

**The Healing Path: Navigating Grief and Trauma Through the  
*Labyrinth* in Amanda Lohrey's Novel**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Amanda Lohrey's *The Labyrinth* is a beautiful book that is grounded in reality, the story of Erica that is depicted is highly relatable because it deals with the themes of grief and trauma which every individual has faced at certain points in time. The story is multi-layered yet compelling. **Aims:** This research aims to examine how *The Labyrinth* employs symbolism, particularly the motif of the labyrinth, as a narrative and psychological tool for processing grief and rebuilding fractured relationships. **Methods:** The study adopts an interpretivist approach, which emphasizes subjective meaning-making and seeks to understand characters' experiences through close textual analysis and contextual interpretation. **Result:** The story focuses on the character of Erica who has moved to a remote little town in Australia after her son was imprisoned for murdering a person. In her own attempt to reconcile with her condition, she starts building a labyrinth with a newly found homeless person named Jurko, and eventually, the other town folks join her initiative and lend her support to finish the work on time. The other side of the novel focused more on the strained relationship between the mother and son. Even though Daniel refuses to talk to Erica at the beginning he eventually starts opening up, near the end of the novel Erica receives a report that states that Daniel is doing better in prison and has found someone who he looks up to as a father figure. Lohrey does not establish a proper conclusion for her story but there are suggestions that their relationship will improve. **Implication:** The results indicate that Lohrey's novel is not only a contribution to Australian literary discourse, but that it also illustrates how literature operates as a context for interpreting trauma, our ability to overcome adversity and the slow regrowth of our ties as humans.

**Keywords:** reconciliation, guilt, denial, *The Labyrinth*.

**Introduction**

Amanda Lohrey won the prestigious Prime Minister's Literary Award for her seventh novel "The Labyrinth" in 2021. The author won a sum of \$80,000 as she is praised by the judges for the beauty of her writing. She has also won the 2021 Miles Franklin and Voss literary prizes (Times of India, 2021). The novel deals with the concept of grief being universal, it is instinctive and adapts to the pain-striking feeling of losing a loved one. In Amanda Lohrey's *The Labyrinth*, the concepts of complicated grief, denial and the towards reconciling with past experiences have closely been depicted. After the death of a loved one, family members go through intense periods of grief where they require the support of their family members to help with distressing emotions,

when these needs are not met, the result is shock and denial (Kučukalić & Kučukalić, 2017). Throughout the course of the novel, Erica tries to find closure but continues to be faced with adversaries one after another. Erica is seen to lose her mother at the age of 9, the unprocessed trauma continued to haunt and torment her as she grows up. When she was 18, she had to witness the death of her father. As the days went by she has even been distanced from her own brother, the story is pain-striking as it explores the world around Erica as it falls apart. Erica sets out on a journey to find peace and reconcile with her only son.

There are two main focuses within the story, the first is Erica's son Daniel who has been imprisoned due to manslaughter in a fit of rage and the second is the labyrinth that Erica builds to distract herself from all her problems. The story sets with Erica leaving city life to life to be closer to her son. She knows that cannot save him from his own hell but wants to be there for Daniel and morally support him even though she is herself perplexed and cannot wrap her head around the idea of her son murdering another person. The periods where the interactions are shown between the mother and son are represented by feelings of sadness, guilt, despair and denial. Researchers argue that the framework which is often used to measure the recovery procedure of jail inmates can be both sociological and psychological (Wright, Crewe & Hulley, 2017). This can help explain the profound quietness which is often observed when Erica goes over to see her son every fortnight.

The novel explores the early years of Erica's life in great detail as the seed of Labyrinth is planted. In the story, Erica goes back to the asylum where she once grew up but much to her surprise the place has changed and has been turned into a tourist destination. Erica is seen searching for the labyrinth where she once played with her little brother when they were both little (Mandryk, 2021). The labyrinth was the only sense of joy she recalls from her childhood as the rest of her memories are bleak and filled with sadness. Erica's past has made her live a troubled adult life where she had to face multiple dysfunctional relationships. Her living standards did not quite improve after Daniel was born and thus she blames herself for failing him when Daniel commits the murder and gets imprisoned. The shack that she buys in the small coastal town helps Erica find the peace that she has been looking for her whole life, by building her own labyrinth with the help of some friends.

