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Nømädnêss: The Gospel According to Wanda B. Lazarus

MA Creative Writing Reflective Essay

The Wandering Jew as Picara: Reimagining the Heroine's Journey

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The Wandering Jew as Picara – A New Myth of the Feminine

What if The Wandering Jew was a woman? And not just any woman; a feisty, autonomous Picara, accidentally cursed with immortality, who wanders through the Ages at the behest of the Muses of Antiquity to retrieve the lost Music of the Spheres. In *Nømädnêss,* I have attempted to conduct a satirical investigation into misogynistic and antisemitic prejudices through the voice of a female character, Wanda B. Lazarus, who relates her own fantastic tales in her quest for autonomy.

Nømädnêss – a portmanteau that fuses the concepts of 'nomad', 'not mad' and 'madness' – initiates a cycle of self-contained yet interlinked stories as the Wandering Jew hitches a ride through history, experiencing the trials and tribulations of being 'other' in a series of epochs, each with its own peculiar challenge, triumph or failure.

In *Nømädnêss,* Wanda B. Lazarus recollects her personal history through a literary fusion of the Picara, the 'Heroine's Journey' and the Wandering Jew, exploring various nuances and distinctions of her relationship to the world and within herself. The stories interrogate the idea of whether a woman who emulates the Heroine's Journey loses the capacity to embrace the Feminine[1] or, as the subversive Picara, discards the notion of individuation and remains unchanged by circumstances after each encounter. *Nømädnêss* creates alternative possibilities within a revised mythological narrative, integrating Wanda's weltanschauung into alternative ways of being 'other'.

The literary objective of my novel is to re-imagine the myth of the Eternal or Wandering Jew as Picara, refuting the ideal of the Eternal Feminine – hijacked by male writers and poets for their patriarchal projections – and to construct an alternative Heroine's Journey.

I equate this work process with creating a mosaic, each tessera complete in itself, finding its unique place in the puzzle, only being able to see the full picture by taking a step back.

Protagonist and Point of View

The novel emanates from a protagonist whose life stories are told over a two thousand year period in the form of a fictional autobiography. Wanda travels through thirteen

[1] I use the term 'Feminine' to refer to the experience and nature of being Woman, the expectations and enactment of which are explored from various angles throughout the novel. The Feminine is also critically considered in this essay in relation to of issues of gender, sexuality and agency. Simone de Beauvoir begins her seminal thesis, *The Second Sex*, with the key insight that 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.' De Beauvoir, Simone. 1973. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, 301.

different epochs wherein she becomes voyeur and participant in historical events in which accomplished Jewish women were marginalised, wiped off the record, or simply wiped out.

By employing first person singular, I have attempted to get under the skin of Wanda's character, knowing her every thought and move, seeing through her eyes, enabling her to embody the position of some key women in history and to subvert the known record with her own, subjective stories.

Throughout her journey Wanda engages with a host of characters who manifest as a result of her need, and my writing thematics. They, in turn, tell her stories of their lives and woes, bringing in other voices and perspectives. She eavesdrops conversations, speeches and invocations and, because the entire novel is written in her voice, she is the classic unreliable narrator. Her coming of age in the Age of Trump feels apposite; she is entitled to retell her history her way. Fiction has always been a vehicle for alternative facts.

Wanda discovers in the course of her travels that the human race has a peculiar obsession with immortality. Wanda is made of different stuff; she is immortal, she has defied death. *Nømädnêss* explores this premise from a myriad of angles: what if the human urge to everlasting life could be framed from the contrary point of view? What if an immortal sought mortality? What if Wanda wanted to experience her eternal bliss differently, risking her afterlife for an adventure or two in the human condition? This quest for mortality permits an inversion of expectation and deliberate transgression of the normal order of things. I was curious to see how this stance could be created, maintained and voiced with wit, empathy and insight. For it is empathy that makes Wanda relatable, despite the outrageous misfortunes she brings upon herself, dying at the end of each episode to be reborn time and time again.

When she descends, in each incarnation, into the 'real world', Wanda is at first at the mercy of circumstance. At the conclusion of the story cycle, by discovering her own musical voice, and with greater insights into herself as a powerful woman, she becomes mistress of her own destiny. As the writer, I draw on the Picaresque format, yet push the boundaries of the genre to impart the idea that I do want Wanda to grow, however imperceptibly, and that even as a Picara, and in defiance thereof, empathy is possible within autonomy.

The original name I gave to my protagonist was Wanda B. Lustolotsky, to reflect her wanderlust through a satirical play on the appellation of a typical Jewish surname. When I first wrote her into the First Century CE, I corresponded the siblings of biblical Bethany with Wanda's back story, claiming her identity as Mary of Bethany,

aka Miriam Bat Lazarus, sister of the boy whom Jesus raised from the dead.[2] This fitted well with the theme of death and resurrection and conflates her name with that of *Lazarillo de Tormes*[3], the protagonist of what is acknowledged to be the first Picaresque novel, written in the Spanish Golden Age, describing the life of a 'beggar, son of dishonoured parents, deriv(ing) noble pedigree from elemental rootlessness … a being stripped of social identity, dominated by hunger, he is a wanderer in a world where normal conceptions of good and evil no longer operate, a lost soul who is either playing tricks on people or having them played on him and who, like a god before Prometheus, has no wish to benefit mankind'.[4] Lazarillo prefigures Wanda's eternal and immortal identity, wherein she remains true to herself throughout her earthly incarnations.

Fictional Autobiography into Autobiographical Fiction

Early on in my writing process, I mapped out the outline for this work in the form of stories from my own cultural experience as an expatriate South African Jewish outsider, recreating my younger self through a form of memoir. As I wrote, I noticed my perspective begin to shift from deeply personal subjective recollections towards a type of fictional autobiography, wherein I began to invent and develop the character of an autonomous protagonist with her own ideas about her journey. History, biography and imagination began to conflate in this process as I explored an array of historical epochs within which my character's challenges could play out. I teased these stories into an episodic adventure series, pacing them across a two thousand year swathe, exploring the customs and quirks around which she acts and reacts. As I wrote her into being, this protagonist started to become Wanda B. Lazarus. And she refused to hold her tongue.

The moment of transformation from memoir to fiction came after writing my first draft of Chapter One. Up until that point, the writing was threatening to become a bildungsroman, describing the taking of my virginity on the night of the Soweto riots while our youth group were pledging allegiance to Zionism. He was a youth leader; he was thirty, I was fifteen. One particular sentence I'd written caught my attention. 'He took me in the shadow of the Temple.' It prompted new questions and possibilities for me: what if the Temple of my adolescent assault is *The* Temple? What if my assailant was a priestly pederast in Jerusalem, circa 33AD? What if he assaults Wanda in the actual Holy of Holies? What if I placed the first episode on the very day Pilate scourges Jesus? What if she is the one whom Jesus curses, initiating her immortal status?

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[2]*The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible: New International Version. 1990* (1973). John 11:1-44. USA, B.B. Kirkbride Bible Company, Inc.
[3] Fiore, Robert, L. 1984 (1555). *Lazarillo de Tormes* (English edition). Boston: Twayne Publishers.
[4] Blackburn, Alexander. 1979. *The Myth of the Picaro; Continuity and Transformation of the Picaresque Novel 1554-1954*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, (eBook), 12.

