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“The pale trees shook, although no wind blew, and it seemed to Tristran that they shook in anger”:

“blind space” and ecofeminism in a post-colonial reading of Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess’s graphic novel *Stardust* (1998)

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Abstract: This article calls on two branches of third-wave feminist theory – ecofeminism and post-colonial feminism – to investigate human and non-human interrelations in Neil Gaiman’s young adult graphic novel, Stardust, illustrated by Charles Vess. Stardust follows Tristran Thorn on his journey into the land of Faerie in his attempt to capture and bring back a fallen star. Faerie is both a natural and exotic space and Tristran’s journey “to the East” transposes an Orientalist aesthetic onto its wild geography. Tristran, as would-be coloniser, views Faerie as a place of potentially inexhaustible natural resources. The star – as the imperialistic goal – is in fact a woman, which endows the wild space with further Oriental tropes, rendering it sensual, feminine and embodied. Tristran’s imperialistic impulse is thus associated with both a cultural impulse towards the domination of nature and a patriarchal impulse towards the oppression of women.

Tristran’s increasing recognition of the star’s right to a fully realised selfhood sits uncomfortably with his initial imperialistic ambitions. As the novel progresses, the East becomes not, as it has been, a natural world ripe for colonial exploration and exploitation, but a place of positive intersubjective relations between humans and non-human nature. Initially both a real and illusory textual space resembling Edward Said’s “imaginative geography,” Faerie ultimately becomes a space to call “home,” in an overt critique of the nineteenth century boy’s adventure story with its implicit glorification of empire. Thus, it is argued, Stardust’s ecofeminist counter-discourse calls for mutual equality in man’s relationship with both women and the environment, positing anthropocentric and androcentric thinking as in need of re-evaluation.

Keywords: Neil Gaiman, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, orientalism, imperialism, post-colonialism, nature, indigenous peoples, graphic novels.

Introduction: The culture/nature dichotomy

Forever on the periphery of the possible, the border, the boundary, and the frame are always at issue – and their location and status inevitably raise the problematic of inside and outside and how to distinguish one from the other.

(Mae G. Henderson 1995, 1)

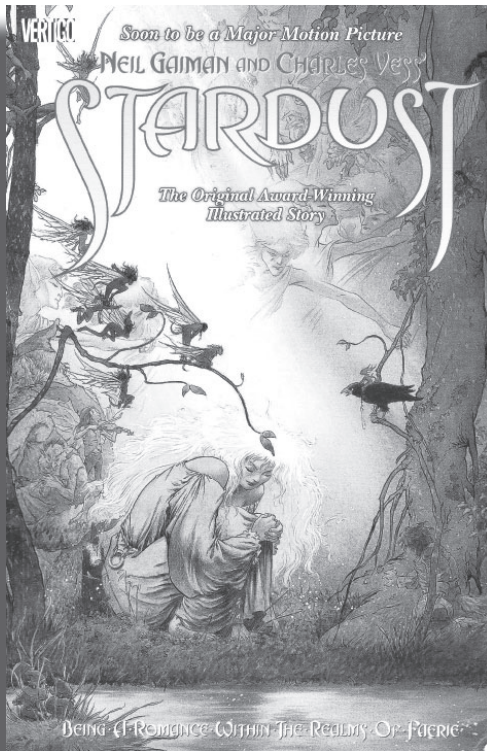
The clear delineation of an outside from an inside in portrayals of the environment is the subject of much ecocritical interrogation. In the representation of settler colonies, Paul Carter notes that the frontier consists of “a line” that relegates the natural world to the position of the outside: “[inside] the line,” he notes, “is culture; beyond it, nature” (Carter 1987, 158). Such a dichotomy, according to David Mazel, renders environmental discourse political since it enforces discrimination between a centre and its margins and thus “genders and potentially racialises the environment” (Mazel 1996, 142). Clare Bradford echoes the claim that the environment is implicitly racialised by noting that the “politics of spatiality” are “shaped by cultural traditions steeped in the ideologies, beliefs, and practices of imperialism” (Bradford 2007, 169). For the purposes of this paper, I shall term the outside space to which nature and native peoples are relegated a “blind space” since it exists outside of culturally imposed reference frames. Blind space is here used to denote a space both out of sight and out of mind: a space to which the cultural majority either wittingly, or unwittingly, turns a blind eye (Curry 2010).