During her journey towards reconciliation with her own self, she meets Jurko a homeless young man who agrees to help her with the goal. At the end of the novel when the police are finally aware of his illegal presence in the town and come to arrest him, Erica lies to them to protect her new friend who she has started to love as her own son. However, Jurko is not the only character with a compelling backstory, there are several others in the small town, who are suffering from their own inner turmoil. The labyrinth acts as a symbol which connects the various people living in the town and helps them feel connected, yet unique in their own separate journeys to find what they are looking for (The Conversation, 2021). Amanda Lohrey has masterfully presented all of these different elements to show how splendid life is.

The story is marvellous in the sense that it portrays a woman who locks herself out of her own world as she spirals down a path of misery after some violent losses on a personal level. However, in her own attempt to leave everything behind, she finds her peace. The labyrinth she creates provides her with wisdom and she learns to open her heart up to new people. Erica learns the important life lesson that just because she has faced adversaries and a few other hurdles in her life, it does not mean that she will live with it always. The life lessons that she learns during her

goal of creating a labyrinth enable her to connect with the local people of the town and even though these people were hesitant to help new women with her madness of creation, they are eventually drawn towards her due to her commitment of creating the labyrinth. The journey of Erica's healing and reconciliation with her own self has been beautifully portrayed in this research. The following study has critically evaluated the different aspects of the book, the symbolism and themes that Lohrey has incorporated to write this compelling story.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review section is particularly important in this section as it helps in understanding the viewpoint of other writers and researchers that have also died with the themes of guilt, denial, healing and reconciliation. In the modern age, as children or parents make certain decisions or choices, the guilt wall is slowly built around them (Wellnest, 2021). Therefore, many people that read *The Labyrinth* can understand the struggle that Erica has been going through to forgive and reconcile with her son even after he has murdered someone. Reconciliation is the path that allows a person to reflect on their actions and take the necessary actions that are required to overcome these problems.

In order to thoroughly understand psychological trauma and the different ways in which it affects people, the researcher has observed *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte. The book skillfully portrays the pain of unrequited love and unhealed trauma. The story opens with the character of Heathcliff, an orphan who represents the struggling section of society. Even though Heathcliff was saved from abandonment, after Mr Earnshaw died, he had to experience abandonment once again. Heathcliff was reduced to the status of a servant and lacked all the emotional nourishment that a boy of his age deserved (Brontë, 2008). The story shows how he valued his friendship with Catherine as it was the only thing that provided him with sustenance and emotional peace. However, despite the pure love that Heathcliff had towards Catherine, she manipulated him and used him for her own needs. The story pans across multiple generations and the psychological need for love, and protection that every person deserves gets turned into bitter malice as Heathcliff grows up in neglect.

The abandonment that Heathcliff faces throughout his life made him seek revenge on his beloved Catherine and her family. Later in life, Heathcliff is seen to manipulate his son Linton to harass his lover, the young man does as his father has directed and thus Heathcliff ends up putting his son through the same trauma that he once experienced in *Wuthering Heights*. Bronte has elaborated on how dangerous unaddressed trauma can be to a person and the harm it can cause. In the book, both Catherine and Heathcliff show signs of Complex Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (Redmayne, 2019), the societal norms have made both of them monsters but inside they are still two children seeking love. In the later part of the novel, it is revealed that Catherine has struggled with love as well, Heathcliff was one of the few people who really loved and understood her, but due to social norms and their status, she had to abandon him which created problems too big for her to handle.

