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Questing Feminism: Narrative Tensions and Magical Women in Modern Fantasy

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QUESTING FEMINISM: NARRATIVE TENSIONS AND

MAGICAL WOMEN IN MODERN FANTASY

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Abstract

Works of Epic Fantasy often have the reputation of being formulaic, conservative works that simply replicate the same tired story lines and characters over and over. This assumption prevents Epic Fantasy works from achieving wide critical acceptance resulting in an under-analyzed and under-appreciated genre of literature. While some early works do follow the same narrative path as J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Epic Fantasy has long challenged and reworked these narratives and character tropes. That many works of Epic Fantasy choose replicate the patriarchal structures found in our world is disappointing, but it is not an inherent feature of the genre. Other possibilities exist. This study uses the figure of the magical woman—a character found throughout Fantasy literature—to investigate the ways in which works of Epic Fantasy challenge, modify, or discard patriarchal narratives that work to contain powerful magical women characters.

In order to investigate the ways in which works of Epic Fantasy are reworking patriarchal narratives and challenging generic conventions, this study first looks to the genre of Epic Fantasy itself, tracing its inauguration as a widely recognizable, marketable genre through the work of J.R.R. Tolkien. In order to investigate new and compelling imaginings of the magical woman, this study analyzes a number of types and approaches to Epic Fantasy including: Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*, George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Steven Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, Lois McMaster Bujold's *Paladin of Souls*, and N.K. Jemisin's *Inheritance Trilogy*. This study finds that the magical woman, while often powerful in her own right through her access to magic, is often constrained by narrative and generic

expectations. It is only when these structures are modified, or discarded, that powerful

magical women characters are not subsumed beneath patriarchal narratives.

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Introduction

Magical Women in Fantasy

"Never put your faith in a Prince. When you require a miracle, trust in a Witch"
(Valente 2006: 134).

"Reading fantasy is what the cool kids do once again" (Smith 2015)

Fantasy recalls our desire for wonder, for epic narratives, for imagining

alternatives and looking at the world anew through a confrontation with human

concerns on a grander scale. Fantasy also offers a chance to imagine a world almost

without limits, where authors can experiment with different social, gender, and

political relationships. The secondary worlds of Fantasy can have magic, and dragons,

and wizards, but Fantasy is not so divorced from the mundane world that it does not

engage with issues that exist in the "real world." This study looks to Epic Fantasy to

explore and comment on myriad issues, in particular patriarchal narratives that are

enacted through the character of the magical woman. This character, and the ways in

which her narrative unfolds within Fantasy works, highlights how patriarchal

narratives influence not only the genre as a whole but also specific character types.

The magical woman, whether she is witch, sorceress, mage, shapeshifter,

shaman, oracle, or seer, is an archetype seen throughout literatures, but appears with

regularity in Fantasy. And as Fantasy works present newly imagined magical women

characters, by challenging or deconstructing traditional tropes and proposing

alternatives, they are often at odds with generic expectations and thus demand new

narrative approaches. If these new approaches are not enacted, the tension that arises

between the figure of the magical woman and narrative expectations is resolved at the

expense of the magical woman: she is contained within a patriarchal narrative, despite

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her power. This study makes clear the ways in which works of Epic Fantasy participate in a feminist tradition of re-appropriating and reimagining often conservative genres.

When I began this study, I expected to find that when the magical woman was able to access power through magic, this would be the deciding factor in whether or not her character was somehow diminished within the narrative. While I found that this is, in a sense, true—magical women's access to power through magic would become an important tool for them to challenge patriarchal expectations—the narrative structure of the work played a larger role in her development. When authors modified, played with, or discarded more traditional Fantasy narrative structures, only then could the magical woman fully step out from behind a male hero. Whether this modification is through multiple focalized narrators and egalitarian world-building, a reimagining of the specifics of the hero's narrative, or an approach to Fantasy that foregrounds the experience of marginalized peoples, it is when these changes are made that magical women are freed from earlier constraints.

This is why, though my interest lies in the figure of the magical woman, this study is also largely concerned with narrative structures, character tropes, and generic expectations. I pay close attention to the ways in which these narrative and generic expectations are reimagined by authors, both subtly and strikingly, and the ways in which these structural changes affect the character and agency of the magical woman. Without confronting and modifying, and sometimes rejecting, these structures, fully realized feminist works of Fantasy are not possible.

This study relies on a number of theoretical works and approaches. I bring together feminist studies of the female hero, narrative theories on focalization, post-colonial studies, and existing studies on Fantasy, casting a large net in order to fully explore the myriad ways authors are reimagining the magical woman and her place within the Fantasy text. I also look outside of accepted scholarly texts and theories. If familiarity, dedication, and volume of reading can make one an expert, then Fantasy fans are some of the most passionate experts that exist. Many fans of Fantasy read voraciously within the genre, and become extensively involved with different works—looking at the absolute thoroughness of fan wiki sites should be enough to convince anyone of the expertise and dedication of Fantasy fans. And, while Fantasy might have been largely ignored by the academy, it has not been ignored by the fans. Blogs, fan sites, and even Reddit offer numerous insightful, detailed, and yes, scholarly examinations of Fantasy. Fantasy authors also tend to be more involved in the Fantasy community than other authors of different genres. Many give extensive interviews, post articles and think-pieces on their own websites, and write for Fantasy magazines and periodicals. Thus, when appropriate, I utilize these resources in my own work.

Helen Young argues in *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* that "Fantasy has a reputation for being a Eurocentric genre, that is, one which is by, for, and about White people" (2016: 1). And while Fantasy might have a tendency to foreground the quests of male heroes and protagonists, Fantasy also offers an array of characters and narratives that challenge preconceived notions of the genre

as being inhospitable to anyone non-white or non-male.[1] Through these characters

(even in those narratives that do focus on male stories), the genre does participate in

complex commentary on a range of social issues. The archetype of the magical woman

is ubiquitous in Fantasy, and her position—as a woman but also as a user of great

power—demonstrates the potential of the genre for challenging the status quo and

upending patriarchal narratives while also foregrounding those trappings of these same

narratives with which the genre must still contend. Given her access to power, the

magical woman always has the opportunity to challenge patriarchal narratives given

her access to power, but only certain characters inhabit narratives in which they do.

Within Fantasy worlds magic may play any number of roles and be governed

by any number of rules. Often it is innate, with magic-users being born with the ability

to somehow access the magic of the world. Other times it can be learned. Sometimes

magic lives in true names, in runes or symbols or spells said just the right way. Other

times it is a force of will. What magic always is, regardless of how one accesses it or

what effects it has on the world, is a way to harness power.[2] Magic gives one an ability

to act upon the world. In a society in which power is taken away from women, the

magical woman is a direct threat to patriarchal control. Many Fantasy texts, both

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[1] Helen Young argues in *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* that "Fantasy has a reputation for being a Eurocentric genre, that is, one which is by, for, and about White people" (2016: 1).

[2] Lori M. Campbell notes that "As most fantasists and scholars agree, magic equals power" (2010: 11). Jane Mobley also writes that "Perhaps magic is best described in terms of power: magic is an elemental creative power capable of actualizing itself in form," and "Magic is an effective power which can be brought to bear on everything we know, even what is usually considered the realm of ordinary nature. It is a condition of life, and it works on or through persons and things, manifesting itself in results which can only be ascribed to its working. As a power, it is impersonal, but it is often connected with some person who controls of embodies it." (1974: 25; 27).

traditional and not, seek to contain the magical woman, reinstating patriarchal control within the narratives. Examples of this are found throughout the genre: Galadriel from *The Lord of the Rings*, Polgara from the *Belgariad*,[3] most of the Aes Sedai in *The Wheel of Time*, Adie, and to a lesser extent Kahlan,[4] from *The Sword of Truth*, Elaira in *The Wars of Light and Shadow*, Mareth, Grianne/The Ilse Witch, and Mallenroh and Morag, among others, from *Shannara*, and Geloë from *Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn*. One popular example of this is from a recent popular movie franchise. In 2013 Peter Jackson introduced the character of Tauriel into his adaptation of J.R.R Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (there were virtually no female characters in the original book). In Tauriel, Jackson gives viewers an elf who is a capable fighter, brave, possesses the attendant magical power of the elves (e.g. healing), and has a clear and steadfast moral compass. However, once inserted into a narrative that maintains its patriarchal structure, Tauriel becomes the prize in a love triangle between Kili and Legolas. Ultimately, it is Legolas who comes to her rescue, saves her life, and avenges Kili's death, and her last scene in 2014's *Desolation of Smaug* shows her crying over the body of Kili, lamenting the pain of true love. This study investigates those magical women who challenge patriarchal narratives, and the ways in which they reimagine many of the generic conventions that both reinforce and replicate these narratives.

　　While distinct in many ways, studies of Science Fiction are useful in mapping out a way to proceed in a study of Epic Fantasy and its use of magical women, most

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[3] In 1997, Polgara would get her own standalone novel, a prequel titled *Polgara the Sorceress*, written by David and Leigh Eddings.
[4] Kahlan is the romantic interest of Richard Cypher, the Seeker of Truth. While he is the hero and focus of the series, Kahlan does get quite a bit of page space and has a well-fleshed out back-story and her own obstacles to overcome.

notably the ways in which feminist scholars have interrogated Science Fiction works. Feminist authors have often had to rework genres in order to tell different stories and genre fiction offers feminist authors unique challenges but also unique opportunities. Because genre fiction relies on specific conventions—as we will see in Chapter 1, much of these conventions for the genre of Fantasy were established by Tolkien— often these "textual conventions and strategies by which the texts construct their meaning subverted the attempt to tell a different story. Or, to put it another way, they defined the extent to which a different story could be told" (Cranny-Francis 1993: 94). Feminist authors had to work within these genres, "writing texts which were like what people had read before, but different enough to be able to construct a different voice" (Cranny-Francis 1993: 98). Science Fiction was one of the first genres to undergo this feminist reconstruction, using its non-realism to imagine different societies, different gendered relations, and different possibilities.

Feminist Science Fiction is now a fairly recognized and critically interrogated phenomenon, as are feminist re-workings of the detective novel and horror story. However, not much critical attention has been paid to the potential feminist power of Fantasy texts. As a genre, Fantasy traditionally adheres to clearly patriarchal narratives, and unlike Science Fiction did not experience a clear and sustained feminist challenge to the genre. As I have argued, Fantasy's departure from consensus reality offers nearly unlimited alternatives, and magic specifically offers a way to circumvent conventional power relations and a variety of authors have begun to make use of this opportunity to present multi-faceted and original female characters and worlds that do not adhere to patriarchal norms.

In order to achieve successful feminist works of Science Fiction, many authors found that female characters could not simply be inserted into slots previously occupied by male characters. They often required a reworking of the narrative or of underlying assumptions of how Science Fiction worlds functioned. We see a similar struggle in Fantasy, but one that is complicated by the use of magic. Magic offers female characters a way to access power that is outside of societal structures, because, while magic may be regulated in different ways, by different schools, or different organizations within the novels, it is not created by society, but exists outside of it. This tension results in characters that are at once powerful in their own right, but constrained by the narratives into which they are written, either diminished in some way or packaged into tired tropes and stereotypes.

With a subject as diverse and massive as the genre of Fantasy, choices must be made. In order to offer a more in-depth analysis of the magical women found throughout Epic Fantasy, a representative rather than survey approach was taken. Each work I include demonstrates a unique approach to magical women through a particular narrative structure, and thus begins to tease out the ways in which the genre has and is still evolving concerning its representation of female characters. Because Fantasy is a popular genre, I was also acutely aware that if I were to make any claims concerning the genre of Fantasy as a whole, I could not, in author Steven Erikson's words, focus only on the branches. Erikson accuses scholars of being mired in the assumption that writers of Epic Fantasy, which serves as the trunk of the Fantasy tree, are "merely imitative or belligerent wanderers in the wasteland of Tolkien's legacy" (2012: 4). He goes on to say that Epic Fantasy has moved on, but critics have failed to notice. And

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while I agree with Erikson's assertion that Fantasy is not a genre filled with authors endlessly trapped under the influence of Tolkien, he still remains a massively influential figure within the genre and so, he garners a decent amount of attention in this study.

In selecting the works I examine, while keeping Erikson's words in mind, I look to those series and novels which first and foremost have something interesting to say about the narrative position of magical women. I also selected a variety of "types" of Epic Fantasy: so-called Tolkien copycats, gritty Epic Fantasy that rejects a sanitized approach to world-building and doesn't shy away from mud, blood, guts, sex, and death, a work of Epic Fantasy that foregrounds the quest, and a work that pushes the definition of Epic Fantasy and engages with clear socio-political critiques.[5] As a popular genre, I also did not limit my selection to works that are critically acclaimed, but have included works that are simply massively popular (though often works are both).

Studies of Fantasy have not yet found a consistent or established place within critical literary studies. This does not mean that there are not studies of fantasy. But as a genre, Fantasy remains remarkably unexplored. The first chapter will examine some reasons for this lack of scholarly attention. This chapter will also provide an overview of both fantasy criticism and Fantasy as a genre. After giving a brief history of the

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[5] It should be understood that I argue that all Fantasy, as an artistic product, engages in some kind of socio-political critique. What makes the final book I examine in this chapter is that it engages in an explicit critique of colonialism, and the author makes clear that she is participating in a reworking of generic expectations.

genre and Fantasy criticism, this chapter will also further explore the ways in which a feminist reading of Fantasy yields important results.

The second chapter examines the character of Egwene al'Vere from Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* (*The Wheel of Time*). *The Wheel of Time* is a fifteen book series that totals over 11,000 pages, or over 4.4 million words, and has over 2,000 named characters and 129 unique point-of-view characters. It has sold over 44 million copies in North America and 80-90 million globally (Walter 2014). Damien Walter describes its fans as "obsessive," filled with "unquestioning adoration," and likens them to religious fanatics or members of a cult (this characterization is not necessarily meant to be negative). And yet, *The Wheel of Time* has not won a single award. In 2014, fans petitioned the Hugo Awards to nominate the series as a whole for Best Fantasy Novel. While unconventional, the entire fifteen book series was put up for the award. It did not win. While perhaps not the most literary work in this study, *The Wheel of Time*, as an immensely popular work of Fantasy, reveals important expectations of both the genre of Epic Fantasy and the ways in which gender functions within that genre. And it merits inclusion for the character of Egwene al'Vere, an undeniably powerful and important magical woman, who manages to exist in a conservative Fantasy narrative. At least until the last battle. Egwene makes a compelling figure for the first chapter, as her position in the narrative is ultimately at odds with her power as a magical woman. In order to maintain a more traditional Fantasy narrative, *The Wheel of Time* falls back on tired tropes to recast Egwene within a patriarchal story.

