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**Selkies in Scottish Folk Tales and Their Interpretation in  
Contemporary Scottish Literature**

(diplomová práce)

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto magisterskou diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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“Folklore is the repository of the timeless yearning of humans to identify with their sense of an eternal oneness in the universe - the sense which tells man he has a soul.”

Mollie Hunter

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to explore Scottish selkie folktales and their representation in contemporary Scottish literature. The narrow scope of selkie tales was mainly chosen based on the sheer vastness of Scottish/Celtic folklore available and the regional varieties specific to each area in Scotland, which make it significantly extensive. The thesis examines the various representations of selkies as creatures and characters in several genres of contemporary Scottish literature and focuses on the similarities and differences in comparison with the original folklore, as well as their development over time and across genres. It also attempts to determine as to what purpose these creatures serve in the narrative.

The thesis first defines selkies and discusses their physical and character description, including their supernatural abilities. It also sheds light on some of the more prominent folktales in which they appear and then focuses on the folkloric and mythological sources of the selkie-lore to provide the basis for the discussion of the specific literary works. In the next two parts, the thesis discusses a selected number of works across genres of Scottish literature, paying special attention to the manner in which the selkies are expressed as characters and how the original folk tales have been interpreted. The next chapter analyses the works of children's and young-adult fantasy literature published in Scotland. It provides an overview of various authors who have employed selkies as characters in their works and discusses some of the works of contemporary Scottish folklorists and their influence on the storytelling tradition. It then proceeds with a more in-depth analysis of two specific works: Janis Mackay's *Magnus Fin* (2011 and 2013) and Mollie Hunter's *A Stranger Came Ashore* (1975). The following chapter focuses on works that have reinterpreted the "Seal Wife" folktale: a drama by Sue Glover called *The Seal Wife* (1980), paying special attention to the reasoning behind the use of the folk tale within the narrative. It then moves to a more thorough analysis of a fantasy novel: Sian Hayton's *The Governors* (1992).

The reason for such a research is based on the fact that few academic works related to the field of Scottish folklore have been written in the Czech Republic.

Furthermore, the fact that selkies are shapeshifters, that is, they change from animal to human form and vice versa, provides the authors with the option to use it as a metaphor for the duality of the conflicted Scottish mentality related to religion and geographical dispositions well as explore larger issues, such as the conflict of childhood and adulthood, the male and female gender, nature and civilization and so on.



## 2. SELKIES IN SCOTTISH FOLKLORE

The following part of the thesis is meant to introduce selkies in more detail. It is going to focus on their appearance, personality and supernatural abilities. Then, it will strive to introduce some of the best-known folk tales in which they appear. Lastly, it examines their folkloric and mythological origin.

### 2.1 Defining a selkie

Defining a selkie as a creature is problematic. There are discrepancies even when various encyclopaedias of mythology are referenced and consulted. In most tales, a selkie takes form of a seal when in water but appears in human form on shore and has, therefore, the ability to shapeshift. The complexity of the character can also be demonstrated by the fact that there exist numerous different varieties of the name, usually connected to the location and its dialect. The word “selkie” derives from the earlier “selch” or “selk” which means “seal” in Scots.<sup>1</sup> One may, however, also encounter selkies, silkies<sup>2</sup>, selkie folk, sea folk, seal people, fairy seals, sea fairies, selchies, selchidh, fin folk, sea maidens or selkie fowk. The reason for such a number of names for the creature is related to its folkloric and mythological origin (see section 2.3 for more information). For the purposes of avoiding ambiguity, this thesis is going to use the term “selkie” for the creature.

Furthermore, the fact of there being numerous names could be ascribed to the various locations in which the selkie lore presides. In Scotland, it is locally bound to the coastal areas of northern Scotland as well as the islands: Shetland, Orkney and Outer Hebrides mainly through the influence of Scandinavian folklore<sup>3</sup>. Seals inhabit these areas and it is common to spot them swimming in the sea. Even though these folk tales

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Melhorn, *The Esoteric Codex: Shapeshifters* (Raleigh: Lulu Press Inc., 2015), 320.

<sup>2</sup> Bruford claims that “silkie” is used in order to mimic the pronunciation of the local dialect. Williamson, however, claims the variety originated based on the silkiness of the seal skin.

<sup>3</sup> Also in Ireland, Iceland and Faroe Islands. See more in Alan Bruford, “Trolls, Hillfolk, Finns and Picts,” in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, Ed. Peter Narvaez (Kentucky: Kentucky University Press, 1997) 121.

are locally bound to these areas, there is at least one folk tale about a selkie in virtually every Scottish folk tale collection.

### *2.1.1 Appearance*

It was already mentioned that selkies resemble seals in water but look human on shore. A trait common to both male and female selkies, whilst in their human form, is their angelic beauty, due to which a marriage between a human and a selkie is very common and many folk tales tell a love story about how a fisherman fell in love with a selkie. The following quotation comes from a folk tale in Tom Muir's *Orkney Folk Tales*: "He clutched her tight and looked into her large, beautiful eyes and he thought that she was the most beautiful girl that he had ever seen and that he would never be happy until he had her for his wife."<sup>4</sup> Selkies resemble human beings even in their seal form. Their huge rounded eyes are described as very expressive and are often part of the description of the selkie in the tales.

Muir suggests that the fact that seals resemble human beings with their eyes gave rise to the selkie tales. He also makes a distinction when it comes to specific breeds of the seals<sup>5</sup>: "There are two kinds of selkies that usually live in Orkney; the common or harbour seal likes sheltered water while the larger Atlantic grey seal can be found in more exposed coastal areas. The grey seal is the most common species in Orkney, which is a major breeding area for them. It was these larger seals that were true selkies, and they contain a secret inside."<sup>6</sup> The variation in different breeds living in different locations is reflected in the folk tales as well. In some, the selkies in human form have golden brown hair, in others black with streaks of grey, obviously referencing the colour of the seals' fur specific to the respective areas of Scotland.

### *2.1.2 Personality and Lifestyle*

In the majority of tales in recent folktale collections, selkies are benign and very shy. In some stories, they are even shown to help people from the midst of

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<sup>4</sup> Tom Muir, *Orkney Folk Tales* (Brimscombe: The History Press, 2014) 93.

<sup>5</sup> In Orkney, people refer to both the animal and the creature as "selkie".

<sup>6</sup> Muir, 91.

drowning and bring them back to shore. In one of Duncan Williamson's stories "The Lighthouse Keeper", a selkie helps an injured man and even becomes something like a pet to him. However, even if trusted sources such as Gienna Matson's *The Celtic Mythology A to Z* describes selkies as helpful creatures,<sup>7</sup> the older tales in Orkney would present them as rather menacing ones. According to Sigurd Towrie<sup>8</sup>: "Above all of the creatures of Orkney myth, the selkie-folk have been 'sugar-coated' in recent years to create an angelic benevolent sea-spirit - a far cry from the original entities that struck terror into believers."<sup>9</sup> The reason behind such a change can be traced back to the original source of the selkie lore, which can be found in section 2.3 of this thesis.

Selkies also love music and dancing and often dance on the beach when they are allowed to shed their skin. Seal sounds do sound like strange music and many folk tales reference that. Barbara Ker Wilson's *Stories from Scotland* describe it as the following: "They loved to make music, these fabulous people who lived in the sea, and wherever they went there was a sound of singing like the laughing of the waves"<sup>10</sup> The fact that the voices are often mentioned in the folktales might be related to the fact that they almost sound human. Tom Muir describes an encounter of his, when he witnessed these sounds, as the following:

It was the sound of a woman sobbing. [...] Had there been an accident? Was someone hurt and needing attention? The sobbing continued, but then it broke away in an unearthly groan that was not human. The blood in my veins ran cold. After a short time, the sobbing began again followed by the groan. This was definitely not human, but what was it? Then it dawned on me; it was the sound of a selkie by the shore. They make a strange array of sounds, from haunting high-pitched calls to grunts and growls, but they also, on rare occasions, sob. Maybe this was the reason behind the story of selkie women being taken as a wife?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Fairies" in *Celtic Mythology A to Z* (New York: Chelsea House Publications, 2010) 53.

<sup>8</sup> Journalist and writer from Orkney.

<sup>9</sup> Sigurd Towrie, "Orkneyjar - The Heritage of the Orkney Islands," *Orkneyjar*, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://www.orkneyjar.com/>.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Ker Wilson, *Stories from Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 1.

<sup>11</sup> Muir, 92.

The seals' voices were also understood as a way of communicating not only with others of their kind but with fishermen as well. The fishermen would also speak or sing to the seals. The famous ballad of "the Great Silkie of Sule Skerry" features a selkie who sings to his human lover and served as base for many Scottish folk singers.

The location where the selkies reside tends to differ from tale to tale. In some of them, selkies live in groups on an island along with the seals. In others, they reside in a kingdom at the bottom of the sea, built from wrecked ships having a "roof" which is made from the hair of young girls who drowned. The kingdom is reigned over by the menacing selkie king who lures his young female victims there to force them become his wives.<sup>12</sup> Overall, the selkie life is solitary and they often watch humans with fascination, since they can only enjoy the company of other selkies. To escape the loneliness, they often engage in play and dance together. The selkie life can be lonely also, as in many tales a selkie is trapped on land and is unable to return to the sea. This is the case of, possibly, the best-known selkie tale about the "Seal Wife" (see section 2.2 for more detail).

### 2.1.3. *Magical Abilities*

The selkie skin is a trait that is present in all selkie folklore. Without it, the selkie cannot return to the sea. In many folktales, the selkie is tricked into shedding its skin. Sir George Douglas retells a story in his *Scottish Fairy and Folk Tales* (1901) in which: "Ollavitinus, the son of Gioga who, having been stripped of his seal's skin, would be forever parted from his mates, and condemned to become an outcast inhabitant of the upper world."<sup>13</sup> In Duncan Williamson's story "Shell House", the skin has magical powers of its own and a human who wears a selkie skin finds happiness in life. The skin is, therefore, an extremely prized possession of the selkie and also a trophy for fishermen: not only as a source of sustenance but also as a way how to keep the selkie on shore. Shapeshifting by putting on the skin is part of the selkie's magic, yet there is variation as to when they can change: in some folktales they seem to maintain the ability to shapeshift at will, while in some they can only change once a year, usually at

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<sup>13</sup> George Brisbane Douglas, *Scottish Fairy and Folk Tales* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2000) 188.

Midsummer, “others assert selkies transform into humans every ninth night.”<sup>14</sup> In many stories, it is prohibited for a human to be able to see the actual change from human to animal form.

Other magical abilities are subject to variation. In some stories, the selkie can manipulate weather forces to conjure up a storm and control the weather. As Bane points out: “Male selkies not only have the ability to raise storms and capsize boats but are also willing to avenge the indiscriminate slaughter of seals.”<sup>15</sup> This is the case in many older versions of selkie tales, mainly those set on the Scottish islands.

The selkies have great riches from the wrecked ships at the bottom of the sea. In many folk tales, selkies trick young people with a jewel “to entice the person into the water then drag him or her under the waves.”<sup>16</sup> Very often, male selkies also have seductive powers, not only related to their attractive looks, but also through their strange, brown eyes. Overall, the selkie’s magical powers tend to differ from tale to tale.

## 2.2 Popular Selkie Folk Tales

In every folk tale collection of Scottish folklore, there is at least one folk tale about a selkie. These can be further divided into three main patterns from which other versions are derived. The first one is concerned with a selkie that has been harmed by a seal-catcher, usually with a knife. The human is then tricked, taken under the sea and transformed into a seal to be taught a lesson. The only way for the seal-catcher to return home is to help the injured seal, since he is the only one who can heal the wound that he himself had inflicted. After healing the seal, the human is rewarded with a gold and promises never to hunt seals again. There are also stories in which a fisherman who hates seals is saved by a seal when he is drowning as in Lawrence Tulloch’s “The Seal on the Vee Skerries” in his collection *Shetland Folk Tales* (2014).

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<sup>14</sup> “Selkies: Norse Mermaids,” *Viking Rune*, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://www.vikingrune.com/2008/11/selkies-norse-mermaids>.

<sup>15</sup> Theresa Bane, *Encyclopaedia of Beasts and Monsters in Myth, Legend and Folklore* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016) epub.

<sup>16</sup> *Celtic Mythology A to Z*, 10.

Another type of stories has a female selkie that is tricked by a human. This “Seal Wife” folktale is the most common there is about selkies. It usually begins with a young selkie girl who is dancing or sunbathing on a beach and is seen by a fisherman. As she is very beautiful, the fisherman falls in love with her and wants to marry her. To keep her on shore, he hides her skin. The selkie makes an excellent mother and housekeeper but is unhappy and often stares longingly into the sea. The “Seal Wife” folktale often ends badly, when the selkie eventually finds its skin and leaves her human family behind. On the Hebrides, this tale is referred to as “MacOdrum of the Seals,” on Orkney “Goodman o’Wastness”. Since this folktale has been adopted and reinterpreted by many writers considered in this thesis, it is going to be referred to as “the Seal Wife” tale.

There are also stories in which a dissatisfied human woman finds a selkie lover. In order to do so, the woman “has to go to the shore and shed seven tears into the sea.”<sup>17</sup> It is not uncommon in these stories that the woman is married. Generally, the male selkie lovers are “kind and gentle, but prone to sudden disappearances”<sup>18</sup> According to Sigurd Towrie, there used to be hundreds of stories like this handed down by the local women but only few remained to the present day.<sup>19</sup> The reason for that might be the influence of Christianity as well as the Victorian taboo of the female sexuality (see section 2.3 for more information).

The third kind of stories includes a selkie character that is not as good as the others. It is usually a male selkie who comes from the sea to look for a bride. The selkie often employs his seductive powers, often related to his huge, hypnotic eyes. He lures the women to his kingdom by offering jewels and other treasures from sunken ships. A 19<sup>th</sup> century Orcadian folklorist Walter Traill Dennison states that these male selkies “often made havoc among thoughtless girls, and sometimes intruded into the sanctity of married life.”<sup>20</sup> The girl who falls for a selkie is then taken to his kingdom underwater and never returns.

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<sup>17</sup> “Selkies: Norse Mermaids”.

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Monaghan , *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore* (Facts on File Inc.: New York, 2004) 411.

<sup>19</sup> *Orkneyjar*.

<sup>20</sup> *Orkneyjar*.

## 2.3 The Origin of the Selkie Lore in Scotland

The following part of the thesis is going to present several possible sources of the selkie lore in Scotland with emphasis on the origin in both folklore and mythology: both Celtic and Scandinavian. It is also going to examine the misconceptions and misrepresentations of the creature and the confusion among the folklorists as to what a selkie is and how it differs from other sea creatures such as mermaids, fin folk and fairies.

### 2.3.1 Origin in Folklore

The folkloric origin is not easy to determine, since it is in the nature of the folktale to be spread by the word of mouth rather than through writings. The majority of Scottish folklorists wrote the stories down in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and were, therefore, hugely affected by Christian principles.<sup>21</sup> This led to a lot of alterations and additions to the original tales. According to these folklorists, selkies had a similar fate to fairies in that they were fallen angels, doomed to live in the form of animals. In Theresa Bane's *Encyclopaedia of Beasts and Monsters in Myth, Legend and Folklore*, she notes that these fallen angels "were not so evil; they partook in the war against heaven but were condemned to earth to live as they do for some far less trivial sin."<sup>22</sup> Others claimed that the selkies were originally human, but due to a bad deed were changed into seals as a form of punishment. These are mainly the case in stories such as "The Seal Catcher and the Merman,"<sup>23</sup> where a fisherman who hunts the seals is turned into a seal to learn to respect them.