A gendered and racialised environment is essentially an embodied one. Embodiment – the acknowledgement that “subjectivity and identity emerge not from disembodied consciousness, but from the experience of acting through – and on – the physical, visceral and mortal vehicle of the body” (Bakker and Bridge 2006, 15) – is key to feminist readings of the environment. Whilst women have been associated historically with the “physical, visceral and mortal,” rather than the abstract and ethereal, the Earth’s fragile physicality is that which provides the impetus for much modern ecocritical re-appraisal. A foundational ecofeminist premise is that cultural domination of the natural world can be compared to, and inform readings of, man’s historical oppression of women, and vice versa (Shiva 1989; Silliman & King 1999; Plumwood 2001). Post-colonialism – as implied in my earlier reference to settler colonies – and ecofeminism together create a dialogue that centres on the dual implications of embodiment and

belonging in a world divided into the human and nonhuman: an inside and an outside. In such a comparison, nature is akin to both the oppressed female and the colonised country.

The implications of such a division for subjectivity are a recurrent preoccupation in the works of trans-Atlantic author Neil Gaiman, whose crossover fantasies, such as *Stardust* and *The graveyard book*, have both a child and adult readership. From his deep knowledge of fantasy traditions, folklore and popular culture, Gaiman works in many genres, and a single concept, such as *Stardust*, has appeared as a novel, graphic novel and film. With motifs of quest, exile and return, and parent-child separation occurring throughout Gaiman's oeuvre, the culturally instituted blind space outside of any given frame is frequently invoked. In the graphic novel version of *Stardust*, produced in collaboration with Charles Vess and subtitled: *Being a Romance Within the Realms of Faerie*, such an inside-outside demarcation is made between the human world, of which the village of Wall marks the border, and the titular Faerie world. This latter world is posited as a natural space in contrast to the urbanised (albeit provincial) human world. Not only is Faerie wild, but also savage, primitive and exotic, in a clear allusion to the Oriental "imaginative geography" that Said famously designates a product of colonialist discourse (Said 1995 (1978), 71).

Set in the heyday of the British Empire, *Stardust* pits the imaginative space of Faerie against the conservative space of Victorian England, in which the text's young protagonist, Tristran Thorn, is raised. Tristran's journey into the space of Faerie to bring back a fallen star situates the novel in the tradition of the nineteenth century boy's adventure story, a genre that emerged with imperialism and which relied on an inside-outside demarcation that posited the indigenous natives as inherently inferior to the colonialist explorers (Green 1979, Butts 1992, Shaddock 1997). Nature receives implicit racialisation when Tristran leaves the village in order to undertake his colonialist mission and in so doing posits Faerie as a conquerable space of exploitable natural resources. Furthermore, nature is embodied as female when Tristran discovers that the non-human entity of the star is in fact a woman named Yvaine. Yvaine's strongly counter-hegemonic voice, speaking up on behalf of the colonised, the nonhuman and the female, serves to gradually subvert Tristran's initial colonialist and patriarchal intentions. Through tempering colonialist discourse with growing ecofeminist awareness, Gaiman and Vess thus render *Stardust* a politically aware exploration in ecopoiesis.



Cover from *Stardust* by Neil Gaiman text and Charles Vess illustrations. New York: DC Comics, 1998

Victorian England: an imperialist aesthetic

As Michael J. McDowell wryly notes in an analysis of the imposed values placed on the environment in historical depictions:

“Most of the early European ‘discoverers’ and later explorers of the American landscape found what they expected to find: Asians, or a howling wilderness, or an abundance of natural resources waiting to be exploited.” (McDowell 1996, 386)

Nature – as seen in the easy jump McDowell makes from explorer to exploiter – lends itself to post-colonial analysis, and the text’s reproduction of colonial discourse in its rendering of the villagers’ attitudes towards both the wider world and the natural space of Faerie foregrounds the novel’s purposeful implementation of imperialistic and patriarchal reference frames.

