



***WORMWOOD GATE* BY KATHERINE FARMAR**

About the author

Katherine Farmar was born in Dublin and has lived there all her life, apart from a year spent in Edinburgh studying philosophy. *Wormwood Gate* is her first novel. She reviews for *The Irish Times* and has written a short book for younger readers as part of Little Island's Nightmare Club series. She is co-author of the guide book *Dublin on a Shoestring*.

BEFORE YOU READ...

Take a look at the cover of the book, back and front, and consider the following questions:

- What does the front-cover image suggest to you about the kind of book this is going to be?
 - How does the designer achieve that effect?
 - Read the blurb on the back cover. What expectations does this raise for you?
 - Write down a few thoughts about your expectations before you read the book. After you have read it, check back and see how you feel about the cover and the blurb.
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GENRE

This book starts out like an ordinary **realistic** novel set in modern Dublin.

- How convincing do you find the opening pages of the book, the relationships between Julie and her friends and non-friends, the Junior Cert results party and night out and so on?
- How do you think Julie feels about 'normal' things like school, friends, boys, fashion? Is she happy in her skin?

Quite soon, however, the story develops into a **fantasy**, still set in Dublin, but not a Dublin we know. 'Fantasy' is a very wide-ranging genre, covering everything from *Alice in Wonderland*, Narnia and the Lord of the Rings series to the work of Diana Wynne Jones, Neil Gaiman, Philip Pullman and Patrick Ness. There is often a framing or outer story set in the **real world**, from which the characters enter the fantasy or secondary world.

- Can you identify the moment when Julie and Aisling step out of reality and into a parallel universe?
- What is the 'portal' and how does it operate?

Once in the parallel world, the girls are frantically trying to work out how this world works. The author uses a variety of **devices**, tricks and humorous touches to create the fantasy world and its characters.

- Can you identify half a dozen such devices and say why they work (or don't work for you) to create the world in which most of the story takes place?

Many of the places, objects, landmarks, characters, notions and phrasing in the fantasy world are based on slightly askew versions of these same things in the **real world**.

- Can you identify half a dozen or so of these images and say why you think they work (or don't work for you) in building the fantasy world and making it cohere (or not)?
- How many allusions to **mythology, legend and other fantasies** can you identify in the novel?



- How well do you think the author has integrated and used these culturally identifiable images to create the world of her novel and make it sit comfortably in the fantasy genre?

Fantasy is a very common genre in **film** and **gaming**.

- Imagine you have been asked to develop this book as a film or computer game. How would you go about casting your film or setting up your game plan?

CHARACTER

Unlike in some fantasies, the characters in this novel, especially the main two characters, develop like characters in a more realistic story.

- Trace the character development of one (or both if you like) of the main characters, and try to identify the point at which you begin to understand the nature of the relationship that is developing between the girls.

You could call this a 'lesbian love story', but although that would not be inaccurate, it would fall very far short of describing the kind of book that this is.

- Do you agree with that assessment and, if so, can you say why that is the case?
- If you disagree, can you say why?

The other characters in the story, apart from the two mortals from the real Dublin are, of course, fantastic creations and we would not expect them to behave in the same way that the realistic characters do. Nevertheless, some of them have great charm and interest.

- Who is your favourite 'magic' character in the story, and can you say why you feel this character works well?
- Do you find any of the characters unconvincing? If so, can you say why?



PLOT

- How well do you think the story has been plotted?
- Can you follow it?
- Does it leave you feeling satisfied that the story has been worked out and coheres? Why or why not?
- What plot elements did you find especially intriguing or difficult and why?

ATMOSPHERE

More than other books, this novel relies heavily on intangible things to create its charm.

- What elements of the book do you feel work particularly well to create the ambience or atmosphere of the story?

The author uses wry humour as well as fantasy in her building of the world.

- Give a few examples of things that made you smile when you were reading the book and try to analyse how the humour works.

AND FINALLY...

Look back now at your initial thoughts on examining the cover.

- How has your attitude to the book changed or developed since you have read it and thought about it?
- Have a go at rewriting the blurb to reflect your feelings about the novel now.