The seal was so important in the Scottish and Irish culture that the people actually refused to eat seal meat, claiming that it would be cannibalism. In a story called "The Crofter's Mistake" in Duncan Williamson's *Tales of the Seal People*, one of the characters says: "the seals are people just like you and me, they need tae live, they need tae eat!"<sup>24</sup> The mentioned Angus loses his whole family as a result of his hatred that

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<sup>21</sup> *Orkneyjar*.

<sup>22</sup> Bane, 285.

<sup>23</sup> This short story can be found in *Scottish Folk and Fairy Tales from Burns to Buchan (Penguin Classics)*.

<sup>24</sup> Williamson, 51.

culminates in him actually harming his niece in a belief that the seals cannot touch her if she has no fingers or toes. The *Encyclopaedia of Celtic Folklore*. proposes that this may even suggest the presence of a totemic system: “the taboo on members of such families killing seals or eating their meat points in the same direction. Seals do bear resemblance to human beings, especially in their wild moaning calls and in the direct gaze from their soft dark eyes.”<sup>25</sup>

Due to the common marriages between a selkie and a human, there are stories in which they also have children.<sup>26</sup> Some families in Scotland even claim ancestry to the selkies (on the Hebrides, the MacPhees; on the Scottish mainland, the MacCondrums; on the Isle of Skye, all fair-haired people).<sup>27</sup> According to Alan Bruford, only Northern Isles have folk tales in which there are selkie children and only there selkies bond with humans. In his essay “Slipping Off the Sealskin: Gender, Species, and Fictive Kinship in Selkie Folktales”, Peter Le Couteur argues that the islanders are particularly proud of their Scandinavian descent, with many boasting about being of Viking blood, even though such claims are far from truth.<sup>28</sup> He goes on to suggest that these tales function as a clan origin myth.

These claims of descent from the selkies originated not only as a source of ancestral claims to the Vikings but also to explain a hereditary disability, where the palms of the people’s hands were deformed in such a way that resembled those of seal flippers.<sup>29</sup> Blaming pregnancy on the selkies was also very common: “Why lay blame on the local boy you love when you can claim ‘the selkie-man seduced me’?”<sup>30</sup> This was especially the case in closely knit communities in remote islands.

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<sup>25</sup> Monaghan, 411.

<sup>26</sup> These half human half selkie children either stay on shore with the father, abandoned by their selkie mother who returns to the sea or join her. The selkie children often have webbed feet and hands.

<sup>27</sup> Monaghan, 411.

<sup>28</sup> Le Couteur describes the pride of the islanders in that they are very proud of their Scandinavian background. One can see that for example in the traditional celebrations during Up Helly Aa, clearly referencing Viking symbolism.

<sup>29</sup> *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, 122.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Le Couteur, “Slipping Off the Sealskin: Gender, Species, and Fictive Kinship in Selkie Folktales,” *Gender Forum*, Issue 55, 2015, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://www.genderforum.org/issues/gender-animals-animality/slipping-off-the-sealskin-gender-species-and-fictive-kinship-in-selkie-folktales/>.



There are accounts in which the selkies are believed to be cursed not because of any particular misdeed but, for example, by an evil witch. The folktale named “MacCodrum of the Seals”<sup>31</sup> shall serve as an example. According to these folktales, the selkies are the children of the King and Queen of the sea. After the death of their mother, the King finds another wife, a sea-witch. Since the witch envies the children for their beauty, she makes a magic potion and casts a spell on them to change them into seals for ever. The fact that they used to inhabit the sea in human form might suggest that the selkies were changed Mermen and Mermaids and indeed, there are folktales in which this seems to be the case. One can see an example on the following quotation: “some of those seals were larger than others, and the country people used to call them ‘Roane’, and whisper that they were not seals at all, but mermen and merwomen, who came from a country of their own, far down under the ocean, who assumed this strange disguise in order that they might pass through the water, and come up to breathe the air of this earth of ours.”<sup>32</sup>

One may then ask whether there is any difference between the selkie and a mermaid. According to Matson even if selkies may resemble mermaids, they only live with one spouse and live under the sea contently.<sup>33</sup> Also, mermaids do not tend to shapeshift, though many earlier folklorists seem to blend the two creatures’ characteristics. In his folktale collection from 1901, George Douglas states: “Unfortunately, however, each merman or merwoman possesses but one skin, enabling the individual to ascend the seas, and if, on visiting the abode of man, the garb be lost, the hapless being must unavoidably become an inhabitant of the earth.”<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Dennison makes a clear division between a mermaid and a selkie. Originating in classical mythology, rather than Scottish or Norse folklore, the mermaid has a fishtail instead of legs. There seems to be some confusion, yet again dependent on the location. Whereas in Orkney, mermaids and selkies are clearly defined, in Shetland, according to

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<sup>31</sup> A folk tale from the collection *Stories from Scotland*.

<sup>32</sup> Jarvie, 12.

<sup>33</sup> *Celtic Mythology from A to Z*, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Douglas, 187.

Jessie Saxby, mermaids mate with male selkies. “The Sea Wife tale” is also told in Ireland, where the creature is not a selkie but a mermaid.<sup>35</sup>

The third possibility is connected to the idea of location and place, namely the proximity of the sea. Accidents were not uncommon, with many people drowned or lost at sea. Any natural catastrophe, misfortune or phenomena that could not be explained tended to be blamed on not only the selkies but the supernatural. Superstition was still relevant in Scotland up to the 1860s, “long after the heyday of the Scottish Enlightenment, instances of ghosts, ‘visions’ and second sight were widespread in Scotland, often involving deaths, marriages, boats and journeys, battles, drownings and other calamities”<sup>36</sup> As a form of consolation, the selkie myth was created, claiming that they are actually the souls of the people who drowned. Clarissa Pinkola Estés aptly summarises the similarity between a seal and a soul:

The symbol of seal as a representation of soul is all the more compelling because there is ‘docility’ about seals, an accessibility well known to those who live near them. Seals have a sort of dogness about them; they are naturally affectionate. A kind of purity radiates from them. But they can also be very quick to react, retreat, or retort if threatened. The soul is like that too. It hovers near. It nurses the spirit. It does not run away when it perceives something new or unusual or difficult.<sup>37</sup>

From another point of view, the selkies were also blamed for these misfortunes. If a girl went missing at sea, people would say that a selkie took her: “The people of Orkney were so afraid of the attentions of the selkie-folk that mothers would paint the sign of the cross on their daughters’ breasts before they undertook any sea journey.”<sup>38</sup> In Duncan Williamson’s story “The Crofter’s Mistake” a girl’s uncle even cuts her fingers and toes off to prevent her from turning into a selkie.

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<sup>35</sup> Dr Andrew Jennings, “The Finfolk,” *University of the Highlands and Islands*, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/research-enterprise/cultural/centre-for-nordic-studies/conferences/the-finnfolk>.

<sup>36</sup> Jarvie, xii.

<sup>37</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estés, “Sealskin, Soulskin” in *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992) 264.

<sup>38</sup> *Orkneyjar*.

### 2.3.2. *The Origins of the Selkie Lore: Finns, Fin Folk, Sea Fairies or Selkies?*

The mythological origin of selkies is unclear as well, especially because Scotland is a place “where Celtic, Norse, and Pict mythology are intermingled.”<sup>39</sup> In *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, Narvaez claims that the selkie myth originated from merging two different traditions: the Scandinavian and the Celtic one. For every supernatural creature that lives on shore, he believes there is a sea counterpart and so in the coastal areas as well as the islands. According to him, the basic traits come from a creature called a sea trow<sup>40</sup>. Even though the word originated from the Nordic “troll”, it bears more resemblance to the Gaelic fairy<sup>41</sup>. The sea trow is a mischievous creature, who destroys the fishermen’s nets and steals their fish. In Celtic folklore, these creatures do not wear a selkie skin but simply a sea skin, and remain human-looking when under the sea.<sup>42</sup> It is also possible that the Celtic swan myth, a tale very similar to “the Seal Wife”, where the girl changes into a swan instead of a seal, might have changed the animal into the seal in Ireland, purely because it is an animal commonly seen in the area. From there, the myth could have moved to Scotland.

Selkies were believed to be a part of the Celtic Otherworld, quite similar to the Underworld of different cultures: the land of the dead, an alternative reality to the real world. In Celtic tradition, it is somewhat similar to the Christian concept of Heaven or the Arthurian Avalon: nobody gets sick, old and it is occupied by sprites.<sup>43</sup> The precise location of the Otherworld is not clear. According to some sources, it is an island somewhere at sea, according to others, it is underground. In Celtic folklore, it is the land of the fairies, into which men are lured to be lost forever<sup>44</sup> or where the creatures help those in need. In Walter Traill Dennison’s famous selkie ballad about the Great Selkie o’ Suleskerry, the lady joins her selkie lover in the Otherworld, although in this case, it is more of a romanticized Hell, since she commits adultery.

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<sup>39</sup> *Celtic Mythology A to Z*, 53.

<sup>40</sup> *The Good People*, 119.

<sup>41</sup> According to Jennings.

<sup>42</sup> See *The Good People*, 120.

<sup>43</sup> Monaghan, 217.

<sup>44</sup> As in the tale of Tam Linn for example.

Alan Bruford agrees with Narvaez and proposes an idea that the selkie lore originated by merging of several tales into one, mixing Celtic lore with myths adopted from Scandinavia. He comments on the fact that, whereas in Shetland, there is a clear distinction between the fin folk and the selkie folk, in Orkney, the distinction is not so clear and people often interchange the fin folk with Finns<sup>45</sup>. According to Sigurd Towrie, the misconception is based on the fact that, actually, the fin folk and the selkie folk were once one and the same and originated from the Scandinavian legends of the Saami<sup>46</sup> people, a tribe from the north of Norway. According to Towrie: “the Saami were regarded as great sorcerers with the power to control the weather, travel great distances in magical trances and shapeshift - usually into the form of a sea animal or bear.”<sup>47</sup> All of these traits could be found with the older versions of the tales.

During the Middle Ages, the Saami remained pagan while the rest of Norway adopted Christianity. Because of their own religious practices, they were considered sorcerers of evil magic and looked upon with great suspicion. The Norse settlement in Orkney is dated roughly between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>48</sup>, although its extent is subject to debate and Towrie suggests that the Norse brought those Saami with them. Apart from the common belief that they were sorcerers, they also used sealskins not only for their boats but clothing as well. The seal people lore, therefore, probably originated through sightings of these people, who were skilled sailors and fishermen. It was also already mentioned that many unexplainable phenomena were attributed to the supernatural. With the Saami, or the Norway Finns as they were referred to in Orkney, bad fishing seasons were usually one such case.

Where Narvaez suggests that there is no connection between these Finns and fin folk, Towrie claims the contrary. According to him: “Further north, in Shetland, there was no such misconception about fins. There, the link between the Norway Finns was recorded as late as the end of the 19th century. In these accounts, the Shetland Finns had all the trademarks of Orkney's Fin-folk and selkie-folk.”<sup>49</sup> He proposes the theory

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<sup>45</sup> Finn does not refer to the inhabitants of Finland but the Norse word for Saami, Finno-Ugric speaking nomadic tribes from Northern Scandinavia.

<sup>46</sup> The Saami were referred to in the Old Norse sources as "finnar", hence the Finns in Scots.

<sup>47</sup> *Orkneyjar*.

<sup>48</sup> Jennings.

<sup>49</sup> *Orkneyjar*.

in which the older version of the lore based on Finns disappeared due to the influence of Christianity, since the locals felt they were protected from any pagan magic and so all these traits were either lost or ascribed to those of a selkie or fin-folk.

The disappearance of the older versions of the folklore and the influence of not only Christianity but the Victorian fancy<sup>50</sup> and the common sightings of seals in the seaside locations intermingled these characters and created the foundation of what we now read about in modern collections of stories. The older vicious fin-folk merged with the Celtic fairy lore to create a new creature: an angelic, shy and benign selkie. In contrast to the truly amorphous Finns, the selkies can only change once a year in modern interpretations: on Midsummer Eve, a fact clearly derived from Celtic mythology. This would also explain the fact that there are stories about selkies even present in Ireland and mainland Scotland – areas which were never occupied by the Saami.

An example of that can be shown on two stories in such collections. In Duncan Williamson's *Tales of the Seal People*, a collection that he bases on the stories he heard from the locals across Scotland, there is a story called "Blind Angus" about a man who takes a selkie on an island and brings a cow with him. The man is paid generously but must promise to have his eyes covered during the time he spends on the island. He cheats, however, and witnesses a savage feeding of the selkies. He is then blinded by the selkies as a form of punishment. In *Folktales of Scotland*, there is a very similar story, although its name itself: "Tam Scott and the Fin-Man" suggests that it is not a selkie but another creature that is both terrifying and capable of evil deeds. Whereas Williamson's source were the local fishermen on the Outer Hebrides, and therefore a direct source of the oral folklore, the Montgomerys give credit at the introduction to these 19<sup>th</sup> century folklorists.

### 2.3.3. Summary

In summary, in the old tales of the Nordic Finns, nomadic tribes who were described as magicians, merged with trows and swan maidens from Celtic folklore and created a creature that spread not only in the Scottish islands but also mainland Scotland,

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<sup>50</sup> According to Bruford, Dennison often filled the gaps with his own ideas.

Ireland, Iceland and Faeroe Island. As a result, the selkie lore is varied and allows much to choose from to authors. The following chapters are going to examine these selkie incarnations and explore how the folktales were interpreted in contemporary Scottish writing.

### 3. SELKIES AS VILLAINS AND SUPERHEROES: CHILDREN'S FANTASY LITERATURE

After the selkies were addressed in terms of their characteristics and origin and some of the most prominent folk tales mentioned, it is time to concentrate on their representation in Scottish literature. This chapter of the thesis is going to focus on Scottish children's literature.

#### 3.1 Overview

Scotland has a great history of children's literature and is a very prolific genre in which the selkie as well as other creatures of the Scottish lore frequently appear. Even the name of the range in which the majority of Scottish children's books are published is fittingly called Kelpies.<sup>51</sup> In Scotland, children's literature merges with the literature for adults. In *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, Stuart Hannabuss argues that many authors of fiction for children base their works on traditional tales and proposes the idea by which it shares origins with adult fiction: that is that the folk tales gave way to fairy tales. He also points out how close the literature is to the concept of storytelling which was established with authors like George MacDonald, Winfred Finlay, Norah and William Montgomerie or Duncan Williamson.<sup>52</sup> According to him: "Scottish writers have made a distinctive mark on the world of children's literature and publishing out of all proportion to their numbers. Writing in many forms, they show the capacity of the Scots to think in English but to feel in Scots, and this binds them successfully to the story-telling tradition."<sup>53</sup>

For the purposes of this research, one should mention the work of above mentioned Duncan Williamson. Unlike the *Oxford Classic Scottish Tales*, which are based on the work of Victorian or early 20<sup>th</sup> century folklorists, Williamson was a collector of stories that he himself heard and wrote down, thus providing the reader with

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<sup>51</sup> A kelpie is a shapeshifting creature which resides in Scottish lochs who lures people in them and drowns them. It looks like a beautiful horse but change into a human.

