have stopped, but Nessa still wanted to yell in frustration. She gave herself a moment to calm her body. “You said I have wings now, yeah? Let me see them.”

Ada nodded, waving her hand toward some nearby bushes. About two dozen fairies, emanating shades of light blue, flew in a circle in front of Nessa, creating a mirror with their sparkling glow. She gasped and stood up, spinning to see every angle. Sprouting from her back were majestic butterfly wings. The edges were all black with splotches of purple filling the centers and a spray paint line of white down each one. Just like the pottery.

“No,” Nessa whispered, awe and disbelief flooding her mind. “This doesn’t make any sense. Why me? Why now?”

“Ambassadors are chosen carefully by the community that needs them. My fairies and I keep track of the locals to gauge what kinds of people are around, and right now we need someone to protect this garden because we know it’s in danger.”

“People mistreat parks all the time. Why do you suddenly need an… Ambassador?”

“Just because it happens all the time doesn’t mean that it should. We’re worried this will be worse than usual and cause irreparable damage. You’re in the perfect position to do something about it, and we know the kind of person you are.”

“Normal? Barely above average at anything?”

“Not at all, Nessa. You’re quietly kind and capable. You do well in school without needing praise for it. You treat the children who come to your place of work with gentle but confident hands.” Ada’s eyes showed her admiration for Nessa.

She shifted uncomfortably. People never looked at her that way, especially with Mel and her achievements around. People rarely looked at her at all, and she liked that. Or at least she thought she did, but this felt nice. “No, I’m sorry. I can’t do this.” She shook her head vigorously. “I can’t protect you all. This is too much for me.” She reached behind her to pull at her wings.

“Don’t!” Ada’s warning came too late.

“Ow!” Nessa winced.

“They’re part of you now, whether you act as Ambassador or not.”

“Fine!” Adapting to the new internal webbing around her spine, Nessa puzzled out how to fold the paper-thin wings against her back. It was like two extra limbs had been asleep all these years and now the pins and needles made them hard to control. She felt like an alien.

“I understand that you’re scared, but we need you—”

“Too bad. I can’t do this. This is too much.” Nessa tossed her backpack over her shoulder, turned, and ran out of the garden.

“Please come back!” Ada’s calls were lost behind her.

“I’m sorry!” Nessa’s apology was lost in the wind.

Lunging through the gate, she didn’t slow her pace. Her backpack made her new wings ache, refusing to let her forget about the situation. Heading for home, she had no idea what she would tell her parents. She felt sweat push its way through her skin and bead on the surface. The farther she ran, the redder she could feel her face getting. Her pounding, racing heart filled her eardrums, and her

peripheral vision blurred. As she rushed into her house, she shouted at her parents whom she assumed were home.

“Hey, Mom! Hey, Dad!” She ungracefully kicked off her dirty shoes near the door, the air cold on her sweaty feet. “I’m home!”

“Hey, sweetie!” her mom shouted back from the kitchen. “Dinner’s almost ready. I hope work went well.”

“I’m gonna take a shower and then I’ll be ready to eat!” Nessa was already halfway up the stairs, so her mom’s reply was jumbled in the hallway.

Itching to be free, Nessa flung her backpack onto the floor. She opened her door just a crack and peeked her head into the hall to make sure the coast was clear. Confident that it was, she sped over to the bathroom and quickly locked the door behind her.

Facing herself in a normal mirror, she let out a deep sigh. It was real. It was all real. She took off her shirt and stretched her wings as far as she could. The sensation was strange but becoming normal, like she had another set of hamstrings that sprouted from her back. She carefully inspected the way the light hazily shone through the white parts of her wings. Though they looked smooth and silky, when she touched them, she found that they were covered in overlapping pieces, like scales. The drying sweat on her body was growing uncomfortable, so she tucked the wings away again and turned on the shower. She twisted to see her back in the mirror, and she found that the wings folded like origami into the spaces between her spine and shoulder blades. With a shirt on, no one would know they were there.