The superiority and suspicion with which the villagers of Wall view Faerie is analogous to that which they direct to “furriners” of all kinds (Gaiman & Vess 1998, 14). In Vess’s depiction of the depiction of the Faerie market in which Tristran’s English father, Dunstan, is to meet Tristran’s Faerie mother, Lady Una, the scene is infused with oriental imagery. A double page spread (20–21) shows a bustling, crowded woodland clearing with large red tents strung up between trees. A black and gold design edges the borders of the tents’ canvases like the body of a Chinese dragon, a likeness that is enhanced by the frayed edges of the material flowing outwards in the wind as if alive. There are Faerie characters with slanted eyes and flat-topped hats, from which single black plaits emerge, replicating the favoured hairstyle of ancient Chinese emperors. Sweeping curves and warm colours complement the natural lines and hues of the wooded enclosure. Faerie is both a natural space and an exotic space, in stark contrast to the austere lines and muted colours of the village of Wall.

Lady Una performs the duties of Madame Semele's slave girl, and through her the text alludes to a further colonial trope: the enslavement of indigenous populations at the hands of the Empire. Her appearance instantly calls to mind the prototypical portrayal of the Oriental female: the girl has "white teeth in a dusky face," "curly black hair" and an "intoxicating, magical" scent (23, 25). Dunstan's brief contact with her at the market leaves him "dazed," "confused" and "bespelled", in the words of the disapproving villagers (26). Not only is Lady Una exotic in appearance, but also seductive in behaviour, her curving, yielding femininity contrasting with Dunstan's upright stance in Vess's accompanying illustrations (23). Their lovemaking takes place in a natural setting, framed pictorially by tree trunks, soft grass and twinkling stars (33). "[G]uiding him with her hand," Una is the sensuous, seductive, dark and exotic oriental female (32). Although she is treated with some sympathy in the text, Una's leading role in the seduction of Dunstan and his (rather than her) subsequent loss of innocence - leaving him "dazed and alone" - posit the Faerie woman as sexually knowing to the point of impropriety, an association that the text replicates in other Faerie characters such as the Stormhold brothers and the Lilim sisters, who are all dark, unknowable and dangerous to the extreme (32).

As the product of a mixed-race union, Tristran grows up to be a man of enculturated Victorian standards whilst his "strange, guilty fantasies" recall his Oriental origins (40). Having fallen in love with Victoria Forester, the village beauty, at the age of seventeen, Tristran appears to have internalised such an Oriental heritage since his extravagant promises fully exemplify Said's Orientalist discourse:

"I would go to India for you, Victoria Forester, and bring you the tusks of elephants, and pearls as big as your thumb, and rubies the size of wren's eggs.

"I would go to Africa, and bring you diamonds the size of cricket balls. I would find the source of the Nile, and name it after you... [.]

"I would travel to far Cathay for you, and bring you a huge junk I would capture from the king of the pirates, laden with jade and silk and opium." (45)

Gaiman's quiet mockery of Tristran's grand Romantic pretensions adds humour when Tristran recognises opium only as "[s]omething in cough mixture" (to which Victoria responds "[i]t does not sound particularly romantic" (46)), yet it also serves to prepare the reader for the later subversion of such colonising discourse by rendering

it as ideologically inappropriate as Tristran's whimsical wooing of Victoria in light of her obvious indifference. The natural blind space – the outside to Wall's inside – is here posited as both a real and illusory textual space and a projection of unfulfilled desires, since India, Africa and "far Cathay," in Tristran's conception, take on as fantastical a status as Faerie.