The other article that has been extensively researched is written by Staub, the article showcases the effects of violence on people. Staub develops the understanding by suggesting that people who fall victim to any kind of intense situation such as violence, or genocide are often deeply scarred by the incident. The individual identity of a person is deeply rooted in their group

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identity and therefore early accounts of trauma experienced in life can have severe consequences in the future (Staub, 2017). The victimization that these people face early in their life changes their perception of the world and make them seek the basic human need of security and comfort. In order to change their life and have a positive impact, meaningful connections need to be made that can help them with the problem. Children that lose their parents at an early age of their life often earn acceptance and attention. The people that lack this kind of positive intervention in their life never attain fulfilment. Healing is a particularly important part of the recovery process and contributes to breaking the chain of violence.

## **Method**

The research focuses on interpretivism philosophy approach to understand characters' experiences through close textual analysis and contextual interpretation. In this context, the research philosophy helps in gaining a proper understanding of the thought process of the researcher and the different factors that were considered for carrying out the study. Interpretivism philosophy has been chosen as it is based on the ideas of positivism but considers the humane aspect of things (Ryan, 2018). Interpretivism also promotes qualitative analysis which has been used for the study. As the present study deals with psychological trauma, this method can help in getting a better understanding of the subject matter in *The Labyrinth*. Additionally, a deductive research approach has also been utilized in the present study. The deductive approach bases its hypothesis on older literature and checks the validity of its findings against newer circumstances and therefore (Evans, 2019). This method can contribute to understanding the different themes used by Amanda Lohrey.

Research design can be perceived as the overall strategy that the researcher uses for carrying out the study. The present research has made use of a descriptive research design, this method has been used as it aims at shedding light on important issues through effective data collection procedures (Atmowardoyo, 2018). This method can help in describing the various aspects of the novel, all the different themes and symbolism that the author has used. Data collection is the process of collecting information for the study, accordingly, the present research has made use of a secondary qualitative data analysis procedure. The data in this context has been collected from book reviews, articles, journals and newspapers. The data analysis method further helps with the observation of the collected data while maintaining the authenticity of the study.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **A. Result an Analysis**

#### **Part One**

Amanda Lohrey is a Tasmanian writer who focuses on writing both fiction and nonfiction, throughout her carrier Lohrey has written several books that have focused on different elements such as life, work, politics, sex and so on. However, despite having a wide range of coverage in terms of genre, publishers and critics of her writing often find it hard to fit her works into the modern genre of "women's writing" (The Conversation, 2022). *The Labyrinth*, one of Lohrey's latest works is no exception, the story opens with the character of Erica Marsden. Much of Erica's childhood has been spent in an Asylum because of her father who was the chief medical officer of the compound. It is unclear as to why Erica's mother ran away when she was only 9, leaving Erica and her brother alone with their father. Guilt and denial are some of the strongest themes that have

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been focused on within the study. While Erica has not experienced any form of physical violence, it is clear that Erica has been subjected to long-term psychological trauma due to the incident. Recent research studies on the subject have pointed out how trauma from past experiences can have persistent neurobiological effects on a child when they grow up (Astbury et al. 2000). The same is applicable to Erica, lack of secure parenting during her early years of life has resulted in long-term psychological, emotional and other forms of behavioural problems. All of these different elements will be explored in more detail throughout the course of the study. Children require healthy family relationships and support in order to have a positive impact on life, however, Erica is seen to lack these elements in her life.

As the story progresses, Erica is seen to revisit Melton Park, the place where she spent years of her childhood. The asylum is decommissioned and has been turned into a tourist trap, the element of change is evident throughout the place (Whitmore, 2021). Erica is flooded with emotions as she recalls the gruesome past when her father was murdered in the very garden where she stands today with a scythe by one of the patients of the asylum. Part one of the book primarily deals with the trauma and violence that Erica experienced throughout her childhood (The Newtown Review of Books, 2021). The place reminds her of her mother running away and dying shortly after when her car was swept off the road in a flood, and her father Ken's tragic death when she was 18. All of these lurid and violent memories flooded Erica during her revisit. The place where she once lived is vividly described, the church that she knew from her childhood has been changed to her a cafe. Erica curiously notices that even though the surrounding area shows signs of dilapidation, there has also been restoration in certain aspects.

