

From Self-Alienation to Self-Awakening in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Mermaid Chair*

¹Mrs.K.Shenbaha Priya, ²Ms.G.Shalini

^{1,2} MA. M.Phil. B.Ed

Abstract: 'Island' is a motif of both aloofness and enlightenment in both East and West. In the East, to the Buddha, island is a positive symbol of revitalization in the core of the ocean of Samsara. In Commonwealth feminist writers such as Anita Desai and Sue Monk Kidd, the island becomes a metaphor for a woman's quest for freedom and identity. *The Mermaid Chair* is a vividly imagined novel about the spirit and the ecstasies of the body; one that illuminates a woman's self-awakening with the brilliant and power that only a writer of Kidd's ability could conjure.

Keywords: Mermaid Chair, Self-Awakening, woman's quest for freedom and identity.

An island is a terrestrial corpus that is often smaller than a continent. An island is normally surrounded by water completely. Egret island is a thin place, in the Celtic nous of the axiom, a habitation where the detectable reality of everyday life and the invisible reality of the sacred interest, where mighty forces work mysteriously to bring about transformation. The main conflict in *The Mermaid Chair* by Sue Monk Kidd is the mental and physical illness of Jessie Sullivan's- the main character, one of those explicit women with no craving to distract the cosmos.

Jessie stands at the bow of a ferry, looking across Bull's Bay towards Egret island, a petite obstacle island off the coast of South Carolina where she matured up. She sees it almost a mile out in the water, a small curve off russet and green. The wind is jagged with the fragrance of juvenile, and the aquatic is ultramarine blue, magnificent like taffeta. Looking toward the northwest tip of the island she can't yet see the spire from the monastery church, but she knows it's there, pricking the white afternoon.

As the ferry approaches the island dock, the air hits her, laden with so many things: the small fish, the disturbance of birds, the green breath of palmetto palms, and already she felt the story like some strange creature surfacing the water above. Perhaps she will be finished with it now. She will forgive herself, and the story will hold her like a pair of arms for as long as her live. As the ferry nudges against the dock on Egret island, the captain blows his horn a second time, and she goes out the railing.

Jessie remembers the flowers spelling into the water as the boat dragged away latter May. The sad little bon voyage party. It seems now like a piece of history starting to shift into dust and at the same time, as if she has only just been there. As if the petals will still be floating on the water. It is February now. The marshlands are floods of golden yellow. The color settles on her like the heart and light of the sun. The island will always be the fixed point of the migrating world. She pictures the mermaid chair alone in the chapel.

The whole island rises up to her, and she has a moment when she honestly don't know if she an steps off the boat. She stands there and let it pass, knowing it will pass. All things do. When she told Hugh she was needed to come and see Mother, to be here on Ash Wednesday, he accepted. Then a moment later, 'is it your mother you're going to see?' {Pg-33}. Not that often, but once in a while, the sorrow and mistrust will form across his eyes. Hugh face will close in. And he will be departed. His mind and body will be there, of course, buy his heat and spirit even will go to outer banks of their marriage and amp. A day or two later, he will be back. She will find him cooking breakfast, whistling, bearing more forgiveness.

Jessie knows at times he's afraid of the separateness, her independence, this abiding new loyalty she has to herself now, but she believes he will come to love this part of her, just as she do. She tells him, smiling, that it was the mermaid who brought her home. She means, to the water and the mud and the pull of the tides in her own body. To the solitary island submerged so long in herself, which she dreadfully required to discovery. But also tries to explain they brought her home to him. 'It's okay. You should go by yourself,' he said. 'You need to go back and face the island and be done with it' {Pg-331}.

Now, stepping onto the island, she feels embracing, feel her need to gather everything up so she can finally lay it down. When Jessie Sullivan is beckoned domestic to the island to survive with her peculiar mother's apparently curious comportment, she is enduring a conservative existence with her husband, Hugh. Jessie dearest Hugh, but formerly on the island, she ascertains herself wan to Brother Thomas, monk about to take his ultimate oaths. He isn't utterly firm whether he has come to the monastery in quest of God or in pursuit invulnerability from life. His life is rested in this. Dom Anthony gave sermons sometime on what he called acedia, the grueling sameness that could snare monks in tedium and boredom, but Thomas had never suffered from it. The cadence and measure of this place had consoled him through his terrible doubt. The profound anguish he'd at being left alive when those he'd loved were dead.

And then this one inoffensive minute; the woman receiving to her feet in a orchard deprived of floras, her face shady and gorgeous and spiraling to him with bright covered around her head. It had shattered his deep contentment, the whole perfect order. He sensed her even now like something returning, inundating around him like the concealed water where he bathed. He knew hardly anything about her, but he'd seen the ring on her finger, and that had been reassuring to him. She was married. He was grateful for that. He was thought of deep blush when she'd talked about the Egret mating dance. He'd foolishly gone with her to the mermaid chair, and now he would lie awake tonight with a vision of her standings in the chapel, her blue jeans tight across her hips.

The abbot led them into the mass, and at the moments when the host was raised, Thomas felt the onrush of longing, not for Jessie but for his home, his monastic home this place he loved beyond all places. He looked at the water asking God to satiate him with that little bite of Jesus, and resolved to put her out his mind. Jessie's powerful attraction whit awakens an immense, sexual and spiritual longing inside her, well as a pulsing new sense of aliveness. Amidst the seductive salt swamplands and tidal streams of the island, she forsakes herself to the lengthy hidden desires of her body and the longings of her artistic. Essence and embarks upon a lineage into her own unmapped and spectral pits in pursuit a place inside herself that is rightly her own. Torn between the force of her desire and her enduring, Jessie wrestles with piercing selections eventually fashioning a "nuptial" with her.

To culminate this, Jessie Sullivan, a woman in discreet catastrophe returns home to the island of a mermaid saint becomes a voyage to self-awakening. In this influential exploration of mid-life marriage and the juncture of the spiritual and the erotic in the feminine soul, the author beautifully illustrates the sacredness of belonging to oneself and the healing mercy of love and forgiveness.

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