

The Moon and the Face Short Guide

The Moon and the Face by Patricia A. McKillip

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Overview

The Moon and the Face is a deftly woven story that incorporates elements of both fantasy and science fiction. It is set four years after the events of MoonFlash, which recounted the journey of Terje and Kyreol, two young lovers, to the Domecity from their home in the Riverworld. Before they embarked on their journey of discovery, the inhabitants of the Riverworld had believed they were alone on the planet of Thanos. Kyreol and Terje discover that there are other lands outside of Riverworld, and they have spent the past four years living in Domecity, where Kyreol is reunited with her mother, Nara. Readers are introduced to only a few of the inhabitants of Domecity, a technologically advanced society, but they are all members of an "Interplanetary Cultural Agency" whose aim is the exploration and study of different cultures.

Both Kyreol and Terje join in these endeavors but in very different ways—Terje travels back into his past in the ancient Riverworld, and Kyreol journeys to a far distant moon of the planet Niade. Both, however, must confront their fears, determine how they will choose to live their lives, and try all the while to retain the strong love they have for each other.

This is a novel that explores very different fantastic worlds as well as very different ways of living. But amid all this conflict, McKillip envisions a world in which people learn to respect different cultures and, through cooperation, learn not simply to survive but also to find friendship and love.

About the Author

Patricia Anne McKillip, who was born in Salem, Oregon, on February 29, 1948, has been a storyteller and writer for almost as long as she can remember. The second of six children, she often entertained her siblings by making up stories. Then, as she recalls, "At the beginning of my fourteenth summer . . . I sat down and wrote a thirty-page fairy tale. . . . I never stopped writing after that." McKillip has written primarily in the fantasy genre, citing as influences the novels of J. R. R. Tolkien and her study of literature at California State University, San Jose, where she earned a bachelor's degree in 1971 and a master's degree in 1973.

McKillip's range of fantasy is considerable. Her first novel, *The House on Parchment Street*, tells the story of two ordinary children who are suddenly visited by a character from the past.

The Forgotten Beasts of Eld and *the Riddle of the Stars* trilogy, which comprises *The Riddle-Master of Hed*, *Heir of Sea and Fire*, and *Harpist in the Wind*, are examples of high fantasy and include depictions of dragons, fantastic animals, magical powers, and heroic quests. It is for those novels that she is most well known. In 1975, she received the World Fantasy Award for *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* and in 1979 was nominated for the Hugo Award for *Harpist in the Wind*. More recently, she has experimented with combining the genres of fantasy and science fiction, as in *MoonFlash* and *The Moon and the Face*.

Although much of her writing has been labeled children's literature, her high fantasy novels are read by adults as well. Of her readers, McKillip says, "I never deliberately decided to write for children; I just found them particularly satisfying to write about. . . .

When I decided to . . . write what I considered an adult fantasy, I was amazed when [it was published] as a young adult novel."

Setting

McKillip creates a fictional universe, then uses contrasting settings to explore how that universe is made up of distinct but often interdependent worlds. On the planet Thanos, the civilizations of Riverworld and Domecity provide the most stark contrast in setting. Riverworld, an insulated ancient world where people continue to practice the rituals that link them not only to each other but also to the river that gives them their food, is described as a lush natural setting. When Terje returns there, he notes the beauty of its colors and smells: "The birds were settling back into the trees, little flashes of lemon, chartreuse . . . and there was just the wind, with its invisible weave of messages . . . animal smells, the smell of honey, the smell of rain."

In contrast, Domecity is the planet's futuristic center of scientific advancement. There, unlike the meals of fresh fish that she had enjoyed in Riverworld, Kyreol "had gotten used to food dried and frozen and summoned up out of a wall dispenser." Whereas the people of Riverworld believe their small society encompasses the whole world, the inhabitants of Domecity know that they are only a small part of a far-reaching universe. Kyreol wishes to find out more about that universe and joins a team of space explorers who will visit distant planets and study alien creatures.

Kyreol never arrives at her intended destination, however. Her ship crashes, and she finds herself marooned on an abandoned moon of the planet Niade.