The theme of change is a recurring concept in Amanda Lohrey's works, in an interview Lohrey quotes James Woods as he remarks that the true purpose of a writer is to find change in the human consciousness (The Conversation, 2022). Through her characters, Amanda Lohrey shows the changes that are spontaneously occurring in nature. In this context, while describing the writing process of *The Labyrinth*, Erica states while writing her works she often rewrites the plot multiple times until the words resonate with her thoughts. Lohrey humorously remarks that through the course of her life, she has tried a few different jobs, thinking that she can make a difference in the world, yet she kept returning back to her writing (Sydney Review of Books, 2021). Perhaps through the character of Erica, Lohrey laments her need for change. In the interview, Lohrey also shares about the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and his marvellous theories about myths, through compelling storytelling, myths portray reality and all the different contradictions of life that Exist. In the limited time that the readers read these myths, there are provided with solace and the faintest possibility of change.

Despite being troubled, Erica is seen searching for the labyrinth, which was the only solace for her when she was little. She remembers the moments when she played in the labyrinth gardens with her little brother. The labyrinth is one of the oldest symbols known to humanity, which stands for both hope and fear; the symbol had several interpretations throughout history. Some researchers consider the labyrinth to be an analogy of life, suggesting that is no maze but a clear yet confusing path that one must take to attain fulfilment. In Greek legends and myths, however, the labyrinth is associated with the idea of hell and redemption (Orie, 2015). The first reference to the labyrinth comes from the Greek legend of King Minos, it is believed that the king's wife had an affair with a bull and that resulted in the atrocity which was their son Minotaur, a half man and half bull



(Camacho, 2022). The king locked the beast in the labyrinth for many years, up until Theseus came and defeated the animal with the power of love.

Even though the story is fascinating and solidifies the concept of a labyrinth, there is no physical evidence of a labyrinth ever existing on the island of Crete. Regardless of the lack of evidence of a labyrinth, the idea of it has often been used in Hellenistic culture as something that is truly evil and as a result in none of the holy sites and temples of the ancient Greek cultures, labyrinths have ever been seen. However, as the world forgot the ancient gods and society became christened, the idea of the labyrinth was adopted as something holy and cosmic. In a later part of the book, Jung suggests:

*“The cure for many ills, noted Jung, is to build something”*

This statement is particularly true, Erica is a woman of many ills, she is haunted by the memories of her parents, she has also etached from her brother, the only blood relative that she once had, Erica has faced abandonment many times in her life, first by her mother, then her father and finally her brother (Fraser, 2020). Thus, wanting to build a labyrinth after she has lost everything in life felt like the right thing to do. Erica is seen going to the new cafe that has opened up in place of the church, there a man working in the cafe conveys to her how the labyrinth had overgrown itself and as a result, it was removed. The book has effectively explored the past of Erica as it shed light on the troubled and dysfunctional life that she once shared. Erica had tried her best to hide her past from her child and as a result unwillingly strained the relationship with her only son Daniel. These memories that are explored in the first part of the chapter have not been revisited throughout the course of the book again.

The Labyrinth is one of the greatest works of Amanda Lohrey as it focuses on the troubled relationship that is shared between a mother and a son. Many critics have described The Labyrinth as a haunting experience because the novel focuses on the fundamental concepts of nature and natural familial relationships in a light which is not used. As the story unfolds, it is revealed that Erica’s son, Daniel, has been imprisoned for carrying out manslaughter. Hearing the news, Erica decides to leave her current life behind and move to a fictional coastal town in New South Wales named Garra Nalla (Webb, 2021). Even though the author has not shared many details about her current life that she experienced in the city, she is seen moving to the coastal town for a simpler life. In the story, Erica paints a picture of her settling in with the population of the small town.