Victoria herself (as her name suggests) is a true product of Victorian England, not simply "the most beautiful girl in the British Isles" but – according to Tristran – the "most beautiful girl in the entire British Empire" (38). Vess gives her a pictorial introduction by showing her as the subject of a painting, set inside an ornate gold-leaf frame (38). Victoria is obviously meant to adorn a man's arm, as her painting is meant to adorn someone's writing desk. With her "heart-shaped" face and "perfectly shaped" lips, she is a subject fit to be framed both within the ethereal realm of fine art and within a patriarchal conception of feminine beauty (38). As a trophy of the British Empire, she firmly belongs within the confines of real Victorian England, framed – and entrapped – within her role as wife-to-be and without the capacity, or the desire, to move out of frame as Tristran himself is destined to do.

With an Orientalist discourse shaping and informing both Tristran's perception of the world and the text's construction of all that lies "beyond the fields we know," it is no coincidence that the star that Tristran grandly promises to bring back to Victoria falls to the East (51). Tristran's "urgent business, to the East" transposes an Orientalist aesthetic onto the imaginative geography of Faerie (47). Tristran's determination to plunder the fallen star in order to win Victoria's esteem echoes the imperialistic impulse for material gain and profit. Thus, venturing into Faerie as a would-be coloniser, Tristran posits the blind space as materially exploitable. If Tristran's point of cross-over at the gap in the wall signals a move out of frame, it is this culturally-constructed imperialistic frame of reference that, the text suggests, must needs be breached. Such a necessary reframing is indicated in the illustrations to the text. Between Tristran's exit from the village and entry into Faerie, a full page is left blank except for the image of Tristran walking beyond the wall (repeated from the page before but now drawn only in outline) (53). The white page acts as a border between the two heterogeneous spaces of Victorian England and Faerie, pre-empting a re-appraisal of both expectations and attitudes. In crossing into Faerie, Tristran truly enters a blind space.

Contrary to rationalisation, Faerie is an infinitely extendable space outside of Wall's limited coordinates, unable to be mapped, plotted or contained within human frames of reference:

Faerie is bigger than England, as it is bigger than the world (for, since the dawn of time, each land that has been forced off the map by explorers and the brave going out and proving it wasn't there has taken refuge in Faerie; so it is now, by the time that we come to write of it, a most huge place indeed, containing every manner of landscape and terrain). (61)

The imperialistic impulse is here posited as both short-sighted and lacking in imagination, forcing Faerie "off the map" rather than into the consciousnesses of "explorers and the brave". Tristran's supernatural knowledge of directions and distances within this formless space foregrounds a further colonialist preoccupation: territorial dominance through Western scientific endeavours to qualify and quantify indigenous lands.

Tristran's interaction with Faerie further demonstrates the tendency of the imperial explorer to posit the colonial other as not fully human. The "little hairy man" whom Tristran meets when he enters Faerie – "if man he was, which Tristran found rather unlikely" – is an example of such (72). In the tradition of the noble savage, the little man's value lies more in his function than in his person since he performs a common role in colonial fiction: the native guide for the coloniser in his journeying through the unfamiliar wilderness of the colonised country. He also uncannily imitates the Jungian "shadow" figure that Ursula Le Guin describes as "inferior, primitive, awkward, animallike, childlike...dark and hairy and unseemly" (Le Guin, 1980, 65). As a representation of the dark unconscious, the "shadow" is a "guide on the journey to self-knowledge, to adulthood, to the light" – the other against which the self can be defined – and hence a figure that plays a recognisable function in the Oriental aesthetic (Le Guin, 1980, 66).