<sup>52</sup> Stuart Hannabuss, *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 680.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

a “poorer” stream of folklore that has been handed down orally from generation to generation. He collected his stories about selkies in a collection called *The Tales of the Seal People* (1992) in which he presents fourteen stories from all around Scotland. According to the editor’s note at the back of the book, Williamson collected the majority of them as a result of working with “tinkers”: “a minority group of several thousand families who live naturally, close to the land and sea following seasonal work and not bound to dwelling in any one place.”<sup>54</sup> As they have no real home to go to, their supernatural belief is ever so stronger, since they believe they will join the Otherworld when they die. Williamson first collected stories from Gaelic speaking crofters in Argyllshire of the West Coast and then moved to Fraserburgh- Scots speaking sailors and fishermen - many known in Morayshire and Buchan in the 1940s and 1950s and many of his stories keep the original dialect.<sup>55</sup> The stories have a moral as well as a religious undertone and show the reader what happens to wrong doers.

Many contemporary authors find inspiration in Williamson’s work. In *Breaking the Spell* (2013), Lari Don recreates one of Williamson’s tales “The Crofter’s Mistake” and calls it “The Selkie’s Toes”. Her version is less violent and was chosen based on the fact that unlike the traditional selkie tales, it focuses on the fate of a selkie child.<sup>56</sup> She has also rewritten “the Seal Wife” folk tale for children in *The Selkie Girl* (2014). Don also wrote a four-part series called *Fabled Beast Chronicles*<sup>57</sup>, that has a selkie as one of the main characters.

To make a complete overview of the works in which selkies appear, one should also mention one of George Mackay Brown’s children’s books *Pictures in the Cave* (1977) as well as Naomi Mitchinson’s *Five Men and a Swan* (1957). In *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* by J.K. Rowling<sup>58</sup>, she claims that the Loch Ness Monster is the world’s biggest selkie who remains in the form of a sea serpent. Unlike the Irish, who have made three children oriented films based on the selkie lore, the Scottish do

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<sup>54</sup> Williamson, 147.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Lari Don, *Breaking the Spell: Stories of Magic and Mystery from Scotland* (London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2013) 67.

<sup>57</sup> The series comprises of *First Aid for Fairies* (2008), *Wolf Notes* (2011), *Storm Singing* (2014) and *Maze Running* (2014), all published in the already mentioned Kelpies range.

<sup>58</sup> It is subject to debate whether Rowling should be considered a Scottish writer. Despite being English by birth, she did write the majority of the Harry Potter saga in Edinburgh.



not have one. There is however, a project called *The Caledonia Series*, an online based comic series.

One can see that selkies were and still are relevant to children's literature in Scotland. The following parts of the chapter are going to examine two pieces of fiction in more detail, paying special attention to how these characters function in the larger scope of the whole narrative.

### **3.2 Mollie Hunter's *A Stranger Came Ashore***

The first work this part of the thesis is going to examine is Mollie Hunter's young adult novel *A Stranger Came Ashore* (1975). It is told through the eyes of a teenage boy named Robbie and tells the story of how a Great Selkie, under pretence of being a sailor who survived a shipwreck, comes knocking on the door of Robbie's family one stormy night. The selkie, Finn Learson, aims to seduce Robbie's older sister, Elspeth. He wants to take her to his kingdom under the sea and never let her return to her family. Finn is able to trick everyone with the exception of Robbie and his grandfather, Old Da. When Old Da dies, Robbie tries to persuade the other members of the family about the real nature of Finn, yet without success. He eventually finds an accomplice in the wizard Yarl Corbie and together they are able to trick Finn and steal his hidden selkie skin. The novel concludes in a final battle, when Finn is blinded in one eye, which prevents him from changing into a human ever again.

#### *3.2.1 Hunter's Selkie: Finn Learson*

When it comes to the selkie character, Finn Learson, he is the main villain and is described in much detail both in terms of his appearance and personality. The following part of the chapter is going to deal with his appearance, personality and magical abilities.

Finn is described as being very attractive, young, with large brown eyes and long hair. Such description matches the appearance of selkies as described in the original folk tales. Finn's hair is dark with a few silver streaks to it. Similarly to the selkie folk tales, his hair reflects the colour of his fur: "The fur of it was the colour of Finn

Learson's hair – dark, almost black, streaked with silvery grey – and it shone so richly that it seemed to turn the whole pool of candlelight into gleaming black and glittering silver.”<sup>59</sup>

Finn seems to be wearing a mask, in that he is hiding his true self: he looks young and human but is in reality very old. Furthermore, when it comes to his personality, he acts like a man who has survived a shipwreck and only looks for a place to stay when in reality, he is the villain: “‘Finn Learson's playing the wounded bird,’ Robbie answered them, for that was exactly what Finn Learson was like - a bird trailing along with a pretence of a broken wing that would make it an easy capture, and all the time leading its pursuers further and further away from its nest.”<sup>60</sup> Finn is truly an accomplished liar, since he tricks almost everyone in the village with the exception of Robbie, his grandfather and Yarl Corbie. Similarly, like in the folk tales in which a male selkie lures girls to his kingdom under the sea, Finn attempts to seduce Elspeth. He promises great riches to her and “has manners like a prince. He has great charm too.”<sup>61</sup>

As was already mentioned before, selkies love music and so does Finn in the novel. Not only music but dance as well. When Robbie listens to the seals in the bay singing, Hunter describes the sounds as following: “This noise from the cow seals was a high, sweet one that sounded like human voices sliding up a scale and echoing eerily between the steep walls of the geo. Also, it was something he had never heard before, in spite of all the times he had watched seals and he was quite entranced by it.”<sup>62</sup> Such a description closely resembles the experiences of fishermen which gave rise to the selkie lore as such. Hunter continues: “Then suddenly at the back of his mind, he found a different sort of memory stirring. He had heard this noise before, he realised. It was the singing sound he had heard from his father's fiddle on Finn Learson's first night on the island.”<sup>63</sup> Quite possibly, the song that Finn is singing is the one of the The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry. Indeed, Old Da, Robbie's grandfather reveals to Robbie that Finn really is the Great Silkie and recites a piece of the ballad to him: “I am a mam upon the land, a selkie in the sea.”<sup>64</sup> Old Da tells Robbie a lot about the Great Selkie: “He's the

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<sup>59</sup> Mollie Hunter, *A Stranger Came Ashore* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2015) 95.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 36.

king of all selkies, ... the great bull seal that has his home deep, deep down in the deepest sea. That's where the selkie's own country is; and that's where he rules, from a palace that has walls of crystal and floors of coral, with sea anemones for jewels, and a roof of waving golden weed. Or maybe the roof is made of waving golden hair – the hair of drowned girls.”<sup>65</sup> This quote suggests that Hunter took inspiration from the older, darker tales. It is also important to mention that the novel is set on Shetland, where these stories blended with the folk tales surrounding the Finns.

Hunter also references the tales in which a fisherman harms a seal. In *A Stranger Came Ashore*, Finn is also harmed with a knife and bears a scar, yet Hunter changes the circumstances, as it is later revealed that he was harmed by Yarl Corbie, who was fighting to get his fiancée back.

The fact that Finn is the Great Selkie is already present in his name, as Robbie soon discovers. Finn Learson is in fact Finn, Lear's son, Lear being the king of the sea. Yarl Corbie later uses the name Aeigirson, referring again to the son of the sea god. The name significance is present in fiction for children fairly often. In her book on children's fantasy, Jane Yolen argues that the use of suggestive names help children to process the meaning and moral of the story that is expressed symbolically in these ancient tales and further apply them on their everyday experiences.<sup>66</sup> This fact will be relevant later in the chapter, when the didactic function of the novel is discussed.

In contrast to the romanticized selkies, Finn is vicious and menacing: “His great dark eyes seemed bigger and darker than ever in the red mask, and the effect of all this sent a stab of fear through Robbie.”<sup>67</sup> According to Old Da, selkies are fallen angels: “selkies are a lot more than they seem to be. They are not animal creatures at all, in fact, but a kind of folk that have been doomed to live as selkies.”<sup>68</sup> Such a fact again confirms that Hunter found inspiration in the folk tales, since she adopts the story of the selkies' origins. It later becomes apparent, however, that Hunter adds another layer to the selkie character mainly due to his magical abilities. While a selkie's magic is usually limited to its skin, Finn Learson is able to do much more than that. Firstly, as was already

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 36-37.

<sup>66</sup> Jane Yolen, *Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie and Folklore in the Literature of Childhood* (Atlanta: August House Inc., 2000) 17.

<sup>67</sup> Williamson, 19.

<sup>68</sup> Williamson, 35-36.

mentioned above, he is able to change his looks and look young. He is also able to read other people's minds and is a skilled hypnotizer. Elspeth describes her trace as the following: "Every time Finn Learson looks at me now, I feel weak. I can't look away from him and then I *want* to marry him."<sup>69</sup> Finn is also incredibly strong and fast: "melting like a shadow [...] like a creature flying."<sup>70</sup> He cannot be killed by any mortal weapon and can only be harmed in the shape of a human. All of these magical abilities suggest that Finn is more than a selkie. One can already deduce from his first name: Finn that he is rather the Finnman from Shetland and Orkney. Indeed, according to Yarl Corbie, Finn is just another name for a magician. Finn also seems to harm Old Da in order to prevent him from revealing his secret, that is that he is the Great Selkie. One may, therefore, suggest that Hunter creates a mixture of the various folk tales and merges a selkie with a Finnman.

### 3.2.2 *The Selkie Lore as a Tool for Education*

The previous part of this chapter suggested that Hunter blends various myths and tales in order to create the character of Finn. The reason why she does so can be best demonstrated on the way she described her own writing. Her stories are "not the retellings of folktales but rather original stories with their roots in Celtic lore."<sup>71</sup> She also admits to have found inspiration in the Scandinavian tribes who came to raid Shetland from Norway. In Hunter's own words, the reason to include folklore in fantasy is "to have one's imagination carried soaring on the wings of another's imagination, to be made more aware of the possibilities of one's mind, to be thrilled, amazed, awed, enchanted- in worlds unknown until discovered through the medium of language and to find in those worlds one's own petty horizons growing wider and wider."<sup>72</sup> Hunter was very much in favour of telling a story of suspense.<sup>73</sup> With her vivid descriptions of the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>71</sup> *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, Ed. Bernice E. Cullinan and Diane Goetz Person (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2005) 392.

<sup>72</sup> Mollie Hunter, *Talent Is Not Enough: Mollie Hunter on Writing for Children* (New York: Harpercollins Children's Books, 1990) 435.

<sup>73</sup> Valerie Bierman, "Obituary: Mollie Hunter (McIlwraith), Writer" in *The Scotsman*, August 7, 2012, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/obituaries/obituary-mollie-hunter-mcilwraith-writer-1-2453621>.

characters and the narrative overflowing with action and thrill, she is able to captivate a young adult reader.

As was already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, storytelling has a long tradition in Scotland and Hunter follows it not only by writing the book itself but also emphasizing it through the character of Old Da. It is the way he talks about Finn's magic that persuades Robbie that Finn is in fact the Great Selkie. The sense of history is also apparent in the fact that the events described in the novel had already happened before, suggesting a cyclical nature of events. According to *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, Hunter was very much inspired by her grandmother's storytelling as well as her own research. It goes on to suggest that Hunter did so deliberately in order to provide insights that children are able to access in their search of the meaning of their lives: their fears, feelings and cultural angst.<sup>74</sup> According to *the Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Modern Transformations*, Hunter replays Celtic legends in the world of modern Scotland and this may suggest that perspectives in magic and the supernatural are needed to articulate an unfamiliar modern world".<sup>75</sup>

One may, therefore, claim that what Hunter was aiming at in writing the book was to educate children. For her, the word lore comes from the Old English root for the verb teach or being learned. She suggests that "folklore is what people have learned and passed on through the ages -in effect, the traditions, beliefs, customs, sayings, stories, superstitions, and prejudices preserved by word of mouth among the common people"<sup>76</sup>. If one understands the concept of a fairy tale as a way of mirroring the real world on the folkloric one, then the shapeshifting seal might be understood as the metaphor for the human capacity to change: for better or for worse.<sup>77</sup>

Hunter may also be aiming to suggest that one should not believe strangers and should listen to the elders. Indeed, in much children's fiction the hero's quest leads him to a deeper understanding of the role of the parent and realizing his or her limitations of

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<sup>74</sup> *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, 392.

<sup>75</sup> *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Modern Transformations*, Ed. Ian Brown, Thomas Clancy, Susan Manning and Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) 203.

<sup>76</sup> *Talent is not Enough*, 61.

<sup>77</sup> Betty Greenway, "The Morphing of Mollie Hunter or Folklore as the Root of All Fantasy", *The Alan Review*, Volume 23, Number 3, 1996, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/spring96/greenway.html>.

power in the society. The selkie in *a Stranger Came Ashore* functions as the ultimate trial for the young hero. The parallel between the world of contemporary Scotland with that of the Celtic Otherworld functions on a much wider range as well. *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* summarizes it aptly in the following quotation:

In Scottish children's books, the young people are expected to be aware of politics; they are expected to be aware of world events and they are expected to want to work for the good of the community and not just for individual gain. Children's fiction expresses with particular clarity society's sense of itself, its structures and the justification of its structures. Juvenile fiction's didactic nature, even when unintentional, can delineate or illustrate for children their place in society, even as it encourages them to question it. The depiction of such role models in Scotland's fiction may be subtly influencing its young people about the characteristics encouraged by Scottish society.

The idea of educating Scottish children through literature is not only relevant in terms of folk tales, where the archetypal truths are shared from generation to generation, but also through the media of a contemporary children's novel.

### 3.2.3 *Old Magic and Scandinavian Heritage*

It was already mentioned above that Hunter merged folklore with history in her work. One particular motif that is relevant to the selkie lore can be expressed through the idea of the Scandinavian heritage. In *A Stranger Came Ashore*, Hunter portrays the clash of sea magic and earth magic. Finn's power is limited, however, in that he loses both his youthful looks and magical abilities once he is above high-water mark. While Finn represents the sea one, Yarl Corbie practices the earth magic and so do the merry dancers during the holiday Up Helly Aa. According to Betty Greenway, Hunter's intention is to express the survival of magic into modern times with this ritual.<sup>78</sup> It was already suggested that many Shetlanders and the inhabitants of Scottish islands in general claim ancestry to the Vikings. Similarly, the seal folk tales also connect these islanders to their Scandinavian heritage. Finn is partly the Great Selkie from the ballad but also a source of misfortune and a powerful Finn, the magician. Hunter blends the

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<sup>78</sup> Greenway.

selkie lore with the Scandinavian concept of magician and she appears to do so in order to provide a sharp contrast to the Christian belief. An example of that may be shown on the incompetence of the minister during Old Da's funeral and dismissing anything pagan that is in any way connected to the old magic, as Yarl Corbie refers to it: "The minister opened his Bible to show how much he disapproved of this further show of superstition."<sup>79</sup>

The idea of heritage is also closely associated with myth and folklore. Greenway also suggests that myth is especially powerful in children's literature. She explains this as following:

Children share the same mental processes as our primitive ancestors. The lore of childhood is a constant that we return to often - the child is father to the man - a source or spring to which we can go throughout our lives to quench our thirst for something other than the ordinary. This can be the Celtic Otherworld or it can be the future of our world. [...] Folklore is 'the common store on which the modern storyteller must draw in his [or her] attempts to create fantasy,' for folklore is the repository of, also in Hunter's words, 'the timeless yearning of humans to identify with their sense of an eternal oneness in the universe - the sense which tells man he has a soul'<sup>80</sup>

The idea of myth and cyclical nature is reflected in the novel as well. When Yarl Corbie talks with Robbie about Finn Learson, he claims that the events have already taken place before. Like the folk tale, the universal archetypal truth seems to be repeating and Hunter uses this as a mirror to modern society.