The third chapter tackles one of the most notoriously complex Fantasy series, Steven Erikson's *The Malazan Book of the Fallen,* as well as one of the currently most popular ones, George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Both series are an example of a grittier approach to Fantasy storytelling. Known for complex plots, realistic characters who display the range of human emotions and morality, and a willingness to kill off main characters when necessary, gritty Epic Fantasy authors often consciously eschew Fantasy conventions. In a 2009 interview, Erikson reveals that in writing *Malazan*, he tried "to write in a style that conveyed a sense of vastness, with a strong flavour of realism where not all answers are forthcoming, not all truths survive their utterance, and sometimes mystery abides no matter how desperate we all are for an end to the questions" (2009: Fantasy Book Review). *Malazan* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* have many things in common—multiple focalized narrators, a gritty approach to describing their worlds, and characters who are not clearly good or bad (or if they are "bad" are still three-dimensional and compelling)—but differ greatly in their approach to writing magical women. This is because, despite surface level similarities, the ways in which Martin and Erikson deploy multiple focalized characters and approach world-building results in vastly different outcomes for their magical women. Comparing and contrasting two magical women within these works, Tattersail from *Malazan* and Melisandre from *A Song of Ice and Fire*, foregrounds the ways in which narrative and structural approaches do or do not cast magical women into stereotypical roles. The characterization of Melisandre further demonstrates that while authors might be consciously eschewing some of the generic conventions of

Epic Fantasy, it becomes all too easy to justify re-inscribing magical women within a patriarchal narrative.

The fourth chapter turns to Lois McMaster Bujold's 2005 novel *Paladin of Souls*, a work that situates the figure of the magical woman within the quest narrative, one of the dominant tropes of Epic Fantasy. This novel won the Hugo, Nebula, and Locus Awards. It would be Bujold's fifth Hugo Award, third Nebula Award, and third Locus Award. Her list of nominations is even longer. *Paladin of Souls* is certainly as critically acclaimed as a Fantasy novel can be. This is perhaps due to Bujold's use of the traditional Fantasy narrative structure of the quest; however, in putting the magical woman at the center of the quest, and changing the backstory and motivation of the hero, the particulars and meaning of the quest is changed in new and highly successful ways. Bujold's magical woman becomes a hero in her own right. Bujold's novel challenges the typical quest narrative by not only making her magical woman the hero, but making her a forty year old widow and mother. Royina Ista could not be a further departure from the typical Fantasy quest hero, who is overwhelmingly a young man who departs on a *Bildungsroman*-esque journey. Bujold demonstrates that the quest narrative is not necessarily patriarchal, but requires a reimagining of characterization to succeed.

In the final chapter I examine N.K. Jemison's *The Broken Kingdom*, the second book in *The Inheritance Trilogy*. The first book of the trilogy, *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, won the Locus Award for Best First Novel, a Hugo Award, Nebula award, Goodreads Choice Award, Gender of Sense Award, and World Fantasy Award. It was shortlisted for the James Tiptree Jr. Award but did not win. Jemison's work is

consistently praised. Noah Berlatsky titled his 2015 interview with Jemisin in *The Guardian* "the fantasy writer upending the 'racist and sexist status quo'" (Berlatsky). Jemisin herself notes that she expressly works against the conservative tendencies that often mark the Fantasy genre. She says: "As a black woman . . . I have no particular interest in maintaining the status quo" (2015) and, as Berlatsky notes, her novels do anything but, representing what he calls a slow but definite change in SF and Fantasy. Berlatsky closes his article with this telling quote from Jemisin: "I don't really understand why so many fantasy writers choose to focus on worlds that just seem strangely denuded. But to them I guess it doesn't seem strange. And I guess that's their privilege. It isn't mine" (2015). *The Inheritance Trilogy* offers not only a unique take on the magical woman, but an exciting look at where contemporary secondary world Fantasy is heading. *The Inheritance Trilogy* is not a quest narrative. Nor does it present a struggle between good and evil in the typical sense. *The Broken Kingdoms*, follows a poor, blind woman who has the gift of magic. Jemisin writes an Epic Fantasy novel that focuses on a simple, personal story that feels relatable, but is still infused with the magic and world-building that makes secondary world Fantasy unique. Jemison is able to utilize the defining features of secondary world Fantasy— her narrative takes place in a wholly different world and is reliant on magic—but reworks many of Fantasy's more conservative narrative tendencies.

Chapter 1

Epic Fantasy: The Evolution of a Genre

"Fantasy is hardly an escape from reality. It's a way of understanding it." - Lloyd
Alexander

In the past 70 years, the genre of Fantasy has seen great success. Works of

Fantasy consistently appear on bestseller lists and fan communities have only grown

thanks to the ability of the internet to bring together geographically separated people.

And in the past twenty years particularly, fantasy has become more mainstream than

perhaps it ever was. This is due in large part to the success of Peter Jackson's

cinematic adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and later, *The Hobbit*,

and both the literary and box office success of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

Countless other mainstream successes would follow: HBO's *Game of Thrones* (based

on George R.R. Martin's bestselling *Song of Ice and Fire* Series), BBC's revival of

Doctor Who, new *Star Wars* prequels and sequels, YA works like *Twilight* and *The*

Hunger Games, cinematic adaptations of several of *The Chronicles of Narnia* books,

James Cameron's *Avatar*, MMORPG's and console games like *World of Warcraft*,

Everquest, *Final Fantasy*, and *Skyrim*, and the current massive success of the Marvel

cinematic universe. This popularity has been matched in many ways by new and

continued critical scholarship: academic responses to YA and children's literature are

extensive; science fiction, which has remained theoretically rigorous for decades,

continues in its critical work; and comic book studies has found a strong foothold in

the academy, as has game studies (thanks in large part to expanding Digital

Humanities departments). Yet despite the burgeoning and established work being done

around fantastic film, games, and literature, there is comparatively little critical attention paid to the genre of Fantasy itself.

Like other fantastic modes, such as Science Fiction, Fantasy has the opportunity to present alternatives to our world, which makes it a genre well-suited for critical intervention and challenging traditional narratives. While Fantasy deals in the impossible, not the improbable, it is not so divorced from our world so as to relinquish its capacity for critical work. And this work is being done. Of course, the genre of Fantasy is massive, with any number of sub-genres that have their own conventions, their own approaches to fantasy and the "real" world, and their own critical contributions. In this study I am particularly interested in Epic Fantasy, the generic distinctions of which will be discussed below.

Terminology

Before we examine the genre of Fantasy, it is necessary to try and delineate some terminology. Many of these terms will become clearer in my discussion of the evolution of the genre below, but some initial clarifications are needed. There exist a number of overlapping and competing terms used in Fantasy literature, and, as *The Lord of the Rings* did much to establish the genre of Fantasy, early studies would contextualize Tolkien's work differently (e.g. as a romance, heroic fantasy, literary fantasy, modern fantasy, etc.) than we might today. In referring to different sub-genres of Fantasy, I tend to agree with popular ideas of generic boundaries that are employed by publishing houses, fans, and the authors themselves. I focus on Epic Fantasy, the subgenre of Fantasy that exists at what Steven Erikson considers the center of the genre, from which all other subgenres depart. John Clute and John Grant define Epic

Fantasy in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* as "Any fantasy tale written to a large scale

which deals with the founding or definitive and lasting defence of a LAND may fairly

be called an EF [Epic Fantasy]" (1997: 319). As examples, they give "the

SECONDARY-WORLD tales central to the development of fantasy over the past 100

years" (1997: 319). Tolkien is obviously included in their list of authors.[6] The term

continues to be used throughout Fantasy fandom and amongst Fantasy authors. While

definitions vary, Epic Fantasy is generally agreed to take place in a secondary-world

(that is, an entirely created world that is not, and has never been, Earth), contains

significant magical elements, where the protagonist(s) must overcome some

significant hurdle, and the stakes must be exceptionally high (usually the fate of the

"world"). The journey to "save the world" has typically been presented through the

Quest, though it does not necessarily have to take this narrative form. High Fantasy is

likely the term most commonly interchanged with Epic Fantasy. I prefer the term Epic

Fantasy for a number of reasons: most of the authors I interrogate in this study identify

their works as in the Epic Fantasy tradition; it remains the designator used by most fan

sites; and it maintains a clear relationship with the core of Fantasy texts.

Throughout this study I will also sometimes refer to works as "traditional Epic

Fantasy." While I recognize the amorphous quality of calling something "traditional"

or "more traditional," within Fantasy there is a generally accepted set of works that,

while not direct copies of Tolkien, follow a well-worn narrative, structural, and

character development path. This does not necessarily mean that these works are bad,

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[6] Unfortunately, they also write that "the term has been increasingly used to describe
HEROIC FANTASIES that extend over several volumes, and has thus lost its
usefulness" (1997: 319).

or that they have nothing of value to offer academic critics (indeed, the second chapter deals with one such work, Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*), just that they adhere more closely to what is generally seen as "the Fantasy narrative": a young boy, likely an orphan, who lives in the country side or a village, is discovered to have powers/is part of a prophecy/has notable parents, is thrust into an adventure, usually with a core group of compatriots, they encounter challenges, the boy comes into his own, and eventually defeats an evil force or person. Of course, details in this outline might be changed or altered, but the basic premise remains the same. This structure will be examined in more depth in chapter two, but for now this basic pattern will suffice in demarking these works. Many of the early popular series fall into this category: Terry Brook's *Shannara* series, David Edding's *The Belgariad*, Terry Goodkind's *The Sword of Truth*, Tad Williams' *Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn*, and of course, Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*.

Fantasy: How a Genre Came to Be

One persistent stereotype surrounding Fantasy literature, and Epic Fantasy specifically, is that it features predominantly male protagonists in tired, predictable patriarchal narratives centered on conquest and the figure of the hero. This is largely due to its reliance on the hero's quest as a foundational structural influence and the socio-historical context which results in most protagonists throughout the history of literature being male.[7] In an interview, China Miéville remarks that Fantasy has a

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[7] This does not mean that the occasional Epic Fantasy book featuring a female protagonist did not exist. For example, *The Halfblood Chronicles* (1991-2002) by Andre Norton and Mercedes Lackey follow a female protagonist, Shana. *Dragonsbane* (1985) by Barbara Hambly also features a female protagonist. But these early works

reputation as a conservative genre because "for a long time a huge amount of it has

been" (qtd in Newsinger 2000). He notes that if one looks at stereotypical Epic or

High Fantasy they

> tend to be based on feudalism lite: the idea, for example, that if there's a
>
> problem with the ruler of the kingdom it's because he a *bad* king, as opposed
>
> to a *king*. . . . Strong men protect curvaceous women. Superheroic protagonists
>
> stamp their will on history like characters in Nietzschean wet   dreams, but
>
> at the same time things are determined by fate rather than social agency" (qtd
>
> in Newsinger 2000).

And this observation is not completely inaccurate, as most early works of Epic

Fantasy, and Fantasy in general, tend to follow this structure that began with Tolkien

but solidified in the 70s and 80s.[8]

  Any study of the history of Fantasy must inevitably include J.R.R. Tolkien. An

exhaustive examination of Tolkien's life and works is outside the scope of this

study—and can be found in a number of other works, notably Tom Shippey's *J.R.R.*

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are few and far between. In the past decade the number of books featuring female leads has grown tremendously.

[8] Farah Mendlesohn notes that immediately following Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Fantasy could be separated into two types: the stylists, like Peter S. Beagle, Poul Anderson, and David Lindsay; and the adventure writers like William S. Burroughs, Sprague De Camp, and Robert E. Howard, that followed more closely the sword and sorcery approach. She marks 1977 as the moment when a third type emerged epitomized by Brooks' *Shannara* series and Stephen Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*: the romance writer. She notes that from Brooks and Donaldson forward the reverie—a kind of internal monologue that the reader is privy to, but does not actually function as fragmented internal dialogue, but rather as a kind of self-contemplation—prophecy that forces the hero to demonstrate his fitness through some kind of display, and action that carries emotional weight push the genre in a clear direction (2008: 38-42).

Tolkien: *Author of the Century,* which is referenced below—but to talk of Fantasy

without acknowledging his seminal influence would be remiss. While Tolkien is not

the only author to be credited with shaping the genre of Fantasy—Robert E. Howard's

Conan the Barbarian laid much of the ground work of Sword and Sorcery, a subgenre

that focuses on sword-wielding heroes, personal battles, and romance (swashbuckling

is not a unapt term to apply here), Edgar Rice Burroughs did much to cement the

adventure story, C.S. Lewis wrote one of the most popular portal fantasies (though

intended for a younger audience)—Tolkien is the figure credited with inaugurating the

genre of Fantasy. Of his influence, Shippey writes:

> it is possible to say that [heroic fantasy] would have existed, and would have
>
> developed into the genre it has become, without the lead of *The Lord of the*
>
> *Rings*. This seems, however, rather doubtful. When it came out in 1954-5 *The*
>
> *Lord of the Rings* was quite clearly a sport, a mutation, *lusus naturae*, a one-
>
> item category on its own. One can only marvel, looking back, on the boldness
>
> and determination of Sir Stanley Unwin in publishing it at all (2000: xvii-iii).

Shippey goes on to note that

> after *The Lord of the Rings* the heroic fantasy 'trilogy' became almost a
>
> standard literary form. Any bookshop in the English-speaking world will now
>
> have a section devoted to fantasy, and very few of the works in the section will
>
> be entirely without the mark of Tolkien—sometimes branded deep in style and
>
> layout, sometimes showing itself in unconscious assumptions about the nature
>
> and personnel of the authors' invented fantasy worlds (2000: xviii).

Shippey also writes that "Tolkien did not invent heroic fantasy, but he showed what could be done with it; he established a genre whose durability we cannot estimate" (2000: xix). Carter Lin admits that although he finds numerous flaws with *The Lord of the Rings*, the work is "surely one of the most remarkable achievements in the history of fantasy" (1973: 119). Emily Auger writes "J.R.R. Tolkien reinvented the medieval 'romance,' complete with archetypal characters, quest theme, and interlace narrative structure, when he wrote *The Lord of the Rings* and, in doing so, he became a principal founder of the modern literary genre of fantasy and inspiration to a wide range of fantasy art" (2008: 70). Brian Attebery calls it the "mental template" for Fantasy fiction (1992: 14). Stefan Ekman writes that "although fantasy works had been written for one or even two centuries previously, depending on how one chooses to define the genre, the publication of Tolkien's novel marked the beginning of seeing fantasy *as a genre*, and its influence has shaped modern fantasy and reader expectations alike" (2013: 9) and because it is so well known, *The Lord of the Rings* acts as a useful touchstone.