With Tristran's discovery that the star, the colonial prize, is "a lady" (103), Yvaine is designated a material possession with a "cold chain binding wrist to wrist" (121). She is given no freedom to direct her fate, objectified by the needs and desires of Tristran's imperialistic impulse. Bruised, earth-bound and with a broken leg, Yvaine's lack of agency is manifested in her physical immobility. When riding in Madame Semele's caravan, she quite literally becomes invisible as a result of the witch-queen's curse and its ruling that Madame Semele will be "unable to see the star, unable to perceive it, unable to touch it, to taste it, to find it, to kill it" (116). Yet if Yvaine lacks visibility, she does not lack voice. The string of insults she hurls at Tristran throughout the first part of their journey is testament to the text's emerging anti-imperialistic counter-discourse, one which

only becomes possible through the gradual emergence of a strong ecological voice in relation to the initially silent and misperceived natural space of Faerie.

Faerie: an ecofeminist counter-discourse

Through the character of Yvaine – the daughter of the moon and hence an entirely natural being – Tristran's imperialistic impulse reveals itself to be an impulse towards the colonisation of nature itself. Yvaine's intense empathy with suffering creatures, such as the fighting unicorn and the bird enchained by Madame Semele (who is Lady Una under a spell), posits her as a spokeswoman for distressed and dominated nature. Viewed from an ecofeminist perspective, Tristran's initial behaviour and intentions toward Yvaine replicate humanity's callous and domineering treatment of the environment. Tristran's increasing recognition of Yvaine's subjectivity as the novel progresses serves as a validation, therefore, of intersubjective relations between humans and the natural world.

Yet nature, in this novel, is deceitful: it offers both beauty and brutality to the unwary explorer. Often allegorical in function, nature in Faerie echoes the desires, attitudes and propensities of its inhabitants. The male heirs to the throne of Stormhold – tall, aquiline and crow-like – inhabit the mountainous crags of Mount Huon, whose tower perches on a phallic peak that “raked the sky like the ornately carved tusk of some great, grey, granite beast” (54). The final undoing of the brothers, in fact, is configured as a form of emasculation that critiques the cruel, to the point of murderous, masculine pride that has so far driven the brothers in their race for the throne. Of the three remaining living brothers, one is poisoned with wine provided as a “restorative and stiffener” for his flaccid male organ (““We can have him upstanding again in a twinkling,’ she said”) yet proves a different type of stiffener altogether (86). The second is killed by the witch-queen who penetrates his flesh with the “longest of the knives,” a phallic implement that renders Primus' own “short-sword” inadequate (145). The third and final brother is also killed by the witch-queen who this time wields a further symbol of masculine potency: a snake whose “fangs s[i]nk deep” into his flesh (179). In a world in which the throne can only be passed down through the male bloodline, these emasculations subtly critique the patriarchal impulse that is so frequently elided with the colonialist impulse, and which is to be further interrogated in Tristran's behaviour towards Yvaine.

Nature's allegorical role in relation to the witch-queen, eldest of the Lilim, is equally telling. Appropriating the youthful body of a seductress, the witch-queen pauses in her quest to find the star to call upon her sisters at "the Barrens, where nothing grows" (155). Both dry (barren) and wet (with "marshy soil" and "wet earth"), this unnatural space "where nothing grows" is embodied as female and foregrounds the unnaturalness of the witch-queen herself, whose seductively youthful appearance belies her tremendous age (156). Clare Bradford et al. note the "conventional association of wetlands with despair, horror and gloom" (Bradford et al. 2008, 87). As the site at which the witch-queen reanimates a dead unicorn – "swollen and dark with blood and fluids" (156) – in order to make contact with her sisters, an act that embodies the unnatural landscape not only as female but also as evil, the Barrens exemplifies such an association. "Diggory's Dyke," where the witch-queen takes up lodgings in order to trap Yvaine as she passes through the "deep cut between two chalk Downs... [where] there was scarcely soil enough for trees," is a further indication of barrenness, with the lesbian undertones of its name foregrounding the strong female bonds between the Lilim (177). These highly gendered bonds, like those of the Stormhold brothers, are posited as unnatural to the point of pathological, and place value instead on the intersubjective relations embodied in Tristran and Yvaine (177). If from a queer perspective the association of non-normative gender bonds with unnaturalness is something to be critiqued, from an ecocritical perspective it works to valorise the gradual interlinking of Tristran and Yvaine's allegorical parallels: culture and nature.