Wings don’t do so well in the shower, Nessa found, so she had to use her hairdryer on them as well as her head. As she used the mirror to find the right angles for drying, she stopped for a moment and burst out laughing. How does this even happen? What was she going to do? She thought about trying to tell people about it, but who? Her parents would think she was on drugs, and Mel,

well... Mel was never the right person to talk to about her own life. Truthfully, she wanted to keep this magic to herself a little longer. It felt precious and fragile. Hers.

...

At lunch the next day, Mel was talking about herself as usual when Principal Kasa came into the cafeteria to make an announcement.

“Hello, juniors and seniors. I have extra special news for you all today. The prom will be held in May, as usual, but we have a new venue.” Students tried whispering among themselves, but some were better at hiding it than others. “This location holds a special place in the town’s heart, and we’re so happy the council is allowing us to make use of it. This year’s prom will be one to remember, and we hope it will be a tradition that continues for many years, just as...”

“I wish he’d just get to the point,” Mel whispered to Nessa, who couldn’t agree more.

“He loves to hear himself speak.” Nessa rolled her eyes, and the two stifled giggles. She recognized her old friend, the one who felt like a sister.

“...I can tell you want to get back to your lunches, so I will tell you what I mean. May’s prom will be held in Lily Glen’s Town Garden! We’ll clear a bigger area in the center to allow for dancing and food.”

A range of reactions came from the students, drowning out his continued speech. Some didn’t seem to care at all, while others acted as though this was the greatest news they’d ever received. Most were somewhere in the middle: happy to think about a fun night in a beautiful place while finishing their lunch.

For Nessa, however, panic was creeping into her mind. This must be why Ada needed her. Hundreds of students stampeding could have no benefits to the garden. And clearing the area? All the plants were in danger, meaning Ada and her fairies were too. A rush of purpose that she hadn't felt before filled her with adrenaline. These creatures just want to protect and live in their space, why should we destroy it?

"Hello? Hellooooooooooooo," Mel's voice broke through Nessa's panic.

"Huh?"

"What's up with you lately? I was talking about my dress, and you know how important it is that no one wears anything similar."

"Right. Yeah." Nessa cleared her throat. "Actually, I'm not so sure the garden is a good place for this. I think I'm gonna talk to Kasa about it—"

"Absolutely not!" Mel looked deeply offended. "What's wrong with you? It's the perfect prom, and that means our senior one will be even better."

"We'll destroy the garden. Have you met our classmates?"

"Who cares? There are people whose job it is to take care of it. They can deal with it. Besides, as president, I get to make decisions like this."

"No, you don't. You make posters and organize the details, but you aren't in charge of prom." She winced at her own harshness, but she had to move.

"I'm sorry, did you just—"

"I'll see you later." Nessa scooped up her belongings and hustled out of the cafeteria.

In the hallway, she shoved everything into her bag and hurried to find the principal before the bell rang. She never liked being in the empty hallway because teachers would confront her. But she was on a mission, and she cared about the garden and its secret residents.

“...send Mel the information so the student government can get working on things.” Principal Kasa was talking to a member of staff around the corner from Nessa.

She took a deep breath and stood straighter as she turned the corner.

“Ah, Nessa. I was looking for someone to give Mel—”

“You can’t do this.”

“Excuse me?” Kasa’s demeanor shifted.

“The garden. It isn’t made for this many students to dance in their heels and drop food and trash all over it. You can’t ruin the space. This is a mistake, and—”

“Young lady, I’m going to stop you right there. This is my decision to make, and the town has approved it. I understand that you want to protect the precious plants, but that’s not your concern. I’m sure they have provisions for this.”

“Are you—”

“I said stop.” He held out a hand to quiet her. The bell rang. “Looks like you need to be heading to class. I’ll speak to you some other time. Tell Mel to check her school email later today.”

Nessa had used up all of her confident energy and couldn’t come up with a reply before he walked away. She was proud of what she had managed to do, but she knew it wasn’t enough. Tears of frustration made her eyes burn. Maybe she could make a good Ambassador if she had the right practice and training. For now, she had to finish the school day and plan her next step.

The garden. She had to get to the garden and talk to Ada.