McKillip is especially skillful in evoking the desolation of Niade's moon, describing a land barren of color and water and covered only by shifting sand. Kyreol finds her only shelter in a city abandoned half a century before by settlers who yearned to return to their home planet. McKillip thus uses this setting, both through plot and symbol, to explore the similar tensions of characters who have left Riverworld for Domecity. Kyreol herself determines she is not bereft after leaving her birthplace, for she will keep it in her heart and, unlike the settlers of Niade's moon, she will be able to continue her journeys far from home.

The final depiction of Riverworld offers hope for uniting both worlds, as disparate as they are. As several characters from Domecity journey to Riverworld, they are no longer withdrawn observers, but are now indispensable participants in a world that may be "simple" but is clearly not limited in its dreams or abilities.

Social Sensitivity

The Moon and the Face is, in many ways, about social sensitivity. Riverworld, Domecity, and Niade's moon all appear at first glance to be distinct and independent worlds. Indeed, inherent in the depiction of these different worlds is a debate about the development of technological societies. Domecity, despite its advancements, is surely not infallible, and the simple life of Riverworld is one that could be envied by the very busy Domecity inhabitants.

Despite such wistfulness, Domecity's lifestyle is not ultimately rejected here.

McKillip celebrates the differences of these worlds, but she also shows how people of different places and cultures must often depend upon one another to survive. She explores common biases against anyone who is seen as different. For example, when Kyreol first sees the alien on Niade's moon, she is afraid of it because of its size and because it is different from anything she has ever seen before. Soon, however, Kyreol comes to respect it as a fellow being with feelings and fears of its own: "It was big, ungainly, ugly, loving, nervous, and so intelligent the intricacies of the Dome would probably be child's play."

McKillip also rejects derogatory stereotypes of beliefs, gender roles, and cultures. Riverworld is called "ancient" but it is never denigrated as "primitive," and its powers of dreaming often far surpass the advances of Domecity.

Gender roles, too, are released from stereotypical patterns. It is the young man Terje who becomes healer and nurturer to the community, and the woman Kyreol who chooses to venture to far-off planets. Furthermore, McKillip's discussion of the interdependence of different peoples is never reduced to a homogenizing of difference. Cultures remain distinct, and each equally worthy of attention and respect. Terje and Kyreol, although recent inhabitants of Domecity, learn that their cultural heritage from Riverworld is an intricate part of their identity, one that they treasure.

Literary Qualities

In *The Moon and the Face*, McKillip effectively combines the fantasy and science fiction genres. While Terje's journey to the ancient Riverworld becomes a fantastic adventure into dream and ritual, Kyreol's space adventures on Niade's moon offer elements common to science fiction. McKillip's use of narrative form—she focuses alternating chapters on each main character's story—is emblematic of the central issue in this novel: the interdependence of distinct cultures and peoples.

McKillip's presentation of this idea is fairly sophisticated in terms of her use of literary devices. In addition to the balancing of genres through narrative form, the author also uses character, setting, conflict and contrasting images and motifs to stress the importance of cultural diversity and cooperation.

Contrasting images, particularly setting, highlight differences between the technologically simple and advanced worlds. The Riverworld is a lush natural place; in contrast, Domecity is "huge, it's noisy, it's full of sharp edges and very few dreams."

Setting is also used to illustrate conflict and symbol. Niade's moon, for example, becomes a testing ground for endurance and cooperation. Unless two very different beings work together, they will certainly die. Their isolation and the threat of death is emphasized by the description of the desolate moon, and the sterility provides a marked contrast to the maternal concerns of the alien, who strives to protect its young.

Characters, then, become symbolic embodiments of the central issues of the novel. Kyreol is a space explorer who has chosen to live in the futuristic Domecity, yet as the healer's daughter, she has the gift of dreaming. And when Terje becomes the healer, symbolically linking Domecity and the Riverworld, he, too, comes to represent the importance of cooperation and balance.

The separate stories of Terje and Kyreol are also held together with motifs of the journey—Terje to his past and the inner world of dreams and ritual, and Kyreol to the future and outer space. In both cases, as they make their physical journey, they embark on parallel inner journeys, facing situations that test their courage, resolve, and faith. The journeys are ultimately circular: not only do both protagonists return to the country of their birth, they also discover that all journeys and all places belong to one world.



Themes and Characters

Kyreol and Terje are clearly drawn and believable characters who, despite their very different interests, never lose their strong commitment to each other.

