

Michael Cropper

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Professor Tara Moore

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### Agency Preparation in Maresi: The Red Abbey Chronicles

In an oppressive society, girls struggle to be independent. They seek to develop new things, but others shut them down. Some people think girls are incapable of living ambitiously. Others may see that they have the necessary skills but disregard them. This society exists in the novel *Maresi: The Red Abbey Chronicles*. However, girls in this novel can counter it because of the Red Abbey. Through the social structure and atmosphere, the Red Abbey helps girls become independent and fight against patriarchy while helping others within it.

Girls receive powerful protection from oppression while staying at the Red Abbey. Its island, Menos, acts as a haven. Most havens in dystopias lie within a “troubling present.” (Basu 147). The world outside of Menos contains oppressive men. Inside is “sacred ground” (Turtschaninoff 83), keeping men out. Despite that, some men attempt to harm the girls in the Red Abbey, like Jai’s father, Sarjan. He and his crew try sailing to Menos to bring Jai back to the patriarchal society. In response, the girls head to Hearth House to eat “dark-green leaves, almonds, and candied rose petals” (Turtschaninoff 134), then they drink red wine, preparing their bodies for a summoning ritual. Afterward, each girl twist, braid, and bind their hair, calming the winds on the island. They go inside the Temple of the Rose and let their hair down. Moving their hair controls the wind’s power: “The Temple was full of white-clad women stomping, swaying,

and writhing, and the faster we whipped our hair, the more the wind howled” (Turtschaninoff 140). Their long hair gives the girls strength, and being inside the Temple of the Rose enhances it enough to destroy Sarjan’s ship.

Traumatic experiences from the patriarchal society force some girls to come to the Red Abbey. Jai shares this reason; she feared Sarjan and needed to get away from him. At home, he is oppressive, and Jai and Unai, her older sister, act as obedient daughters. They must bow, avoid eye contact with men and accept insults and beatings while humbly blaming themselves (Turtschaninoff 98). Either way, it was futile because Sarjan never seemed satisfied. Sarjan’s cruelty also makes Jai fear him. Her trauma peaks when she discusses Unai’s death to Maresi. Sarjan buried her alive, believing she violated their home culture: “[Koho folk] are never allowed to mix with [Miho folk]” (Turtschaninoff 73). Unai, a Koho woman, gave water to a Miho boy, but Sarjan believed they had sex. In his eyes, Unai made the “family’s honor [tainted]” (Turtschaninoff 73), making death her punishment. After that, Jai describes the grim feeling she keeps from Unai’s funeral. She remembers how Unai could have escaped or fought back, but she chose to stay in her grave. During this, Sarjan makes sure Unai accepts his dominance: “He threw earth on her body first. Saved the head until last, so that she would meet her death with open eyes” (Turtschaninoff 100). Witnessing this made Jai fear men and believe that almost all are bad.

Not only does Sarjan’s cruelty traumatize Jai, but also his determination. She believes that Sarjan will return, more powerful than before. Then, seeming that only she is fearful, Jai lashes at Maresi, projecting her fear: “He will have his revenge on everyone who sheltered me” (Turtschaninoff 146). Here, Jai depicts Sarjan as a heartless monster that will kill, if necessary, to

get what he wants. Eventually, the girls witness his evil nature when he returns after the storm. Sarjan's crew controls the Temple of Rose, holding some girls that resisted hostage. Their daggers are out with the "scent of blood in their nostrils" (Turtschaninoff 192). Jai hides in the crypt inside Knowledge House while it occurs. Soon, fear overpowers her, and she surrenders to Sarjan. When he escorts Jai to the ship, she finally fights back by pushing Sarjan off a cliff to his death. Afterward, she "stared at her hands in awe" (Turtschaninoff 203). Jai feels shocked and amazed at overcoming Sarjan's dominance.

The primary purpose of the Red Abbey is for girls to share their knowledge with the world. Most girls in Young Adult novels grow to be "agents of change instead of passive bystanders" (Santaularia 3). Girls in the Red Abbey aim to change the patriarchal system instead of being slaves to it. Their learning structure consists of teachers and novices. Novices gain skills to help others within the patriarchal society, like working with herbs and medicines and other responsibilities. Some of the girls also have occasional lessons taught by Sister O: "We get to learn about history; mathematics; the First Mother; how the world works; about the moon, sun, and stars, and much more besides" (Turtschaninoff 39). History is important because it explains the origins of the Red Abbey and the significance of everything on it. Learning how the world works is also important because it reminds the girls who control life: "But it is the First Mother who gave life to the world and all power comes from her" (Turtschaninoff 80). It shows that men do not control everything, and there is hope for change.