Following this insight, I placed Wanda in the First Century against the backdrop of the Crucifixion, with an immobile, depressed mother, a drunken step-father, an epileptic baby brother and a yearning to escape her ordinary world. She wouldn't go anywhere near Johannesburg until almost two thousand years later. Later, I altered the scenario to one where Wanda retaliates and overcomes her assailant, turning the tables on the anticipated rape, and in so doing, shifting the nature of Wanda's individual agency, and intimating a different possibility for other women.

Genre: Discovering the Picaresque

I discovered Wanda's voice early on in the process and spent long hours transcribing her inner thoughts, but plot, the tapeworm of the tale, was fragmented. One of the significant qualities of Wanda's journey is chaos. In order to give birth to 'a dancing star'[5], the novel required a skeleton upon which to flesh out her coming of age.

Halfway through my first year of writing submissions, I was asked whether I was writing a Picaresque novel. I had no idea. Investigating this further, I discovered that I was unconsciously imitating this genre. The Picaresque novel is defined as an 'episodic, often autobiographical novel about a rogue or picaro (a person of low social status) wandering around and living off his wits. The wandering hero provides the author with the opportunity to connect widely different pieces of plot, since the hero can wander into any situation. Picaresque novels tend to be satiric and filled with petty details'.[6] The resemblance to Wanda was uncanny. Digging deeper, Anne Kaler's critique provided a structure that helped me to stay on course with the storytelling. Kaler emphasises autonomy as the overarching trait of the Picara, from classical mythology to fantasy heroines of dystopian fiction:

> Only as an archetypal pattern of autonomy does the Picara pursue the hero question common to human nature. The Picara seeks her identity through the masculine outward quest for the hero; her call to action is her abandonment as a child or wife; her mentor is her confidante; her magical weapons are her wit and sexuality; her trip to the underworld is her criminal career; her adventures are her wanderings; her obstacles use her warrior abilities; her return to this world appears in the retelling of her memoir. Yet she lacks some particulars of the hero's journey for she never finds peace or reconciliation as heroes do.[7]

[5] Nietzche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. 1881. Pantianos Classics. (eBook), 15. 'One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.'
[6] 'List of Literary and Poetic Terms and Critical Lenses' in *American International School in Egypt*. Accessed at https://www.aisegypt.com/.../List_of_Literary,_Poetic,_Lenses.docx.
[7] Kaler, Anne K. 1991. *The Picara: From Hera to Fantasy Heroine.* Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2.

I identify this definition with Wanda herself, arriving in dangerous worlds as 'other', having her own take on 'tribal' matters, but when confronted, denounces the antisemitism and misogyny she encounters.

There were very few overtly practicing Jews in post-Inquisition Europe, their having been expelled from Spain, then Portugal, then the Netherlands, and I took advantage of this fact to conflate Wanda's trickster traits with the notion of the Sephardic converso, crypto-Jews who were forcibly converted to Christianity, yet practiced their faith in secrecy. Blackburn describes, 'a person who might have abandoned one faith without gaining another, a potentially lost soul skeptical of traditional dogma and morality'.[8] Blackburn asserts that the anonymous author of *Lazarillo* was himself a converso and many subsequent Picaresque authors were alleged to be of Jewish origin. Fernando de Rojas, author of *La Celestina* (1499), for example, was thought to be a fifth generation converso[9], as was Mateo Aleman, who wrote another seminal Picaresque work, *Guzman de Alfarache*. Recently it has been claimed that Miguel de Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote*, was possibly also a converso.[10]

Blackburn describes that:

> Rojas and the first novelists, especially though not necessarily because of the converso situation, lived as marginal men in a world bearing fearful resemblance to our own Orwellian one of Big Brother, Newspeak, Thought Police and Doublethink. As marginal men, they were 'condemned to live in two worlds' and 'to assume in relation to the worlds … the role of a cosmopolitan and stranger.[11]

The role of the converso serves as an apt metaphor for Wanda's personality, where the 'converso situation held the possibility of a counter culture or community of those experienced or conditioned enough to relish the hidden import of the ironist's language'.[12]

Given that the Picaresque form was created by men, I permitted myself to be guided by the genre, but not restricted to it. There is a further ironic inversion as Wanda strides through the ages as a woman, written by a woman. She is, at first, constrained by the masculine zeitgeist, but finds her own ways of dealing with the patriarchy. In a

[8] Blackburn, Op Cit., 9.
[9] Aronson-Friedman, Amy. 2004. 'Identifying the Converso Voice in Fernando de Rojas' 'La Celestina''. In *Mediterranean Studies*, Vol. 13 (2004). Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 79. Accessed at http://www.jstor.org/stable/41166965.
[10] Ivry, Benjamin. 2014. 'The Secret Jewish History of Don Quixote.' Accessed at http://forward.com/culture/192662/the-secret-jewish-history-of-don-quixote/.
[11] Alexander Blackburn, quoting Everett Stonequist's. *The Marginal Man*, cited in Gilman, Stephen. 1972. *Spain of Fernando de Rojas, The Intellectual and Social Landscape of 'La Celestina'*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
[12] Blackburn, Op Cit., 9.

sense, she outgrows both the Heroine's Journey and Picaresque forms, inhabiting her own unique myth and trajectory.

Kaler's explication of the Picara has been key to my understanding of the traditional nature of this female quest, and my experimentation in defying it. She states that:

> The Picara neglects the complementary inward feminine quest toward spiritualty – the creativity symbolised by motherhood. This quest is seldom accomplished by the Picara; she ignores the awakening to motherhood, letting her tricks serve as her creativity outlet; she is too busy surviving to contemplate her sins; her penitence is always suspiciously self-serving; she never reconciles with her society or her nature; she is trapped in a survival mode, struggling for an autonomy neither her nature nor society will grant her. If she follows the masculine quest more readily it is because her nature is one of action rather than of contemplation. Still, she does rely strongly on the intuitive side of her personality to accomplish her contradictory goals of security and autonomy.[13]

It has been challenging to reconcile the plotless, episodic nature of the Picaresque with the circular heroine's quest. I have grappled with this paradox for the duration of the writing process. The novel attempts to break this dialectic impasse and create an alternative paradigm through which to perceive the Feminine as Wanda interacts with a vast cast of characters, from priests to princes, servants to savants on her path to autonomy.

The Pleroma and the Muses: Framing Narrative

Many religious and spiritual practices have ambivalent references to the place of the undead. The unspoken Jewish space is called Sheol 'the place where the dead go … the bowels of the earth, a pit … The limit of possible human awareness; it is a metaphor for God's ultimate mystery.'[14] The Greeks speak of the Underworld from whence Persephone graduates from rape status to Ruler of Hades.[15] Catholics cling to Purgatory, 'for the purposes of purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.'[16] I wanted to create Wanda's own inversion of this in-between world, an imaginary space from which Wanda emanates and to which she returns between her adventures on the human plane.

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[13] Kaler, Anne K. 1991. Op Cit., 2.
[14] Gillman, Neil. 2013 (1997). *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 65.
[15] 'Persephone'. *Theio.com*. Accessed at http://www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Persephone.html.
[16] 'Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part III The Final Purification, or Purgatory.' *Vatican.va.* Accessed at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a12.htm.

In the beginning I had Wanda musing to herself in a space I called the Pleroma, conceptually related to Carl Jung's definition of a place that is 'nothing and everything'[17]. Jung proposes that '[i]t is quite fruitless to think about Pleroma. Therein both thinking and being cease, since the eternal and infinite possess no qualities'.[18] I conceived of this Pleroma as Wanda's rest stop in a state of non-being, but Wanda soon realises that boredom is the Pleroma's unbearable shadow. Some archetypes get stuck there, wallowing in their bliss and waiting out eternity in the nothingness.