### **3.3 Janis MacKay's *Magnus Fin***

In the first book of the trilogy, *Magnus Fin and the Ocean Quest* (2010), Mackay tells a story about an eleven-year-old boy who discovers he is a half-selkie. Just when he turns eleven, he is sent on a mission to save his selkie family, which is threatened by an evil monster. He fights not only the monster but also himself as he

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<sup>79</sup> *A Stranger Came Ashore*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Greenway.

comes to terms with his seal heritage and gains confidence in himself, since he is often bullied in school for his strange appearance. In the sequel *Magnus Fin and the Moonlight Mission* (2011), Mangus needs to protect his family once again, this time from a mysterious disease. As he does so, he learns more about his family, discovers many selkie secrets and even turns himself into a seal in order to find his way home.

### 3.3.1 *The Characters*

The following part of the thesis is going to focus on these characters and how the image of the selkie retained its folkloric characteristics or whether it changed and progressed in Mackay's interpretation. Mackay presents several selkie characters in the course of both books, all somehow related to Magnus: his father, Ragnor, his grandmother Miranda, uncle Loren and his cousins Aquella and Ronan. Despite all the fact that they are all selkies, each has their own personality and a unique story, which makes them reasonably complex. Such complexity is demonstrated not only through Mackay's various inspirations rooted in the Scottish folktales but her own imagination as well. Mackay does not seem to differentiate between a Finnman and a selkie, although she adopts the basic traits of a selkie from folk lore: they are beautiful, shapeshift but cannot use their magic to change the weather and they do not harm humans.

Her selkies have "moon-white skin and long black hair, each one more beautiful than the one before."<sup>81</sup> They also need their seal skin in order to transform into a seal. She makes a distinction between a mermaid and a selkie, however: "the two long-haired women, dressed in seaweed and shells, seemed to him magical, wonderful creatures. Only once had Tarkin seen such a miraculous sight: the mermaid he'd seen in a freezing lake on a fishing trip with his dad, long ago." There is a mention of several mermaids in the books and they are often described as being very similar in terms of their appearance with the exception of the fish tail that is typical for a mermaid. The mermaid seems to be a part of Neptune's kingdom, since they are asleep together with Neptune most of the time and Tarkin seems to be the only character who has ever seen one.

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<sup>81</sup> Janic Mackay, *Magnus Fin and the Ocean Quest* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2011) epub.



The characters in Mackay's novels are particularly interesting, since the reader sees the world through their eyes and can, therefore, sympathize with them. Unlike Hunter's selkie, whose thoughts remain hidden to the reader, these characters have the ability to express their feelings and allow the readers to sympathize with them on a much deeper level. Also, in contrast to Hunter, the selkie characters in Mackay's books are kind and do not mean any harm to humans. As Miranda puts it: "We selkies love human things. And we love humans."<sup>82</sup> Mackay is doing this on purpose, since she uses these characters to show larger issues. In contrast to the didactic function of older fairy tales, which often have a moral at the end, Mackay uses a much more subtle strategy. It is the characters and their personal struggles that allow her to address issues such as searching one's identity, namely that of maturing from a child into an adult or environmental awareness related to sea pollution in coastal areas of Scotland. In *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults*, the authors claim that children's books "permit children, by facilitating self imaging and self-identification, to gain entry into their own emotions as well as others', thus enriching their emotional and psychological experiences."<sup>83</sup> With Magnus Fin, not only can the reader see the story through his eyes: he is also the protagonist in the story. Even though Magnus Fin is half-selkie or a selkie child, a creature that often appears in folklore, Mackay uses him as a character to show her intended reader that being and feeling strange is a part of the process of growing up and maturing.

### 3.2.2 *Selkies as Family Members*

The first character worth mentioning is Magnus's father Ragnor. He is important not only in the story itself but also for the reader, since he serves as the first example of a selkie. The reader gets to know him through his own story, as he tells it to Magnus. With Ragnor, Mackay alludes to more than one folk tale. Ragnor is a selkie that would often come ashore in order to watch human girls: "A kiss from a human girl, for us in our world, was like kissing a beautiful princess in this world."<sup>84</sup> Ragnor is charmed by Magnus's mother Barabra and falls in love with her. Like the folktales, he

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ruth Nadelman Lynn, *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults* (New Providence: Reed Elsevier Inc., 1995) 26.

<sup>84</sup> *Magnus Fin and the Ocean Quest*.

charms her with his dance and the jewels he brings from the kingdom under the sea. The reader also learns that Ragnor is a very handsome man, similarly to the selkies in folklore. Ragnor does not take Barbara under the sea, however, and stays with her on land. “He remembered the sea shanty he’d often heard his father sing: *I am a man upon the land, I was a selkie in the sea, but I came ashore and married a lass, now I’ll see no more Sule Skerrie.*”<sup>85</sup> Here Mackay alludes to the traditional Orkney ballad called “The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry”, in which a woman asks the sea who the father of her child is and a selkie answers her that it is him. He also predicts that the woman is going to get married and her new husband is going to kill both him and the child. The ballad goes as following:

'I am a man upo the lan,

An I am a silkie in the sea;

And when I’m far and far frae lan,

My dwelling is in Sule Skerrie.<sup>86</sup>

Ragnor gives Barbara his seal skin, despite the warnings from his kind. Out of fear that Ragnor will leave her with the child and return back to the sea, similarly to the fate of the woman in the ballad, Barbara burns it, which has catastrophic consequences: “With the burning of the skin we broke the law of the sea and every day we age, we grow greyer, weaker, slower.”<sup>87</sup> At the beginning of *Magnus Fin and the Ocean Quest*, Ragnor looks like an old man due to a curse that has been put on him and Barbara as well. So old, that Tarkin, Magnus’s friend mistakes him for his great-grandfather. Conversely to the folklore, the selkie is punished and so is his wife.

Another selkie character is Magnus’s grandmother, Miranda “the wisest and most beautiful seal that ever lived”. With this character, Mackay introduces the concept of selkie hierarchy, with Miranda being the Queen of all selkies. Her role as selkie

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<sup>85</sup> *Magnus Fin and the Ocean Quest*.

<sup>86</sup> *Scottish Ballads*, Ed. Emily Lyle (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1997) 124.

<sup>87</sup> *Magnus Fin and the Ocean Quest*.

royalty is not acquired through hereditary claims but earned by her good deeds: “In the selkie kingdom you are not born a queen or a prince. It is something you achieve. Selkies who do brave deeds to help others, they can become kings and queens, princes and princesses.”<sup>88</sup> In helping his selkie family and being brave, Magnus is also able to join the family and come to terms with his heritage.

It is interesting that, conversely to the folkloric origins of selkies (see section 2.3.1), Mackay’s selkies were originally seals: “It’s not given to all seals but there are some of us with the gift of both worlds.”<sup>89</sup> Miranda is extra special in this matter from other selkies in that she can change at will: “she taught me to change out of my seal skin into human form at will. She had the wisdom to change whenever she wanted. She didn’t have to wait for the change times - midwinter and midsummer.”<sup>90</sup> The shape-shifting is a very useful skill to have in a selkie world, since when one acquires it, he or she can live for a very long time. Mackay also presents Miranda as more human, especially in comparison with Hunter’s Finn. Miranda not only helps people but she also has her own story of falling in love with the wrong “person”, dealing with disease and death.

Apart from being a selkie queen, Miranda also plays an important role in the story as a part of Magnus’s family. Unlike the evil selkie in Hunter’s novel, here the selkies form a family. What finally allows Magnus to breathe underwater is a kiss from Miranda and it is Miranda who teaches Ragnor to change into a human at will. Similarly, Aquella, Magnus’s cousin helps Magnus in changing into a seal and taking his skin off. It is also the family bond thanks to which Magnus decides to go on his adventure and save his family. The sense of family and community is further emphasized by the customs that the selkies hold sacred. There is a special ceremony for the young selkies, which is described to Magnus by Ragnor:

On your third birthday, I wanted to take you under the sea. It is our custom to present our young to the family at the age of three. Us seal folk have always done this. It’s a time of great celebration and well-wishing. It’s the time the

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<sup>88</sup> *Magnus Fin and the Ocean Quest*.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

young one meets the elders and good wishes are given, we call them hansels.<sup>91</sup>

One may argue, therefore, that Mackay also wishes to express the importance of community and family not only in the world of selkies but also the real world of human beings. Magnus is a member of a community oppressed by an evil monster king. One can argue that this state of events, quite possibly, mirrors the contemporary Scotland's condition. While one may claim that such a reading is excessive, Mackay did write the novels during the referendum period in Scotland.

### 3.2.3 *Selkies as Metaphors*

Apart from true selkies, Mackay also introduces the selkie child "*Sliochan Nan Ron*, ... related to the seal folk"<sup>92</sup> named Magnus, the protagonist, who has "uncanny eyes: one green, one brown. And [...] his pupils were not black but dark blue,"<sup>93</sup> where his green eye represents his human half and the green the sea one. As he is a half selkie, his feet and hands are webbed. All of these traits make Magnus a target of bullying. He feels estranged and finds solace in the sea: he often goes to walks along the coast and looks for treasures from sunken ships. Mackay describes his feelings as the following: "Thank goodness for the sea, for the shore, the sand, the rock pools, the treasures the tide brought in, the oystercatchers and screeching gulls and the lone heron that stood hunched over a rock, staring at the flat sea. Magnus Fin loved the sea and the shore. He forgot his troubles when he was by the sea."<sup>94</sup>

When Magnus celebrates his eleventh birthday, he finally discovers the truth. Suddenly, the boy who is bullied and insecure finds comfort in the natural world: "with water he was brave. With water he was happy."<sup>95</sup> The duality of the character is emphasized not only through the two worlds of the human and selkie or sea, thanks to which Magnus can move freely between the two, having the ability to breathe underwater, but also through the character's age, with eleven being half between

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<sup>91</sup> *Magnus Fin and the Ocean Quest*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

another two worlds - childhood and adulthood: “He is no longer a young boy, not yet a man. Some call it the age between the worlds.”<sup>96</sup> Magnus age puts him on the verge of teenagerhood, a period in a life of a human, that can be strange and confusing, not only because of the physical changes of the body but the mental maturing as well. The selkie metaphor and having these two sides can therefore be read as Magnus’s child and adult side that merge together at that stage of his life. Magnus is a typical example of a teenager, trying to make sense of his course of life. Mackay uses the selkie metaphor in order to show the child’s struggle of coping with his peculiarities and learning to accept them. An example of that is his webbed feet, which he tries to hide. As he swims with his grandmother under the sea, the following happens: “‘Grand feet,’ said his grandmother, and for the first time Magnus felt proud of his feet.”<sup>97</sup>

In the first book, he is able to use his webbed feet to swim underwater, although requires quite a bit of help from his grandmother to be able to swim larger distances. As the plot progresses, he learns that his eyes have special purpose, since they act like torchlights for him to be able to see under water well. In the second book, Magnus is able to fully transform into a seal without assistance and becomes even more comfortable in his own skin. Similarly, other characters also experience the struggle of finding their true self. Tarkin, Magnus’s new American friend gradually becomes Scottish, not only through the use of Scots but through really understanding the Scottish identity.

Mackay also alludes to the original selkie folktale of the “Seal Wife”, mainly through the character of Aquella, a selkie who has lost her skin and is trying to come to terms with her now human life, since she is unable to go back to the sea. Mackay presents a powerful image in the scene where Aquella is look at her own body in the mirror. According to Nadelman:

Children’s literature is rightfully and seriously concerned with coming of age as subject matter and theme. The young adult novel, so popular today, derives much of its popularity from the fact that it explicitly deals with the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

issues young people confront during adolescence-physical changes, acne, peer relationships, dating, drugs, alcohol, sex, career anxiety and decisions, relations with parents, loneliness, suicide-and suggests that, by and large, the dilemmas associated with them are manageable and solvable.<sup>98</sup>

Another theme, very much present in a lot of contemporary children's literature, is the environmental awareness. In the first book of the three, *Magnus Fin and the Ocean Quest* (2010) the selkie world is threatened by an evil monster, who forces the sea creatures to work for him and uses the energy from the waste and rubbish in the seas. In the following books *Magnus Fin and the Moonlight Mission* (2011) and *Magnus Fin and the Selkie Secret* (2012), Mackay also includes issues such as the impacts of the fishing industry by showing the scarred fish as well as the perils of popular culture, that threatens to destroy the selkie magic.

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<sup>98</sup> Nadelaman 137.

## 4. REWRITING THE “SEAL WIFE” TALE

### 4.1 Overview

The following part is going to provide an overview of literary works published in Scotland that have selkies as characters in them or whose which are inspired by the selkie folk tales. They are not going to be commented on in greater detail simply because the folklore is not as interesting for literary analysis or are similar to other works which are discussed in the following chapters in that respect. Also, there are not that many works which deal with the selkie folklore. As was already mentioned in this chapters, the selkie folklore is very varied and tends to differ in different locations across Scotland and tends to appear on the island or in coastal areas, given the proximity of the sea. The following parts are going to divide these works into three groups: children’s literature including story collections, fiction for adults and poetry. Several specific examples are going to be mentioned in each part, followed by a brief commentary to introduce the writers and their work. This part of the thesis is also going to provide a comprehensive base to which specific chapters will refer to when comparing similar themes and motifs.

It was already mentioned that selkie folklore is usually more prominent in coastal areas as well as the islands. The Orkney islands seem to be most prolific when it comes to literature inspired by selkie folk tales, since they are mentioned by both Eric Linklater and George Mackay Brown. Linklater rewrites the “Ballad of Selkie of Sules Skerry” in his short story titled “Sealskin Trousers”. In his account, it is a selkie man, not a woman who wears the skin. Also, the story is set firmly into contemporary Scotland and the selkie is given a human name and even studies at university. In contrast to the original tale, the selkie wears fur trousers, a modern representation of the original selkie skin. Also, conversely to the original ballad, the selkie wants the girl to come with him and change into a selkie.

According to *BBC Two* website, it is George Mackay Brown, who is the Orcadian writer whose works “are concerned with protecting Orkney’s cultural heritage from the relentless march of progress and the loss of myth and archaic ritual in the modern world, an anxiety which was further influenced by his conversion in 1961 to

Catholicism.”<sup>99</sup> Brown finds inspiration in the selkie folklore in two of his works of fiction: a short story collection for children *Pictures in the Cave* (1977) and a novel *Beside the Ocean of Time* (1994). In the latter, Thorfinn, the novel’s protagonist falls in love with a selkie girl and brings her to his house as his wife. Brown also wrote a play that features a selkie girl called *The Girl from the Sea: A Play for Voices* (1984).