The knowledge taught to the girls is powerful, so men will seek to steal and abuse it. The girls keep it inside Knowledge House: "Knowledge House conceals all the power the First Sisters brought with them" (Turtschaninoff 41). Most of them were scriptures. Despite that, they

knew hiding it was not enough. They also “wrote in riddles” (Turtschaninoff 83), only allowing those who know the language access to them.

Girls must perform rites and rituals to get a feeling of independence from the patriarchal society. Most of them involve giving thanks to everything around them. Some people cannot perform “meaningful rituals and rites of passage in their cultures” (Cowdy 47). Outside Menos, girls must conduct rituals and rites that men make. Therefore they must develop their own. These give the girls a sense of belonging and unity in the world. They also provide a foundation that men cannot destroy thanks to the First Mother: “Her energy flows through the earth like blood flows through our veins” (Turtschaninoff 80). This foundation reassures the girls that female power can overcome anything since the First Mother is strong enough to provide life.

The girls worship the First Mother as a Goddess to remind themselves of who they are. She is known as “Maiden, Mother, and Crone” (Turtschaninoff 106). Their belief in all three aspects helps them resist patriarchy. Each one is united and makes up a Triple Goddess. The Maiden is the most important aspect: “Her determination to be Her individual self and all She is capable of achieving-these are qualities that are vital to human happiness and development” (Conway 23). The Maiden emphasizes independence, reminding women they can create anything within a dominant culture without being overruled. Her power lies within each girl and helps them when they leave the Abbey. The Mother aspect represents “life and fruitfulness” (Turtschaninoff 122). She helps girls find themselves in the world and deliver love to others. How they help others in the patriarchal society should multiply and be beneficial for everyone. The last feature of the Triple Goddess is the Crone. She represents death but is also the “ultimate Teacher of the very deepest of spiritual Mysteries” (Conway 78). In other words, she is the

keeper of worldly and divine knowledge. The Crone resides in her realm within Knowledge House. She gives knowledge to the girls that help them change their oppressive world.

The girls honor the First Mother for protecting them from the patriarchal society through the Moon Dance. They visit her inside her realm as she displays herself as the Goddess through her three aspects. It is done under a full moon because the girls believe that the First Mother is watching them and granting the earth power through the moon: “The moon who rules the movements of water and women’s blood, the moon who gives energy to all that lives and grows, the moon who measures time and reigns over death” (Turtschaninoff 106). The First Mother reassures how powerful she is even through the moon. She acts as a guardian through her three aspects controlling the earth and the girls. She also protects them from evil people with desires to take advantage of them.

In conducting agency, the girls must be ready to protect themselves and each other from danger. Maresi demonstrates it against Sarjan’s crew. They break into the Crone’s realm, preparing to harm the little girls hiding there. During this, the Crone pressures Maresi to act: “Give me what belongs to me” (Turtschaninoff 211). She has the power to open the Crone’s door and demands her to do so. Maresi is hesitant because she believes that doing this means she will have to give up her life. Nonetheless, she opens it, and the Crone devours the men’s bodies and souls.

After the Crone’s massacre, Maresi aims to fix the patriarchal society. While inside her realm, the Crone tempts Maresi by offering knowledge beyond existence, which Maresi values (Turtschaninoff 213). After telling Sister O, she asks Maresi to be her novice. She declines,

saying that she wants to return to Rovas, her homeland. With Rovas being a secluded place, patriarchy rules it: “Life in Rovas was like a cave where everybody is oblivious to the outside world” (Turtschaninoff 57). The inhabitants live a poor life, and without knowledge, the men in power can take advantage of them. Maresi believes that she can change their lives with what she knows. Maresi realizes that it is futile to “shut out the world” (Turtschaninoff 223). People will always need help fighting the oppressive society. To contribute, Maresi plans on founding a school allowing her people to inherit her knowledge.

Even though conducting agency can be difficult, especially against many oppressed influences, the girls in the Red Abbey inspire female readers to change lives. They can be useful in society regardless of what others say. Some girls believe that they can bring forth change but become scared and discouraged. The Red Abbey reassures that a woman has uniqueness ranging from wisdom, purity, and responsibility. This concept and support from others give girls the courage to make a difference in life.

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