The Lord of the Rings and the Shape of a Narrative

In this study I am arguing that the character of the magical woman found in works of Epic Fantasy presents an opportunity to articulate the genre's potential for social change. Most of the works in this study challenge and reimagine the narrative structures that have influenced the genre for decades and therefore challenge patriarchal expectations and limitations. In making this argument, I rely heavily on the ways in which authors respond to and depart from generic expectations. In order to better understand these different conventions I examine, *The Lord of the Rings* serves

as a useful template for the ways in which Fantasy narratives have traditionally

unfolded and the myriad influences that shaped the genre. Before continuing with my

own argument it is necessary to briefly map out the specific ways Fantasy has

traditionally approached narrative structures and the specific literary influences that

are still found within the genre.

One of the most recognizable narrative forms Tolkien deploys in *The Lord of

the Rings* is that of the quest. Frodo must leave the Shire, and overcome a number of

obstacles (with the help of various friends and guides, of course), in order to fulfill a

specific goal—the destruction of the one ring. As Joseph Campbell points out in *The

Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

> The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification
>
> of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation—initiation—*
>
> *return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. *A hero*
>
> *ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural*
>
> *wonder: fabulous forces are encountered and a decisive victory is won: the*
>
> *hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow*
>
> *boons on his fellow man* (1949: 30, emphasis in original).[9]

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[9] The specifics of the Fantasy genre are echoed in Campbell's breakdown of these
stages into subsections. Separation or departure is further divided into the Call to
Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Supernatural Aid, the Crossing of the First Threshold,
and the Belly of the Whale. Trials and victories of initiation is divided into the Road of
Trials, the Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as Temptress, Atonement with the
Father, Apotheosis, and the Ultimate Boon. And finally, return and reintegration is
further divided into Refusal of the Return, the Magic Flight, Rescue from Without, the
Crossing of the Return Threshold, Master of the Two Worlds, and Freedom to live
(1949: 36-37).

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is, at its heart, a quest narrative, the form that would come to dominate Epic Fantasy. It fits nearly perfectly the basic structure of the quest laid out by Campbell: Frodo leaves the safety of the Shire, a place of rolling farmland, ventures into the world outside where he encounters magical beings and supernatural forces, recruits friends and allies, faces trials and danger, battles a great evil, and restores the land.

In addition to the quest, Tolkien employs the medieval romance and the fairy-tale.[10] George H. Thomson writes that "The *Lord of the Rings* is . . . the first attempt since the Renaissance to write a fully developed traditional romance" (1967: 44). The story itself is, according to Thomson, an "anatomy of romance themes or myths" (1967: 45). In addition to utilizing the archetypal characters and quest theme of the medieval romance, Tolkien also uses a similar interlace narrative.[11] This interlace, or tapestry, narrative "is a series of interwoven stories each of which is picked up or dropped as occasion and suspense require" (Thomson 1967: 48). Emily Auger, quoting Eugéne Vinaver's *The Rise of Romance,* argues that the interlace of the

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[10] While not particularly pertinent to this discussion, Tolkien also borrows from the Victorian travel narrative. Martin Simonson notes that the Shire is "an idealized reconstruction of a rural England prior to the Great War" (2006: 81), the journey out of the shire and in the beginning of the quest to destroy the Ring is filled with "irreverent joking," and "the travelling as such is more like a walking holiday in the countryside than a dangerous expedition" (Simonson 2006: 82). Simonson argues that the characters of Bilbo, Gandalf, Frodo, and Sam "confirm the *possibility* of high adventure and the inclusion of dark, fantastic elements in a narrative that starts off in a nineteenth-century blend of bourgeois fairy tale and humorous and rural novels" (2006: 85 emphasis in original). Simonson also notes that moving from the relative safety of the Shire as rural England to the greater, much darker, and more dangerous, world beyond presents certain narrative obstacles.

[11] The medieval romance is also evident in the general setting and technologies of the work. People travel by horse, there are kings and regents, armies of cavalry, archers, and foot soldiers, armor, sword-fighting, castles and manors.

cyclical romance "can only be understood in terms of the simultaneous pursuit of multiple themes that 'alternate like threads in a woven fabric, one theme interrupting another and again another, and yet all remaining constantly present in the author's and reader's mind' (76-77)" (2008: 73). Thus, while Frodo's journey to destroy the Ring is the central quest, Tolkien spends significant time and attention on the war with Sauron, Aragorn's struggle with his destiny as the returning King of Gondor, Merry and Pippin's time with the Ents, etc. The main story of the Ring "involves many other stories, all more or less independent yet linked at many points and occurring more or less simultaneously" (West 81 qtd. in Auger 2008: 74).[12] This interlace narrative will become a staple of Fantasy, found in the multiple point-of-view narratives that many works contain.

Tolkien also liberally borrows from the fairy-tale, and, more specifically, the *Märchen* or folk-tale. Linda Dégh describes the structure of the folk-tale as such:

> The *Märchen* tells about an ordinary human being's encounter with the suprahuman world and his becoming endowed with qualities that enable him to perform supernatural acts. The *Märchen* is, in fact, an adventure story with a single hero. . . . The hero's (or heroine's) career starts, as everyone else's, in the dull and miserable world of reality. Then, all of a sudden, the supernatural world involves him and challenges the mortal, who undertakes his long voyage

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[12] Auger also identifies another level of stylistic interlace in the frequent storytelling that occurs in the text, particularly when Aragorn tells the story of Beren and Lúthien (their tale is told in great detail in *The Silmarillion*, published posthumously in 1977) to the resting Hobbits in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. This telling weaves together three different threads that are present in the current text of *The Lord of the Rings*: a journey to Rivendell, the love of a man for an elf, and the eventual path of Aragorn and Arwen's love (2008: 75).

to happiness. He enters the magic forest, guided by supernatural helpers, and

defeats evil powers beyond the boundaries of man's universe. Crossing several

borders of the Beyond, performing impossible tasks, the hero is slandered,

tortured, trapped, betrayed. He suffers death by extreme cruelty but is always

brought to life again. Suffering turns him into a real hero: as often as he is

devoured, cut up, swallowed, or turned into a beast, so does he become

stronger and handsomer and more worthy of the prize he seeks. His ascent

from rags to riches ends with the beautiful heroine's hand, & kingdom, and

marriage. The final act of the *Märchen* brings the hero back to the human

world; he metes out justice, punishes the evil, rewards the good (1972: 63).

Of course, as Sullivan notes, few tales follow this structure exactly, but with minor

modifications, or metaphoric readings, many stories fit this structure. *The Hobbit* and

The Lord of the Rings both fit in general (1996: 307).

Tolkien also borrows from the narrative approach of the realist novel. This is

seen in his prose style as well as his approach to world-building. Initially, the affinity

between *The Lord of the Rings* and the realist novel seems incompatible given the core

tenets of the realist novel, namely a desire to achieve a "correspondence between the

literary work and the reality which it imitates" (Watt 1957: 11). Part of portraying the

world as it is is an attention to particular individuals in a particularized time and place,

and abandoning a reliance on disguises and coincidences for a more causal connection

of events operating through time (1957: 9-22). All of this is to be relayed through

simple, easy, and natural prose. Watt summarizes this as follows: implicit in the novel

form is "the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic

report of human experience" (1957: 32). And while Fantasy novels do not represent the world as it is, not only can they give a "full and authentic" report of human experience, they also have the freedom to depart from it, offering experiences not constrained by patriarchal ideas.

Tolkien makes the world of *The Lord of the Rings* as "real" as possible. Each book begins with a map of Middle Earth that does more than simply provide a reference for readers; it insists this world is unified, it has terrains that are navigable and, more than that, that have been recorded. Tolkien goes on to describe his landscapes in painstaking detail, attributing to them a history that indicates this setting is not simply some ephemeral world that someone has entered for adventure, but that this land has meaning, substance, and a function beyond the actual story the reader is currently experiencing. The aim is expressly to treat the fantasy world as if it were fact: "The less 'invented' the world of a fantasy seems, the more true and free of control it will also appear" (1975: 169). Integrating the stylistic approaches of the realist novel, particularly in regards to characterization, helps Tolkien to create more fully realized characters that, while still basic types, are also substantially more complex than the characters found in earlier literary fantasy

These features—the hero's quest, the interlace narrative, and approaches to world-building and characterization—are all elements that will continue to appear in this study. This is because each of these aspects of the genre of Fantasy influence the ways in which the object of this study, the magical woman, is presented within the narrative. The hero's quest is traditionally a male endeavor and thus, the narrative shape this quest takes is geared towards male experiences of and in the world. In order

for a female hero to successfully complete her quest, the facets of the hero's quest must be reexamined, modified, and in some cases, discarded. The interlace narrative encourages not only in-depth development of secondary characters, but also their subordination to the primary (male) hero's narrative. This allows authors to create powerful, strong, interesting magical women characters, while still subsuming them within a patriarchal narrative that upholds the male protagonist. World-building can either support and encourage the creation of independent, fully realized magical women by structuring the very foundations of the world as one that has gender parity, or it can do the opposite by creating worlds that repeat and uphold patriarchal gender relations.

Fantasy after Tolkien: The Repetition of Form

Tolkien's influence is seen most clearly in the successful early works published in the 70's. Terry Brooks' *Shannara* series (the original trilogy was published from 1977-85, though Brooks has published books in the Shannara universe as recently as 2017) would demonstrate the potential success of the Tolkien inspired narrative, thereby solidifying this approach as central to the genre.[13] The original trilogy follows the Ohmsford family as: Shea and Flick retrieve the Sword of Shannara to defeat an evil warlock; Wil fights demons with the elves; and Jair and Brin (the first main female protagonist) use an ancient tome called the Ildatch to save the land from evil magic. Brooks deliberately modeled *The Sword of Shannara* on *The Lord of the Rings* and "has always acknowledged his indebtedness to the work of J.R.R. Tolkien"

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[13] Miéville also notes that the particular post-Tolkien stream that adheres to many of the conservatives tendencies are what people mean when they think of "Fantasy" (Newsinger 2000).

(Clute and Grant 1997: 142). Mike Perschon at *Tor.com*, in his review of the

publication of *The Annotated Sword of Shannara*, notes that:

> Recognizing correspondences between those works [*The Sword of Shannara*
>
> and *The Lord of the Rings*] isn't a revelation worthy of annotation, but
>
> needlessly well-trod ground. We shouldn't assume Brooks believed he was
>
> sneaking these affinities past his readers in 1977, or 35 years later in 2012. He
>
> admits his debt in the first annotation: "…it was only after reading *The Lord of*
>
> *the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien that I realized the fantasy genre held the grand
>
> tapestry I needed to tell the tale of *The Sword of Shannara*" (2012).

John Clute and John Grant's summary of the first novel brings these similarities into

stark relief:

> A young Hobbit-like UGLY DUCKLING is told by a Gandalf-like WIZARD
>
> that he is a HIDDEN MONARCH, last of the Shannara line; and must now
>
> undertake and arduous QUEST, with suitable COMPANIONS, for the
>
> eponymous SWORD. The MAGIC sword had been crafted centuries earlier by
>
> an associate of the current DARK LORD, a REVENANT who threatens to
>
> effect a terming THINNING of the world" (1997: 142-43).

What the annotations also reveal is the influence of Ballantine's editor, Lester Del

Rey, who was specifically seeking a marketable Fantasy series after Tolkien.[14] And it

worked. With the publication of *The Sword of Shannara*, Brooks was the first Fantasy

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[14] Part of this success, as Perschon notes, is that Shannara is in many ways easier than
Lord of the Rings. He writes that "Brooks was not an Oxford scholar steeped
in *Beowulf* and the *Eddas*. He was a law student looking to become a best-selling
writer" (2012).

author to make the New York Times bestseller list (Clute and Grant 1997: 142) and demonstrated that Tolkien's approach was a repeatable, viable, and profitable formula.

This basic narrative structure is seen throughout early Fantasy, and would only serve to reinforce the perception that all the stories presented within the genre are essentially the same. David Eddings' *Belgariad* (1982-85) reinforces the young orphan boy on a quest, following Garion (a young orphan boy who grew up on a farm) and his quest to find the Orb of Aldur. Patricia McKillips' *Riddlemaster* trilogy (1976-79) follows Morgon, who wins a crown from a ghost, attempts to claim his bride, Raederle, defeat the Earth Masters, and in so doing realizes he is the High One's rightful heir.[15] Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* focuses primarily on the exploits of the wizard Ged (though Le Guin revisits her protagonist Tenar in the fourth book *Tehanu*, published several years after the main trilogy). Tad Williams' *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn* (1988-1993) follows a young kitchen boy named Simon (though later books would expand the number of focalized characters) as he attempts to find three legendary swords that will help defeat the Storm King.

The 1990s would see a continuation of this type of Epic Fantasy, with many incredibly popular series starting publication at this time. The first book of Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, *The Eye of the World*, was published in 1990 (he began writing it in 1984).[16] The fourteen book series follows Rand al'Thor in his quest to

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[15]The *Riddlemaster* trilogy will be revisited in chapter four as a possible example of a duomyth as the second book shifts to Raederle's quest to find Morgon during which she comes into her own powers. However, it is Morgon who eventually defeats the Earth Masters, learns he is the High One's rightful heir, takes his place as ruler, and is the eponymous Riddlemaster of the series.
[16] While he acknowledges the response to Tolkien offered by Terry Brooks and Stephen Donaldson, Michael Livingston dubs Robert Jordan "America's Tolkien"

defeat the Dark One. After *Shannara*, it is perhaps the most faithful representation of the Tolkien inspired format: a young boy who grew up in the country discovers he is part of a prophecy and must journey to faraway lands, complete a number of quests, until he battles The Dark Lord (1990-2013). It is also the focus of the following chapter of this study. Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth* started with *Wizard's First Rule* published in 1994 after a bidding war where the book "sold at auction for more than six times the record price ever paid for a first fantasy novel" (Flewelling 1995). It would go on to become "one of the most successful debut fantasy novels in the history of trade publishing" (Flewelling 1995). The series follows Richard Cypher, who is named the Seeker of Truth, his companions, Kahlan Amnell and the wizard Zed, as they attempt to save the world from the evil Darken Rahl. This traditional approach remains the perceived limit of the entire genre. So much so that in 2006 Diana Wynne Jones parodied the clichés associated with Fantasy in *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland: The Essential Guide to Fantasy Travel* as well as in her 2001 novel *The Dark Lord of Derkholm*.[17]

(2016). Livingston writes that Jordan "is a true successor, a true heir, to the kind of mythically philological trail of creation that Tolkien had blazed some fifty years earlier. Like Tolkien's Middle-earth, the world of the Wheel is a myth behind myths. . . . Again and again in Jordan's work we see this same kind of mythological revision that is the hallmark of Tolkien's work" (2016).