She sees that every person she meets has their own set of problems, the different women in the area have all been suffering from relationship problems, with either their human or children. Erica also meets with another woman who is bored with the life that she lives in the small town but cannot afford to move out, she also meets different men that are eccentric. However, the person that caught Erica’s attention was a stonemason named Jurko. The two soon become close As Erica became keen on constructing a labyrinth. Erica has experienced a visible debate on whether to design a maze or a labyrinth, she ultimately decided to make the labyrinth because while mazes are meant to confuse people, labyrinths are designed in a pattern that promotes a meditative walk. Erica says:

*“The maze is a challenge to the brain (how smart are you), the labyrinth to the heart (will you surrender). In the maze, you grapple with the challenge but in the labyrinth, you let go. Effortlessly you come back to where you started, somehow changed by the act of surrender”*

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There have been many reasons that led to Erica seeking refuge, on one hand, she wanted to cut ties with all of her friends and family out of the guilt that her son has committed but in the process, she realized how fractured her relationship with her son really is and spends a great portion of the film reconciling with him as she cannot leave her son behind like how her own parents did it with her. The burdens of family ties and relationships have been fleshed out in this section. Erica received a dream that instructed her to create a labyrinth (Whitmore, 2021). Even though Erica ran because she did not want to face people, she eventually did come to terms with the people living in the small village and started embracing them as her own family. The story is an elegant portrayal of a broken woman who seeks love and affection but her past experiences have led to her building walls around herself. While the story by itself is short, it has a powerful message of the importance of a sense of belongingness and acceptance.

Erica is seen to visit Daniel once every fortnight, however, the relationship and dynamics that are portrayed by the author during these interactions are bleak and heartbreaking, it is clear both the mother and child are suffering, yet they are having trouble communicating it to each other. Daniel is most unresponsive during all the interactions he has with his mother. In this context, one of the strongest instincts of any mother is to protect their child under any circumstances, Erica has failed and for the most part, blames herself for her son's condition. There exists a duality in her actions and thought process of Erica, she knows what her son has done and therefore her feelings for Daniel are blurry, yet she also knows that he is her flesh and blood and therefore she cannot abandon him. When she is not visiting or thinking about her son, she focuses on her other project, which is building the labyrinth.

## **Part Two**

Erica is described to live in a run-down shack which she bought with the money that she had left after retiring, despite her obsession with building the labyrinth, she is seen to be not sure of the exact method with the help she can carry out the task (Kavanagh, 2020). Her obsession with building the labyrinth made her turn towards her new neighbours in the coastal community and seek help. There is a vivid loneliness in the landscape of the place. The second part of the story indulges with the concepts of desperation, guilt, loneliness and reparation. It stresses the relationship between the mother and son and how fragile and unsettling the relationship has become since the son's imprisonment (Reading Matters, 2021). The acts of her son have tremendously shocked Erica, but she is unwilling to give up, whether she is motivated by her own past or merely her motherly instincts is up for personal interpretation.

In the text, Daniel asks her mother to burn the remaining books that they still have left, however, burning the books has been hard for Erica. Books are often times referred to as mirrors that are used to view the soul, In this context, burning away the box has been a tough experience for Erica because these books are some of the only things that she still has left which are reminders of her son. During the later parts of the story, Erica employs a little girl named Lexie to burn the books, the plot makes it clear that Erica has been suffering from parting with the books and therefore instructs Lexie to arrange all the books alphabetically before burning them. As a mother, Erica is a complex character, despite having a troubled childhood where she never really experienced any form of love and affection, she could have easily abandoned her son but she wanted to break the cycle by being close to her son.