One year into the writing process, while Wanda was wondering alone in the otherworld of the Pleroma, I read of a mosaic of the nine Muses from 200AD, recently uncovered in the ancient city of Zeugma, Turkey, precisely the location I was researching for my chapter on Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, to whom Wanda is indentured as a sex slave. I began to write dialogue between Wanda and these mythical feminine creatures who had been banished by Zeus to dwell in anonymity on the slopes of Mount Helicon. In spite of, or maybe because of their amorphous identities – so anonymous that nobody remembers their names – the Muses began to act as a type of Chorus in the novel, commenting collectively on the dramatic action in the manner of ancient Greek tragedy, and becoming the foils for Wanda's Pleromic musings.

I have since evolved a framing story in the form of a Picaresque quest; Wanda is mistakenly cursed with immortality, she meets the Muses in the Pleroma on her first death who task her to return to life time and again to retrieve the components of the music of the spheres. This device separates Wanda's sensuous earthly adventures from the ethereal world of myth and imagination. Crafting the notion of the nine Muses who meet her in the Pleroma has given Wanda the context to reflect on her adventures. This fusion of magic realism and her earthly adventures helped me to structure the different worlds of the novel.

To differentiate these two planes of existence and Wanda's reflections thereon, I have positioned the narrative of the Pleroma in present tense in italics, while the earthly realm is narrated in past tense, in non-italic, Roman type.

The Myth of the Wandering Jew

The legend of the Wandering Jew is an historical and literary thread I have adopted and adapted for my protagonist to pursue in her quest to 'set the record straight'. The idea that the Jews were responsible for killing Christ was highly prevalent from the Middle Ages onwards in an effort to create a scapegoat to blame for the death of an

[17] Hoeller, Stephan A. 1982. *The Gnostic Jung: And the Seven Sermons to the Dead.* Wheaton: Quest Books, 182.
[18] Hoeller, Ibid., 182.

immortal god, another bizarre paradox. The gist of the tale is that on his way to Calgary, Christ rests on a doorstep and asks a Centurion called Cartaphilus for a drink of water. When the man refuses, Christ curses him, condemning him to 'tarry until I return', which has been interpreted as a reference to The Second Coming. The story was set down in the Thirteenth Century when Roger of Wendover, an English monk, wrote *Flores Historiarum*.[9] Roger's version further claims that a visiting cleric, The Archbishop of Armenia, had spotted the Wandering Jew on several occasions during his travels through Europe. The myth was redacted from the Middle Ages to biblical times. There is no actual evidence of this encounter anywhere in the Gospels.

Wanda's assertion in the novel is that Roger got it wrong. It was she who refused Christ's request, owing to the fact that the chalice she bore was intended for Pontius Pilate in a sub-plot to poison the Prefect. Wanda was there that fateful day; but it was she who was accidentally cursed, doomed to wander the ages to await the Messiah's return. By reimagining alternative facts, this sub-plot puts forward the idea that women are and have always been historically invisible, that history is the story written by the victors[19] and that the notion of truth is an entirely subjective matter.

The existence of diasporic Jewish communities throughout history has allowed me to pursue locations where I could place Wanda for her adventures; in Cochin, India, which has an entire Quarter called Jewtown; the Silk Road, along which Jewish travellers traded from Turkey to China; the court Jews of Europe, the harem fixers of Istanbul, the bawds who ran the brothels of Jaffa, the forgotten songbirds in the jazz clubs of New York City.

As the novel develops, Wanda becomes a warrior, a criminal, a prostitute, an avaricious mistress of disguise. She wanders the world in pursuit of satisfaction and the secret to the music of the spheres. Even if she were to be perceived as a victim – in that women were vanquished as a sub-species in all patriarchal cultures – she musters different reactions to each situation, retaining her own world view, her 'weltanschauung' and her autonomy, which is her ultimate survival tool.

Historical distance also permits me the artistic license to superimpose current critical observations of politics and power games into epochs of the past. There are many hidden references that the astute reader can read into; Herod's firepool is one example, equating the Iudaean client-king with South Africa's head of state. The very mention of 'alternative facts' has become a dog whistle to those who rile against the fictions created by the American president. The satire operates on several levels, but is, inevitably, also about the present day, rendered through the prism of fiction. By recreating the myth of the Wandering Jew, I have taken bold liberties with the facts as

[19] Churchill, Winston. Accessed at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3626376/History-as-written-by-the-victor.html

Wanda, across time, descends time and again from her immortal apathy to become truly human.

Issues of the Feminine

The Eternal Feminine: Literary Ghost in the Machine

The reclamation of the Feminine is a big theme in the novel. Much experimentation took place to render the subtext without heavy handedness. In the Pantheon of the Immortals – the Pleroma – for example, I had to be mindful not to hamstring myself with too many mythical juxtapositions. I had to take an ancient individuation myth and pertain it to a re-created archetype.

I was bothered by the notion of the Eternal Feminine being hijacked by men in literature. This defined archetype 'idealises an immutable concept of woman … the belief that men and woman have different core essences that cannot be altered by time or environment'.[20] Women 'were often depicted as angelic, responsible for drawing men upward on a moral and spiritual path'[21] and 'having virtues such as modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliance, reticence, chastity, affability and politeness'.[22]

This idealisation has been perpetuated by a legion of male writers for whom female characters 'symbolise pure contemplation, in contrast to masculine action'.[23] Simone de Beauvoir regarded the Eternal Feminine as 'a patriarchal myth that constructs women as 'a passive, erotic, birthing or nurturing body, excluded from playing the role of a subject who experiences and acts.'[24]

Through the voice of my time-travelling protagonist, I consciously intend to subvert these patriarchal structures, philosophies and treatments, shaping a new identity of the Eternal Feminine, demarginalising women's historical position and empowering them with other options. I have attempted to create a character who experiences and acts, at first under instruction, and finally, through her own agency.

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[20] Abraham, Susan. 2009. *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology: Shoulder to Shoulder*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 207.
[21] Oppel, Frances Nesbitt. 2005. *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 6-7, 16-17, 22 et passim.
[22] Gilbert, Sandra & Gubar, Susan. 1979 (2007). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination.* Connecticut: Yale University Press, 23.
[23] Gilbert, Sandra & Gubar, Susan. Ibid., 21.
[24] Bergoffen, Debra B. 2007. *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*. New York: State University of New York Press, 143-144.

The Archetypal Feminine

Philologists, psychologists and artists have defined the Archetypal Feminine over millennia in a myriad of different ways. Erich Neumann codifies the Archetypal Feminine in an array of strata; from the undifferentiated maternal uroboros to the collective unconscious of the Archetypal Feminine, embracing the elemental and transformative aspects of the Great Mother and the concept of the Anima – man's primordial image of woman, his biological expectation and a symbol of a man's feminine possibilities.[25]

My private studies and personal experiences of depth psychology over the past twenty years have given me a platform from which to investigate these aspects from a literary point of view and imagine them into the subtext of my novel. As a woman, for the sake of wholeness, I am tasked to integrate my Animus, the projection of all that is masculine in my feminine psyche. It could be argued that the Muses are one massive projection of the Feminine in my novel. These inversions add an extra dimension to my investigation as Wanda struggles to embrace the Feminine without simply projecting herself into her own contrasexuality, creating another myth of the Feminine as a composite of many of these factors.