[17] Her "guide" consists of all the typical elements of a Fantasy novel and their tongue-in-cheek definitions. For example, the following is her entry for Legends: "Legends are an important source of true information. They always turn out to be far more accurate than HISTORY. Listen and attend carefully if anyone recounts you a Legend. The person telling it may be an old HERBWOMAN, a BARD, a bad KING, one of your COMPANIONS, or just someone in an INN" (1996: 112). *The Dark Lord of Derkholm* posits a fantasy world that people from "our" world travel to on vacation. But, the fantasy world is a bit too mundane to make for a good adventure, so the people there are forced to adopt roles. Each year one person is elected to be the Dark Lord, who must transform their home into an appropriately terrifying castle. The

While these more traditional works remained massively popular throughout the 90s and 2000's, the 90s also saw a shift in some approaches to Epic Fantasy that remain popular today. It was in the late 20th C that an identifiable and consistent challenge[18] to Tolkien inspired Epic Fantasy coalesced into an identifiable approach, what would be called Gritty Fantasy. Helen Young notes that both creators and consumers constructed Gritty Fantasy in opposition to Tolkien-inspired Fantasy works. Gritty approaches to Fantasy are "marked by low-levels of magic, high-levels of violence, in-depth character development, and medievalist worlds that are 'if not realistic, at least have pretensions to realism' in their depictions of rain, blood, and mud'" (Young 2016: 63). I would add that Gritty Fantasy also presents morally ambiguous characters and eschews the hero's quest, opting instead to present a number of different characters and plotlines and often disparate goals (as opposed to a clearly identifiable fight against a Dark Lord or Evil One). Popular examples of Gritty Fantasy are George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (the first novel, *A Game of Thrones*, was published in 1996) and Steven Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen* (the first novel *Gardens of the Moon* was published in 1999).

A number of factors contributed to the rise of grittier Fantasy. At a New York Comic Con panel called "Winter is Here" a number of Fantasy authors offered their theories on why gritty Fantasy had become more popular. Brandon Sanderson and

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tourists, divided into small groups, are led by young guides who take them through a series of stereotypical encounters before they "fight" the Dark Lord. Everything is staged and all roles are played by townspeople who generally have better things to do.
[18] Throughout the decades following Tolkien there were undeniably Epic Fantasy works that did not follow the pattern or approach laid out *in The Lord of the Rings*, but the most visible, popular, and foundational works did.

David Chandler both pointed to other media, namely movies and television. Chandler

remarked:

> Horror movies, before about 1975, were mostly guys in rubber suits. And after
>
> 1975, we started to see buckets of blood and viscera and intestines all over the
>
> place. I had a professor in college who said was [sic] the Vietnam war. People
>
> had seen all this on television and they didn't believe the guy in the rubber suit
>
> any more. Certainly, the last 10 years of television have shown us all kinds of
>
> horrible things in the most hardy, realistic fashion, so that's what we're
>
> demanding now from our myths and legends (qtd in Faircloth 2011).

This is echoed by Doug Smith who notes that gritty Fantasy surged to popularity at

about the same time that TV shows like *The Wire* became popular. He writes that this

"shows us that people want something to become invested in. Great characters who

can't be painted with anything but shades of grey. Vast landscapes that feel lived in.

Stories that require a significant investment on the part of the viewer/reader" (2015).

Other examples he gives are *Breaking Bad* and *The Dark Knight* trilogy. Peter V. Brett

offered a different take on the recent popularity of grittier Fantasy works, contributing

their rise to a natural evolution in the genre. He said:

> You mature, and you want to do your own thing. Many people have tried to
>
> build upon the high fantasy foundation and watered it down, and it got less
>
> interesting. The new crop of fantasy writers are the people that read all that
>
> stuff and while they enjoyed it, they're also kind of tired of those aspects and
>
> want to do something new and want to create a new magic system. Because the

old grey-bearded wizard in robes with the staff is boring now (qtd in

Faircloth).

This approach to Epic Fantasy, even if a work was not explicitly "Gritty" Fantasy,

continues to the present. Contemporary authors like Joe Abercrombie, Robin Hobb,

Patrick Rothfuss, Glen Cook, and Alex Marshall, among others, retain many of the

features of Gritty Fantasy. Bad language, more explicit sex scenes, more mud and

blood and guts, and more ambiguous "victories" are not uncommon in these works.

Of course, this does not mean that in adopting the grittier approach authors are

somehow prevented from falling into the same plots and character types that are

common in "non-gritty" Fantasy—one can simply add mud and blood and sex to a

traditional, patriarchal narrative—or that all Epic Fantasy has gone the way of

grittiness. For example, Brandon Sanderson, Saladin Ahmed, Lois McMaster Bujold,

and N.K. Jemisin, while their novels do other interesting things within the genre and

are both award winning and popular, do not follow the path laid out by grittier Epic

Fantasy. And of course, those series that began in the 80s and 90s, like *Shannara* and

The Wheel of Time, remain massively popular to this day.

In "Defense" of Fantasy

It is not uncommon for studies of Fantasy to include a defensive declaration

that Fantasy is a legitimate field of study. Lucie Armitt begins her 2005 work *Fantasy*

Fiction: An Introduction by acknowledging that "'Fantasy' is a word commonly

disparaged by literary and nonliterary voices alike" (2005: 1). Lori M. Campbell

explicitly states that she is "dispensing with the 'apology' [that] usually opens any

'academic study of literary fantasy" (2010: 5). Brian Attebery notes that before

discussing fantasy literature, "a number of obstacles must be cleared away," one of

which is the tendency for people who don't read fantasy to "consider themselves

superior to it" (2014: 1). He actually gives what he calls the "book burners"—those

typically religious groups that protest Fantasy works as witchcraft or devilry—some

credit for taking Fantasy seriously (2014: 2). While I also wish to "dispense with

apology" concerning my chosen object of study, the status of Fantasy within the

academy is still tenuous enough and so nebulously defined that some attention must be

paid to answering at least the most common and vocal critiques of the genre. These

critiques are often divided into two main threads. First, Fantasy is just popular genre

fiction, and as such, does not have the same value as "real" literature. Second, as

simple escapist literature, it has nothing of weight to say about the world.[19] I'd like to

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[19] I'd like to offer an illustrative anecdote of how these two assumptions play out. In
the Fall of 2017 I attended a general literature conference to present a paper that
examined the historical devaluation of the Fantasy genre juxtaposed against the
relative critical acceptance of Science Fiction. The paper was meant to be a general
rumination on the generic attributes and various early theoretical works that
established an academic prejudice against Fantasy literature. As often happens at a
general literature conference when one is presenting on Fantasy, my panel was an
eclectic mix of papers that didn't quite go together. Two of my fellow panelists, both
trained Classicists, were presenting part of a collaborative work that focused on
philology and Nietzsche's concept of slow reading. They were interested in the
argument that, in a world that encourages one to "hurry-skurry" and emphasizes the
drive to "get it done" (even more so now than when Nietzsche was writing in 1886),
the art of philology is indispensable as it "teaches how to read well, that is, slowly,
profoundly, attentively, prudently, with inner thoughts, with the mental doors ajar,
with delicate fingers and eyes" (2007: 9). Thus, philology is "an art which must carry
out slow, fine work" (2007: 8). They posited their discipline, studies of classical Latin
and Greek literature, was uniquely well suited to accomplish these goals. During the
question and answer session, I was asked by another Classicist whether or not it was
possible to "slow read" Fantasy, because his experience with Science Fiction was that
none of those authors could write—there was no complexity to their words, no
sentences of phrases or word choices that would require a philological examination.
And, he surmised, Fantasy was the same. Like many people just getting into Fantasy,
he had read the first book of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and said

quickly address each of these charges before moving on to an examination of the
current field of Fantasy studies.

While an extended defense of popular literature is not the goal of this study—
there are numerous scholarly works on popular literature and culture that examine this
issue in-depth—the charge that Fantasy belongs to a group of works termed genre
fiction, and that that designation alone precludes it from scholarly attention, does need
to be addressed.[20] Genre fiction is a term that is generally used to designate works that
are easily identifiable. That is, they have certain conventions that a reader can expect
to encounter and that alerts them to the specific genre they are reading. Thus, a
mystery will have a detective, a romance a love story, science fiction advanced
technology, etc. Of course, the conventions surrounding these genres are more
complex than that basic list, but genre fiction tends to have easily recognizable aspects
that let the reader know what to expect given what other works in the genre have done.
The nature of Fantasy, and Epic Fantasy in particular, makes it nearly always
recognizable (few other genres set their stories on created magical worlds, or have
wizards and dragons) which tends to pre-determine its status as genre fiction.[21]

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that he thought that it seemed like Fantasy that one could actually read slowly, but,
instead of using that as an indicator that perhaps the genre of Fantasy was worth
further investigation, instead concluded that Martin was an outlier thus further
cementing his belief that the rest of the genre was "not like that." Of course, he would
later mention that he had not read any other works of Fantasy.

[20] *Popular Culture: A Reader* (2005), edited by Raiford Gains and Omayra Zaragoza
Cruz, compiles a wide range of scholarly works that deal with different aspects of
popular culture, and is a good representation of the various disciplines involved in and
approaches to popular culture studies. For a detailed and comprehensive study of
popular literature specifically, see Ken Gelder's *Popular Fiction: The Logics and
Practice of a Literary Field* (2004).

[21] A number of critics have noted that while many devalue genre fiction because it is
formulaic, "The real point often seems to be the reverse formulation, that 'literature' is

Throughout this study I will be examining works that challenge these conventions, that, in effect, do not always give the reader what they are expecting or what they have read before, but still clearly fall within the genre of Epic Fantasy.

But genre fiction is not simply a way of labelling certain types of works. It often carries with it an implicit, or sometimes explicit, value judgment. As John Lennard writes the "reading [of genre fiction] is often (and not only by professional critics) supposed 'shallow', as opposed to a 'deep' mode associated with 'literature'— hence the persistent characterisation of genre fiction as 'airport' or 'railway' books, fit for journeys, not studies, and discardable without loss" (2007: 10).[22] In the academy, Lennard notes, this translates into prejudice, that professors of literature should be aware of (and even read some) popular fiction, but they "are not supposed to spill serious ink on the matter" (2007: 10). This leads to an assumption that genre fiction is not necessarily a worthy object of academic study.

When the division between literary fiction and genre fiction begins to indicate that genre fiction is bad, or empty, or devoid of artistic merit (and conversely that somehow all literary fiction is of value) this division does harm to a whole wealth of literature that is ignored before it is even given a chance. This distinction can even bias readers against genre fiction, causing them to perceive it as less emotionally

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somehow not 'generic' (Lennard 2007: 10). Anne Cranny-Francis makes a similar point when she writes that "all fiction (and all non-fiction) is generic, but some of it works to disguise its conventionality" (1993: 93). Literary realism naturalized conventions "so that they seemed obvious or inevitable to readers, and so became effectively invisible" (1993: 93). Literary fiction also utilizes generic conventions, they are just not as obvious and so presented as natural.

[22] Lennard also argues that there are also class judgments at work in judgments of literary merit: "leisured 'literature' being the nobility, and hasty generic scurries through the market-place the proletariat or *petit bourgeoisie*" (2007: 10-11).

resonant, thereby confirming their own bias. When a study conducted by David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano published in *Science* claimed that reading literary fiction increased performance in Theory of Mind, the ability to identify and understand the subjective states of other people (in other words, empathy) more than reading genre or non-fiction,[23] a slew of headlines followed espousing the ability of literary fiction to increase empathy, and most articles made sure to note that it mattered what *kind* of fiction you read as popular genre fiction didn't produce the same positive results. This study seems to confirm what many people already believed: popular genre fiction is just fun escapism, it isn't challenging, and it isn't worthy of much further consideration. But, what if the fault isn't with genre fiction, but with people's pre-existing biases and value judgments?

It was this question Chris Gavaler and Dan Johnson set out to answer. They wanted to measure "how identifying a text as science fiction makes readers automatically assume it is less worthwhile, in a literary sense, and thus devote less effort to reading it" (Flood 2017). Gavaler and Johnson gave groups two identical texts, apart from "setting-creating" words. So, instead of a character entering a room,

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[23] David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano argue that literary fiction "forces the reader to engage in ToM [Theory of Mind] processes" (2013: 377), but that other forms of fiction do not necessarily achieve this. They also call upon Roland Barthes' distinction between readerly texts—texts that, like most popular genre fiction, are meant to entertain passive readers—and writerly texts—texts that engage their readers creatively as writers—and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory that literary fiction is polyphonic, and requires readers to contribute their own voices (2013: 377). In other words, literature forces readers to fill in gaps and search for meaning. Popular fiction, on the other hand, "tends to portray the world and characters as internally consistent and predictable" (2013: 378). To test this hypothesis, they first compared the effects of reading literary fiction and non-fiction, then literary fiction and popular fiction. Their conclusions were that reading literary fiction improved performance on affective ToM tasks, while reading non-fiction and popular fiction did not.

they would enter a galley. Instead of door, there was an airlock. Gavaler and Johnson surmised that this should have no effect on their ability to relate to the characters, or to infer what they were feeling. What they found was that converting the world to a science fictional one "reduced perceptions of literary quality" (Flood 2017). They conclude that the science fiction setting "triggered poorer overall reading" and "appears to predispose readers to a less effortful and comprehending mode of reading . . . regardless of the actual intrinsic difficulty of the text" (Flood 2017). Gavaler specifically addresses Kidd and Castano's study as a major incentive for conducting his own. He was not only annoyed that their category divisions weren't accurate, but that they didn't account for pre-existing generic bias. When a text is identified as genre fiction, the reader assumes it is simpler and thus invests less effort into understanding it. This then lowers their score on comprehension tests, though readers still report that the story required less effort to understand. It becomes a self-fulfilling bias (Flood 2017). He concludes: "So when readers who are biased against SF read the word 'airlock', their negative assumptions kick in – 'Oh, it's that kind of story'—and they begin reading poorly. So, no, SF doesn't really make you stupid. It's more that if you're stupid enough to be biased against SF you will read SF stupidly" (Flood 2017). It's not hard to imagine readers would have the same response to altering the setting to a Fantasy world.

My aim is not to suggest getting rid of genre distinctions—they are useful in studying conventions, tracing movements within fields, and highlighting new and innovative approaches (not to mention their usefulness in marketing)—and examining them informs a large part of this study, but rather to expand the value judgments

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placed on different genres and the distinctions between them. When someone's presuppositions concerning a genre keep them from reading it, or if they do read it, biases them against giving it a chance, whole swaths of literature that is potentially insightful, interesting, challenging, and timely is omitted from critical scholarship.