The labyrinth can be perceived as a form of distraction that Erica has come up with to seek solace, the act of creating the labyrinth is highly inspirational and it also helped in establishing a sense of friendship with the East European stonemason, Jurko (Australian Government, 2021). Jurko is of Balkan origin and has been living in Australia without a proper visa, he helps Erica to build her dream labyrinth. This act of kindness has helped in melting Erica's heart, which up until now had sealed herself and all her emotions in an attempt to hide her pain. Part two of the book focuses mainly on the construction procedure of the labyrinth and how through improved communication the awkward relationship between Erica and Jurko has evolved (The Newtown Review of Books, 2021). The labyrinth not only changes Erica but also those around him. One of her neighbours named Lewis who never communicated with her ever since she came suddenly started showing interest in helping her build her labyrinth.

Another character that went through a similar transformation is the character of Lewis. In the present context, Lewis is a local architect who originally turned down Erica's proposal of building a labyrinth but later on, participated in helping her. Change even though it is very minute has also been noticed in Daniel's behaviour, previously he used to sit in silence when his mother visited him. However, when he saw his mother was aggressively silent, he talked to her. The seed pattern that was used for creating the labyrinth represented that of a uterus, female power is expressed with the idea of the labyrinth. Creating the labyrinth with her newly found neighbours has been a remarkable experience for Erica, the process has helped her realize that Jurko is almost similar to a surrogate son and she shares a pure and respectful relationship with him, near the end of the story she finally realized how carrying out this project has been reconciling for her.

*"Yes, I can see how it might work: rough and yet delicate, makeshift and yet permanent, poor and yet elegant. I look up at him and smile. He too is smiling. We have got there; we have arrived at the form."*

Ray her neighbour is not only willing to help her and Jurko finish their task but he is also seen to come over and physically help them with the task. In a similar manner, the architect also brings in his son and he wants the child to learn about labyrinths (Lohrey, 2020). At the same time, Erica also receives a report from prison which states how Daniel has found a father figure in prison and that his mental conditions have slowly been improving. The writer might not have mentioned anything directly about the repairment of the broken relationship of Erica with her son, the changes that have swept everyone can possibly fix her relationship with her son. Another important theme that is explored in this section is permanency when Erica was suggested to make the footing for her labyrinth with concrete, she was unsure of how to react (The Newtown Review of Books, 2021). The years of mental turmoil that she has experienced due to family trauma have made it hard for her to embrace permanence, thus she says:

*"Concrete footings? But that would be ... ' I hesitate. The word permanent is on my tongue, and for the first time, I consider whether anything lasting is what I want."*

Near the end of the story, when Erica is told that the police are looking for Jurko, she hides him and lies to the police. Her monthly instincts resurface at this point in time. As it has previously mentioned, working close with Jurko has taught Erica many things, she has been able to open up and thus hiding Jurko felt like the right thing to do for her. All her life, Erica has lost everything



that she loved, she did not want to lose the new friendships and relationships that she has developed in this small village. Erica provides Jurko with the safety of her house to stay in but the story ends with Jurko escaping the police enquiries because staying in that place would not have been safe for him.

The story of *The Labyrinth* is a highly contemplative narrative which beautifully highlights many complex emotions that humans experience. The perplexity and guilt that Erica faces can be relatable in certain aspects, even at her lowest points she just wants to spend her remaining years with her son, she knows what abandonment feels like and thus she does not want her son to go through what she had to in the early years of her life. Being lost her mother and her father at an early age, Erica has been troubled all her life and thus even though she knows what Daniel has done cannot be forgiven she tries her best to be the best mother that she possibly can. The duality that she faces makes her want to build something and that is where the labyrinth comes in. The early focus of the story is on the fraught relationship with her parents, though not mentioned directly in the later parts of the story, which has made a significant impact on Erica (Fraser, 2020). One of the most noteworthy features of Lohrey's work is the open-ended presentation style of her characters, as they are vivid it is hard to put them in designated boxes.