Whilst nature can be read as an indicator of human nature, the "serewood" into which Tristran and the little hairy man unwarily wander towards the beginning of Tristran's travels foregrounds the dangers of viewing nature through a human frame of reference:

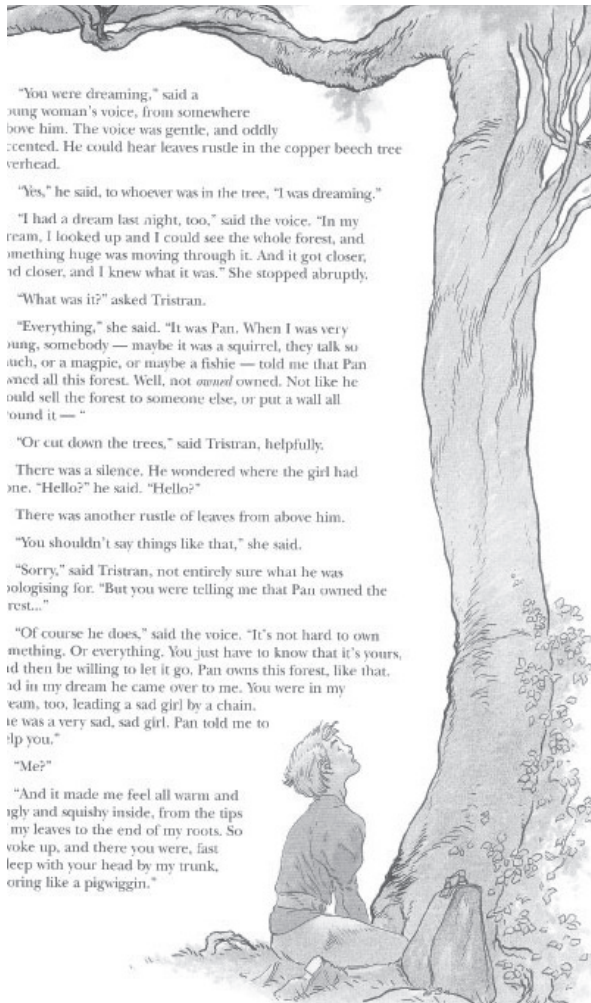
"Now we're in for it," said the hairy man, in a small voice...
[.] "We've walked into the trap" ... [.]
"Perhaps we could arm ourselves," said Tristran.
"Arm ourselves?"
"Before they come."
"Before they come? Why – they're here, you puddenhead. It's the trees themselves." (76-7)

The trees, in Tristran's eyes, have human attributes: they seem to crowd about, whisper, and shake in anger (77). With their leaves

“stinging and smarting...cutting and slicing,” they are violent and unpredictable (81). Arranging themselves “into a wall,” the trees form a battle line that mimics the wall separating the known world from Faerie, a metaphorical barrier between cultures (81). Threatening the would-be imperialist with “no escape,” the serewood can be read as a metaphor for the coloniser’s fear of the incipient vengefulness of colonised peoples (76).

Vess’s accompanying illustrations show Tristan standing, after his escape, in a pose that imitates a scarecrow (83). His previously neat plaid suit is in tatters and he has lost one of his shoes, suggesting that his former Victorian sensibility has taken a metaphorical shredding. His donning of new Faerie clothes allows him, or rather forces him, to assume a new identity. This anti-conservative metamorphosis is so distasteful to his enculturated sense of propriety that it sees Tristan contemplate “making the rest of his quest wrapped in a blanket, like a savage aboriginal from one of his schoolbooks” (93). Tellingly – and despite his internalised sense of cultural superiority – Tristan’s appropriation of the clothes of Faerie is less the adoption of a new identity and more the growing into a true or destined selfhood: “The new boots fit him better than the old ones ever had” (93); “Tristan felt quite at home with his new garb” (94).