Kyreol is fascinated by the opportunity to explore other planets. She explains that as "long as there's a place with a name that I haven't been to, I'll be curious about it." Kyreol's statement is soon tested when her spaceship is wrecked on a desolate moon, with only a strange alien for companionship.

Kyreol's skills and determination to interact with other cultures are immediately called upon, for she must confront her fear of this unknown creature and find a way to communicate with it.

Only through their mutual cooperation, a major theme in the novel, will they be able to survive on the inhospitable moon and return to their respective worlds.

Whereas Kyreol chooses space exploration, Terje decides to return to the Riverworld as an observer. He knows that despite Domecity's technological advances, Riverworld has strengths that Domecity has lost. Domecity finds its power in the machines it has created, but the people of Riverworld build their community upon their simple use of natural resources and their reliance on ritual. Terje explains that in Domecity "they've forgotten how to dream. . . . That's why they want to protect the Riverworld from their world. They want the Riverworld always to remember how to dream. How to see."

This ability to dream is a means of envisioning the truth that lies behind appearances. Domecity has been particularly careful to protect Riverworld from any knowledge of its existence.

Observers dress as Riverworld inhabitants and remain only on the outskirts of the village; spaceships are noiseless and do not fly close to Riverworld.

Despite these precautions, Icrane (the healer and leader of Riverworld and Kyreol's father) has had dreams of Domecity's ships flying in space. Indeed, the Riverworld's dreaming often seems more insightful than all of Domecity's scientific knowledge. For example, when Kyreol is marooned on Niade's moon, her fellow space explorers cannot locate or communicate with her, but Icrane knows that she is alive because of his dreams.

Just as Kyreol's journey does not go as expected, Terje finds that he must face unanticipated challenges in the Riverworld. The dying Icrane senses Terje's presence and, seeking his own successor, calls Terje to his side. Saddened by the impending death of Icrane yet changed by the knowledge that he has gained in Domecity, Terje must decide if he will accept the healer's dreams and carry on the rituals of the Riverworld. Terje's conflict becomes one of science versus faith. For example, Terje knows the Moon-Flash that the Riverworld's inhabitants believe is the signal for their



ritual time is actually nothing more than the exhaust of one of Domecity's supply ships. Yet Terje also knows the incalculable value and power of the dreams and rituals of Riverworld. That power becomes even clearer to him after Icrane's death; without any prior gift of foresight, Terje receives the knowledge of the rituals of Riverworld through a series of dreams. And he soon knows what he must do to become the new healer. It is clear then, that although McKillip does draw dichotomies in her depiction of these two worlds—of River world based in nature and faith, and Domecity in science and technology—she does not denigrate one at the expense of the other. Whatever paternalism Domecity scientists may have felt as they sought to observe and protect Riverworld is clearly undercut by the realities of Icrane's insights and of their own shortcomings. When Kyreol's ship is marooned on Niade's moon, for example, it is clear that Domecity's technology is fallible. Domecity is not, however, dismissed as a sterile place that has lost its spirit. Kyreol, after all, chooses to remain there and Domecity's explorations of other worlds is motivated by curiosity and respect, not by conquest.

In each adventure, cooperation and respect for different cultures and peoples becomes essential for survival.

Both protagonists embody the concept of coexistence in their sense of identity and in the conflicts they face. Kyreol, for example, is the healer's daughter and carries the power of dreaming. Yet she has left the Riverworld, as had her mother before her, and chooses instead to live in Domecity and to explore space. And when Terje becomes the new leader of the Riverworld, he chooses as his symbol the Moon-Flash and the River, explaining his choice thus: Maybe Icrane "was trying to bring the two worlds together finally."

In the end, both characters symbolize a composite of both worlds.

The Moon and the Face is also a story of personal love. Unlike Nara, Kyreol's mother, who felt she had to leave Icrane to explore new worlds, Terje and Kyreol vow to remain true to each other, regardless of what adventures lie in wait for them. They commit themselves not only to each other, but also to their cultural heritage in Riverworld. As Kyreol explains: "I was afraid I'd travel so far from Riverworld I would lose it completely from my head. But instead, it just came with me.

As long as I can remember in my heart where it is in this mess of stars, I won't be sorry."