Given the supernatural nature of selkies and their often horrifying image in the stories on the islands, there are also two crime novels which feature selkie characters. The first of them, *the Gathering Murders* (2006) written by Keith Moray<sup>100</sup> hints at the selkie folktales when a local poet is drowned under mysterious circumstances. Moray sets the novel in a fictional town of Eastern Uist, somewhere in the Hebrides and the body of the poet is found on one of the islands completely isolated from civilisation. Another crime novel inspired by the selkie folklore is *the Seal King Murders* written by Alanna Knight. It is a historical novel set in 1861 in Orkney, in which a detective comes to investigate mysterious drownings, which are believed to be the work of the mythical seal king.

The authors who reinvent the selkie folklore in greater extent are Sian Hayton and Sue Glover (see parts 4.2 and 4.3 of this thesis).

## 4.2 Sian Hayton’s *The Governors*

Sian Hayton’s novel *The Governors* (1992) is difficult to define in terms of its genre. While there are fantastical elements in the story, it also provides a rational explanation at its end: that everything which happens in the world under the sea is solely the product of the main character’s imagination. One can, therefore, understand it also as a psychological novel. The story revolves around Hester, a young mother of one who is expecting her second child and is struggling to come to terms with her duties as a mother, a wife and a woman in general. Through her own imagination, she is able to

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<sup>99</sup> “George Mackay Brown”, *BBC Two: Writing Scotland*, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/57Vz7BB367BxpBcts30x0CX/george-mackay-brown>.

<sup>100</sup> pen-name of Keith Souter.



overcome her trauma of losing her father as well as come to terms with her own body and sexuality.

Hayton's novel is fairly complex because it can be read both literally as a fantasy as well as metaphorically, as a means to Hester's overcoming postpartum psychosis. Hester moves freely between the real world and the sea world of her imagination, that is occupied by selkies, Mer Maids and other sea creatures. Due to the novel's double-reading, the selkies may function not only as supernatural creatures but also as a product of Hester's mind, a metaphor for something or someone else. The structure of the narrative is disturbed by sections in italics, narrated in the first person. The voice belongs to a selkie as well, possibly Hester's deceased father. The following part of the thesis is going to analyse Hayton's novel in terms of both of these readings with special attention to the selkie characters as well as the references to the folk tales in which they appear.

#### 4.2.1 *Hester or Hesoine? A Metaphorical Selkie*

Hester lives in between two worlds: the real world and the sea world or the "other" world but is not content with living in either. The schizoid duality of the character may be demonstrated even through her name. While her true name is Hesoine, and she is indeed referred to as Hesoine in the sea world, she prefers Hester in real life. She is referred to as Hester in the parts of the book narrated in third person, yet the unknown first person narrator calls her Hesoine or the short Hes.

Also, Hester does not feel comfortable in her own skin, especially when she is pregnant: "It's me that's shapeless just now. Not the clothes. Nothing is going to look good on me for another four months."<sup>101</sup> In a way, Hester is, like the selkie wife, unhappy about her life on shore and she is longing to return to the sea by finding her lost skin. Germanà claims that "the selkie's entrapment on dry land - and 'dual' identity dictated by the evocative wearing of the 'skin' - is an important subtext to the story: like the selkie's, Hester's soul feels, in a sense, disembodied."<sup>102</sup> She feels alienated in the world, distant from her husband and mother and other people in general. This is

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<sup>101</sup> Sian Hayton, *The Governors* (Nairn: Balnain Books, 1992) 22.

<sup>102</sup> Germanà, 111.

suggested in the use of her wording: she refers to a drunk man as a “creature” and a group of children as “aliens”.

In her book on the origins of various myths, Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés, who is a post-trauma therapist as well as a Jungian analyst, comments on the selkie myth in much detail. She presents her own version of the tale, almost identical to the Seal Wife one but names it “Sealskin, Soulskin” precisely because she understands the skin itself as a representation of a part of the female psyche: “The pelt in this story is not so much an article as the representation of a feeling state and a state of being - one that is cohesive, soulful, and of the wildish female nature.”<sup>103</sup> The source of Hester’s unhappiness is the fact that she lost her skin. According to Estés, the metaphorical loss of the skin might occur during big changes in a woman’s life: being pregnant, having her first menstruation, getting married and so on. As was mentioned above, Hester is definitely not content with her pregnancy. Also, Estés adds that the loss of the skin might occur due to long periods of limbo, a kind of tedious routine of everyday life when a woman focuses on everything around her but not on herself. Hester’s life is precisely the case. The following quotation shall serve as an example: “The morning routine took over. James showered; Hester cooked; Robbie played in his cot. James ate; Hester fed Robbie.”<sup>104</sup> The simple syntax only intensifies the repetitive, routine nature of Hester’s home tasks.

Hester first tries to compensate for the lost skin by creating a new persona. She “wears” a new identity as a replacement for her lost skin. The example of that can be found in the way how she applies make up: “There was a real face there, somewhere, and she must find it and show it to the world.”<sup>105</sup> One can find the term “persona” in Jungian psychology as well, described as a part of the psyche that one projects to others.<sup>106</sup> This camouflage does not seem to provide any relief to her damaged soul and so she needs to find a different way how to retrieve her lost skin. Estés argues: “eventually every woman who stays away from her soul-home for too long, tires. [...]

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<sup>103</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estés, “Homing: Returning to Oneself” in *Women Who Ran with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992) 264.

<sup>104</sup> Hayton, 17.

<sup>105</sup> Hayton, 9.

<sup>106</sup> Robert H. Hopcke, *A Guided Tour of the Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Boston: Shambala Publications Inc., 1999) 89.

Then she seeks her skin again in order to revive her sense of self and soul, in order to restore her deep-eyed and oceanic knowing.”<sup>107</sup> She also suggests that the selkie tale serves as guidance to other women. Like the selkie wife who longs for the sea, the woman hears the calling of her own wisdom in herself. By this internal emotional journey, she is able to understand her true self. This self-realization or , in Jungian terminology, individuation is further discussed on the background of the selkie tales in the following part.

#### 4.2.2 *Finding the Skin as a Metaphor for Finding the Self*

If one takes the Seal Wife tale as a guidance for individuation, as Estés suggests, then the analysis of the Jungian archetypes seems more than fitting. Jung believed that in order to achieve it, one needs to make contact with the personal and collective unconscious in several steps. Jung proposes an idea that one can successfully reach one’s Self through self-therapy in the form of dreams. When Hester enters the sea kingdom, she does so in a dream. In *The Fantasy Principle* (2004), Vannoy Adams claims the following:

Compensatory dreams confront the ego and challenge it to relate to alternative perspectives to which it has previously been unrelated or ineffectively related. The ego may then seriously entertain, critically evaluate, and either accept or reject these perspectives. There is no imperative for the ego to integrate these perspectives. What Jung advocates is not an uncritical capitulation by the ego to the unconscious but a relational dialogue between the ego and the unconscious.”<sup>108</sup>

In contrast to Freud, Jung claims that the aim of the dream is not to indulge in the forbidden but rather confront it. Hester’s stays in the sea world are definitely not a pleasant experience but comprise of rather confusing or even horrifying states of events. According to Jung, in the process of individuation, one needs to make contact with one’s shadow, which represents the part of the psyche where the repressed, socially

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<sup>107</sup> Estés, 264.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Vannoy Adams, *The Fantasy Principle: Psychoanalysis of the Imagination* (New York, Brunner-Routledge, 2004) 22.

unacceptable and bad aspects of one's personality are stored. Only through facing these repressed emotions can one get closer to the Self.

The source of Hester's neurosis is the imbalance between these two parts: her conscious and unconscious parts of her psyche. There is a scene in the book in which Hester reads the Seal Wife folk tale to her son and she is thinking the following about the selkie: "That poor woman – how it must have hurt her to leave the land. Imagine living between land and sea and never being content with either."<sup>109</sup> The folk tale actually mirrors Hester's situation because she is struggling with exactly that. She is unhappy with her pregnancy; she is repulsed by her own body and uncomfortable with her sexuality. The core of her neurosis lies in the aspects of her psyche that she has repressed: the emotions connected with the death of her father when she was a child, the fact that her mother left her alone most of the time and her feeling dirty. Like the seal wife in the folk tale, Hester enters the other world, the representation of her unconscious to restore the balance.

The manner in which she enters the other world is worth mentioning as well. According to Germanà the fact that a mysterious door appears in Hester's house suggests the start of her schizoid split. She also points out that in fantasy literature, the door often portrays the entrance to another world<sup>110</sup>. In Hester's case, it is the sea world. When applied to the selkie lore, since the sea world is occupied by supernatural beings, one may claim that it is in fact a place similar to the Celtic concept of the Otherworld. This "other" world is far from the original concept, however (see section 2.3.2). Whereas in Celtic mythology, it is a place similar to the Christian concept of Heaven, where there is no death or pain, the "other" world in *The Governors* is truly terrifying and full of the unknown, as it embodies Hester's unconscious part of the psyche.

Hester has, therefore, an ambivalent approach to the door: "She wished passionately that the closed doors to the kitchen and the living room led to other places. She wanted to open them and find a completely new scene beyond where her life would

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<sup>109</sup> Hayton, 28.

<sup>110</sup> See Monica Germanà, *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing: Fiction since 1978* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) 110.

be free of all these distresses and discomforts.”<sup>111</sup> She longs for her psyche to feel complete but is also afraid of entering the realm of the unconscious: “Sometimes the door to the sea was there, and sometimes it was not, and when it was there she was afraid she would go through it. She had no intention of going, but [ ...] she knew that if the door kept appearing, one day she would go through it.”<sup>112</sup> The reason for her hesitation is related to the experiences she has in the other world. It is full of sex, violence and dirt: all things she despises. Estés comments on the nature of the ego as a part of the psyche that is influenced and partly governed by the outside world but is fascinated with the mystical and the magical. She claims that the ego desires the light and the knowledge of the self but can only go so far and due to its fear of penetrating deeper is limited in its exploration. This limitation is the reason why the ego feels lonely. One may then claim that Hester is the representation of that lonely ego. It is difficult for her to enter her unconsciousness not only because of the thing she sees there but also because she is afraid: “It was taking her all her time to cope with routine reality, let alone thrust herself into a seething cauldron of change.”<sup>113</sup>

The fact that Hester meets selkies when going through the tunnel is suggestive of more than a mere coincidence. There is a case in Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), in which he describes a patient’s dream:

A subterranean channel led directly into the water from a place in the floor of her room (genital canal—amniotic fluid). She raised a trap-door in the floor and a creature dressed in brown fur, very much resembling a seal, promptly appeared. This creature turned out to be the dreamer's younger brother, to whom she had always been like mother.<sup>114</sup>

It was already mentioned that Hester also struggles with her sexuality. On his analysis of the dream, Freud suggests that the channel symbolizes the vagina. This tunnel, therefore, symbolizes Hester’s exploration of her sexuality. This companion resembling the seal as described by Jung is present in *The Governors* as well, possibly

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<sup>111</sup> Hayton, 33.

<sup>112</sup> Hayton, 154.

<sup>113</sup> Hayton, 145.

<sup>114</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Basic Books, 2010) 412.

in the form of the selkie narrator in the sections in italics. Jung describes the ego as a small island on the sea of unconsciousness but according to Estés, it is an animal that represents the ego in folklore. She goes on to suggest that “sometimes the ego is able to gain control in a most brutish and destructive manner, but in the end, through the heroine’s or hero’s progress, it most often loses its bid to reign.”<sup>115</sup> Hester’s journey reflects this process. She witnesses enslaving of the elephant seals by the selkies, she is attacked and blinded by one of them and conversely, she kills a group of sirens. There also is a scene in the book in which Hester and her husband find a dead seal on the beach and Hester is distressed by this. She identifies with the seal. Germanà states that “these coincidences question the boundaries of Hester’s real and imagined selves: to Hester’s subconscious there is little difference between the corpse of the ‘real’ seal and the selkie of the legend; they are both, arguably, projections of her own (battered) self.”<sup>116</sup> Jung also claims that the individuation process may include witnessing one’s own metaphorical death in a dream.

If the seal and the selkie are projections of Hester’s self, then one can argue that they are part of her psyche, namely the shadow and animus archetypes. Not only does she project herself on the characters under the sea but she also projects other people she knows in the real world. When she first sees the elephant seal who is supposed to take her to the other world, the creature is described as following: “His face was a broad oval; his heavy jaw was clean shaven; the long straight nose and small plump mouth were her own; the heavy auburn hair hanging over his forehead was Charlotte’s.”<sup>117</sup> Hester also projects her friend Ronnie on a grouper. Jung understands these dreams as essentially subjective which leads to a conclusion that the dreamer not only invents the scene but also directs it, participates in it and criticizes it. He suggests that all the figures in the dream are personified parts of the psyche and serve as a basis for the interpretation.<sup>118</sup> If one adopts Jung’s terminology, then Hester’s journey is a quest to reach the Self.

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<sup>115</sup> Estés, 270.

<sup>116</sup> Germanà, 111.

<sup>117</sup> Hayton, 161.

<sup>118</sup> See Jung, *Collective Works*.

The theme of quest is also reminiscent of the older folk tales in which a seal hunter is turned into a seal in order to heal the wounds he has inflicted. Hester has also hurt herself and it is only her who can heal these wounds. She is able to do so successfully, in one of the last scenes. She sees herself as a young girl, who has partly turned to stone. She kisses her on the lips saying that she loves her and breaks her free. As a consequence, she wakes up from the dream and is literally and metaphorically healed, having restored the balance. She progresses from shapeshifting to metamorphosis. As Simone de Beauvoir claims in her seminal work of feminism, *The Second Sex* (1949): “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”<sup>119</sup>

#### 4.2.3 *Entering the Sea Realm as a Metaphor for Cleansing*

The fact that Hester enters the sea kingdom, that is, the element of water is a metaphor for cleansing of not only the body but the soul as well. According to Germanà, the presence of water in the dreams expresses one’s hope for rebirth or renovation.<sup>120</sup> The dreams of entering the sea world are according to her “the beginning of Hester’s quest for integrity and wholeness. They represent her necessary subconscious drowning in the past, in her guilt and fears, to cleanse or more appropriately naturalise her.”<sup>121</sup> Hester feels dirty and ashamed of the natural processes of her body. The following quotation comes from the part of the book where she, due to her risky pregnancy and bleeding, needs to wear a sanitary towel: “This year she had spent too long with her thighs chafed by towels and her thoughts on the wetness of her vulva. She wanted it to be over. She wanted to be clean.”<sup>122</sup> According to de Beauvoir, when a young girl enters puberty, she starts to hate her body, the hairs in her armpits and beginning menstruating.<sup>123</sup> Hester too is repulsed by these natural processes in her body and as the sight of her teenage self, stuck in the rock might suggest, her development into becoming a woman has not reached completion.

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<sup>119</sup> Shannon Musset, “Simone de Beauvoir,” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed November 6, 2016, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/beauvoir/>.

<sup>120</sup> See Germanà, 110.

<sup>121</sup> Germanà, 111.

<sup>122</sup> Hayon, 94.

<sup>123</sup> See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, 1982) 32.

The water has therapeutic effects on Hester. The following excerpt supports the claim:

She had been on holiday that summer in Greece with friend of the family. There she had learned the joy of swimming in clear, warm water. Each day she had swum out to the rocks in the bay and stayed there, the lower half of her body submerged, feeling the joy of an endless supply of clean salt water scouring off her secretions. She would love to do that now.<sup>124</sup>

According to Estés, the Seal Wife tale is especially empowering for women because it shows the need for returning to the sea despite the selkie's human family that she leaves behind. Returning to the sea in the story means returning home, returning to the Jungian concept of Self. Thanks to water, Hester is also able to finally move freely: "The water supported her like clear jelly, and she found movement through it as easy as walking - easier for one in her state."<sup>125</sup> Due to Hester's risky pregnancy, she needs to be very still and is basically bound to lie in bed for several months. Like the selkie wife, the water gives her a sense of freedom.