The social system of matriarchy is also a consideration I have borne in mind in the writing of *Nømädnêss*. The very idea of a society or culture in which females hold primary power and moral authority has been asserted and negated throughout history. There is cultural evidence that matriarchy and Goddess worship were intertwined, a symbol of the unconscious origins of humankind, which have long been symbolised as Feminine.[26] Archeology and anthropology continue to unearth artefacts that attest to matriarchal predominance from antiquity[27] to the present day.[28] The novel reflects different aspects of the Feminine, from Wanda's discovery of the Terraphim, small clay idols representing Asherah, Consort of Yahweh[29], to her refusal to bear children as an inevitable female fate would dictate.

Jung speaks of myth as 'an elementary idea or archetype continuous with the whole history of man and thus capable of developing spontaneously, along traditional lines, wherever mankind lives, dreaming'.[30] In cross-referencing Jung's psychic interpretation with Blackburn's literary definition of the Picaro, I found the connection:

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[25] Neumann, Erich. 1963 (1955). *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
[26] Neumann, Ibid. A browse through the visual artefacts section in *The Great Mother* attests to the existence of goddesses and matriarchal societies throughout history. A full analysis thereof is beyond the scope of this essay.
[27] Gimbutas, Marija. 1991. *The Civilisation of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe.* San Francisco: Harper.
[28] Sanday, Peggy Reeves. 2002. *Women at the Centre: Life in a Modern Matriarchy.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
[29] Patai, Raphael. 1990 (1967). *The Hebrew Goddess.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
[30] Blackburn, Op. Cit., 6.

> The mythological archetype, cutting across boundaries of time and culture, functions to awake the sleeping consciousness to the profound mystery and order of the universe. The real function of literature in human affairs is to continue myth's ancient basic endeavor to create a meaningful place for man in a world oblivious to his presence.[31]

As with life, so with literature.

The Heroine's Journey

The notion of the Heroine's Journey is not without its paradoxes. Joseph Campbell, in studying world hero myths, claimed to identify the monomyth, a hypothesis that 'all storytelling, consciously or not, follows the ancient patterns of myth, occurring in every culture in every time'.[32] He codified this as the Hero's Journey, a structure he presented as having been followed by writers as far back as the Ancient Greek epic poets[33] to contemporary Hollywood blockbusters.[34]

In her response to Campbell's model, Maureen Murdock adapted and feminised Campbell's Hero's Journey into the 'Heroine's Journey', claiming that Campbell's thesis 'failed to address the specific psycho spiritual journey of contemporary women'.[35] Campbell's dismissive rebuttal thereof was to state that 'Women don't need to make the journey. In the whole mythological tradition the woman is there. All she has to do is realise that she's the place that people are trying to get to'.[36] His comments echo clearly the stereotypically imposed notions of passivity, receptiveness and lack of agency bound up with male perceptions of the feminine.

In more deeply understanding how these modes have operated historically, I was then free to subvert them by interweaving phases of the Heroine's Journey into the subtext, using Murdock's model of the Feminine Journey, comprising: separation (her departure from her original family), identification with the masculine (her sexual appetite), treading the road of trials over and over (the Muses' tasks), finding and then losing the boon of success (she often fails). Halfway through the book, concomitant with the Renaissance, Wanda awakens further to feelings of spirituality and death (in her case, mortality). In later episodes, Wanda is falsely initiated and descends into a

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[31] Blackburn, Op. Cit., 6.
[32] Campbell, Joseph. 2008 (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces: Collected Works of Joseph Campbell.* California: New World Library.
[33] Homer. 1980 (800BC). *The Odyssey.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[34] Higgs, John. 2015. 'The Hero's Journey: The idea you never knew had shaped 'Star Wars'' in *Salon*. Accessed at http://www.salon.com/2015/11/07/the_heros_journey_the_idea_you_never_knew_had_shaped_star_wars/; White, Brandon. 2014. 'The Da Vinci Code – Hero's Journey.' *Prezi.com*. Accessed at https://prezi.com/wph85rlld-qv/the-da-vinci-code-heros-journey/.
[35] Murdock, Maureen. 1990. *The Heroine's Journey. Women's Quest for Wholeness*. Maryland: Shambhala Publications.
[36] Murdock, Maureen. 'The Heroine's Journey.' in Leeming, David A. (ed). 2016. *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*. Accessed at http://www.maureenmurdock.com/articles/articles-the-heroines-journey/.

chthonic goddess state after which, yearning to reconnect with the Feminine, she attempts to heal the mother-daughter split, caused by her mother's indifference, and the inner wounded masculine, mirrored by Yahweh and her father's abandonment, by finding her musical voice and integrating her masculine and feminine selves into her own brand of Hieros Gamos, the alchemical union of opposites, and Jung's ultimate symbol of transformation.[37]

Kaler's definition of the Picara provided me with a core structure and positioning, both as reference and inspiration, especially in moments of self-doubt. By consciously channeling the Picaresque genre into my character, attitude and plotlines, I have attempted to fuse archetype, thematic and action. One of the elements of the Picara, though, that always bothered me, was the character's lack of empathy. Ultimately I found myself needing to transgress the very rules I had discovered – autonomy without empathy is a form of narcissism whereby the reader cannot relate to the character. Wanda had to grow; she had to care in order for the reader to care about her. By weaving the Heroine's Journey into the overarching plot, I hope to refine the notion of picarisma, 'the epitome of the picara's autonomous archetypal pattern of individualism.'[38]

Feminine or Feminism?

I initially had no intention of writing a feminist novel. However, as I wrote Wanda into being, her outrage for the patriarchy was unmistakable. Setting out in each episode according to the dictates of the Muses, Wanda blurs dichotomous boundaries to discover a new kind of autonomy beyond the classic, restrictive male construct, exercising her free will in a new paradigm of the Feminine. Even though many women have more rights than ever before, enshrined in Constitutions the world over, we have barely scratched the surface of our gender's liberation from the patriarchy[39].

Nømädnêss's position is largely congruent with Fourth Wave Feminism's combining 'politics, psychology and spirituality in an overarching vision of change'[40], evident in Wanda's character development in her quest for autonomy. I wanted Wanda to own her sex and her sexuality.

I had no idea to begin with that she would be erotically charged. As the writing progressed, though, Wanda made that decision for me. Given that transgressive

[37] Jung, Carl G. 2014 (1922). *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 5: Symbols of Transformation.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
[38] Kaler, Op. Cit., 5.
[39] Singh, Sejal. 2017. 'Missouri Votes to Let Employers Fire People Who Use Birth Control.' *Feministing.* Accessed at http://feministing.com/2017/06/21/missouri-votes-to-let-employers-fire-people-who-use-birth-control/.
[40] Diamond, Diana. 2009. 'The Fourth Wave of Feminism: Psychoanalytic Perspectives. Studies in Gender and Sexuality.' (Abstract). *Taylor & Francis Online*. Accessed at http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15240650903228187.

fiction 'is based on the premise that knowledge is to be found at the edge of experience and that the body is the site for gaining knowledge',[41] I realised that I was channeling this genre for my novel. As a woman, Wanda uses her body as a weapon, a lure, a ruse, a disguise, a way of being in the world – and of departing it. Given that I wanted to subvert the story of the Wandering Jew, she forced me to engage her in as much sexual transgression as I could invent. There is also something deliciously perverse about Wanda turning her female gaze upon men throughout the work. This is a central orientation of her character, ironising the idealisation of the male gaze[42] and giving her agency in the world.