The second major challenge concerning the worthiness of Fantasy for critical scholarship is the assumption that, even amongst different genre fictions, Fantasy in particular does not do much of note. That while other genre fictions have somehow cleared the hurdle of offering critical social commentary—it would be hard for anyone to argue that Science Fiction was unworthy of academic study considering the critical acclaim of authors like Octavia Butler, Samuel Delany, Philip K. Dick, Kurt Vonnegut, and Ursula Le Guin, among others—Fantasy has somehow not quite made it. Because Science Fiction and Fantasy are so often grouped together as sister genres (the acronym SFF, Science Fiction/Fantasy, is a common one), the critical acceptance of Science Fiction offers a useful counterpoint to Fantasy's continued struggle for acceptance. Helen Young writes that Fantasy receives less critical attention than Science Fiction "not least due to the legacy of Marxist thought which drew overly distinct boundaries between the two and saw fantasy as reactionary and nostalgic" (2016: 33). One of the most influential of these works on the critical division between Science Fiction and Fantasy is Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History and of a Literary Genre* in the late 1970s.[24] Suvin's argument

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[24] In a 2000 interview, China Miéville says that Suvin has "Probably the most influential Marxist position" and "his original formulation is still very influential" (qtd in Newsinger). He goes on to say that he finds "a lot of people sceptical or dismissive of fantasy because it's got magic or ghosts or whatever in it, and because as Marxists

against Fantasy (and for Science Fiction) embodies, though with significantly more sophisticated critical language, the claim that Fantasy is escapism, that it is just for fun, that it says and does nothing of lasting political or social import.

In *Metamorphoses*, Suvin coins his famous phrase "cognitive estrangement," which is the phenomenon that occurs when the reader moves from the author/reader's reality to the narrative in which scientifically plausible innovations are actualized and needed in order to understand plot-events, and then back from those "novelties to the author's reality in order to see it afresh from the new perspective" (2016: xvii). Essential to this estrangement is the presence of a novum, some technological piece of strange newness that compels us to imagine the world differently. This interplay between cognition and estrangement, argues Suvin, is what makes Science Fiction intellectually distinct from Fantasy, and also distinct from mimetic realism, as Science Fiction is a "dynamic transformation" of our history and not a "static mirroring." It not only reflects reality, but reflects on reality (2016: xviii). Cognition in Science Fiction is primarily about facilitating the return from science fictional estrangements back to the mundane world in which we all live.

For Suvin, Fantasy belongs to those genres that participate in estrangement, but this estrangement is of a *non*-cognitive type and thus, these works do not reach the reflexive sophistication of Science Fiction—that is, in Fantasy works there is no *novum* that the reader must strive to understand, no strange newness that alters the reality of the narrative world and is absent from the readers' own world—and this

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we don't believe in them They see something dubious in literature that pretends they're real" (qtd in Newsinger). See also Jameson 2002.

interrupts his principle of return.[25] For Suvin, Science Fiction appeals to social groups

who feel as though something in the present can be done about the future, while

"Fantasy's appeal is to uncertain social classes or fractions who have been cast adrift

and lost that confidence, so that they face their own present and future with horror or a

resolve to have a good time before the Deluge—or both" (2000: 238). Further

ruminating on Fantasy's readership, Suvin writes that "There is no doubt the

sociological bearer of Fantasy is a large group of alienated readers at the margins of

the Post-Fordist social hegemony, drawn from the marginalized intellectuals, the

young, the lower classes, and the women, and that a good part of them would be

Benjamin's narcotized dreamers escaping its pain" (2000: 237). Science Fiction, then,

is political, as it appeals to people who still believe changes can be made in the world,

while Fantasy is not, appealing to those who simply wish to ignore (or escape) the

world around them and have abdicated political responsibility.

There are a number of ways to answer the charge that Fantasy has no social or

political aspirations. First, the one that seems to garner the least amount of

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[25] Suvin would go on to write that "Though fantastic fiction has a long pedigree in
most European countries and the United States, for the first half of this century in the
United States it 'flourished only as a parasite on its more popular cousin, science
fiction' (Scholes 12-13). In the 1960s, the Tolkien craze—and the Conan resurgence—
began to change this relation by infiltrating and inflecting the U.S. SF subculture"
(2000: 210). Suvin would eventually walk back his sharp division between genres and
his dismissal of other speculative sub-genres, particularly fantastic works, but his
reconsideration has very clear limits. In "Considering the Sense of 'Fantasy' or
'Fantastic Fiction': An Effusion" published in 2001 Suvin writes: "Let me therefore
revoke, probably to general regret, my blanket rejection of fantastic fiction. The divide
between cognitive (pleasantly useful) and non-cognitive (useless) does not run
between Science Fiction and fantastic fiction but inside each" (2000: 211). Suvin is
willing to admit certain types of (very limited) fantastic texts, though he still insists
that nearly all Fantasy crafts worlds defined by essences and capital E evil "that
cannot allow the possibility of historical change" (2016: xxxiii).

disagreement, is that Fantasy tackles grand scale elements of the human condition. Epic Fantasy author Steven Erikson says of his work that

> [It] was always an exploration into those elements of the human condition that seemed under siege: compassion, heroism and the notion of redemption, all played out against a rather epic backdrop—which of course is what fantasy does best among all the genres. The juxtaposition of normal human beings and the playing out of a dramatic history—one involving gods and beings with vast powers (Orullian 2012).

Brian Attebery echoes this sentiment when he writes that Fantasy provides new contexts and therefore new meanings for myth. He argues that

> Fantasy spins stories about the stories. That is the cultural work it performs . . . By telling stories about, around, and upon mythic stories, we put ourselves onto the same stage with the gods and heroes and monsters and thus are forced to confront our godlike, heroic, and monstrous selves (2014: 4).

This foray into a world not our own, where stakes are often larger than life and the reader feels as though they are part of something bigger than themselves contributes to what Tolkien would term Recovery and recalls the Classical Epics and myths of the past. For Tolkien, Fantasy offers the reader a chance to regain a clear view:

> We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and the perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses--and wolves. This recovery fairy-stories help us to make (1965: 57).

John H. Timmerman similarly writes that "Fantasy is essentially rejuvenative. It permits us a certain distance from pragmatic affairs and offers us a far clearer insight into them" (1983: 1). Erikson also pushes back specifically against charges of escapism: "I never said my series was escapist, in any sense, and at no time do I recall feeling any "escape" while writing it. The themes never went away" (qtd. in Orullian 2012). Thus, Fantasy is not about escaping, but standing apart for a time and then returning with a renewed sense of direction and purpose. This is why stories of heroes and quests appear throughout history and remain popular even now.

But the thrust of Suvin's distaste for Fantasy seems to stem from the idea that Fantasy somehow allows its readers to opt out of social responsibility, that it does not inspire or require them to think about how they can move from their experience as a reader of Fantasy to confronting "real world" issues. Of course, Fantasy, like any popular genre, reflects the society in which it was written. Helen Young notes that because most early successful authors were white men, the genre formed certain habits of whiteness that shape the narratives themselves. So like all popular culture Fantasy is a representation of the socio-political context in which it was written. But Fantasy can do more than just reflect society, it can also offer socio-political commentary. In fact, the features of the genre make it an excellent site for this kind of work. Even Attebery, who approaches fantasy as modern myth-making, highlights its social and historical embeddedness, writing that "the most powerful and provocative fantasies recontextualize myths, placing them back into history and reminding us of their social and political power" (2014: 4). Fantasy as a genre is well-suited to this kind of work.

Fantasy, and secondary world Fantasy in particular, occupies a liminal space: it is like our world, but it is not our world; Fantasy does not entirely reject mimesis but it does depart from consensus reality. This not only ties it to the "real" world but also offers opportunities for authors to explore a range of issues without the constraints of realistic literature. Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz write that "Fantasy cannot be 'free-floating' or entirely original, unless we are prepared to learn a new language and new way of thinking to understand it. It must be understandable in terms of its relationship to, or deviance from, our known world" (2001: 7). If there is no connection to our world "then we arrive at the absurd and nonsense" (2001: 8). Lori M. Campbell notes that

> Because the writer can never completely detach from the Primary world, the Secondary world cannot help but absorb the questions, relationships, and troubles of that world. Distancing the commentary from the Primary space and attacking the problems of that space through symbolism endows the writer with great freedom to speak the 'truth' (2010: 4).

Thus, Fantasy does not allow us to "escape ourselves or our situation: fantasy has an inevitable role as a commentary on, or counterpart to, reality and realism" (Hunt and Lenz 2001: 8). Fantasy offers authors a way to explore socio-political issues without the constraints and burden of remaining true to an accurate account of the world as it is. Fiction encourages readers to imagine differently, but Fantasy's departure from consensus reality offers even more vectors of exploration. Thus, if an author wishes to explore issues of colonialism or conquest, or gender, or revolution, setting their story

within a world not our own gives them the unique freedom to do so. Fantasy can offer a space within which to confront these issues, and to imagine differently.

Take even the most stereotypical plot from Fantasy: the young boy who grows to challenge a great evil. One certainly can read this in a way that highlights its conservative elements—the hero is typically a white male, there is often some aspect of conquest that is seen as natural or pre-ordained, there are often racist elements concerning those who are seen as "evil," etc.—and these aspects should not be ignored or glossed over, but even here there are explorations of what inspires those who are weaker to believe they can stand up to, and maybe even defeat, a force that is seen as overwhelmingly powerful. Along the way they will meet those who find it easier to simply be complicit in something they know to be morally wrong in order to make profit or because it is the easiest way out. The reader encounters systems of oppression—the evil ruler does not maintain rule alone—as there are those who actively attach themselves to whoever they believe is going to win. There is great sacrifice (rarely does every member of the party make it to the end), and characters must figure out how to keep going in the face of great sorrow. And as Fantasy has evolved as a genre, those aspects that make this narrative problematic are challenged, reworked, and sometimes discarded: works begin to explore and comment on the colonial aspects often embedded in these quest narratives, like in N.K. Jemisin's *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, Django Wexler's *The Thousand Names*, and Robin Hobb's *Soldier Son*; heroes take on new characteristics, becoming women, people of color, or queer, as in Saladin Ahmed's *Throne of the Crescent Moon*, Lynn Flewellen's *The Nightrunner* series, and Elizabeth Bear's *Range of Ghosts*; texts

explore the ways in which these changes alter narrative structures; the nature of evil changes, becoming not a single entity that, once vanquished restores the land, but more amorphous and systemic; and so on. As Young notes, the very fact that Fantasy is expected to be conservative, racist, sexist, ableist, etc. gives it considerable power to "dig up" long buried issues. Indeed, we see the impulse to address these "hidden" issues in many contemporary works of Fantasy that consciously respond to the genre. N.K. Jemisin writes that *The Inheritance Trilogy* "was born out American epic fantasy's tendency to focus exclusively on people at the top of society, exclude or diminish cultures that don't read as European, squeal "Ew! Cooties!" at any hint of a feminine aestheticism, and take all damn day getting to the point" (Nicoll 2011: 45). While she stays within the genre of Epic Fantasy, she uses its features to do something different, highlighting its inherent ability to tackle these kinds of narratives.

Secondary worlds are created worlds, and while they must be internally consistent, an author may create any kind of world they desire. That many of these worlds have recreated the power dynamics of our own world is disappointing from a feminist standpoint. Patriarchal worlds are not an inherent or necessary component of the genre. Authors can, and have, imagined differently. And when they do not, they face increasing criticism from not only fans but scholars as well. This is clear in the debate over George R.R. Martin's use of sexual violence against women in his immensely popular *A Song of Ice and Fire* series (and subsequent HBO series *A Game of Thrones*). And, as Fantasy continues to evolve, more space is made for different types of authors, who help to push the genre in new and exciting directions. There is no need to abandon Epic Fantasy, but there is a need to remain critical of accepted

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tropes and narrative structures, and to not only hold those accountable who reproduce outmoded power structures, but also to give those works that are doing something new, or in a new way, the critical attention they deserve.

A Brief History of Fantasy Criticism

Before beginning my own analysis of the magical woman in Fantasy literature, a brief history of fantasy criticism will help to situate my work within the larger context of Fantasy studies. While I have previously said there are few studies of Fantasy (as genre), there are a number of studies of "fantasy," and, due to the term's nebulous nature, these studies only occasionally include studies of works of Fantasy. As Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz note, most studies of fantasy begin (as most academic studies do) with an attempt to define the object of study, "marking out academic or conceptual territory" (2001: 9). In the case of fantasy, they note that this can turn into "a fairly defensive exercise" (9). This is due to the fact that "fantasy" can take on so many different meanings. It is surely possible, they note, to claim that all fiction is fantasy "because fiction narrates and makes sense of things in a way that is unavailable in reality" or, in a more commonly encountered move, "one could reasonably include the category of fantasy any fanciful tale, from myths to religious parables, from the folk tale to the absurd, from nursery rhymes to nonsense" (2001: 9). Of course, defining one's object of study is also good academic practice, so even Hunt and Lenz offer their own run-down of available definitions: W.R. Irwin defines fantasy as "the literature of the impossible" (1976: 4);[26] Erik S. Rabkin defines it by

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[26] More specifically, Irwin defines fantasy as "a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into 'fact' itself" (1976: 4).

what it is not, writing that fantasy's "polar opposite is reality" (1976: 14);[27] Colin

Manlove foregrounds its relationship to our world and beliefs, calling it "another order

of reality from that in which we exist and form our notions of possibility" (1975: 3)

and "a fiction involving the supernatural or impossible" (1999: 3); Brian Attebery

takes a self-referential approach, writing that fantasy is anything that violates "what

the author clearly believes to be natural law" (1980: 2); Le Guin highlights the ways in

which fantasy helps us to understand existence, defining it as "a different approach to

reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence" and goes

on to offer a number of descriptive terms, writing that fantasy "is not anti-rational, but

para-rational; not realistic, but surrealistic, superrealistic; a heightening of reality"

(1992: 79) (2001: 9). To their fairly comprehensive list I would add: Tzvetan Todorov

marks the fantastic as when "In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know .

. . there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar

world" (1973: 25); Farah Mendlesohn attempts to side-step a definition, but at some

point must identify what rhetorical move that she can identify as "fantasy" entering the

text, writing that it is "dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the

construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fiction of consensual construction of

belief" (2008: xiii); and Rosemary Jackson locates the fantastic as existing "Between

the marvellous and the mimetic, borrowing the extravagance of the one and the

ordinariness of the other, the fantastic belongs to neither and is without their

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[27] Rabkin is more specifically concerned with establishing the fantastic as the opposite of narrative reality. He writes that the fantastic occurs "when the ground rules of a narrative are forced to make a 180 reversal, when prevailing perspectives are directly contradicted" (1976: 12).

assumptions of confidence or presentations of authoritative 'truths'" (1981: 35). It subverts unitary vision, introduces confusion and alternative, and is meant as an opposition to the "realist" novel's support of bourgeois vision (1981: 35).[28]

The studies listed above include vastly different texts and further confusion arises through a conflation of genres, with studies also seeing little difference between Fantasy and the fantastic—Hunt and Lenz's assertion that "fantasy" is relative is evident nowhere more than when one attempts to find a definition for fantasy and then determine which texts fall within that definition.