APPENDIX 1: Summary of the novel that would follow

Sixteen-year-old Nessa is often told that she's unremarkable. With college applications looming, she has a deadline to make herself stand out. Her best friend Mel is perfect on paper: student body president, awarded violinist, extrovert. Nessa hates the constant comparisons. Nessa is a quietly great student with a job at a pottery shop. When she follows a note hidden near a piece of pottery to the village garden, her eyes are opened to the world of nymphs and her own potential. Nymph and human worlds coexist because nymphs appoint Ambassadors to advocate for them amongst the humans. The nymphs' domain is gradually being destroyed by human greed, and they need Ambassadors to help them protect their land. Nessa learns that she has been chosen, and butterfly wings sprout from her back. Overwhelmed by the responsibility, she runs away.

Soon after, her high school announces that prom will be held at the town garden. Anxiety fills Nessa as she realizes the irreparable damage this will do to the nymphs' sanctuary. Mel mocks Nessa for caring about the garden. She attempts to talk to the principal, but he brushes her off, saying the decision has been made. Frustrated, she runs back to the nymphs and accepts her role. They formulate a plan to change the administration's minds. First, they must find an alternative location. Mel nags Nessa for the hundredth time about attending her string quartet performance at the town museum. Nessa is inspired to suggest the museum as an alternative, so she scopes it out online and at Mel's concert a few days later. Mel gets defensive of the garden plan that she has already started organizing. Nessa compiles an informative document anyway and emails it to the principal. Unfortunately, she receives a dismissive reply that her help is unneeded and unwanted.

Disappointed yet determined, she returns to the nymphs who introduce her to Diwata, an older Ambassador. Diwata recommends they go to the museum and pretend to be a bride and bridesmaid booking it as a wedding venue. She also helps Nessa write an email to the town council,

enquiring into the potentially disastrous decision that they have made. With the date and pricing secured, Nessa nervously visits the principal in his office. She calmly expresses her concern about damaging the garden and explains the museum alternative. As she's talking, she realizes that he doesn't particularly care about the environment, but he does care about the image of the school. She switches tactics to explain that using the museum would make the school look better because it is a unique, local, educational, and cultural venue. He is nearly on board when Mel knocks on the door with a sample of the prom poster. The principal is tempted by the easier plan that is already in its early stages, but Nessa has one last card to play. Her phone buzzes with a reply from the council, saying that they have taken her concerns seriously and will be reconsidering hosting the event. As she is reading it aloud, the principal receives a similar email. He accepts that Nessa is right. Mel is instructed to have the student government cooperate with Nessa's museum plan. Their friendship is ruined, but Nessa takes pride in returning to the nymphs with great news. She looks forward to college and joining other Ambassadors doing this on a bigger scale.

APPENDIX 2: Context Paper

The Garden Wings changed drastically from first to final draft. What started as a short story of a young woman's personal transformation became the opening to a middle grade novel starring a teenage girl finding her purpose. The central threads that remain are the protagonist Nessa and her introduction to a fantasy world that exists within a seemingly normal reality. The unavoidable issue with the short story version was its limitation in space. Telling a story about transformation and friendship loss in a fantasy setting required more a longer form, and shifting focus to a younger audience allowed it to be more playful. Three texts greatly influenced the rewrite: J. R. R. Tolkien's 'On Fairy-Stories', Francis Spufford's *The Child that Books Built*, and Cassandra Clare's *City of Bones*. Tolkien articulated many of the reasons I have appreciated the fantasy genre from a young age through today. Spufford offered ways of explaining similar experiences from a reader's lens. Clare's novel is an example of what readers might advance to after *The Garden Wings*, which is aimed a bit lower and has less complex worldbuilding. The key elements I analysed in the writing process were the fantasy genre, worldbuilding, and Nessa as a protagonist for a younger reader.

The fantasy genre is wide-ranging and appeals to many ages and people. Tolkien is meticulous in defining each of his terms, and a few stuck out to me. As seen in the title of his essay, he opts for the term 'Fairy-Stories', or tales about 'Faërie, the realm or state in which fairies have their being', as well as all sorts of creatures, plants, objects, 'and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.'¹ He takes care to include humanity in the realm, making it more tangible to us, though it is clearly separate from our world. In the case of my story, 'Faërie' refers to the nymph, fairies, and Ambassador system, as explained by Ada.² The desire to be taken to a different reality by stories is common. Spufford states, 'More than I wanted books to do anything else, I wanted them to take me

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories' in *Tree and Leaf* (London: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 2001), p. 9.