It has taken me thirty-five years to prepare my writer's womb to carry this current child to full term; a novel that interrogates and celebrates the Feminine through the eyes of a Picaresque anti-Heroine, casting my character into the world to carry out the wishes of Simone de Beauvoir who said, almost seventy years ago:

> On the day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in her strength, not to escape herself but to find herself, not to abase herself but to assert herself – on that day love will become for her, as for a man a source of life and not of mortal danger.[43]

Antisemitism, Apartheid and Jewish Identity

Nømädnêss traces the antecedents of the human tendency to project their fears upon a scapegoat – the death of Christ, the Plague, economic hardship, war – and explores issues of gender, identity and exile in the ancient and modern worlds.

Ernst Simmel views antisemitism as a 'mass psychosis … characterised by a delusional denial of reality and uncontrolled destructive aggressions'.[44] Much of the activity of this phenomenon, he suggests, may be seen as 'an expression of real socioeconomic and political tensions … displaced onto the Jew as a vulnerable and easily identifiable target … prejudice is a by-product of specific situations and not simply a product of depraved and disturbed minds'.[45] Minorities have always been targets of hatred. It would seem that the 'other' is always a potential victim. This is Wanda's fate wherever she goes, forever in exile, forever 'other' – as Jew and as woman – encountering this quality of mind with both the victors and the vanquished.

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[41] Chun, Rene. 'Naked Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner.' *New York Times*. April 23, 1995, pp 49, 52. Quoted at http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/202/300/nwhq/NWHQ-l/WIRE/April/0078.html.
[42] Eaton, A.W. 2008. 'Feminist Philosophy of Art.' *Philosophy Compass. Wiley Online Library*. Accessed at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/wol1/doi/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2008.00154.x/full.
[43] De Beauvoir, Simone. *Cultural and Critical Theory Library*. Accessed at. http://criticaltheorylibrary.blogspot.co.za/2011/01/simone-de-beauvoir-quotes.html.
[44] Shain, Milton. 1998. *Antisemitism*. Cape Town: The Rustica Press Bowerdean Publishing Company Limited, 10-11.
[45] Ibid., 11.

I have used the word ‘detribalised’ to describe myself as a liberal-leaning, non-practicing Jew who would like to believe that I have no conscious prejudice against any racial group or individual. However, my categorisation as a so-called ‘European’ in apartheid South Africa, fingered me as part of some kind of ‘master race’, which must have affected me subconsciously in my teenage years and beyond. In drawing on my past experiences for material for this novel, I realise how strongly I have been influenced by the ethos of my tribe: I was always Jewish, even if I didn’t know it.

Growing up peripatetically as the child of ex-pat South Africans, always the stranger, always ‘other’, I was flung into apartheid South Africa at the age of thirteen, a whitey, a woman and a Jew. Having been raised in Britain and Australia, I knew nothing of Separate Development and xenophobia as the rule of law. Due to an accident of birth and a loophole in the immigration laws, I was deemed ‘European’, of the privileged White race, as opposed to non-European, meaning Black, Coloured or Asian.

I knew something was wrong. I had a sense that I was perceived and treated differently, but I couldn’t quite put my finger on the root of the problem. We’d had nannies in the UK; apple-cheeked country girls who slept under our roof, but state-sanctioned servitude was a novelty to me, considering I’d been the family housekeeper when they put my mother to sleep for six weeks when I was ten. I picked up a hint of the strange, shadowy figures who lurked behind our seder services in the kitchen, my granny’s summonsing bell on the dining room table, being called ‘Miss Lynn’ by a woman thrice my age. I didn’t see a township until I was twenty-five. Apartheid was a most efficacious system of oppression; it jailed us on both sides of the bars.

Ironically, it was Zionism that attempted to brainwash me. We were swearing allegiance to the Israeli flag on the night of the Soweto Riots. I was in an all-white-all-girls’ school where antisemitism thrived secretly among the teachers. I thought my righteous grandfather ran the universe.

Marrying young, into an ultra-Orthodox family, I was unceremoniously ‘sent to the back’ of the synagogue, a separation of the sexes and a diminution I’d never encountered in my left-leaning Reform shul adolescence. When I fell pregnant on honeymoon, I cried as if my life was over. I knew, at twenty, that there must be more to life, more to me than bearing my husband a child. I was destined to become a living example of Friedan’s ‘Feminine Mystique’,[46] the idea that women are naturally fulfilled by devoting their lives to being housewives and mothers.[47] There must be other ways to express creativity than the mere fulfillment of my biological destiny, I thought.

[46] Friedan, Betty. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
[47] Ibid. Even though this book was published in the late 1940s, the syndrome – that Friedan refers to as ‘the problem that has no name’ – was just as pertinent in the 1980s. Accessed at https://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/archive/reader/trial/directory/1959_1970/18_ndh.htm.

On entering the workforce, graduating from secretary to copywriter, I had the continual sense that I was being limited by the invisible 'glass ceiling' of the dominant zeitgeist that gave men economic prowess and priestly privilege. Stray salary slips provided the evidence of underpayment as compared to my lesser endowed male peers. There was a constant undertone, from boardroom to bimah, of having to fit in, dumb down, deaden my dreams for the higher cause of maintaining the status quo; marriage and procreation for God and Man.

Working and studying towards a B.A. through Unisa, I began to connect with seminal feminist writings that resonated with and shaped my mindset. I started to see the world through a feminist lens; fighting for fair wages, speaking out against absurd work restrictions, becoming unemployable in the conventional corporate sense due to my 'trouble-making' tendencies. I took much of this anger out on the Jews themselves, blaming the rules and laws of Our Jealous God for the restrictions, but it was a triple-edged sword; being raised in an apartheid state, my personal struggles seemed slight in the face of total onslaught.

I left South Africa after my divorce, with the intention to never return, and bungee jumped into the world without a parachute, experiencing life as I'd never dared to before. Traces of this can be seen in the treatment of the solo female traveller, the inversion of the male gaze, the perspective of life from an outsider's perspective.

On returning from this post-divorce overseas binge in the late eighties, South Africa was seemingly coming out of its own dark ages and entering its Renaissance. Nelson had been set free and so had I. I turned in my Green Card and focused my energies into the new RSA; penned a spate of radio series, children's stories and edgy cabarets and fronted an Afropop band. Then I discovered the blues and spent some years absorbing and performing a genre that had quite escaped my cultural attention. Blues led to jazz and I entered the Black underclass, attracted by the music, oblivious to my otherness as the only white girl in the village. I gatecrashed Kippies, Johannesburg's legendary jazz venue, presented myself at Dorkay House, where the forgotten ladies of jazz still congregated, gigged in dingy downtown clubs, brought my travels home. I'm not sure whether it was my race, my ethnicity or my sex that made me different – try being a woman in a jazz band. It was overwhelmingly male. It was exclusively Black. I gatecrashed onto the scene like an alien. The playing of dodgy gigs, the condescension of male musicians, the come-ons, the put-offs, the outsider status; all of this I forged in the crucible of my imagination to bring this book to life.

Music as Metaphor

> Music is intangible and ephemeral but it comes from the home world of the spirit and though so fleeting, it is recognised by the spirit as a soul speech fresh from the celestial realms, an echo from the home whence we are now

> exiled, and therefore it touches a cord in our being, regardless of whether we realise the true cause or not.[48]

These words from mystic Max Heidel echo the instinct I had to employ music as the dominant metaphor for Wanda's journey. From the start, I wanted to explore Wanda's evolution from talented idiot savant to musical sovereignty over herself. I had Wanda hail from a long line of female musicians where she was force-fed fake joy for the sake of appearances. In her first childhood she rejects music's spiritual and healing qualities, having had it shoved down her throat by an overbearing mother whose own voice was banned by the Priestly class.