Tristan’s adoption of Faerie attire, precipitated by his near-fatal brush with nature, induces a sense of belonging that prefigures his eventual psychological displacement from Wall. Tristan, in fact, experiences the exact opposite of Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial sense of “unhomeliness” (Bhabha 1994, 13). Instead of becoming a psychological refugee in his move out of the space in which he has been enculturated, Tristan is welcomed into the “outside” as a natural member of the new community, a community over which he later goes on to rule when his birthright is discovered. Tristan is unique amongst the characters of the novel in this instinctive sense of belonging. Large numbers of creatures in the text are forced to assume new and alien shapes on account of spells placed upon them, such as the “field mouse...[who] was a prince under an enchantment who could not regain his outer form until he chewed the Nut of Wisdom” (68) and Tristan’s own mother. The oxymoronic image of a mouse-cum-prince is playful in intent, yet does more than simply appropriate fairy tale discourse for metafictional purposes. It also reflects a sense of non-belonging or unsettled identity – when one’s inner and outer forms are not in alignment – resulting from cultural diaspora and that Yvaine, as a displaced person, herself feels.



"You were dreaming," said a young woman's voice, from somewhere above him. The voice was gentle, and oddly centered. He could hear leaves rustle in the copper beech tree overhead.

"Yes," he said, to whoever was in the tree, "I was dreaming."

"I had a dream last night, too," said the voice. "In my dream, I looked up and I could see the whole forest, and something huge was moving through it. And it got closer, and closer, and I knew what it was." She stopped abruptly.

"What was it?" asked Tristran.

"Everything," she said. "It was Pan. When I was very young, somebody — maybe it was a squirrel, they talk so much, or a magpie, or maybe a fishie — told me that Pan owned all this forest. Well, not *owned* owned. Not like he could sell the forest to someone else, or put a wall all around it —"

"Or cut down the trees," said Tristran, helpfully.

There was a silence. He wondered where the girl had gone. "Hello?" he said. "Hello?"

There was another rustle of leaves from above him.

"You shouldn't say things like that," she said.

"Sorry," said Tristran, not entirely sure what he was apologising for. "But you were telling me that Pan owned the forest..."

"Of course he does," said the voice. "It's not hard to own something. Or everything. You just have to know that it's yours, and then be willing to let it go. Pan owns this forest, like that. And in my dream he came over to me. You were in my dream, too, leading a sad girl by a chain. She was a very sad, sad girl. Pan told me to help you."

"Me?"

"And it made me feel all warm and cozy and squishy inside, from the tips of my leaves to the end of my roots. So I woke up, and there you were, fast asleep with your head by my trunk, looking like a pigwigginn."

Tristran meets the wood-nymph. Illustration by Charles Vess from *Stardust* by Neil Gaiman. New York: DC Comics, 1998.

Contrary to his initial impulses, it is only once Tristran has abandoned his colonialist intentions, thereby achieving an ideologically rendered movement out of frame, that nature, in this novel, takes on a gentler aspect. The gentler face of nature reveals itself to Tristran when he receives advice from a wood-nymph, in an episode that provides a further critique of the imperialistic impulse. The wood-nymph in tree form, whom Tristran believes to be a girl hiding in the branches, informs Tristran that Pan, the rustic Greek god of the woodlands, owns the forest:

“Well, not *owned* owned. Not like he would sell the forest to someone else, or put a wall all around it---”

“Or cut down the trees,” said Tristran, helpfully. There was a silence. He wondered whether the girl had gone. “Hello?” he said. “Hello?”

There was another rustle of leaves from above him.

“You shouldn’t say things like that,” she said.