Part of the confusion in defining fantasy lies in the conflation of the fantastic and what one generally thinks of when one hears the term "fantasy literature." A.P. Canavan notes that

> 'Fantasy,' as a term, is used in three major ways: the mode, the genre, and the formula. This simple statement reveals a problem that has plagued fantasy scholarship almost from its very inception: when we as academics discuss fantasy, we are almost always arguing at cross purposes, not because we have never defined the limits of fantasy nor because our desire for taxonomy has obscured the discussion but because we use the term fantasy to mean multiple things (2012: 1).

He goes on to note that a number of theorists use "the term 'fantasy' interchangeably with 'fantastic' to refer to the supergenre or mode of 'the fantastic,' the grand overarching category of nonrealist or nonmimetic literature" (2012: 1-6). While this

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[28] S.C. Fredericks outlines some of the shortcomings of many of these studies in "Problems of Fantasy" (1978).

isn't by default an issue—studying different manifestations of the fantastic in literature allows critics to place their work in context and make connections between different traditions—"fantasy is not the same as the fantastic" (Canavan 2012: 6). Neglecting to differentiate or acknowledge the ways in which the fantastic and Fantasy differ often leads to an uneasy grouping together of "fantastic" texts, like those of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allen Poe, and Fantasy texts, like J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. While of course one can examine texts like these in a single work, to expect them to interact with fantastic elements in the same way, or to satisfy the same definition of fantasy, is to invite confusion and disappointment. This is why, in Rosemary Jackson's study, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, she finds little value in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings.* She lists it with other fantasies that "are all of the same kind, functioning as conservative vehicles for social and instinctual repression" (1981: 155). She goes on to argue that "romances (of integration) by Le Guin, Lewis, White, etc., leave problems of social order untouched" and that the popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* "indicates the strength of a romance tradition supporting a ruling ideology. Tolkien is nostalgic for a pre-Industrial, indeed a pre-Norman Conquest, feudal order" (1981: 155). The fantasy she is interested in is the tradition that runs through the Gothic to Dickens, Poe, Hawthorne, Sartre, etc. Tolkien's work is fundamentally different, and it is not surprising that she finds little of value in his texts.

Kathryn Hume's definition of fantasy as mode has been extremely helpful to my own work in sifting through the confusion over how different critics imagine the

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category of fantasy/the fantastic and its distinction from the genre of Fantasy. She writes:

> literature is the product of two impulses. These are mimesis, felt as the desire
> to imitate, to describe events, people, situations, and objects with such
> verisimilitude that others can share your experience; and fantasy, the desire to
> change givens and alter reality—out of boredom, play, vision, longing for
> something lacking, or need for metaphoric images that will bypass the
> audience's verbal defences (1984: 20).

From there she reaches the definition that "Fantasy is any departure from consensus reality" and this departure does not have to be noticed by the characters, only the reader (1984: 21; 23). In order to examine fantasy "we must abandon the assumption that mimesis . . . is the only real part of literature" (1984: 21).[29] Hume goes on to examine different ways fantasy might operate within any variety of texts as escape, adventure, horror and ghosts, augmented worlds, mythic dimensions, didactic approaches, etc. These approaches may appear in any fantastic genre. Hume's clear distinction of fantasy as mode also goes a long way to alleviating the concern of C.W. Sullivan III who points out that while many trace the history of fantasy back to *Beowulf* or *The Faerie Queene* this confuses the nature of fantasy. He writes that "the contemporary fantasy writer's borrowing of material from medieval and ancient literatures for his modern texts automatically makes those older narratives no more fantasies than it makes them modern" (1992: 99). He goes on to argue that "fantasy

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[29] Hume notes that a number of factors—particularly the classical theory of Plato and Aristotle, and early Christian literary theory—led to the valuation of mimesis over fantasy (1984: 5-7).

literature . . . is a product of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and should be approached as such" (1992: 100). His point is well taken, but if one considers fantasy as mode, then looking back to ancient epics, Medieval literature, epic Romances, the Gothic, etc. becomes much less fraught if one's focus is on the ways in which fantasy appears narratively in the text. These texts are not "Fantasy" in the generic sense, because "fantasy requires some concept of realism before it can exist" (Hunt and Lenz 2001: 15) and is a 20th century genre, but they certainly employ fantasy as mode and have a traceable influence on Fantasy as genre.[30] In this study, I refer to these works as literary fantasy, acknowledging that, while they are not accepted as works of Fantasy (the modern genre), they do make use of fantasy as narrative strategy and a number of their features are found within the genre of Fantasy.[31] I attempt to make the distinction easily distinguishable by speaking of fantasy as mode and Fantasy as genre, marking the difference through capitalization. I have chosen this approach in order to more clearly call attention to works of literary fantasy that, while not Fantasy, do exist within the same tradition, if at a distance.

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[30] Canavan suggests abandoning the use of the term fantasy to describe mode at all. He argues "Fantasy is not the overarching mode. Fantasy is not the term to use for the discussion of the mode, the supergenre, the all-encompassing category. Fantasy is a genre within the fantastic. . . . Fantasy is a distinct tradition, a distinct genre, a distinct entity with all the complexity, paradoxes, exceptions, and formulas that every other genre exhibits" (2012: 6). I largely agree with him—it would be infinitely more simple if the term fantasy was reserved for the genre of Fantasy alone, while the term the fantastic was deployed to speak more broadly of a supergenre or category of texts that in different ways depart from consensus reality. Unfortunately, established scholarship has already deployed these terms in a variety of ways.

[31] Tom Shippey terms all literature that utilizes fantasy as "the fantastic" and further claims that viewed this way "The dominant literary mode of the twentieth century has been the fantastic" and that "even authors deeply committed to the realist novel have often found themselves unable to resist the gravitational pull of the fantastic as a literary mode" (2000: vii, viii).

Of course, the compulsion to define fantasy can also distract from moving forward in critical analysis. Farah Mendlesohn attempts to reject the tradition of defining fantasy before she begins her analysis. In her book *Rhetorics of Fantasy*,[32] she opens her introduction by stating:

> This book is not about defining fantasy. The debate over definition is now long-standing, and a consensus has emerged, accepting as a viable 'fuzzy set,' a range of critical definitions of fantasy. It is now rare to find scholars who choose among Kathryn Hume, W.R. Irwin, Rosemary Jackson, or Tzvetan Todorov: it is much more likely they will pick and choose among these and other 'definers' of the field according to the area of fantasy fiction, or the ideological filter, in which they are interested" (2008: xiii).[33]

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[32] It would have perhaps been more useful to distinguish this book from the study of the genre of Fantasy by amending the title to *Rhetorics of the Fantastic*. Likewise, many of Erikson's complaints concerning *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy* might be ameliorated if the title chosen had been *The Cambridge Companion to Fantastic Literature*.

[33] Additionally, the "fuzzy set" Mendlesohn refers to as an accepted definition of fantasy is generally understood to apply to fantasy genres, not fantasy as mode. Thus, as Brian Attebery notes, even a fuzzy set needs a few texts to stand near the center. Fuzzy sets, he writes, are "categories defined not by a clear boundary or any defining characteristic but by resemblance to a single core example or group of examples" (2014: 33). He continues, noting that "fuzzy sets involve not only resemblances but also degrees of membership. Instead of asking whether or not a story is science fiction (SF), one can say it is mostly SF, or marginally SF, or like SF in some respects. Allowing for partial membership in genre categories helps explain how genres can hybridize" (2014: 33). This is not so much a definition of the narrative effects of fantasy, but of Fantasy as genre. Mendlesohn's own study is essentially approaching fantasy as mode—she is interested in the rhetorical effects of fantasy within a narrative, so the ways in which fantasy interrupts or shapes a story—but is not terribly concerned with generic distinction. Thus, for her, it does not matter what genre a work is traditionally considered as belonging to, but rather the narrative function of fantasy within it. She uses these functions to establish a new criteria for organizing fantasy texts, one that is often at odds with accepted generic divisions.

Mendlesohn is interested in the way in which fantasy enters the text, and defines the type of fantasy from there. This leads many of her definitions to contradict popular generic labels. For example, she groups *The Lord of the Rings* with other portal fantasies like *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Her argument is convincing: the world of the Shire is essentially non-fantastic as it is "small, safe, and understood" and Frodo then moves into the "wild, unfamiliar world of Middle-Earth" (2008: 2).[34] But because Mendlesohn's interest is in grouping texts together by their rhetorical uses of fantasy, she is little concerned with popular genre distinctions. While this does not detrimentally affect her own work, it does not do much to further studies of Fantasy as genre.

There is also a danger in simply declaring the pursuit to define fantasy as over, which recalls debates concerning terminology addressed earlier in this chapter. Canavan again notes that:

> We have debated aspects of fantasy. We have debated key texts within fantasy.
> We have debated approaches to the fantastic. We have agreed on a consensus
> of critical frameworks that can be applied to the fantastic as well as to fantasy.
> But we have never had a debate about fantasy. The very shape, size and core of
> the genre remain areas that need meaningful and concerted debate,
> deconstruction, and discussion (2012: 6).

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[34] Mendlesohn notes that most quest fantasies fit better within the designation portal fantasy, as the main character often goes from a mundane life that has very little to do with the fantastic (even if they know of its existence, it is distant and unknown) to "direct contact with the fantastic, through which she transitions, to the point of negotiation with the world via the personal manipulation of the fantastic realm" (2008: xx).

That is, the genre of Fantasy (when considered not in relation to other fantastic texts)

is severely understudied. This criticism is echoed by author Steven Erikson, who

criticizes scholars for ignoring the "trunk" of the Fantasy genre, that is, Epic Fantasy,

and focusing too much on the outliers of the genre, where he sees "specialists pushing

their selected works" (2012: 4).[35] Thus, there remains "a gaping hole in the middle" of

the discussion of Fantasy and he hopes "to witness the aforementioned academics

focus their formidable talents on epic fantasy" (2012: 5). This study joins recent others

in attempting to fill that hole in highlighting the ways in which Epic Fantasy is

participating in important generic, theoretical, narrative, and socio-historical work,

thereby expanding the study of Fantasy texts.

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[35] Indeed, this tension between terminology distinctions is evident in the introduction
to the *Companion*, where the authors delineate the context of the volume. Part I
examines "fantasy from the late seventeenth century through to the present day to
build up a picture of the vibrant and diverse range of writing commonly grouped
together under the rubric 'fantasy', or sometimes 'the fantastic' (3). This first section
includes essays on literature from Dryden to Dunsany (Gary K. Wolfe), an entry on
gothic and horror fiction (Adam Roberts), American fantasy from 1820-1950 (Paul
Kincaid), children's fantasy (Maria Nikolajeva), and (finally) an entry on Tolkien,
Lewis and genre fantasy (Edward James). Part II deals with theoretical approaches to
fantasy. The third and final section examines a range of literature from magical
realism to historical fantasy. In examining the index, Erikson's criticism seems more
than warranted: in a purported book about Fantasy, Jorge Luis Borges is mentioned
twelve times while Erikson is not mentioned at all. Furthermore, very few epic fantasy
writers are mentioned in more than passing, if at all. One notable exception is W.A.
Senior's entry "Quest fantasy."

Chapter 2

"Egwene died": The Magical Woman as Donor/Helper

". . . to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul" (Mauss 1990: 12).

The impulse to venture out into unfamiliar lands, battling monsters and dragons, winning fame and possibly love, and defeating a great evil—that is, becoming a hero—is something that is found in our earliest literature and has never quite left our collective consciousness. From Beowulf and Rama to Achilles and Gautama Buddha, and from the Redcrosse Knight and Kama to King Arthur and Sir Gawain, literary fantasy has tended to portray this journey as one undertaken by a young man who is thrown into adventure and becomes greater than he once was. And this trend has continued. Literary fantasy, myth, folk-tales, epics, romances, and medieval literature would all influence the genre of Fantasy and, while Fantasy would become its own unique, independent genre in the mid-20th C, these influences are still clearly seen from characterization, to plot, to narrative style. Unfortunately, this also meant an emphasis on the hero's journey as a fundamentally male narrative. This does not mean that women do not feature prominently in Fantasy; they are present in a number of ways. However, these women rarely feature as the novel's protagonist or hero, rather, they are given a number of supportive roles within the narrative that allow them to assist, or motivate, the male hero. Sometimes these female characters are girls, who disguise themselves as boys, in order to have adventures and at some point may join the hero's troupe or perform an important task that aids in the hero's

journey.[36] Or they are evil or broken and either betray someone or are in need of saving from their tortured path, offering the hero a chance to redeem a fallen woman.[37]

The limitations placed on female characters of Fantasy has become a somewhat tired refrain of (female) readers: critics and fans consistently lament the tendency to rely on repeated tropes. Gabrielle Taub writes that "There's something to be said about the fact that women, even in fantasy novels, are given the same tired, overused roles – and that 'something' is: this is getting ridiculous" (2015). Emily Russel compiled a list of "The Four Women-in-Fantasy Tropes I'm Bored With" that includes Princess Hellion, The Tortured Waif, The Innocent Rogue, and The Woman Warrior.[38] Faith M. Boughan focuses on the specific issue of "Your Heroine is too Beautiful" and writes that "While it's true that females have a greater role in fantasy novels these days than in previous decades, I think we still have a long way to go before the character of the "strong woman" becomes more than a man in sexy woman's clothing (or, in other cases, a sex object with a "masculine" attitude)" (2013). Tor.com, a leading publisher of Fantasy novels, hosted an article by Kate Elliot encouragingly titled "Writing Women Characters as Human Beings" (2015). This is also why an internet search of any variation of "fantasy and strong female

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[36] Britomarte from the *Faerie Queene* and Bradamante from *Orlando Furioso* are early examples of this. Brienne of Tarth and Arya from *A Song of Ice and Fire* are modern ones.

[37] Shadea a'Ru in the *High Druid of Shannara* or the Ilse Witch in the *Voyage of the Jerle Shannara* are examples of this trope.

