

**All the Voices in Our Heads: Exploring  
Female Identity by Reimagining the Fairy  
Tale and the Young Adult Novel**

A Novel and Critical Exegesis

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision.

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

Signed

Annika Josephine Herb

Date 29<sup>th</sup> September 2017

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores and rethinks female identity across a range of representations and experiences in Young Adult (YA) literature. In understanding female identity as a complex and multifaceted concept, I address enduring social issues that shape or restrict the female experience, including how the female is read, performed, and received. This thesis is comprised of two parts: the exegesis, which offers critical analysis to deconstruct historical and contemporary representations of female identity and experience in YA novels, and the creative work, a YA novel which puts these ideas into practice.

Drawing on the established relationship between fairy tale, gender, and trauma, this thesis posits that the retold fairy tale can be repurposed for trauma recovery in a manner which resonates with female characters/identities in YA literature. Using non-linear modes of storytelling and applying the structure of Indigenous Songlines my creative work responds to literary criticism and a close reading of a range of contemporary YA texts. My research reads the gendered trauma inherent in fairy tale as mirroring, or symbolising, the female experience of trauma stemming from living in a patriarchal world. This is realised in the development of an interrelated, entangled narrative or dialogue that crosses genre and generation to privilege a metafictional sisterhood/sistahood as mode of recovery, forming a map of femaleness by which to navigate and survive.

Female identity is examined through several key areas of focus including female sexuality, control, and trauma. Female sexuality refers to an exploration of the experience and restriction of female pleasure and desire throughout the genre; empowerment and agency; queer desire; and body image and the relationship with the



physical self. This intersects with modes of control, including heteronormative or patriarchal social demands and expectations that shape or restrict identity; enforced silencing; literal and figurative possession; and domination of the body and spirit. I study and later revise these notions through a creative lens that incorporates emerging and recognisable tropes of the paranormal genre and the fairy tale, utilising them as analogies of contemporary social issues. This thesis demonstrates that there are new avenues for female identity and trauma recovery available in YA literature by building on the relationship between fairy tale and YA literature, offering spaces of empowerment and modes of survival.