The focus on Erica's childhood is important because it showcases how she is familiar with the madness of the world. She moves to the deserted coastal small town of Garra Nalla to seek solace but also to hide from the world after what her son has done, but rather than being isolated, she meets new people who start to appreciate her and her commitment to building the labyrinth. She cut off ties with her family in hopes of being able to heal and grieve. This grief is not for love but for the chaos that she harbours within herself. All of the interactions that she has with her son in the prison evoke pain and suffering to the point that is incomprehensible (Reading Matters, 2021). She is presented as a mother who thinks she has failed herself as she could not protect her own son, the sorrow, anger and feeling of hopelessness have been beautifully depicted by Lohrey. Being lost in everything in life, the novel is a journey that Erica embarks on to find reasoning, and a need to live. The labyrinth became the sole reason for her to continue with her life.

### **Symbolism of the Labyrinth**

The symbolism of the labyrinth runs deep within the course of the story, while the present research has already elaborated on the concept of what a labyrinth truly is and its significance to the Hellenistic world, there is another meaning to the word. The Greek word for a labyrinth is the word "labrys", this is a double-headed stone weapon that has often been used by the Amazons to symbolize the matriarchal society. The fact that the seed pattern of Erica's labyrinth represents that of a urethra, suggests that she is also seeking the same empowerment. The opening of the labyrinth is supposed to represent the women's labia, the outer part of it which is known as the cervix and the womb. This is a strong symbolism as the womb represents childbirth and therefore creation itself. The mother provides the child with shelter, protection, preservation, nourishment and even fertility, the social process of giving birth has been beautifully reconstructed and presented by the author (Abaka-Attah, Opoku-Bonsu & Gbologah, 2017). Thus the labyrinth also stands as the symbol of creation, Erica notes "the womb and the labrys axe", while the idea represents both men and women, Erica is unsure as to why women should wield the axe.

Despite having some similarities with a maze, a labyrinth is different and more unique,

maze represents a puzzle, where each choice a person makes leads up to the end of their fate, whereas a labyrinth is a single path, it does not branch but continues to lead the person towards the centre, a labyrinth, therefore, has a sense of unambiguousness and is not hard to navigate. While the labyrinth was not used in any of the temples of ancient Greece, they started on coins as far back as 430 BC (Labyrinth Park, 2023). The idea and meaning of the labyrinth have changed over time, the labyrinth of Crata that is referred to at the beginning of the story primarily refers to a maze, while it had one entrance, the branching pattern was multicursal. During medieval times, the labyrinth started to represent a hard path that one must embark on to reach god and salvation. The entrance of the labyrinth, therefore, became birth, whereas the centre started to take shape of the God. In another context, the labyrinth is thought to symbolise pilgrimage, and a path towards enlightenment. Perhaps the labyrinth that Erica has been subconsciously chasing all her life leads up to this idea.

## **B. Discussion**

In order to keep herself distracted from the chaos outside, Erica dedicates herself to two projects, the first is the destruction of the extensive book collection that Daniel possessed and the second, is the building of the labyrinth. Erica could have burnt all of the books at once, but she wants to hold on to those books as long as possible and therefore she has made it a part of her daily ritual to burn them one at a time. Eventually, she hires a little schoolgirl from the small town to help arrange the books in alphabetical order. It can be hard to let go of old belongings this is because these things are reminiscent of memories that they once had (Ong, Terry & Twohig, 2020). In the case of Erica, these books represent her son and she struggled to let go of the last bit of memory she still had left of him. While her son is in prison, these books helped in creating a social connection. Perhaps this is the reason why she felt the need of hiring a child to help with her task, to distract herself from the inevitable demise of all the books. All she could do was slow down the process by asking the child to organise them alphabetically to relish the last memories one last time.