On her accidental death and return to the Pleroma, a central premise drives Wanda's quest; the Muses have lost the Music of the Spheres, Musica Universalis – a medieval metaphysical ideal that regards proportions in the movements of celestial bodies as a form of Musica, creating orbital resonance.[49] The nine Muses, who are represented as confluent with the planets, modes and structure of Musica Universalis, task Wanda to retrieve a series of sacred sound symbols to reconstruct their agency – and hers – in the transcendent world. As she travels through the Ages, various musical motifs emerge, symbolised by the procession of string instruments over which she attempts to gain mastery. Whether or not she succeeds in each quest forms the impetus for each episode.

As we have no accurate concept of what ancient music sounded like – there were no recordings until the early Twentieth Century and we can only make a guess at the sound of early notation – I was at liberty to apply my own interpretations to a variety of different musical genres and instruments at Wanda's disposal. I narrowed down my choices from an infinite array of possibilities, selecting a range of chordophones with which Wanda interacts on her travels. This also helped in my choice of stories. I also played with the cultural peculiarities of Jewish secular, folk and religious music, the latter being considered Ervah – nakedness – the result being that females are traditionally forbidden to vocalise in orthodox synagogues as 'the singing voice of a woman is considered sensual and possibly stimulating to males.'[50] Wanda eschews these confines and consciously transgresses this prohibition throughout her lives; she must find her own feminine voice, even though it has been silenced for centuries.

On escaping her ordinary world – the realm of the shofar, a distinctly male preserve – she meets the Praetorian Cartaphilus, who offers her a glimpse into the transformative power of music and love. His Phorminx, an ancient iteration of the Kithara, becomes the symbol of her quest as the Muses task her eternal return to earth. Each episode

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[48] Heindel, Max. 2003. *The Rosicrucian Mysteries: An Elementary Exposition of their Secret Teachings.* (eBook).
[49] Glareanus, Hendricus 1496 (1547). 'Musica Practica.' Petrucci Music Library, International Music Score Library Project. Accessed at http://imslp.org/wiki/Dodecachordon (Glareanus%2C_Henricus).
[50] Weisberg, Chana. 'Why can't a male listen to a female singer?'. *Chabad.org.* Accessed at http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/478233/jewish/Why-cant-a-male-listen-to-a-female-singer.htm.

centres around the retrieval of a particular aspect of pluck; a Komuz carved from a refugee's dead son, the monotone twang of the Indian Ektar, smuggled silken strings of an Oriental Pipa Princess, the forbidden Devil's harmony sounded in a British Nunnery, a Languedoccian Lute, an Ottoman Saz, Rasputin's Balalaika, an anonymous Gypsy Jazz Guitar; each choice came to define the particular epoch through which Wanda travels, making meaning of her paradoxical quest as she is exposed to the universality and individuality of different musical symbols.

Sometimes the instruments pursue her through time; in Cremona, Italy, she poses for the prototype of the modern Guitar for none other than Stradivarius, only to rediscover it in the Twenty-first Century as war booty to a vile Countess who insists that the instrument be sold at auction. The Muse Terpsichore has lost her sacred plectrum to a Victorian nobleman and sends Wanda to Buckingham Palace for its return. I have also included the sub-text of the Lemba – a black Jewish tribe of Southern Africa – who make occasional appearances throughout the work, and finally emerge in the South African chapter, whence they have carried their sacred drum, their Ngoma, from their wanderings across the globe. Wanda finally carves her own string instrument from Arctic ice – a phenomenon that I had the privilege of witnessing in Norway in February, 2017 – allowing her a brief moment of spiritual respite where she finds her 'soul-speech'.

I counteract this profound theme via Wanda's own anachronistic musical interpretations; the refrain, 'Caliguleee … Caligula …' in the Zenobia episode, is aligned to the unmistakable strains of The Happy Wanderer, the first song I ever learned on the guitar. The jukebox silliness of 'Love Yurts' as a musical request on the Silk Road circa 1054, is inserted into the text for ironic effect. Wanda is able to fabricate her own alternative musical facts. In addition, I have referenced lyrics and musical genres from various ages; the love sonnets of Suleiman the Magnificent, the trobairitz ballads of Beatrice de Dia, as well as a spectrum of transliterated Hebrew prayers and Yiddish folk songs. I have a natural facility for rhyme, which I have employed in various verses, particularly in the Pleroma.

As a precocious musician myself, with total musical recall, I have explored my own path to virtuosity through Wanda's journey, applying my experience to literary fiction, from origins to fulfillment, in the cadence and rhythm of words. The process of composing and improvising music – which I've practiced for some years as a singer and jazz guitarist – is analogous to novel writing in that rhythm and melody, story and theme must complement and support each other for the piece to come into its own. It has not been my intention to give music lessons to my reader or to explain the way music created the Western notion of time through the Liturgy of the Hours; each instrument Wanda discovers has its own story to tell, transforming the metaphor of music into language.

Humour & Satire

Jewish humour has always 'snickered in the face of authority'.[51] From the biblical Sarah's ironic guffaw[52] at the notion that she will conceive a child in her dotage, 'her laughter is, in effect, a minor rebellion against god.'[53] Wanda's entire journey could be summed up thus; even though she has a sense of faith, she is continually subverting the notion of a monotheistic deity to suit her own devices. This produces a comic and even blasphemous effect akin to what Freud defines when 'the conscious allows the expression of thoughts that society usually suppresses or forbids.'[54]

Humour and irony have always been embedded in the tribe that inhabits my DNA. No joke can make its mark unless preceded by a 'whole megilla', exaggerating the story for the sake of an unexpected punch line. It was how I survived the outrageous misfortune of my family fate. Words must amuse. The turning of the 'joke's on me' to the 'joke's on us all' drives my passion to storytelling that takes deadly serious material and treats it with the lightest touch, creating a character with anachronistic unrecognisable incongruities that have a comic effect, all the more so for being out of historical context. One way of satirising the follies of humankind is to invent a different reality, a myth that by its very telling is ironic.

As a Jewish female, I have a congenital predisposition towards self-scapegoating (I'll get in first!), 'a coping mechanism for all the worst afflictions faced by the Jewish people'[55], which leads to self-irony and self-satire. My protagonist's tales embody and reflect these personality traits, juxtaposing the fantastic and the banal to shine a light on the unconscious hypocrisy that emanates from our human condition. And the large, hearty human soup to which we all return.

> Satire is a genre of literature in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, corporations, government or society itself, into improvement.[56]

In times of disruption and discontent there is a lens through which satirical writers focus their social bite. By utilising satire, by ironising society in the stories of the cycle, Wanda holds up to society the mirror of its own folly. Given the world of alternative facts in which we are now living, words and phrases from the modern world have been slipped into the narrative to indicate to the reader that this entire story is a satirical commentary on the modern world.

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[51] 'What is Jewish Humor?' in *My Jewish Learning*. Accessed at http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/what-is-jewish-humor/.
[52] The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible: Op. Cit., Genesis 18:12.
[53] 'What is Jewish Humor?' Op. Cit.
[54] Laurie, Timothy & Hickey-Moody, Anna (2017). *Masculinity and Ridicule*: Accessed at https://www.academia.edu/31232852/Masculinity_and_Ridicule_2017_
[55] 'What is Jewish Humor?', Op. Cit.
[56] Elliott, Robert C. 2004. 'The Nature of Satire.' *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Accessed at https://www.britannica.com/art/satire.