Also, when Hester first comes to the 'other world' or hallucinates, depending on the reading of the novel, she sees herself swimming in a river. The water then serves as a mirror to Hester, who sees herself not as she is in real life, but rather her alter. The mirror not only shows her alter ego but mirrors her fate as well: "She tried to shout to the swimmer but her mouth was sealed, and all she could get out was a moan. The swimmer was getting near rusty metal. Hester ran along the bank to see if she could find someone to help. Something must be done to stop her or she would choke on the filth that she was approaching so calmly and so steadily."<sup>126</sup> Hester attempts to save her alter ego but to her dismay, is awoken by her husband James and never finds out what happens to her. This encounter is reflected later in the novel, when Hester reads from a collection of folk tales to her son:

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<sup>124</sup> Hayton, 94.

<sup>125</sup> Hayton, 59.

<sup>126</sup> Hayton, 15.



Tonight's story was from a really old collection of Scottish legends illustrated with line drawings and colour plates. One of the plates – unsuitable for children – was of a naked woman standing on the seashore.<sup>127</sup>

The fact that Hester sees her naked self and that the selkie is naked as well symbolizes her removing the bonds to human society and its rules, a sort of freedom from marriage and motherhood. Because as the selkie in the tale, she needs to leave all that behind in order to return to the Self.

Finally, the book concludes with a scene in which Hester takes a bath. In the bath, she connects her thoughts with the elephant seal and says to him: “I think I like myself – slime and all.”<sup>128</sup> Similarly to the scene where she frees her younger self, this suggests that she is able to face the shadow and comes to terms with the aspects of the psyche she had repressed.

#### 4.2.4 *Dealing with Loss*

Another reason for Hester's neurosis is the trauma caused by the loss of her father. Her father's profession was marine biologist and such fact may then serve as a basis for her dreams about the sea world. Hester does not mention her father much in the novel, but one may notice that she is still vulnerable at the mention of him. Her changing the name might serve as a good example. The following excerpt describes the reasons behind the choice of the name and the reason why Hester decides to change it: “Don't call me Hes,” said Hester in a strangled voice. ‘I know you hated it when I said you must stop calling me – my real name – you said so often enough. If you can't call me Hester at least call me – Hesoine.’”<sup>129</sup> To that, her sister Charlotte reacts: “I was upset when you stopped using the name daddy gave you. It was rejecting the memory somehow. [...] It's like this – Hesoine, the character you were named after, was given a very hard time by her father – offered to the sea monster and so on – so when daddy got killed you felt he had betrayed you and you rejected him and the name he gave

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<sup>127</sup> Hayton, 27.

<sup>128</sup> Hayton, 223.

<sup>129</sup> Hayton, 42-43.

you.”<sup>130</sup> This suggests that Hester has still not accepted her father’s death. It was already mentioned that Hester projects not only herself but also her friends and family onto the characters from the sea world. One may then suggest that the nameless narrator is the representation of Hester’s father and also a selkie, judging by the following quote: “She’s never seen me in the skin before, so I guess it was no wonder she didn’t recognise me.”<sup>131</sup> In trying to cope with the loss of her father, Hester projects him as a seal, who is her guide in the world underwater. This is reminiscent to the folkloric origin of the selkies, who were believed to be the souls of fishermen lost at sea (see section 2.3). It is her father who shows Hester her younger self and helps her to come to terms with her own body.

Furthermore, Hester also has a difficult relationship with her mother, who often left her alone when she was growing up. According to Estés, the fact that the bond between the mother and the daughter is missing leads to the incompleteness of initiation. She proposes that the selkie folktale functions as this initiation into the woman’s journey to psychological wholeness. Estés comments on the function of the myth as following: “What can be derived from those deep templates echoes the innate patterns of women’s most internal psychological processes. In this sense, fairy tales and mythos are initiators; they are the wise ones who teach those who have come after.”<sup>132</sup> By following the example of the Seal Wife, Hester enters the sea world in the search for acceptance and wholeness.

It was already mentioned above that Hester also loses a part of herself, that is her seal/soul skin. Estés comments on the nature of the skin to be able to react to danger or change of temperature. There are many instances in which Hester’s senses are obstructed: she loses her voice, her hearing and even her sight as she is blinded by the selkie messenger. Unlike the folktales in which the selkies blind the human as a form of punishment<sup>133</sup>, Hester is able to retrieve her younger self from the depths of the other world.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 187-8.

<sup>132</sup> Estés, 263.

<sup>133</sup> As in Duncan Williamson’s “Blind Angus”.

#### 4.2.5 *The Supernatural as a Way to Express Ideology*

It was already mentioned above that there are two possible readings of the novel. One would suggest that all the creatures living under the sea are purely the product of Hester's imagination. Such claim can be supported by the following quotation, in which a selkie speaks to Hester: "You are a human, that means you know more than us. You are our ruler; you made us. You must help now."<sup>134</sup> Hester indeed has very vivid imagination and is a passionate reader. In such a reading, the supernatural nature of the selkies and other sea creatures would feel redundant, however. And one must admit that there is a huge array of these creatures, not only selkies but also elephant seals with shapeshifting powers, a seductive bull ray, a transgender sea horse or sirens who feed on male genitalia. As was already mentioned in the introductory part about the selkies, they appear in the folktales not only because of their supernatural abilities as a source of amusement but seem to have another purpose as well. According to Stuart Hannabuss: "All writing is ideological since all writing either assumes values even when not overtly espousing them, or is produced and also read within a social and cultural framework which is itself inevitably suffused with values, that is to say, suffused with ideology."<sup>135</sup> As a result, one may suggest that it really does not matter whether we read the novel as fantasy or a psychological novel, since even fantasy carries a hidden meaning. The supernatural sea world also allows for violation of the rules in the real world. The following quote comes from a scene in the book where Hester discusses her punishment with the selkies: "In her world this argument would be nonsense, but here it seemed completely reasonable."<sup>136</sup>

A good example is the character of the Mer Maid. While she is portrayed as the mermaid from Classical mythology, with the bottom part of her body looking like a fishtail, according to Germanà, "embodying two opposed versions of femininity - the sensual femme fatale and 'the greatest little housewife' - the mermaid represents the kind of feminine whole Hester has longed for all along."<sup>137</sup> "As is in the nature of the mermaid in folklore (see section 2.2), she is promiscuous, having had several husbands

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<sup>134</sup> Hayton, 101.

<sup>135</sup> Hannabuss, 41.

<sup>136</sup> Hayton, 100.

<sup>137</sup> Germanà, 111.

and enjoys her sexuality. While Hester identifies with the selkie woman, she also has sex with the Mer Maid's lover, the bull ray. Even if at first, she refers to the Mer Maid as a "display of vulgarity,"<sup>138</sup> she eventually identifies with her too.

#### 4.2.6 Hayton's Selkies

Hester sympathizes with her seal alter ego, a mother who needs to abandon her children and find her seal skin, but she feels threatened and repulsed by the other selkies: both male and female. One may argue that Hayton follows the two different folkloric representations of seal people: both the fairy-like selkies and the menacing fin folk. This claim may be further supported by the fact that they can control the weather and are generally terrifying. While Hester's alter ego selkie changes from seal into human, the menacing "other" selkies do not shapeshift, yet are referred to neither as "dry-siders" nor "sea-siders", but are said to inhabit a third world, even though they seem to live fine in both the sea and on earth. They have huge bulging eyes, chinless faces and their hands only have four fingers. They wear brown dresses and something like a white turban on their heads and look very similar to one another. An interesting connection is also related to the woman whom Hester meets in the hospital, since she is later reflected in her imagination as a messenger of the selkies. Hester probably makes the connection over the fact that the woman is wearing the fur coat, like the mythological origin of the Finn man, who were believed to be shapeshifters based on their "magical" skills and their clothes and equipment made from seal skins.

The selkies in *The Governors* are truly evil and menacing creatures. Consider the following section:

They surrounded her and bore her to the ground. ... Her head was seized and forced back, bony fingers were driven between her teeth and her mouth pulled open. They were almost standing on top of her, their gloating faces intent. She tried not to struggle and give them the pleasure they were anticipating.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Hayton, 186.

<sup>139</sup> Hayton, 131.

The selkies also enslave elephant seals and laugh at the death of the sirens. Moreover, they threaten Hester as well. They want revenge like the selkies in the folk tales based on the Saami people, since they blame the death of the seal mother on her: “You still owe us – you’ll have to pay. You took a life – you saved a life. You are still in our debt.”<sup>140</sup> Even though the structure of the narrative is divided into the real world in regular type and then the “other world” in italics, there are instances when the two overlap. The selkies appear also in Hester’s reality. She sees them out of the window from her kitchen and describes the encounter as following: “Three of the men were carrying a net on their shoulder, and some women hurried up the hill behind them, some carrying white bundles in their arms and all had that intent look which meant someone was for it.”<sup>141</sup> Like the fin folk from the folktales, these selkies here seem to be luring people under the water and are looking for their next victim.

It was suggested above that Hester is a metaphorical selkie, because in purely supernatural reading, she is clearly human. One may argue, however, that she is able to communicate with the creatures under the sea with her mind: “the crab’s answer came to her like a voice speaking into the bone behind her ear.”<sup>142</sup> She is also able to remain under water for several minutes like the seals, which “can stay underwater for more than twenty minutes at a time and their heart all but stops beating.”<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, she is never able to understand the content of the lecture she is invited to in the other world. She still is a stranger there and is treated so by the other characters. She looks laughable with the pair of artificial gills which she wears like a necklace.

#### 4.2.7 *Animal as Object – Rewriting the Seal Wife*

Like the selkie folk tales, the story blends the biological with the cultural and bridges the world of humans and animals. According to Germanà, “recurrent hints to Scottish/Celtic selkie lore attach a significant supernatural layer to the psychological reading of the story,”<sup>144</sup> not only because it expresses an unhappy union between a man

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<sup>140</sup> Hayton, 100.

<sup>141</sup> Hayton, 146.

<sup>142</sup> Hayton, 58.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>144</sup> Germanà, 111.

and his seal wife but also because they address the eternal struggle between humans and animals.

Like Glover's play (see 4.3), Hayton also portrays the objectification of women. In doing so, however, she does not really copy the Selkie Wife tale but recreates it by focusing it on the actual seal. At the beginning of the story, Hester embodies the immobile object, quite literally, because of her risky pregnancy. There is a scene in which Hester moves from a wheelchair onto the bed "like a seal over rocks."<sup>145</sup> Having lost control over her own body, she is paralyzed in her state, constantly followed by either her mother or her husband. She sympathizes with the female seal that she and her husband find on the beach: "I wish he'd leave her alone," she thought. "We've no right to maul her around like this. We're strangers – we should show more respect and let the sea take her."<sup>146</sup> In her seminal work on feminism *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir discusses on the objectification of women and the loss of control over their bodies. The following excerpt summarizes her claims:

The campaign of inspection was viewed as a particularly outrageous violation of such rights and the women viewed as victims of male and medical appropriation of their bodies. Here we find the beginnings of arguments picked up later in campaigns against rape and sexual violence, as well as in campaigns for access to birth control and abortion and in the feminist health movement, all of which stressed women's rights to control what happens to their bodies.<sup>147</sup>

The loss of control over her body is expressed not only in Hester's inability to move but also through precisely the same encounters mentioned above: she feels very uncomfortable when a gynaecologist examines her or when the women in the hospital shave her vulva. She is also raped by a bull ray, even though it happens only in her imagination. When her selkie alter ego is in labour, she is tied to the bed with her own hair. One could also argue that she is objectified through what Mulvey calls "the male

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<sup>145</sup> Hayton, 89.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>147</sup> Kathleen Lennon, "Feminist Perspectives on the Body", *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed November 5, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/feminist-body/>.

gaze”<sup>148</sup>. The examples of that can be not only the scene in which Hester’s face is put on a big screen during a lecture but also in the way the bull ray looks at her: “He raked her with his eyes [... and she] felt herself go limp under his penetrating stare.”<sup>149</sup> He takes all her clothes off afterwards, revealing her naked body completely. Le Couteur also suggests that this is an important factor in the selkie myth: “Without her sealskin, the selkie woman is naked – literally and metaphorically – and it is this that both attracts the man and gives him power, making her dependent on his clothing and housing.”<sup>150</sup>

If Hester is a metaphorical selkie, then the loss of control over her body is mirrored in the loss of the seal’s skin. It is the selkie’s husband who now has control over her life. Estés’s theory in which the seal skin is part of the soul can be applied here as well. According to her, the loss of the skin happens due to the pressures of the everyday life: those of the family to be a good mother and wife and those of the society as well. Hester feels that her only function in life is to give birth to the baby and loses her sense of self, which is the metaphorical skin, as a consequence. When she is having a conversation with one of the sea creatures in her imagination, she exclaims: “I feel as if I’ve failed at everything over the last few months – keeping the house, minding the kids, even being pregnant – I just couldn’t get it right. And then everyone else started doing it for me – and doing it better.”<sup>151</sup> Like the folktales which served as a reminder of the Nordic descent, the selkie here is the source of future generations. But eventually, like the seal wives who give up their human children, Hester hands the baby to her sister and goes into the sea as a part of her emotional journey to find her true self.

The loss of the skin is important in the discussion of power, since it is the man in the folktales who steals the skin. In the folktale that Hester reads, the weal-wife bound to the life on shore: “Provided she never saw the skin she would remain a faithful human wife, but the instant she saw it she would return to the sea and never come to land again.”<sup>152</sup> One of Hester’s quests on her emotional journey is to find that lost skin and challenge her husband’s authority. She is partially successful in doing so. There is a scene in a restaurant when she does not hesitate in speaking her mind and confronting

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<sup>148</sup> Mulvey describes it in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”.

<sup>149</sup> Hayton, 201.

<sup>150</sup> Le Couteur.

<sup>151</sup> Hayton, 190.

<sup>152</sup> Hayton, 27.

him in front of their friends. She also challenges her role as a mother and stands up to her husband when it comes to her choice of clothes or her motherly duties. She is able to do so gradually and her realization of not wanting to be an object culminates in the scene in which she witnesses scenes suggesting objectification of women on television. Hester comments it as following “Bloody male fetishism. It’s like Chinese foot-binding to stop women running away from the house.”<sup>153</sup> She is not only referencing her own binding during giving birth to her selkie child but also the fact that the man is the one who steals the skin from his selkie wife.

### 4.3 Sue Glover’s *Seal Wife*

The following part of the thesis is going to examine the play *The Seal Wife* (1980), Sue Glover’s first play, which started her series of plays inspired by history and folklore.<sup>154</sup> The location of the play appears to be of significance. Glover currently resides in East of Neuk in Fife and the play is set there as well. While the selkie tales are not particularly popular in the area, as there is no mention of them in the collections of stories, Glover seems to locate the play to the area to portray the life of the fishermen and their familial issues. The following portion of the thesis is going to examine that in more detail.