[38] Her description of the Tortured Waif is particularly poignant: "It's a tragedy, because it left this young woman with total, like, scars. Not real scars, no. Those make people ugly. But emotional scars, totes" (2015). Thus, many female characters' backstory, while complex, still allows her to fit conveniently within a patriarchal narrative, e.g. the Tortured Waif has been through tough times, but she is not removed from the possibility of romantic/sexual interest.

characters" will generate a number of fan compiled lists—readers of Fantasy have recognized their own desires to read works with stronger female characters and seek to help others wade through less progressive offerings to find these works.

One common way women are integrated in modern Fantasy is as users of magic. As witches, sorceresses, and elves, magical women exist throughout Fantasy. And yet, even these popular figures rarely feature as the protagonist of the story. For the purpose of this chapter, I am most interested in the role that is often reserved for magical women in particular—that of the helper or donor. Like the Spider Woman of Navajo lore, or the helpful crone or fairy godmother of European fairy-tale, many of the magical women found in Fantasy are what Joseph Campbell terms "supernatural aid," a character that exists to assist the hero in some important way (1949: 70-71). When the magical woman is cast as donor/helper, the Fantasy narrative must contend with two often opposing forces: the power that magic affords female characters and the proscription to make her secondary to the male hero. By examining this character in particular and the tensions she creates within the narrative, the fissures in the patriarchal scaffolding of Fantasy are made clear.

The donor/helper character supports the hero in his quest by entering into an economy of exchange: he or she gives the hero essential assistance in exchange for the hero's eventual success. This relationship between narrative function and the exchange of gifts (in a variety of forms that will be explored below) both further clarifies the way in which the donor/helper operates and, through the character of the magical woman, presents a unique situation that modifies what is traditionally considered the rules of gift exchange as outlined by Marcel Mauss and later adapted by Jacques

Derrida. For this reason, not only is Vladimir Propp's discussion of the narrative function of the donor/helper integral to understanding this character, so too are different theories on gift exchange.

While distinct in many ways, the donor and the helper are also similar. In his study of folktales, Propp describes the donor as one who provides the hero with some agent, usually magical, which allows the hero to overcome some future misfortune (1968: 39). A classic example of the donor is the Lady in the Lake who gives Arthur both Excalibur and its sheath. While magical women are often donors who give objects to heroes that are necessary to complete their tasks, they can also be cast as helpers. The helper, according to Propp, generally belongs to the group of characters who "place themselves at the disposal of the hero" (1968: 45). Jessica from *Orlando Furioso* is an example of the helper, though the most famous is Merlin or perhaps the fairy godmother figure of fairytale. The functional closeness of the donor and helper is made clear by Propp's observation that if a donor is missing, then their narrative functions are often transferred to a helper (1968: 84). Insofar as the helper also donates to the hero both their time, skills, knowledge, and often physical and emotional companionship necessary for the hero to complete his task, they are not entirely outside the sphere of transaction. What is unique about this relationship between donor/helper and hero in Fantasy is the way in which it diverges from a traditional gift economy: the hero rarely returns the gift of the donor or helper through an eventual exchange of goods or clear services to the donor herself.[39] Of course, this also does not

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[39] In Marcel Mauss' *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1990) the highly complex and socially codified rituals of gift exchange in "primitive" societies. Gift-exchange, like the *potlatch*, are not merely an exchange of

make the gift a "true gift," one given without expectations of "reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt" (1992: 12).[40] The hero returns the gift of the donor/helper by triumphing over evil and the restoration of the land. This is why the donor will often test the hero prior to bestowing the gift: the donor must verify that the hero is capable of completing the quest and making this return.

The magical woman as donor/helper is present in a number of Fantasy series. Adie from Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth* series, Polgara from David Eddings' *The Belgariad*, Moiraine (and nearly all the female characters who are not the Foresaken) from *The Wheel of Time*, Valada Geloë from Tad Williams' *The Dragonbone Chair*, and Melisandre from George R.R. Martin's *The Song of Ice and Fire*[41] are all examples from popular series. These magical women occupy periphery positions in

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goods, but are rather "religious, juridical, and moral" and involve both family and society (1990: 3). The gift, Mauss argues, is not simply a physical item, but is something that is "part and parcel of his nature and substance, because to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul" (1990: 12). This is often seen in the magical gift given by the donor—they are often imbued with the donor's own magic—and that of the helper, who so often gives the hero physical and emotional support. This obligation to give and to receive forms bonds of alliance and commonality (1990: 13). Once someone receives a gift, they are in a "position of inferiority so long as he is not freed from his pledge-wager" (1990: 62).

[40] In Derrida's conception of the gift, giving and receiving functions as a kind of circle—what is given always returns in the form of the reciprocal gift—that precludes the gift as such. In other words, the recognition of gift *as* gift annuls the possibility of the gift (1992: 14).[40] We reach an aporia: if the gift is recognized *as a gift*, then it ceases to be a gift as it enters into a reciprocal economy of exchange, but if the gift is *not* recognized, then it also not a gift. The question then arises, is anything ever given, if the act of giving is a circle? Is it possible to get outside of this circle to a place outside the economy of exchange, or the "ritual circle of the debt" (1992: 23-24)? To accomplish this, a gift must be secret, from an unknown donor, and unnamed.

[41] In a work that features relatively little magic, it is telling that Martin makes his most clearly magical figure a woman who also serves as a helper, devoting her magical abilities to the service of Stannis Baratheon.

the narrative, assisting or interacting with the hero in ways that reinforce the primacy of the male hero's journey while relegating them to largely supporting roles. While many of these characters are interesting, captivating, and fan favorites, their relative power, gained through their use of magic, is nevertheless mediated and integrated in a male narrative, containing their potential. This paradigm of magical woman as donor/helper, found throughout fantasy literature, was codified in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. It would become so paradigmatic, that it becomes difficult for subsequent works of Fantasy to completely break free of its influence, even when they expressly attempt to do so.

In order to demonstrate the ways in which Egwene from Jordan's *A Wheel of Time* fulfills the need for a strong, complex magical woman, but ultimately reinscribes her into a narrative structure that privileges the male quest, I will first give an overview of the magical woman as helper/donor in literary fantasy in order to establish the long history of magical woman as donor/helper in fantasy literature. From ancient epic, to Renaissance poetry, to folk-tale, one finds the figure of the magical woman whose main purpose in the narrative is to assist the hero on his journey through either action or a bestowing of (magical) gifts. While Fantasy is, of course, a genre distinct from the literary fantasy tradition, this establishes a narrative function that is a ready-made and recognizable slot into which magical women handily fit. The generic expectations established by Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* discussed in the first chapter also serve to reinforce the secondary position held by magical women, particularly as donor/helper, as Tolkien makes use of this function for his magical woman, the elf-queen Galadriel. Tolkien's influence on the characters and narrative

form in Fantasy cannot be understated, so an examination of Galadriel's position helps to establish how a magical woman is easily cast as donor/helper despite, or in spite of, her magical power. Finally, this chapter will examine a work that was clearly influenced by *The Lord of the Rings*, Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*, for its portrayal of magical women, particularly for the way in which donor/helper positions are both maintained and challenged.

The Wheel of Time follows most of the narrative ground rules laid out by Tolkien's text, but its expansion of points of view narration and the addition of more data—*The Lord of the Rings* is a trilogy of slightly over 400,000 words, *The Wheel of Time* consists of fourteen novels and is just over 4.4 million words—begins to open up new roles for magical women. However, *The Wheel of Time* is still fundamentally a traditional Fantasy narrative like *The Lord of the Rings* and the tension between these expectations and the expanding role of magical women prove too fraught for the series to maintain. This tension is resolved through the death of the character who most clearly breaks away from and challenges the supportive roles assigned to the magical woman, Egwene al'Vere. Despite the promising developments in the characterization and importance of magical women within *The Wheel of Time*, Egwene is ultimately re-cast as donor/helper, though an unconventional one. Through her death Egwene re-establishes the primacy of the male hero and his journey by becoming a donor/helper, giving him the motivation to finally triumph over the evil forces plaguing the land. This demonstrates that the narrative compulsion to subsume the narratives of magical women under the hero's quest through the function of donor/helper is difficult to

overcome, even by those who create complex and captivating magical women characters.

Literary Fantasy and the Magical Helper

Because literary fantasy so clearly influences Fantasy, the roles established for magical women throughout literary fantasy offer a clear history of the ways in which authors have imagined magical women and establishes narrative precedent for what to do with these characters. This history reveals that the magical woman as donor/helper is a popular role, though its realization necessarily differs from work to work. What it also reveals is that by casting a magical woman as donor/helper, her power is effectively contained within the narrative of the male hero's story. If her primary narrative function is to help or assist the actual hero, she cannot be a hero in her own right. Interestingly, when magical women have outlived their usefulness as donor/helper, yet are still clearly powerful, they are often re-cast into another popular role for magical women, that of the evil sorceress. What this brief history demonstrates is that narrative positions that are subordinate to the hero's are often used to contain magical women, who by virtue of their magic possess great power.

The magical woman who gives tokens to the hero or helps him along on his quest abound in Classical literature.[42] The abundance of goddesses, demi-goddesses, magical beasts and items, and the popularity of hero-journey literature makes this

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[42] For the purpose of this study, I will treat these figures as they appear in their most popular mythic forms (See Morford and Lenardon 1999). However, it should be noted that the specifics of these stories are not consistent and are treated differently depending upon which ancient text, or images, one consults. For more on the various incarnations of Ariadne, see Webster 1966; for an analysis of the various studies of Heracles, see Philips 1978.

unsurprising. Jason and the Argonauts offers a clear example of the hero's journey—

their quest is to retrieve a golden fleece from a dragon—and prominently features one

of the most iconic magical woman, Medea, as donor. Medea's fate in subsequent tales

also highlights the ways in which the magical woman and her power must somehow

be contained through her casting and narrative function—Medea would transform

from donor/helper, to evil witch. Medea first appears in the tale of Jason and the

Argonauts. Jason, in an attempt to reclaim his family's throne, is sent on a quest to

obtain the golden fleece. While on his journey, Medea, a priestess of Hecate who is a

witch skilled in magic, falls in love with Jason and gifts him a magic ointment that

will protect him against fire or iron for the length of one day. He uses this ointment to

make it past fire-breathing bulls and the armed men who spring from the dragon's

teeth. She also gives him the knowledge that he will need to throw a stone in the

middle of the men so that they will fight each other to the death. Still, he is only able

to take the fleece with further help from Medea: he uses the herbs she provides to drug

the serpent.[43] Jason, victorious in his quest "took her who had made possible his

success, a second prize" (Morford 1999: 472)—Medea is at once recognized as being

integral, even responsible, for Jason's success while also being relegated to his prize.

Of course, Medea's eventual fate is well known as she embraces another role reserved

for magical women, the evil witch who breaks taboos, once her usefulness as

donor/helper is outlived. Several other magical women in Classical literature also

function clearly as donors: Theseus receives aid in vanquishing the Minotaur from

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[43] Euripides gives Medea a much larger role, making her, and not Jason, the dragon-slayer (Morford and Lenardon 1999: 471).

Ariadne, in the form of a sword and magical ball of yarn; Perseus, on his way to kill the Gorgon Medusa, receives a sack that can safely contain Medusa's head from the Hesperides, nymphs that tend Hera's orchard; and Athena frequently offers magical assistance to any number of heroes, giving Heracles a number of tokens and frequent assistance to complete his Twelve Labors, and aiding both Odysseus and Telemachus.[44]

The magical woman as donor/helper is also found in medieval literature, and, like Medea, when the magical woman is not a donor/helper, she is then contained as sorceress or witch. In Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur,* Arthur receives his famed sword Excalibur and a magic scabbard from the Lady of the Lake. While the sword Excalibur has remained in the forefront of the Arthur mythos, Merlin reveals that it is the scabbard given him by the Lady of the Lake that is the true prize, for "the scabbard is worth ten of the swords, for whiles ye have the scabbard upon you, ye shall never lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded" (1906: 44). Of course, Arthur is tricked out of his sword and scabbard by Morgan le Fay who replaces them with a counterfeit and throws the real scabbard into a deep lake, but for many of his adventures the scabbard is indispensable. Morgan le Fay appears again in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, not clearly as donor or helper, though her testing of the hero "teach[es] him a lesson and thus make[s] him into a better person" and, thus, "help[s] the hero grow" and ultimately fulfill his quest to prove both his and the court of King

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[44] While a god of course differs from a human magical woman, her relation to magic and her function within these narrative remains the same.

Arthur's virtue (Battles 2012: 20). Of course, Morgan le Fay is most typically portrayed as, like Medea, another evil magical woman.

Fairy-tales also offer several examples of the magical woman as donor/helper. While the fairy-godmother who assists the young girl in ultimately securing a prince/husband is a popular character, magical women often act as donor/helpers to male heroes as well. While many of these are written primarily for children, the fairy-tale is undeniably an influential genre within fantasy literature. In George MacDonald's *The Princess and Curdie*, a young miner is given a test, tokens, and a task by a mysterious woman who appears in the moonlight. After passing the trial given to him by the woman, Curdie is given his mission, but only after he is asked to put his hands in the fire, which he does without complaint. This grants him the ability to "know at once the hand of a man who is growing into a beast" (1888: 73)—that is, Curdie is now able to perceive both hidden good and hidden evil. The woman gives Curdie the first part of his mission: to head north to court. The woman sends him a companion, Lina, a creature who has very long legs like an elephant, a thick tail, and a head between a polar bear and snake who, while terrifying, becomes extremely loyal to Curdie (1888: 76). After a series of adventures, Curdie and Lina find Princess Irene and the King, and discover that the king is being poisoned. There is a duplicitous doctor and Lord Chancellor, a battle, victory, a promise of marriage between Curdie and Princess Irene, and the bestowing of an eventual kingship.

As these examples demonstrate, the narrative strategy of placing the magical woman in an accessory role is one that is used by a number of different genres throughout the history of literary fantasy. In the 20th century, Tolkien would draw on

many of these genres and traditions when writing what would become an integral

touchstone for the genre of Fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings*. In making use of these

narrative structures and character tropes, Tolkien also largely inscribes magical

women to these secondary roles as donors or helpers, whose main purpose within the

narrative is to assist the hero on the primary quest, regardless of their own power.[45]

This narrative strategy simultaneously privileges male quests while containing those

women within the narrative that might challenge male characters in regard to power

and autonomy. Beyond that, it redirects their power to the hero for his own gains. The

tendency of literary fantasy to ascribe magical women narrative functions that put

them at the disposal of the hero, and the various structural and stylistic traditions

Tolkien borrows from, complement each other. The interlace narrative, the heroic-

quest, the medieval romance and the fairy-tale all privilege the central narrative of the

male hero, making it narratively convenient to cast magical women in these

donor/helper roles.