The way I have embedded the themes of otherness have been dealt with through satire and humour, creating Wanda's exuberant style of commenting on the folly of the human race as seen through Wanda's eyes. As a wandering Jew myself, I have absorbed the traits of Jewish humour through my pores. And because irony often arises by a juxtaposition of the unexpected, the work is satirical in nature.

Writerly Concerns

The Creative Process

I began with a voice. The voice of Wanda, self-assured, self-opinionated, dazzling me with her anachronistic wit. As she emerged, I dialogued with her incessantly, placing her in the Pleroma to whisper out loud. Over time, a kind of doppelganger effect began to kick in. I started to think her thoughts, to speak in her voice, dare in her derring-do. The writerly task of bringing a character into being entails the idea that 'to understand just one life you have to swallow the world'.[57] I had to create Wanda's inner being before I could expose her to the outside world of action. I have written a novel's worth of backstory to find out exactly who she is, how she thinks, what she wants. I realised that no matter where she goes, Wanda brings her weltanschauung to bear upon her circumstances, remaining a consistent character throughout, even though we never know exactly how she will act or react. I trusted in her voice and her curiosity. I placed her into scenarios and she engaged with me on screen. My first reflective essay submission was, in fact, written by Wanda, an idea that makes me cringe in retrospect due to the lack of academic objectivity, but something I needed to try in order to tease out her imaginary trajectory.

Then I discovered the Muses and narrowed down my mythological structure, returning Wanda to the Pleroma between lives to, literally, muse over her voyage and receive instructions for her following adventure. The Music of the Spheres seemed to be an appropriate symbol for her quest. Once I'd committed to the Muses, the tricks of magic realism found their place in the Pleroma, giving Wanda a gaggle of goddesses with which to interact. Thus was the framing narrative formed.

I found it preferable to recreate Wanda in ancient settings, inventing fresh literary interpretations of the characters she encounters. Zenobia, circa 272AD, for example, is rumoured to have been 'not indifferent to the Jewish population of Palmyra, and fostered good relations with the Jews of Antioch and Alexandra'.[58] Wanda becomes her sex slave but is helpless to stop her nemesis from erasing her from the record. In the Sixteenth Century, Beatriz de Luna was one of the most successful Jewish

[57] Rushdie, Salman. 2006 (1981). *Midnight's Children*. USA. Penguin. Accessed at http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/135395-who-what-am-i-my-answer-i-am-everyone-everything.
[58] Southern, Pat. *Empress Zenobia: Palmyra's Rebel Queen.* (eBook) London: Bloomsbury.

businesswomen and financiers of the diasporic Ottoman Empire, but I was loathe to make her Beatriz herself; instead, Wanda serves as fixer to the harem and Beatriz becomes her benefactor. As she segues into the Ashkenazi world, she encounters life in St. Petersburg, London, New York City and Norway. Anachronistically, this identity is prefigured in her previous adventures, taking liberties with her eternal wandering status and Jewish identity.

Moving into the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, I had many 'Wanda sightings', discovering women in history whose identity she could assume, but as the writing advanced, I found that she needed to remain distinctly herself. She meets Fanny Mendelssohn, sister of Felix, whose works were never published in her lifetime, the wife of Stradivarius whose chief function was to produce progeny, Maya Deren, avant-garde filmmaker who rose to fame for a brief moment and disappeared into drug-addled oblivion, all of whom become adversaries or companions to Wanda's adventures.

In researching my backstories, I came across an obscure novel with an almost identical premise to mine[59]; the tale of Salome as Wandering Jewess through the ages, written by a man who had been jailed in the United States for fascist and antisemitic activities during the Second World War.[60] This discovery intimidated me for some time, as I felt I was plagiarising Viereck's work. I was reassured, however, by T.S. Eliot's dictum that claims that novelty is possible only through tapping into tradition and that a new work 'alters the cohesion of this existing order and causes a readjustment of the old to accommodate the new. What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it.'[61]

South Africa: The Missing Chapter

My personal experience of politics and culture have had a significant bearing on the writing of *Nømädnêss*. Much as I came to eschew the idea of memoir, many aspects of Wanda's adventures contain echoes of my life and travels, transformed into fiction. I made creative decisions in my writing based on antisemitic incidents from the time of Christ to modern times, grafted with my own experience as 'other'. I was spoilt for choice; Jews have been blamed for everything from droughts to dead babies. I tried out many scenarios and worked on chapters that resonated with Wanda's wanderings.

[59] Viereck, George S. & Eldridge, Paul. 2007 (1930). *Salome the Wandering Jewess: My First Two Thousand Years of Love.* Eastborne: Wildside Books.
[60] Carlson, John R. 1943. *Under Cover*. Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company,
[61] Eliot, T.S. 1919 (1921). 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. Accessed at http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html.

Owing to the change of direction in the storytelling, I eschewed the notion of memoir, and was loathe to include a South African chapter, deeming it too subjective. Towards the end of my second draft, however, I was compelled to include an episode set in my adopted hometown, Johannesburg, in the time of Nelson Mandela, the Messiah who was supposed to lead our nation to the Promised Land. Through my research, I stumbled upon the Lemba, a tribe of black Jews living in Limpopo, who carried the lost Ark of the Covenant in the form of a sacred drum from ancient Israel, via Ethiopia and Yemen, to southern Africa. A eureka moment occurred when I read that the DNA of Lemba males has been scientifically proven to carry the Cohen Modal Haplotype, linking their genetics to the Cohen Priestly caste.[62] This became a way to connect the present with the distant past, as Wanda herself has descended from this selfsame tribe. In this way, I could bring in the experiment with South African identity, race and culture, bringing the story closer to home.

Novel Structure

As a copywriter for over three decades, I am steeped in the tradition of branded content storytelling for radio, structured in a specific order to meet the demands of the client; story arc, storylines, script, production, dispatch. During the MA Creative Writing course I chose to experiment, breaking the linearity of this process. I wanted the process to guide me. I discovered that I write fiction non-sequentially, giving a stream of consciousness to my character that I would never dare in the fast turnover realm of advertising. The labyrinthine process was not without its pitfalls, causing confusion in readers' minds, events lacking resolution, sidetracks that led to dead ends. I trusted my instincts throughout the process, though, gathering my own rules as I evolved the work, conflating historical synchronicities of the earth-bound tales. By the time I started on the second draft, eight months before final submission, I had settled on the following key framing points to which I made constant reference:

- Every time Wanda returns to the Pleroma, she has to bring a boon. The boon is something to do with music;
- She meets her end at the end of each episode. The circumstances of her death sometimes have an influence on how she appears in the Pleroma;
- Enlarge Wanda's narration by having her eavesdrop and increase dialogue, creating stories within the stories;
- The Muses have control over Wanda at first, but she eventually makes her own choices as her consciousness slowly evolves towards transcendence;
- The trajectory of the story arc mimics the evolution of human consciousness and the creative process.

[62] Parfitt, Tudor. 2009. *The Lost Ark of the Covenant: The Remarkable Quest for the Legendary Ark*. Harper Collins.

Once I had created these rules, I was also free to break them by interweaving phases of the Heroine's Journey into the subtext, imitating and subverting Murdock's model.