The title of the play suggests that the original inspiration comes from the “Seal Wife” tale. While the main body of the play indicates that the plot is derived from the original tale, there are a few discrepancies. Alec does not steal Rona’s skin from her, since loses it herself. The skin is later discovered by one of the tinker sisters, who decides to throw it away. Also, Alec hurts Rona and is a seal catcher, which seems to suggest that Glover also found inspiration in the tales about the punishment of a hunter who kills seals.

In the play, Rona, the seal woman appears suddenly on the beach with her foot injured. Alec, a seal hunter who lives with his mother on the beach shoots her by accident and horrified at what he has done, he brings her home with him. Rona longs for coming back to the sea even in the middle of a storm and asks Alec to bring her to

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<sup>153</sup> Hayton, 211.

<sup>154</sup> Other such plays are for example *Bondagers* (1990) and *The Straw Chair* (1990).



the island that night. Alec, however, persuades her to stay with him. They fall in love and, are soon married and Rona is pregnant. The major conflict appears when Rona confronts Alec because of his hunting the seals. She is very upset and begs of him to stop hunting. The more pregnant she gets, the less time Alec spends with her and when Rona finally gives birth, alone on the beach, she gives the baby to Agnes, Alec's mother and leaves. The play ends in an ambiguous way, since Alec confesses he has shot a seal cow. Since this event closely resembles Rona's dream, the play seems to suggest that it was her.

#### 4.3.1 *The Selkie Wife: Duality and Alienation*

There are, arguably, more than one selkie characters (see section 4.3.2 for a closer look at Alec and his father) in the play. As was the case in *The Governors*, the selkies in the play can be interpreted as either supernatural beings or as a metaphor for something else.

When one takes the literal approach, that is that the selkies are supernatural, then the best candidate for such a creature is undoubtedly Rona. While she does not seem to possess any supernatural powers per say, she has a mystical vibe around her. It was already mentioned that seals and selkies alike are associated with music and dancing. Even before Rona arrives, the audience is presented with quiet music. It may very well come from the fair in town but it can also represent the selkie song. The circumstances of Rona's arrival are mysterious, while it is not clear what truly happens. The events are only provided to the audience through the commentary of one of the tinker sisters: Cath on what she had previously witnessed. She describes the events as seeing a young girl coming out of the sea stark naked. She and her sister later find a sealskin on the beach. The idea that Rona is a selkie is further supported by the fact that the skin appears to be magical: "It's alive! [...] It's curling up, curling away from you."<sup>155</sup> It was already mentioned that the selkies are believed to have supernatural abilities in controlling the weather. According to Duncan Williamson's *The Tales of the Seal People*, it is the selkie's skin can predict the weather: "before a storm the hair rises up telling you it's going to be rough; when the sun comes out the

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<sup>155</sup> Glover, 13.

seal-skin lies smooth and soft and silky”<sup>156</sup> The fact that the skin appears to be alive might be suggestive of its supernatural origin.

The skin also provides the way how to shapeshift back into a seal and Rona’s nakedness and confusion appears to be caused by her distress at losing the skin. While she does not seem to have any supernatural powers over the weather in her human form, she delights in the storm and tries to persuade Alec to go to the island with her in his boat. When he opposes her and worries that they could drown, she exclaims: “No. Not when you’re with me.”<sup>157</sup> The weather also seems to influence Rona: “She used to change with the weather. And so would I. I used to catch her moods, or get caught by them. [...] She’d come back from a walk in the storm and she’d be wild with it.”<sup>158</sup> She spends most of her time by the sea and the people believe she is singing to sea. She also never eats anything is generally very unhappy about her life on shore. All these traits support the claim that Rona is a selkie.

#### 4.3.2 *Loneliness and Isolation*

In terms of her personality, Rona is probably best described by one of the tinker sisters:

She reminds me of ... you know the red squirrels – very rare, and shy... Or – if you go to the zoo, and there’s a fawn, some animal like that – that won’t come over to the fence – and you feel – if only it knew you’d keep still, and if only the other people would all go away<sup>159</sup>

Rona is almost otherworldly in that she is so out of place in the village. She is considered an outsider in the community and judged by the other women, with the exception of Agnes. This is quite contrary to Glover’s other play, especially *Bondagers*, in which it is precisely the community of women who help each other. In *The Seal Wife*, Rona is completely secluded from everyone and prefers to spend most of her time by the sea. “I don’t even belong here. I hardly exist ...,”<sup>160</sup> she claims in an argument with

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<sup>156</sup> Williamson, 1.

<sup>157</sup> Glover, 25.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>160</sup> Glover, 45.

Alec. According to *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights* : “Scottish drama is habitually concerned with the nature and politics of the community, with the moment of inclusion in, or exclusion from, that community as recurrent narrative spine.”<sup>161</sup>

The name Rona itself aims to symbolize the struggles and loneliness that Rona has to face: “That’s what I am [...] Rona: it means the island of the seal.”<sup>162</sup> What Glover is aiming at here is to express the burden of the female sex. Just like her mother, the selkie child has ears as little shells and black hair that shines in the sun. Like her mother, she will be “a daughter. An outsider. Another island”<sup>163</sup> As is the case of Sian Hayton’s *Governors*, in *The Seal Wife*, Glover employs the folktale in order to express the woman’s struggle in a patriarchal system. In this sense, Rona is like Hester, in that she is a metaphorical selkie. Indeed, Glover also portrays a woman who feels trapped in a marriage and decides to leave her child behind. In contrast to Hester, Rona finds solace in escaping and abandoning her family.

Also, in *The Seal Wife*, it is the man and the society whom Glover blames for trying to capture and tame the woman. At the end of the play, Alec recollects his last hunting trip. He confesses to Agnes that he has shot an adult seal, contrary to the pups he hunted before. Agnes does not understand this and asks him about the incident. This encounter seems to reflect one of the first scenes in the play in which Alec brings the hurt Rona home and it also reminds the audience of the dream Rona tells Alec about. “It was asking for it! The way it moved into my sights, it was damn well asking.”<sup>164</sup> The play seems to suggest, therefore, that Rona was the shot seal, although the circumstances are unclear. “It has disappeared – vanished! In the silence underneath the water ...”<sup>165</sup> In her article on Scottish female playwrights, Ksenija Horvat comments that the themes of social responsibility and the contrast between what a woman wants and what her social obligation is appears to be a common source of investigation. According to her, Scottish female playwrights, Glover included, reject the established idea that to have a family: a husband and children is the biggest achievement a woman

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 69.

can accomplish.<sup>166</sup> Glover contrasts these two opposites in the character of Rona and the character of Alec's mother Agnes, While Rona refuses to be oppressed and limited, Agnes decides to stay in the village because of her son as well as the hopes of her lost husband returning. Another contrast can be shown on the girls from the village dancing to the music at the fair and Rona dancing to the music of the storm and sea. According to Ksenija Horvat, in "mixing history and mythology, Glover offers a powerful criticism against the double standards of patriarchal society where the feminine is always seen as the other, the inferior, the chaotic and the godless, something that needs to be subdued and tightly controlled."<sup>167</sup> Similarly to *The Governors*, Glover uses the selkie as a metaphor for the inner conflict in a woman. Alec comments on Rona's personality as following: "You want to be two people. And one part of you is as opportunist as the seal."<sup>168</sup>

One may come to the conclusion that Rona is not a real selkie but the folk tale serves the purpose of a metaphorical rendering of women's liberation: "Rona always knew what she wanted, took what she wanted. Like the seal,"<sup>169</sup> Alec exclaims at the end of the play. What connects Hester and Rona is the fact that both need to find their own skin. When Rona is looking for her lost skin at the beginning of the play, she exclaims: "I have to find it for myself."<sup>170</sup> While Hester needs to undergo a spiritual journey to be able to find it, Rona has a seal skin hanging on the wall all the time and even if it is not her own skin, she eventually takes it with her when she leaves her family behind. Like the selkie, Rona is trapped on shore both metaphorically and literally, since due to her foot injury, she is unable to walk. Glover also uses the selkie's dancing as a metaphor for freedom and conversely, the inability to do so results in isolation and despair. According to Banks, "mobility then is a crucial way of interrogating place's social significance. It is also a means to expose the ways in which space is gendered. Patriarchal limits on women's mobility operate as 'a crucial

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<sup>166</sup> Ksenija Horvat, "Scottish Women Playwrights Against Zero Visibility: New Voices Breaking Through", *Études écossaises*, Issue 10, 2005.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Glover, 31.

<sup>169</sup> Glover, 62.

<sup>170</sup> Glover, 16.

means of subordination, confining women to particular places, frequently within the domestic sphere, allowing only men to access the public sphere.”<sup>171</sup>

AGNES: She moved across the shingle with you like she was dancing. Like a wave.

ALEC: She doesn't dance now.<sup>172</sup>

Rona's final escape then can be seen as an act of deliverance. According to Trish Raid: “Glover thus transforms the legend from a narrative of seduction and deceit to one of resistance and release, in the process critiquing the cultural pressures that bear upon Scottish women and assign them unproblematically to domestic roles.”<sup>173</sup>

#### 4.3.3 *Hunting and Being Hunted*

As for the original folk tales Glover found inspiration in, she does not derive from only one. Although, as the title of the play might suggest, she mainly bases the play on the “Seal Wife” tale, she also draws on two other selkie folk tales, creating a unique mix that seems to fit best her creative intentions. It was already mentioned above that Alec hurts Rona at the beginning of the play which does not happen in the original folklore but rather reminds one of the folk tales in which a hunter needs to become a seal to heal the wound he has inflicted. One may argue that Alec is not successful in doing so, however, even though he attempts it:

ALEC: It was the fear, you see, the fear of the hunter ... when I hunt, I share their fear. Out there alone, I fear other men as much as they do – other men, other guns. When you hunt something, you become - what you hunt. You can escape into their world.

RONA: You'll be saying next that you love them.

ALEC: Well, maybe I do. Maybe it is something like that.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> *Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*, Ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 2011) 161.

<sup>172</sup> Glover, 34.

<sup>173</sup> *Community in Modern Scottish Literature*, Ed. Scott Lyall (Danvers: Brill Rodopi, 2016) 152.

<sup>174</sup> Glover, 22.

It is the idea of the attraction of the different that is so appealing to Alec, who is, however, unable to fulfil his duties as both a husband and a father. Alec wants to understand Rona but the only way for him to be able to do so is to kill her. This is an analogy of him hunting the seals. In addition, as was already mentioned above, Rona's name refers to the island of the seals. Rona represents the magical island, the Otherworld. It is the other, the different that attracts Alec to Rona: "She grew so far away, I couldn't follow. I loved her because she was so different from the others – more like me. But she was wild, wilder than I was. I grew afraid. Like I used to be afraid of my father."<sup>175</sup>

Similarly to Mollie Hunter, who uses the selkie folk tale in order to express man's ability for change, Glover uses the take as an allegory of hunting. In Glover's point of view, the woman is the man's prey: "You have murdered something, Alec. She fled from something, to save herself. [...] there's always another hunter, another prey."<sup>176</sup> In contrast, Glover also uses the hunter/prey metaphor from a different point of view. When Alec and Rona discuss flirting with girls in the town, they compare flirting to hunting.

#### 4.3.4 *The Heritage of the Selkie Father*

Although the play focuses mainly on the character of Rona, the play suggests that there is possibly another selkie character. It is Alec's father David. Despite not having an active role in the play, he is mentioned several times. The fact that he is potentially a selkie is suggested by the ways Alec's mother describes him: "David used to talk to the sea."<sup>177</sup> He is very similar to Rona in the fact that he also longs to leave the cottage and loves the sea:

AGNES: He was never settled.

ALEC: Like Rona you mean?

AGNES: There's ways you're like him. But Rona – yes she is one of

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 38.

his kind ... People like Rona and your father, they only live as other people dream living. They need to escape. And they know how.<sup>178</sup>

In addition, the father is also reminiscent of the male selkie from the Selkie of Sule Skerry ballad as he only spends a very short time with Agnes and then decides to leave her and his son behind. Furthermore, as was already mentioned in the chapter related to the origins of selkies, in some cases, selkies were often blamed for natural disasters and misfortunes. In Glover's play, the father brings misfortune to the other fisherman:

Nothing went right for them, when David was there, so they wouldn't take him on board anymore, they bought him out. He'd watch them from the harbour wall – ad be there again when the boat came in. Their luck never turned, they said – not until David went away – right away – and left the two of us behind.<sup>179</sup>

As was mentioned in the introductory part, various misfortunes, including empty fishing nets, were often blamed on the selkies. Like Rona, David is completely separated from the rest of the community. According to Aston Reinelt, "Scottish drama is habitually concerned with the nature and politics of the community, with the moment of inclusion in, or exclusion from, that community as recurrent narrative spine."<sup>180</sup> The selkies are portrayed as strangers, behaving in an odd manner and even unholy. While David seems to bring misfortune to the fishermen, the tinkers are shocked to see Rona "christening" the baby in sea water.

If one develops the idea that Alec's father is a selkie, one may also come to the conclusion that Alec is a selkie child. According to Duncan Williamson<sup>181</sup>, the selkie child has a choice of either staying on shore with the human parent or leaving with the selkie. Alec impersonates such inner conflict, since he is unable to live comfortably in

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<sup>178</sup> Gover, 35.

<sup>179</sup> Glover, 38.

<sup>180</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights*, Ed. Elaine Aston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006),102.

<sup>181</sup> Williamson, 1.

either. He hates the seals but is also fascinated by them. He is unhappy, yet unable to leave. This complex relationship to the land can be seen on the following quote:

RONA: You're not afraid of the sea?

ALEC: Yes, I'm afraid. I love to be near it, on it. But I'm afraid of what it can do.

Like David, Alec also cannot be a fisherman. One may therefore claim that what Glover aims to express is the idea of being unable to escape one's heritage. Moreover, not only Alec is conflicted when it comes to the life in East of Neuk. Rona hates seal hunting, even though it provides a source of income to Alec. When Miss Manzie comes to the house and enquires about the seal skin on the wall, Rona responds it is a reminder of her husband being a murderer. In another scene, however, she puts the seal skin over the baby's pram and watches it in satisfaction. Similarly to Mollie Hunter's *A Stranger Came Ashore*, the community seems to be split in two: the people who live off the sea and decide to stay and those who cannot be tamed by any rules. In both cases, those are the selkies. When Rona argues with Alec over him killing the seals, she claims: "You were going to shoot all of us."<sup>182</sup> Clearly, the use of the pronoun suggests that Rona belongs to the other kind. With Alec, he is half-selkie half-man and that seems to be the source of the inner conflict he is unable to overcome. What Glover appears to suggest is the idea of being linked to a place through one's family. Same as her mother, the baby will "have to face everything that you've had to face – eventually. And maybe more."<sup>183</sup>

#### 4.3.5 *Timeless Spaces*

When considering the dramatic form of a play, Ian Brown notes that the use of a folk tale might have more than a content-related meaning. He proposes the idea that, through the use of the folk tale, the author is able to escape the limitations of time and thus, free the dramatic space as well as the setting.<sup>184</sup> According to the stage directions Glover provides at the beginning of the play, the set is no more than minimal: "An indication, no more, of a house by the beach watery sea greens and blues for the set,

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<sup>182</sup> Glover, 41.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> *Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*, 163.



and the costumes; a suggestion of a high tide mark curving along the stage. The more that is defined onstage, the more confined the dialogue and the action – and the imagination of the audience. “<sup>185</sup> It may be argued, therefore, that the play abandons the naturalistic portrayal not only due to the seemingly supernatural seal woman Rona but also through the openness of the setting. The idea of timelessness that the folk tale seems to be reflected not only on the set but the lives of the Grey family as well. “We don’t have a clock,”<sup>186</sup> Rona says to Miss Manzie.