Topics for Discussion

1. Describe the healer, Icrane. Why is he so respected by his community? Is he a heroic figure? What are his weaknesses?
2. What are the values of Domecity's observation teams, which journey to Riverworld? Is their value system clear-cut? What are some possible problems or ambiguities? Are there some issues that they attempt to avoid?
3. Compare and contrast the relationship of Icrane and Nara with that of Terje and Kyreol. What problems does each face and how do they attempt to resolve them?
4. What are the different ways of knowing or learning that are presented in this book? How effective are they?
5. Describe Regny from Domecity.

Why does Terje believe it is so important that Regny is with him in Riverworld?

6. Discuss the resolution of the novel. What decisions has Terje made, and why? Do you think his plan is possible?
7. What issues of prejudice does McKillip examine in *The Moon and the Face*? What problems and possible solutions does she present? Do you think the themes in the novel have parallels to various types of prejudice in the modern world? If so, how?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Develop a definition of ritual. Explain some rituals that you are familiar with and why they are important. Then examine the ways in which McKillip describes ritual in the Riverworld.
2. Describe the alien that Kyreol meets on Niade's moon. How does McKillip humanize the alien? Develop an analysis of that character by exploring the expectations Kyreol first has of the alien creature and how her view changes. Find an account of contact between two cultures, such as the meeting between the Spanish explorers of Mexico and the Aztecs or Maya, or Lewis and Clark's meetings with the Native American tribes of the western United States, and compare it to meetings presented in *The Moon and the Face*.
3. Examine the gender roles in this novel, particularly those of Terje, Icrane, Kyreol, Nara, and the alien creature. Are there gender-specific roles? How is a person's role determined?
4. Terje and Kyreol go on very different journeys—one to his past, the other to a far planet. Are there any ways in which these journeys are similar? Explain by describing what each character experiences and learns on his or her journey.
5. Read McKillip's novel *Moon-Flash* (1984). What does she say about different cultures and beliefs in this novel?

Are her ideas similar to or different from those presented in the sequel *The Moon and the Face*?
6. Choose one of the main settings and explain how it is used to illustrate the values or conflicts associated with that place.
7. Define fantasy and science fiction.

What are some of the similarities or differences? Why, and in what ways, are the two genres used in *The Moon and the Face*?

For Further Reference

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Marecki, Joan, and Charles L. Wentworth. "Patricia A(nne) McKillip." In *Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series*. Vol. 18. Edited by L. Metzger and D. Straub. Detroit: Gale, 1986: 316-320. The entry includes an interview with McKillip in which she discusses her writing career and interests.

Review. *English Journal* (September 1986): 82. Recommends the novel, and notes the theme of love versus independence in the story.

Review [Moon-Flash]. *School Library Journal* (December 1984): 92. Recommends Moon-Flash but criticizes the presentation of the Moon-flash as a manipulation of "paternalistic anthropologists."

Spivack, Charlotte. "Patricia McKillip."

In *Merlin's Daughters: Contemporary Women Writers of Fantasy*. New York: Greenwood, 1987. Offers an insightful examination of McKillip's fantasy novels, particularly *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* and the *Riddle of the Stars* trilogy.

Related Titles

The Moon and the Face is the sequel to McKillip's 1984 novel, Moon-Flash, which details the journey of young Kyreol and Terje as they leave the Riverworld for the first time. Kyreol, who has just been betrothed to Korre, must decide if she should simply accept a fate decided by others. She knows she will be unhappy married to Korre, a quiet, often sullen young man who calls her stories nonsense and expects her continual obedience. She already misses the ready friendship and understanding of Terje, who has been her companion since childhood.

Shortly before her marriage ceremony, Kyreol journeys with Terje along the river. Although the two had always believed that the Riverworld encompassed the entire world, they soon discover that it is only one small part of a much larger world. As the two travel through strange new places, they learn the varied ways that people view the Moon-Flash, a yearly blaze of light in the sky. When they finally arrive at Domecity, they discover the origin of the Moon-Flash and then face important decisions about truth, faith, and reality.

Moon-Flash is an apt predecessor to The Moon and the Face not only because it explains how Kyreol and Terje first arrive at Domecity and reunite with Kyreol's mother, but also because it introduces, in the form of an adventure and love story, the central issue of this series—the integrity of cultural diversity and respect for difference.

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Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor
Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design
Amanda Mott

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)
ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)
ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996