The second project is her beloved Labyrinth from the local stones that were available in the area, she planned the project for many hours even though she did not possess the knowledge of building or constructing anything prior to her arrival at the small town. Erica is seen to be puzzled throughout the novel, as she struggled to believe that her son could do something as heinous as killing another person. It took Erica some time to process these feelings and creating the labyrinth with her newly found neighbours was the only thing that kept her sane throughout the process. She dreamt of the day when the labyrinth will be complete and that walking to the centre of the construction will help in calming the chaos that has been tormenting her throughout her life. Erica recalls her father's teachings, as she says:

*"First the making—I recalled my father's words: the cure for many ills is to build something—and then the repetition, the going over and over so that time would rupture and be stopped in its flow. And I could live in an infinitely expanding present in which there was no nostalgia, no consequence, no outcome or false promise."*

The idea of building something to hide the pain is a constant theme within the novel, as Junko is seen to say the exact same thing in a later part of the story. Erica has a troubling past and

has been promised that everything will be fine, yet nothing really changes. During her childhood, her father promised them that their mother would return, yet she died in a flood accident. Before she could recover from the incident, her father was brutally killed by a patient in the asylum. All of these nostalgic memories and false promises that she had to carry her life have finally started to wear her down. The only fragment of joy that she recalls was the time that she spent in the labyrinth as a child, thus, as the story draws to its end, Erica just wants to find the same peace that she once experienced. In order to carry out the task, Erica realizes that she cannot do it all by herself and befriends Jurko, an illegal immigrant, the relationship between a mother and son that develops between them is something that is truly remarkable.

The Labyrinth is a remarkable novel that shares a rare example of a lone woman who has lost everything in life and is on a journey to find peace and solace. Her journey leads her to a small coastal town where she is faced with the fact that she cannot reach her dreams by herself, Erica through the course of the novel is taught the importance of friendship and family relationships (Kavanagh, 2020). She mends her fractured relationship with her son and befriends the new local neighbours of the area who helps her in building the labyrinth together. The connections that she makes along the way teach her to open her heart to other people and to live once again. The novel masterfully records the roots of the labyrinth and how it helps in bringing together the people of Garra Nulla, the small coastal town which barely has a hundred people. The remote setting of the story that Lohrey has developed further helps in establishing this idea. The memories with her father and her personal experience of childbirth are both unsettling but at the same time make her the woman that she is today. She recalled her father saying:

*“believed in the mind as a divine engineering project designed for the invention and use of tools. Homo faber: man the maker. The use of the hands is a powerful medicine, he would say”*

While Erica can never reconcile her relationship with her father, she knows that there is a chance to do it with her son. Near the end of the novel, the readers are made aware of Daniels's change in the prison and finding a father figure who can help him turn around. The people from the coastal town have their own burdens which they carry and the labyrinth draws them all in together, Lexie the little girl was to leave Hamlet and explore the outside world, but her neighbour Ray is tormented by his own misery, whereas Jurko is presented by Lohrey as an illegal immigrant who is trying to run away from his past (Kavanagh, 2020). There are instances where these characters find similarities and connections between themselves but ultimately they are bound to travel their own paths to reach salvation. The labyrinth provides a sense of comfort to all of these people and helps in providing them with hope for their conditions. The theme of loneliness runs strong in the novel but it ultimately teaches the different ways that life can be interpreted and it is never too late to remake oneself and the relationships that are shared.

## **Conclusion**

As concluding remarks for the preset research, it can be seen that The Labyrinth is a beautiful piece of work that focuses on the strained relationship of Erica and Daniel. The research has provided a brief introduction to the writer Amanda Lohrey and her writing procedure. The theme of grief and loss are portrayed beautifully throughout the novel. The literature review section

has carried out a literature review on *Wuthering Heights* and other articles on psychological trauma to have a better understanding of the situation. The novel portrays a grieving mother who despite being ashamed of her son's actions tries her best to stay by his side and ensure that he gets stimulation during his stay in the prison. Erica hides her pain and suffering for her son and dedicates her life to building a labyrinth in order to find peace. The study manifests in Erica's own troubled childhood and the untimely death of both her parents. All her life Erica has faced abandonment and she ensured that her children have never gone through with it. The sadness in the interactions that Erica had with her son had been painful to read at times, however, with time Daniel does open up. Erica's interaction with the different people of the small town teaches her the power of friendship and that she does not have to suffer alone.

### **Originality Statement**

The author declares that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for publication in any other published materials, except where due acknowledgement is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom the author has worked, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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