² Hannah Dougherty, *The Garden Wings*, p. 6-9. All further references will be in brackets.

away.’³ While the ability for literature to do this is not limited to one genre, fantasy has a particular way of transporting the reader elsewhere. In my first draft, the worldbuilding was revealed to the reader all at once, and it lacked consequence. The pixies ‘flit around, land on people’s shoulders, and push them in one direction or another’, and the ‘system for how humans and pixies coexist’ does not exist. After reading Tolkien’s description of the ‘three faces’ of fairy-stories, ‘the Mystical towards the supernatural; the Magical towards Nature, and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards man’, I knew I had to revisit my constructed world.⁴ The Mystical is not relevant here. The Magical stood out in the first draft but became far more important with revision. The nymphs and fairies are deeply interconnected with the land, and Nessa’s butterfly wings demonstrate that she will be too. The Mirror towards humanity originally reflected little. In its new form, the idea that the common ancestors ‘were in communion with nature’ challenges the idea that all of what we term ‘development’ has truly been positive (7). Nessa becomes a budding climate activist because of the Mirror aspect. This conflict also speaks to Tolkien’s argument that humankind has separated from other creatures, yet yearns ‘to hold communion with other living things’; one ‘virtue’ of fantasy is satisfying ‘certain primordial human desires’ such as this one.⁵ Nessa is learning to return to honouring nature, which allows the reader to experience the same. Since this is only the opening to the novel, I could not explore the full extent of the fantasy world, but it is more complex and meaningful with these elements of the genre incorporated.

The last concept of Tolkien’s that inspired me was the idea of ‘the story-maker’ as ‘sub-creator’.⁶ As the writer, I am taking the ‘Primary World’, in which we live, and creating a ‘Secondary World’, in which the story takes place and the reader temporarily lives.⁷ In the case of *The Garden Wings*, Lily Glen acts as a Secondary World to ours, and the realm of the nymphs is

³ Francis Spufford, *The Child that Books Built* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002), p. 82.

⁴ Tolkien, p. 26.

⁵ Tolkien, pp. 66-7, 15, 13.

⁶ Tolkien, p. 37.

⁷ Tolkien, pp. 59, 53.

almost a Secondary World to that one. Lily Glen is a cookie-cutter American suburb, and the characters know that. Spufford writes that he ‘was nourished most, and felt the people were most real [...] when it was a small town in America’ because of ‘the idealistic, almost didactic impulse in the stories of the American town.’⁸ While Lily Glen is not a real town, it is an average of the towns I grew up in and around. While it seems perfect from the outside, the couple’s argument is a window into the truth of life: it is messy (4). Since this piece would likely be read by children looking for an introduction to fantasy at their level, I wanted to start in a place that would be familiar either from experience or from stereotype. Even Spufford, who wanted books to be an escape, argues that fantasy worlds ‘can’t be remote from our fears and desires, or we would find no urgency in them.’⁹ By establishing a Secondary World that is somewhere within most people’s media consumption, Nessa’s fears of being too ordinary and desires to protect nature seem closer to reality, despite the fantastical creatures. Cassandra Clare sends her protagonist Clary into a greenhouse, where she finds ‘a riot of color: blue purple blossoms spilling down the side of a shining green hedge, a trailing vine studded with jewel-toned orange buds.’¹⁰ Ada beckons Nessa into the garden, where she finds ‘a white gazebo roofed with greenery that was impossibly perfect: flowers in a gradient from violet to jade to honey to crimson’ (5). The colours of nature appear magical to the human eye, especially when well-tended. Although it is not Clary’s first encounter with the supernatural, it is a new angle that she has not yet seen in her city life. For Nessa, it is a smoother transition into the world.