According to Jack Gillon, “the East Neuk villages have a character which is quite distinct from other parts of Scotland. They have survived relatively unchanged for centuries with their narrow streets and local vernacular architecture, due to their geographical isolation.”<sup>187</sup> The geographical isolation is then reflected onto the characters, not only in terms of the simplified set in the theatre but also the concept of one’s home in the play itself. As a selkie, Rona is literally stuck on shore as is Agnes, who decides to stay in the area in the hopes for her lost husband to come back. As was already mentioned before, Alec is unhappy in both his life on the beach and the city: “I’m sick – sick to the back teeth – of being stuck in this bloody hole, with you.”<sup>188</sup> For Rona as well as David, leaving is the only option. According to Jan McDonald, Glover contrast the female capability for change and rebirth with that of male inflexibility, demonstrated by Alec. The idea of the ability to change was already discussed in the part of this thesis related to Mollie Hunter’s *A Stranger Came Ashore*. One may claim that the selkie folk tales are primarily about such a capacity. As Betty Greenway claims: “the shape-shifting can occur equally to the destructive and the creative, the evil and the good, and the transformation can work both ways -the inanimate can come alive and the living can become inanimate, or frozen in time.”<sup>189</sup>

There is a sense of nostalgia that Glover seems to be wanting to portray: “It’s how a man should live. From the sea or the land. Not sputtering along the main road into the Smoke at eight in the morning and back again at five.”<sup>190</sup> Such nostalgia may be demonstrated on the island where Rona so desperately wants to go. It was already

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<sup>185</sup> Glover, 5.

<sup>186</sup> Glover, 53.

<sup>187</sup> Jack Gillon, *East Neuk of Fife Through Time* (Stroud: Ambereley Publishing, 2015, epub).

<sup>188</sup> Glover, 42.

<sup>189</sup> Greenway.

<sup>190</sup> Glover, 32.

mentioned that in folklore, selkies often live on an island and that is precisely the case in *The Seal Wife*. The island may be interpreted as the Celtic symbol of paradise: the Otherworld. Indeed, the island in the play appears to have a hypnotizing effect: “On the island – things are – different,”<sup>191</sup> Alec exclaims when Rona confronts him about the killing of seals. Similarly to Mackay’s *Magnus Fin*, Glover also addresses issues related to the damaged caused by industrialization in coastal areas of Scotland. When the injured Rona is brought to the Grey’s house, she does not want to be treated by Agnes, Alec’s mother and claims that the water will heal her wound. To this, Agnes replies: “I’ve seen the day when the sea was a grand healer – but it’s right now!”<sup>192</sup> Clearly, Glover implies that the quality of the water reflects the state of the environment in the area.

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 15.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

The aim of this thesis was to explore the Scottish selkie folktales and determine to what extent they have been interpreted in contemporary Scottish literature. In its first part, the thesis defined the term selkie and revealed some discrepancies related to the various names it has been given. It then moved to the physical description of a selkie: it is beautiful, with large, hypnotic eyes and long dark hair. As for a selkie's personality, in most recent tales, selkies are benign and shy. In some older Orcadian tales, however, they are menacing. Selkies love music and often come on shore to dance. As for its magical abilities, there is again variation, yet what all tales share is the seal skin with which a selkie can transform. In some tales, especially the older ones, a selkie can conjure up a storm and control the weather.

The next part of the chapter introduced the best-known tales. It subdivided them into three main plot-line patterns. The first one concerns a seal hunter who is punished by selkies by being changed into a seal. The hunter needs to travel to the kingdom under the sea to heal the wounds he has inflicted. The second type deals with a fisherman who falls in love with a selkie. In order to keep her on shore, he steals her magic skin. This form of tale often ends badly, as the selkie finds her skin and leaves her human family behind. The third kind presented a selkie as a menacing creature who steals fish from the fisherman and lures young girls into his kingdom under the sea.

Furthermore, this chapter concluded in defining the folkloric and mythological origins of the selkie lore in Scotland. It emphasized the importance of seals in Scottish culture and compared it to a totemic system, while eating seal meat was considered cannibalism. It also highlighted the fact that, since the majority of the stories were penned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of the tales were influenced by Christianity. Selkies were believed to be fallen angels or souls lost at sea. This part also came to the conclusion that claims of Viking descent influenced the popularity of selkie tales. They were also influenced by the geographical location, that is proximity of the sea. Overall, the folklore is a blend of Scandinavian legends, Celtic legends, mainly from Ireland, and Christianity. This part also addressed the confusion in distinguishing a benign selkie from an evil one from the respective forms of tales .

In the old tales of the Nordic Finns, nomadic tribes who were described as magicians, merged with trows and swan maidens from Celtic folklore and created a

creature that spread not only in the Scottish islands but also mainland Scotland, Ireland, Iceland and Faeroe Island. Whereas in some locations, there is a difference between a selkie, a mermaid and a Finnman, in some, they are one and the same. The selkie folklore, in general, is therefore very varied and it depends on the author of the specific folktale collection, to which source he refers. This then provides more than a prolific background to Scottish fiction writers, who can choose, adjust and challenge these folktales and use the selkies not only as supernatural creatures but as metaphors as well.

The following chapter dealt with selkies in children's literature. It opened with an overview and emphasized the importance of the storytelling tradition in Scotland. It then moved to the discussion of Mollie Hunter's *A Stranger Came Ashore*. In her novel, Hunter envisions a selkie Finn Learson. He is a villain in the story and Hunter blends the selkie lore with the Finnman legends from Scandinavia. She uses these tales for educating Scottish children and brings attention to the Scandinavian Heritage. The chapter then moved to the analysis of Janis MacKay's *Magnus Fin*. Mackay has many different selkie characters in her books as well as a selkie child. In contrast to Hunter, her characters are kind and caring. She uses the selkie tales in order to educate children in environmental issues. She also uses the metaphor of the shape-shifter in order to show the child's struggles with coping with maturing into an adult, including body image.

The final chapter discussed Scottish works that rewrite the "Seal Wife" tale. It firstly provided an overview of Scottish fiction that features a selkie as a character or rewrites the tales in general. It then moved to the discussion of Sian Hayton's novel *The Governors*. Hayton uses the whole array of motifs present in Scottish selkie lore. She not only uses them as supernatural creatures but also portrays her protagonist, Hester, as a metaphorical selkie who is on a quest to find her lost seal skin. She also references the origin of the selkie lore in that the tale not only serves as a form of guidance to her individuation process but also as a way of coping with the loss of her father. Finally, the thesis focused on Sue Glover's drama *The Seal Wife*. In it, Glover transforms the tale into a story of loneliness and isolation. Similarly to Hayton, she also uses the literal entrapment as a metaphor for the oppression of women. She also expresses nostalgia over the changed coastal areas of East of Neuk, emphasizing the Scandinavian heritage as well as sense of home and family.

Overall, the authors mainly use the selkie lore in order to make the shape-shifting creature metaphor: for the ability to change, age, sense of place, gender roles and heritage.

## 6. ZÁVĚR

Cílem této diplomové práce bylo prozkoumat skotské lidové pověsti, které se týkají tuleních lidí a také určit, do jaké míry byly interpretovány v současné skotské literatuře. V první části práce definovala tuleního člověka a objasnila některé nesrovnalosti, které se vážou k pojmenování těchto bytostí. Poté se práce přesunula na fyzický popis tuleních lidí: jsou krásní, s velkýma, hypnotickýma očima a dlouhými tmavými vlasy. Co se týče jejich povahy, v novějších pověstech jsou laskaví a plaší, ale v těch starších, zejména z Orknejí, jsou tulení lidé hroziví. Tulení lidé také milují hudbu a v mnoha pověstech vychází na břeh, aby si zatančili. Nadpřirozené schopnosti tuleních lidí se liší příběh od příběhu. Jednotným znakem všech pověstí je ale tulení kůže, díky které se tulení lidé mohou proměnit. V některých pověstech mohou tulení lidé vyvolat bouřku a ovládat počasí.

Dále kapitola představila nejznámější pověsti, které rozdělila na tři hlavní dějové linky. První z nich vypráví o lovcí, který je tuleními lidmi proměněn v tuleně jako forma trestu za zabíjení. Tento lovec poté musí putovat do království pod hladinou moře, aby zhojil rány, které tulení způsobil. Další skupina příběhů se týká rybáře, který se zamiluje do tulení ženy a aby ji udržel na břehu, ukradne jí její kožešinu. Tento typ pověstí končí většinou špatně tím, že tulení žena kožešinu najde a opouští svou lidskou rodinu, aby se vrátila zpět do moře. Třetí druh představuje hrozivého tuleního muže, který rybářům krade úlovek a mladé dívky láká do svého království pod hladinou moře, kde budou uvězněny navždy.

V neposlední řadě se tato kapitola soustředí na původ pověstí o tuleních lidech ve folkloru a mytologii. Zdůrazňuje důležitost tulenů ve skotské kultuře a přirovnává je k totemickým systémům. Jíst tulení maso bylo totiž považováno za formu kanibalismu. Také je zdůrazněn fakt, že většina pověstí byla sepsána v 19. století, a tak je silně ovlivnilo křesťanství. Věřilo se, že jsou tulení lidé padlí andělé nebo duše lidí, kteří utonuli na moři. Tato část práce také došla k závěru, že přesvědčení o vikingském původu značně ovlivnilo popularitu těchto pověstí. Dále byla důležitým faktorem lokalita, tedy blízkost moře. Celkově se dá říci, že pověsti vznikly smíšením skandinávských a keltských legend a také vlivem křesťanství. Tato část práce také přinesla řešení nesourodosti, co se týče povahy tuleních lidí v daných pověstech, tedy zda jsou zlí nebo mírumilovní.

Ve starých pověstech nomádští Finové ze severu Skandinávie, kteří byli popisováni jako čarodějové postupně splývají se skřítky a labutími pannami z keltského folkloru a vytváří zcela nového tvora, který je v pověstech přenesen nejen na skotské ostrovy, ale i na pevninské Skotsko, do Irska a na Faerské ostrovy. Zatímco v některých oblastech je rozdíl mezi tulením člověkem, mořskou pannou a Finnmanem, v jiných jsou tyto tvorové jedno a to samé. Pověsti o tuleních lidech jsou tedy velmi různorodé a zaleží na autorovi jednotlivých sbírek pověstí, jakou verzi si přisvojí. Díky tomu mají skotští autoři velké množství materiálu, ze kterého mohou čerpat. Tyto pověsti mohou dále upravovat a využít tulení lidi jako nadpřirozené bytosti, ale i metafory.

Další kapitola se zabývala zobrazením tuleních lidí v dětské literatuře. Nejprve poskytla krátký přehled a zdůraznila důležitost vypravěčské tradice ve Skotsku. Poté se přesunula na román Mollie Hunterové *A Stranger Came Ashore*. V tomto románu Hunterová představuje tuleního muže Finna Learsona. V příběhu je Finn záporná postava a Hunterová v něm spojuje keltskou legendu o velkém tulením muži s legendami o Finnmanovi ze Skandinávie. Tyto legendy Hunterová využívá pro vzdělání skotských dětí a soustředí se v nich také na důležitost skandinávského dědictví. V této kapitole je také blíže představeno dílo *Magnus Fin* Janis Mackayové. Ta ve svém díle popisuje tulení lidí hned několik, a to včetně tuleního dítěte. Na rozdíl od Hunterové jsou její postavy tuleních lidí laskavé a obětavé. Mackayová tyto postavy využívá jako nástroj k poučení dětí zejména co se týče otázek životního prostředí. Tuleního člověka také využívá jako metaforu pro obtížnou dobu dospívání v životě dítěte a také porozumění vlastnímu tělu.

Poslední kapitola se zabývala skotskými díly, které vychází z pověsti o tulení ženě. Nejdříve tato kapitola poskytla přehled literatury, ve které se tulení lidé objevují jako postavy nebo nějakým způsobem odkazují na pověsti o nich. Tato část blíže představuje román Sian Haytonové *The Governors*. Haytonová používá celou škálu motivů ze skotských lidových pověstí o tuleních lidech. Nejen, že je zobrazuje jako nadpřirozené bytosti ale svou hrdinku, Hester, ukazuje jako selkie pouze metaforickou, která hledá svou ztracenou tulení kůži. Haytonová také odkazuje na původ pověstí a to tak, že příběh funguje nejen jako jakýsi návod na proces její individuace, ale také jako způsob, jak se vyrovnat se ztrátou otce. Nakonec se kapitola soustředí na hru Sue Gloverové, *The Seal Wife*, která česky vyšla pod názvem *Tulení žena*. V této hře

Gloverová pověst přetváří na příběh o osamělosti a naprosté izolovanosti. Podobně jako Haytonová používá doslovné uvěznění z pověstí jako metaforu pro utlačování žen. Dále pak vyjadřuje jistou nostalgii nad časem a průmyslem proměněnou oblastí East of Neuk a důraz dává i na skandinávské dědictví a smysl pro domov a rodinu.

Dá se říci, že celkově vzato autoři používají pověsti o tuleních lidech tak, aby využili jejich schopnost proměnit se jako metaforu. Metaforicky pak zobrazují jednak možnosti změny jako takové, ale také tyto bytosti a příběhy využívají jako metaforu věku a dospívání, smyslu pro místo, rolí pohlaví i kulturního dědictví.



## 7. ANNOTATION:

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**Title:** Selkies in Scottish Folk Tales and Their Interpretation in Contemporary Scottish Literature

**Supervisor:** Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

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**Description:** This thesis focuses on selkies in Scottish folk tales and their representation in contemporary Scottish literature. The first part is concerned with the mythological and folkloric origin of selkies as well as the best-known folk tales in which they appear. This section also provides a physical and character description of selkies and makes a clear distinction between a selkie, a Finnman and a mermaid. The next part is concerned with children's literature published in Scotland which feature a selkie as a character. After a short overview, the thesis discusses two works in more detail: Molli Hunter's *A Stranger Came Ashore* and Janis Mackay's *Magnus Fin*. The third part of the thesis deals with works that rewrite the "Seal Wife" tale: Sian Hayton's *The Governors* and Sue Glover's *The Seal Wife*.

## **8. ANOTACE:**

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**Vedoucí práce:** Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

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**Klíčová slova:** selkie, tulení lidé, skotský folklor, lidová pověst, současná skotská literatura, Sue Gloverová, Sian Haytonová

**Popis:** Tato práce se zaměřuje na postavu tuleních lidí a jejich interpretaci v současné skotské literatuře. První část se zabývá jejich původem v mytologii a folkloru a také nejznámějšími pověstmi, ve kterých se objevují. Tato část také nabízí fyzický popis tuleních lidí v lidových pověstech a jasně určuje, jak se od sebe liší selkie, Finnman a mořská panna. Následující část se zabývá dětskou literaturou publikovanou ve Skotsku, v níž se tulení lidé objevují jako postavy. Po krátkém přehledu následuje detailnější rozbor dvou děl: *A Stranger Came Ashore* Mollie Hunterové a *Magnus Fin* Janis MacKayové. Třetí část práce pak řeší díla, která jako inspiraci využívají povídku o tulení manželce: *The Governors* Sian Haytonové a *Tulení žena* Sue Gloverové.

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