“Sorry,” said Tristran, not entirely sure what he was apologising for. (129)

If putting “a wall around” the forest is deemed an action of the coloniser, enforcing a distinction between an inside and an outside, Pan’s refusal to create such a division constitutes a strongly anti-imperialistic gesture. Refusing to “sell” the natural resources or “cut” them down for profit, Pan becomes the protector of the forest just as Tristran is to become the protector of Yvaine. Pan’s ownership of the forest, in fact, foreshadows Tristran’s later possession of Yvaine’s heart: an ownership that presupposes no materialistic gain. A contrast, then, to the type of possession that Tristran initially envisages when he formulates his colonialist plan to plunder Faerie for the star, Pan’s intersubjective relations with the forest provide an ecological counter-discourse that devalues material gain through imperial domination.

Hence, when the tree agrees to give Tristran “aid and succour,” she does so in recognition that he has rejected his colonialist intentions towards the star (131):

“If you had kept her chained, and she had escaped her chains, then there is no power on earth or sky could ever make me help you... But you unchained her, and for that I will help you.” (132)

An amalgam of the human and nonhuman, the tree herself is a victim of patriarchal violation since her metamorphosis came as a result of being “pursued by a prince, not a nice prince, the other kind... [who wouldn’t] understand about boundaries” (131). Thus the tree, as nature embodied in female form, provides a strong ecofeminist narrative voice to speak up alongside that of Yvaine, advocating a non-materialist and non-imperialist treatment of the natural world. If Tristran is initially unaware of the negative implications of this behaviour (his apology, when he was “not entirely sure what he was apologising for” is testament to this), it is at this point in the narrative

that he begins to become aware of the need to determine meaning outside of his enculturated frame of reference.

Conclusion: intersubjective culture/nature relations

In *Stardust*, growing cultural respect comes hand in hand with growing ecological awareness. By the end of his quest, Tristran's increased recognition of Yvaine's subjectivity sits uncomfortably with his former imperialistic ambitions:

[Tristran] could no longer reconcile his old idea of giving the star to Victoria Forester with his current notion that the star was not a thing to be passed from hand to hand, but a true person in all respects and no kind of thing at all. (183)

Tristran's acknowledgement of Yvaine as subject rather than object serves to invest the blind space in which the nonhuman other resides with ideological significance. His success can be judged by his reception when he finally returns to the village of Wall, where he is told he looks and talks "nothing like" his previous self (186). Initially barred entry into the village of his birth, Tristran can no longer appropriate the necessary frame of reference that would allow him ideological entry. He thus exhibits the post-colonial trope of the exile, experiencing active displacement as an outsider in his own land, a displacement that sees *Stardust* veer away from the Victorian boy's adventure stories with their implicit glorification of empire and their perpetual instigation of a return home to the safe and civilised.

If the natural landscape of Faerie had initially been a blind space – the outside to Wall's inside – it is Tristran's own hometown that now takes on such a status:

In front of them, across the meadow, on the other side of the gap in the wall, now guardless, was the town of Wall. Oil lamps and gas lamps and candles glowed in the windows of the houses of the village. To Tristran, then, they seemed as distant and unknowable as the world of the Arabian Nights. (209)

Ultimately, Tristran transposes an Oriental aesthetic *not* onto the exotic East, but onto the "pallid folk of Wall in their worsted jackets

and their hobnailed boots" (187). If the novel's appropriation of colonialist discourse has hitherto placed value on material gain and profit, Tristran's decision to turn his back on Wall for "the last time" suggests a concomitant desire to reject the imperialistic impulse (209). It is only when Tristran recognises Yvaine's right to a fully realised selfhood that he comes to invest the natural space of Faerie with the connotations of home.

Thus when Tristran leaves his erstwhile hometown behind and, with Yvaine, begins "to walk toward the East," the East is not, as it has been, a space ripe for colonial exploration and exploitation, but a space of belonging brought about through positive inter-subjective relations between humans and nature (209). These positive intercultural relations are mirrored in Tristran and Yvaine's romantic union that, if not conventionally fruitful ("we can probably never have children" (201), is a union brought about through mutual love and respect. Thus, in *Stardust*, feminist and post-colonialist discourses merge with ecological concerns in Gaiman and Vess's representation of the natural space of Faerie to encourage a re-evaluation of both androcentric and anthropocentric thinking.

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