Each magical element straddles the line between Primary and Secondary worlds, just as Nessa does between her world and the magical one. While in the original draft Diwata was just like Nessa in physical form, Ada is less familiar. When Nessa sees her, she thinks, ‘A beautiful woman stepped out from behind the gazebo. Except she wasn’t a normal woman’ (5). She first recognises what is similar before explaining the extreme differences. Nessa needed to be thrown into the magic

⁸ Spufford, pp. 116, 144.

⁹ Spufford, pp. 51-2.

¹⁰ Cassandra Clare, *City of Bones* (New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2007), p. 143.

more than she had been in the first draft. Ada personifies the hidden world in a way that no character did in the first draft. She makes it tangible to Nessa and therefore the reader. She speaks for herself. Nessa's transformation, therefore, embodies bridging the gap between her human existence and Ada's natural, earthen magic one.

Nessa has remained the core of the story through its own transformation. She is the lens through which the reader encounters the fictitious world. As such, she ponders and vocalises many of the audience's questions. In *City of Bones*, Clary does some of this too, wondering 'Why would there be a block in her mind? Why would a powerful warlock have put it there, and to what purpose?' as she delves further into her world.¹¹ Nessa is just barely older than Clary, but she has lived a more sheltered life. Therefore, she starts questioning every detail immediately (2-3, 6-9). Some of her questions are answered directly or indirectly, but some are left for her to pursue. On the topic of age, Spufford writes that for child readers 'it's easier, at this time, to imagine yourself as a hero than as an adult' because of the autonomy.¹² The scope of Nessa's life so far is limited, so she meets the fantasy world in a small way. Clary's fantasy world is much grander and has higher immediate stakes, but Nessa's still has consequence. She is taking on the task of saving the local garden because that is what is currently within her power, but the underlying nymph and fairy world exists across the globe. Discovering this world reveals her potential in the present and the future, where she might become a climate activist or worker of some sort. She will never be killing demons, but her goal will be to save lives in the long- and short-term.

The reader meets Nessa as an everyday high school girl simply going about her business. Mel, her best friend mostly from circumstance at this point, has a contrasting personality that Nessa has to contend with. Early in Clare's novel, she writes that Clary 'wished for the thousandth time that she could be a bit more like her mother. Everything Jocelyn Fray drew, painted, or sketched was

¹¹ Clare, p. 198.

¹² Spufford, p. 179.

beautiful, and seemingly effortless.’¹³ In this case, the protagonist is contrasted against another woman who she wishes to be more like. In Nessa’s case, the contrast is less flattering for the other girl: ‘Mel always needed to excel at what she did’ and ‘needed to sit at the biggest lunch table surrounded by the most people’, which Nessa begrudgingly accepts (3). Jocelyn turns out not to be perfect, and Mel is never fully evil; however, establishing Clary and Nessa as unlike other women in their lives helps define both characters. The differences between Nessa and Mel grow as Nessa changes, physically and emotionally. The first personal shift she notices is that her mind is ‘clearer and happier’, though maybe not fully in her control (5). It can be difficult to explain what someone’s brain feels like, but this is an attempt at articulating the experience of starting to wake up to the world. Nessa’s life is reaching a turning point, and she can sense the excitement of that before it fully hits her. It is important for her to sense the feeling inside before her body changes. Her wings are certainly the most significant physical change. The first draft did not give her enough space to investigate and understand her new body. In the final draft, she takes a moment by herself to explore these magical things that are permanently part of her, and she approaches the overwhelming change with a gentle curiosity (10). The change is painful, as many are, but she does start to accept it, which she would only continue to do in a novel.

Fantasy is a genre of balance: Primary World and Secondary World, far from our reality yet tangible, clearly fictitious but with real world parallels. The short story format did not allow for sufficient worldbuilding and exploration of the friendship plot. Clare successfully wrote an introduction to a complex world in *City of Bones*, and Tolkien offered many words of wisdom for fantasy readers and writers alike. Spufford’s memoir speaks to the child reader’s perspective specifically, which ended up being rather important for this work. *The Garden Wings* so far is only

¹³ Clare, p. 18.

the opening to a novel and a plan for the rest, but it is inspired by and infused with ideas from all three of these writers, which brought it from a failing short story to a much more intentional piece.

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