Story and Plot

During my second draft of the novel I came to understand the subtle difference between story and plot. According to E.M. Forster, 'a plot cannot be told to a gaping audience of cave men or to a tyrannical sultan or to their modern descendant, the movie public. They can only be kept awake by 'and then – and then –'. They can only supply curiosity. But a plot demands intelligence and memory also.'[63] I was ever mindful of the difficulty of plot and will likely require another few drafts before being satisfied that I have not created Wanda as a wise-cracking Bond girl. At times, it was beyond my conscious control; the more I wrote, the more outrageous she became, the more sex she wanted, the more life she desired. My greatest writing discovery is this; character informs plot; but without it, there is no story.

Oscar Wilde has one of his characters state that 'memory is the diary that we all carry about with us'.[64] Part of Wanda's personality is to have recall of her past; this is what makes her human. In the first episode she has only the experience of her immediate circumstances. With every adventure, however, her memories span a greater and greater period, until she can stitch her identity together from the fragmented fabric of her multiple lives.

Research and Verisimilitude

Never again will I write my first novel. Or underestimate the sheer volume of information I have had to absorb and apply over a very short period of time. Had I comprehended the enormity of this task, I might have stuck to my original plan of writing an adolescent memoir, a portrait of the writer as an Ugly Duckling. Once this transformed into fiction, there was a more complex story to be told.

In my proposal, I stated my intention to give Wanda a 'cybercyde', her own private Internet, to get her historical bearings and have some knowledge – or alternative facts – of the epoch into which she was being inserted. That was before the Muses made their appearance as Pleromic entities and took over that role, metaphorically. Besides, the existence of another alternative world in the novel proved too confusing. It was only after a year of Wanda's musings that I realised it was for me, the writer, to harness the power of the 'cybercyde' for myself.

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[63] Forster, E.M. 1927. *Aspects of the Novel*. New York: Rosetta Books, 86.
[64] Wilde, Oscar. 1895. *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*, Act II. (eBook)

I researched voraciously online, purchasing books – real and virtual – downloading one link after another, until I had amassed a fragmented collage of cultural quirks pertaining to each era. I gathered references of a multitude of ages, from ancient instruments to Zeugma mosaics, silk-making to Silk Road routes; attitudes towards Jews. With layers of experimentation, the chapters took their place. For the first draft class submissions, I let my imagination take me where Wanda wanted. In draft two I committed to my choices and edited each epoch into place and time.

Contemporary news also fuelled Wanda's voyage. At a point, everything I saw, ate, heard or touched was infused with 'What would Wanda do?' It was only through sitting down and writing that I could begin to answer those questions. Synchronicities started to happen all the time. In ancient Palmyra, I cast Zenobia as Wanda's lesbian Empress. In Russia, I gave her Rasputin with love. I swapped Robin Hood with Rambeaux de Villiers because the Languedoc was where it was at, musically. I often wrote clues into the story to follow up in subsequent drafts.

Of the thirteen chapters submitted, I have been to around half of the cities and imagined the others with details culled from my extensive online and library investigations. The final chapter is set in Norway, a country I had never previously visited, and it was instructive to have written half of this chapter from my imaginings, then visit the actual Ice Music Festival in Geilo, and complete the chapter on my return. The sensual detail of an element such as the weather had a significant effect on the writing. It is my wish to visit the cities I have not yet seen; St. Petersburg, Magao, Cremona, Palmyra, and conduct further research in the cities I have passed through in my extensive travels; Jerusalem, London, St. Albans, Istanbul, New York.

Outtakes: The Women I Left Behind

I always knew I wanted Wanda to reincarnate through the Ages. I had a myriad of choices in the women throughout history whose voices have been muted. At one point I toyed with her being a poodle or a parrot – without a constant companion it is challenging to give more than the protagonist's subjective perspective. At first, I had Wanda embody into existing bodies, giving her the possibility to be anything. Given the fragmented state of the composition, however, I had to stay true to Wanda's voice.

In discovering synchronicities in the historical epochs I choose – which often felt as if the character herself was making these selections – I wrote between twenty and thirty first drafts of the different eras. I had the bold ambition of doing an episode every hundred years, but this would have taken me the same amount of time to write.

I began many chapters, some stillborn, some still to be nurtured, featuring an array of female Jewish artists and cultural icons; Diane Arbus, the legendary photographer, Roslin Franklin, discoverer of the structure of DNA, Alice Herz Sommer, pianist and

concentration camp survivor, Maria the Jewess, the first alchemist, and many other women who did not make it into the mainstream, or my final submission. The closer I came to the present day, the more these 'Wanda sightings' suggested themselves. Given that I wanted to spread the episodes across a two thousand year period, I had to make incisive editorial decisions and remove writing that did not fit into the eventual structure. I may write an 'interquel' later, featuring some of these forgotten women.

Wanda's Vocabulary and Glossary

Wanda's language is full of anachronisms, culled from her various incarnations, inserted into the text from the start as Wanda is writing from the present day. I have created a vocabulary all her own, a mixture of modified Yiddish, nonce words malapropisms, and misheard phrases picked up on her journeys. I have tried to be consistent with regard to her erotic slang, particularly in regard to body parts, such as 'pomegranate' to refer to her genitals, 'fig'[65] instead of 'fuck' and with reference the male organ, 'schmekel', a diminutive of 'schmuk'. This produces a comic effect and develops the reader's familiarity with her personal slang. I also made the decision never to place the word 'Jew' into the text. She calls her tribe the Yiddels, using the Yiddish spelling. This indicates Wanda's perpetual self-ironisation.

In the beginning, I inserted footnotes for words and phrases with which the modern reader may not be familiar. This presented me with a sub-text, which tended to distract from the narrative flow. I removed these in their entirety for the second draft, convinced that the intelligent reader would comprehend the substitution, look up historical terms and build her vocabulary as the episodes accumulated. The text assumes that the reader can follow Wanda's linguistic peculiarities and appropriated verbal engagements. I do intend to include a glossary of these words at the end of the novel in a future draft in the manner of *A Clockwork Orange*.[66]

Creative Synergies

As obsessed as I became with the writing process, Wanda's story has also evolved in different mediums. During my extensive research, I gathered visual images of each era; modes of transport, historical personages, fashion, food, exterminations, deportations, political and planetary occurrences. These images accompanied each submission to give visual context to each epoch and differentiate each story. In the latter part of the writing phase, I collaged these images into thirteen different circular polystyrene cake boards. They may or may not accompany the manuscript. I include a couple of examples to show the development of the imagery.

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[65] Mailer, Norman. 1948. *The Naked and the Dead.* New York: Rinehart & Company. The use of 'fig' references Mailer's choice to employ the euphemism 'fug' in lieu of 'fuck' in his novel.
[66] Burgess, Anthony. 1995 (1962). *A Clockwork Orange*. New York: W.W. Norton.

As a guitarist and singer, I took queries to my teacher and worked through the different musical styles of the Ages. I had a bespoke guitar made for me by a South African luthier and have a vestigial collection of songs, one per chapter, which will be further developed for possible multimedia exploration at a later stage. I have drawn Wanda a number of times, basing her image on the Gypsy Girl Mosaic, another unearthed artefact from the shores of the Euphrates. I have created symbols of the Muses in clay. I have several journals replete with storyboards and large multicoloured diagrams mapping out themes, instruments, storylines and sundry plot devices.

This kind of childlike play has permitted me the space to ponder – a form of creative meditation – and return to the writing with renewed focus and faith. These extra-curricular activities have helped me to connect my conscious and unconscious creative processes. Returning to future drafts, these images and sounds continue to guide me back to the writing.

Ironically, I found it literally impossible to listen to music during the writing process. I had to work in absolute silence to hear Wanda's voice.

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