Galadriel and the Giving of Gifts

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien presents the reader with a complex

combination of a number of different genres to create something if not wholly new,

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[45] Sarah Workman notes that critics continue to question the presence of women in Tolkien's work. She cites a recent critique by Candace Fredrick and Sam McBride who ask how the actual lived experience of the Inklings, as an all-male group, translates into their work. They conclude that "there is no female presence whatsoever" in the Inkling's work. This is particularly noticeable in *The Lord of the Rings*, and Tolkien's personal life fuels this type of criticism. In his personal letters, one finds a daunting level of misogyny (2014: 76). Workman would go on to argue that when read as elegy, *The Lord of the Rings'* women become central characters.

then wholly unique.[46] While this mix of genres explains the narrative structure and style of Tolkien's work, the structure also helps to explain the characters that Middle-earth is populated with and that are presented to the reader. The plot of *The Lord of the Rings* is essentially a hero's journey. While the main quest of the narrative is Frodo's attempt to destroy the Ring and subsequently save all of Middle-earth, and other characters' side quests ultimately come to support this central aim, all of these different narratives are traditional male journeys: Aragorn is the King returned who regains not only his kingdom, but also his love; Merry and Pippin gain battle experience and return to the Shire to lead an insurrection; and Gandalf defeats his (previously unknown) nemesis and becomes the White Wizard: rule, military prowess, power. While Tolkien did much to implement the characterization important to the realist novel, his work still contains the archetypal characters found in Romance. According to George Thomson, "Like the persons of traditional allegory, the characters of *The Lord of the Rings* are types. At the allegorical extremes are Sauron the type of all darkness and Gandalf (reinforced by Galadriel, the Queen of the Elves) the type of all light" (1967: 50). This narrative structure and use of archetypal characters clearly demonstrates the ways in which Tolkien borrows from various types of Romance, but it also inscribes the female characters to the same kinds of secondary

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[46] Sullivan reminds those critics who negatively comment on the structural similarities in the plots between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* that Tolkien's plot structure is the plot structure of the *Märchen*, legend, and epic and that "Folk-lore and mythology scholarship has repeatedly shown that traditional stories share traditional characteristics, and Tolkien wanted to tell a traditional story" (1996: 307). What they believe is a negative is in fact a purposeful re-imagining of these traditional plots.

roles.[47] As Ian Watt notes in *The Rise of the Novel*, romance has less to do with the

love story between the hero and the damsel, and more to do with "the adventures

which the knight achieved for his lady" (1957: 136). Therefore, the male quests

occupy the spaces of central concern. This is clearly seen in the examples drawn from

literary fantasy previously discussed—if the magical woman was not a donor/helper,

then she was evil, and sometimes, she is both in order to elevate the male hero's

journey. What is clear is that this character type perseveres as does the relegation of

magical women to secondary roles.[48]

While magic appears in various forms throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, it

always in some way intersects with the male heroes and their journeys: Gandalf goes

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[47] Much work has been done to "rescue" Tolkien from charges of misogyny for his
lack of strong female characters in his works. Jack M. Downs argues that while both
The Hobbit and *The Lord of the Rings* see the male characters performing a bulk of the
action, if one examines Tolkien's entire mythos one finds not only more women
characters, but ones that are not assigned to merely secondary roles. In order to
demonstrate this, Downs examines the story of Lúthien from *The Silmarillion* and
Eowyn from *The Lord of the Rings*. Downs successfully demonstrates that each
woman participates in their own hero's journey, often subverting gendered
expectations. Where Downs' argument loses its force is his necessary
acknowledgment that both characters are reintegrated into traditional gender roles
once their quests end—both women willingly give up their heroic persona in favor of
marriage. Downs generously forgives the casual reader for assuming women do not
feature strongly in Middle-earth if they have not read anything past the main texts of
The Hobbit and *The Lord of the Rings*. Downs ultimately speculates that women were
largely left out because that mirrored Tolkien's experience on the front in World War I
and the death of his school-friends in the war where women were absent on the
frontlines. Downs argues both that women do exist in Tolkien's work, and also that if
they don't it's because women weren't on the frontlines of WWI. Ross Smith notes
that while most of the leading figures in Tolkien's works are male, this has not proved
an obstacle to attracting a female readership, as the *Lord of the Rings Research Project*
shows fans to be fairly divided between men and women (2006: 46).
[48] The magical woman as evil witch or sorceress in modern Fantasy also merits critical
analysis. How is this figure re-inscribed in modern Fantasy narratives? How does this
character evolve from her functions in literary fantasy to modern Fantasy?

on a number of quests, Sting helps Frodo, and later Sam, out of many dangerous

situations, and the phial of light helps Sam defeat Shelob. The most powerful magical

woman in *The Lord of the Rings*, the elf-queen Galadriel, also uses her power to aid

the male heroes. But she is not only a magical woman, she is perhaps the most

powerful magical figure aside from Sauron in the entire series (while her power does

not allow her to defeat him, it does allow her to withstand him). And yet, all of her

magic is redirected through the male characters, while she is relegated to a largely

passive role in which she acts as Propp's donor. And she fulfills the role nearly

perfectly: she provides the heroes with magical gifts that allow them to complete their

journey, and she also performs a series of tests.[49]

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[49] Scholarship on Galadriel is perhaps less abundant than that on other aspects of *The Lord of the Rings*. Romuald Ian Lakowski notes that Galadriel is "one of the best known and best loved characters" (despite only playing an important role in Book II: 6-8 and the end of Book VI), but little has actually been written about her (2007: 91). Part of the reason for this Lakowksi identifies is that the Galadriel of *The Lord of the Rings* is quite different from the Galadriel that is elaborated on in later writings like *The Silmarillion*, *The Unfinished Tales*, and Tolkien's late letters. Tolkien seems to have continually re-imagined Galadriel's past. *The J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* traces her evolution from a Faerie Queene type figure in *The Lord of the Rings* to a kind of Virgin Mary figure in later renditions. According to his 1971 letters, Tolkien largely agreed with this interpretation, writing "I think it is true that I owe much of this character to Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary, but actually Galadriel was a penitent: in her youth a leader in the rebellion against the Valar (the angelic guardians). At the end of the First Age she proudly refused forgiveness or permission to return. She was pardoned because of her resistance to the final and overwhelming temptation to take the Ring for herself" (*Letters* 407 qtd in Drout 2007: 228). Both Lakowski and Drout point to Galadriel as a counterargument to the claim that Tolkien does not write strong women, yet both rely on largely unfinished works and letters written after *The Lord of the Rings* to make this claim. Each also relies on the isolated aspects of her character and less on the narrative function she plays within the main work (she plays a much more active role in the tales of the First Age, though here she also goes from prideful rebel who is subject the Ban of the Valar for taking part in Fëanor's rebellion, to not playing a role in the rebellion and leaving for Middle Earth with the permission of the Valar). Charles Nelson comes closest to recognizing Galadriel as donor, casting her as a guide character, noting that "Of all the things

Frodo first meets Galadriel in the Galadhrim elf city in the forests of Lórien,

where the hobbits, Aragorn, and Legolas will eventually meet Gimli and Boromir to

form the Fellowship. Galadriel is first described as sitting "side by side" with Lord

Celeborn and after rising, Tolkien notes that they both were very tall, "the Lady no

less tall than the Lord" (1954: 345). In addressing Frodo, Galadriel tells him that

Gandalf was wise to send them to Lórien for "the Lord of the Galadhrim is accounted

the wisest of the Elves of Middle-earth, and a giver of gifts beyond the power of

kings" (1954: 347). And yet, though she tells them the gifts are from the Lord *and*

Lady, it is Galadriel who gives them the most powerful, and ultimately essential, gifts

and from her words it becomes apparent that these gifts come more from her than

Celeborn. These gifts tend to be magical in nature. Aragorn receives a sheath to fit his

sword and any sword drawn from this sheath cannot be stained or broken. Galadriel

tells him that "it was left in my care to be given to you" (1954: 365); Elessar, the

Elfstone of the house of Elendil, is also given to Aragorn. Galadriel makes clear that it

is an heirloom Galadriel passed to her daughter, and she to hers (1954: 366); Boromir,

Merry, and Pippen all get belts of precious metals; Legolas is given a bow; Sam is

given earth from Galadriel's own garden, which she has blessed so that anything

planted in a sprinkling of it will grow; to Gimli she gives three of her hairs; and

which Galadriel does for the Fellowship, perhaps the most important is her giving of
gifts at their parting—for in many ways, these tokens allow the individual members of
the quest to proceed in doing their duties and bring their varied missions to successful
conclusions" (2002: 53). Sarah Workman works to reinterpret *The Lord of the Rings*
as an elegy that positions women as the central mourners. This "text as elegy" would
reposition Galadriel as a hero whose power is that of memory and commemoration
and Arwen's decision to renounce her immortality and marry Aragorn as a "heroic
decision [that] privileges the gendered-female work of mourning above her own life"
(2014: 83-84; 88).

finally, to Frodo a crystal phial filled with the light of Earendil's star held in the waters of Galadriel's fountain (1954: 366). A sheath placed in *her* keeping, an heirloom she passed down to *her* daughter and granddaughter, earth from *her* garden, locks of *her* hair, and a phial filled with water from *her* fountain—it seems that including Lord Celeborn as a giver of these gifts was largely a formality.[50] Indeed, the only gifts given personally by Celeborn are boats.

Galadriel also tests Frodo (and Sam), ensuring they are worthy of her gifts. After many days and nights in Lothlórien, Galadriel brings Frodo and Sam to the Mirror of Galadriel. And so begins the first test. The Mirror, if left free to work, will show "things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be" (1954: 352-53). Sam looks first, and sees a number of injustices happening in the Shire, namely people cutting down trees they shouldn't, and this causes in Sam a desperate urge to return home. Galadriel reminds him of his vow not to go back without Frodo, and Sam, breaking down into tears, agrees to stay and complete his journey. Reluctantly, Frodo looks into the water next. He sees a series of images that he understands to "be parts of a great history in which he had become involved" (1954: 354). The last image he sees is the Eye of Sauron. She advises both Sam and Frodo, preparing them for their journey. It is Galadriel who offers wise council, not Celeborn.

While Galadriel's role in the narrative is largely passive, as a giver of gifts to aid in the central journey, she is clearly an objectively powerful character within the text, rivaling Sauron and commanding Gandalf's respect. As already noted, she holds

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[50] These gifts also clearly echo the observation that in the gift-giving economy, gifts are not merely inanimate objects. Rather, gifts are in actuality an exchange of "spiritual matter" (1950: 18).

an equal social and political position as Lord Celeborn, and she alone seems able to resist Sauron's power. At the Mirror of Galadriel with Frodo and Sam, she tells them "I perceive the Dark Lord and know his mind, or all of his mind that concerns the Elves. And he gropes ever to see me and my thought. But still the door is closed!" (1954: 355). She also wears the Ring of Power Nenya, the Ring of Adamant. It is here that Galadriel reveals that if Frodo succeeds and destroys the One Ring, both her power and Lórien will fade "and Time will sweep it away," forcing the elves to leave for the West (1954: 356). Frodo offers her the Ring and she, passing her own test, refuses it. And yet, her power is evidenced largely in the gifts she gives to the Fellowship. As Jack M. Downs notes, "her role is primarily passive and oracular, rather than active and heroic" (2006: 67).[51] She is there to aid Frodo on his journey, not to become a central player in the quest to destroy the Ring, despite being a clearly powerful, and good, figure.

Already the tensions between a narrative structure that focuses on the male hero's journey and a powerful magical woman are evident. Galadriel may use her magic, but only in service to the true heroes of the tale as a donor, though her power is clearly evident. Tolkien largely succeeds in smoothing out these tensions by relegating Galadriel to a mostly unseen role and mediates her power by linking her clearly with Lord Celeborn—the reader hears tales of her power and catches small glimpses of her magical ability, but as a character we do not get to know her in any real sense. Whenever her magic is actually implemented, it is done so through one of the main,

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[51] While Downs and I agree on this characterization of Galadriel in the *The Lord of the Rings*, we differ in our conclusions that supplementary texts somehow address Tolkien's lack of strong female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*.

male characters utilizing the gift she has given them. She does not get her own interlace narrative, but is folded into the main narrative in the span of a few pages.[52]

Works after Tolkien would do just that, building on the interlace narrative structure, expanding their narrative through multiple point of view characters and letting the reader get to know the magical women as more fully fleshed out characters. While the number of side/complementary journeys increase, and as series also increase in length from the trilogy to multi-volume works, the core narrative consisting of a hero's journey remains the same, and the subordination of these side narratives to eventually re-intersect with the main quest is still the predominant approach. However, with the expansion of points of view characters, and the explosion of volumes of books in a series, these interlace narratives became more and more complex, and their protagonists, while still subsumed under the main hero, became infinitely more individualized. In this way, it seems almost inevitable that some of these interlace narratives would be centered around women characters. And yet, despite introducing a magical woman with a complex characterization and motivation, the narrative structure itself cannot allow her to fully assume agency and must subsume her under the male hero's journey. This is clearly seen in Robert Jordan's fourteen volume series *The Wheel of Time*.

The Wheel of Time and the Tensions of Narrative

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[52] Perhaps if Tolkien had expanded his work past the initial novel and trilogy, Galadriel's narrative would have become more complex as more space was opened up within the narrative. This speculation seems probable given her expanded role in *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*.

It is certainly clear that *The Wheel of Time* follows the course laid out by

Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings*. Especially in the first book of the series, *The Eye of

the World*, their similarity is blatantly evident. We begin in a lush, rural town that is in

preparation for a spring party, and meet Rand al'Thor, an unassuming farmboy who

questions whether his life in the Two Rivers is all there is in the world. Rand is clearly

the Dragon Reborn, our hero who will eventually fight the Dark One. Once they set

out on their adventure, all of the stock characters are found: Mat is the Comic,

Moraine the Mage/Guide, Lan the Ranger/Warrior (who eventually is revealed to be

the uncrowned king of Malkier, a kingdom that borders the blight and is at war with

the Shadow. The similarities between Aragorn and Gondor are clear), Thom is the

Bard, etc. *Escapist Magazine* forum member Anachronism, in a post titled "*The Eye of

the World*, or: *The Fellowship of the Wheel of Time*" notes that "if you turn the map

ninety degrees, Rand's home and the Blight (the domain of the Dark One) line up

almost exactly to where the Shire and Mordor are on the Map of Middle-earth"

(2010).[53] However, as Brian Attebery notes, the simple fact that something relies on

formula does not mean that it is bad. He writes that "a poor non-formulaic story may

be far worse than a good performance of the formula" (1992: 10), and the

opportunities for creating "lively, ingenious, highly entertaining variations on a

limited theme" certainly exist in the Fantasy genre (1992: 9). And while the

similarities between *The Wheel of Time* and *The Lord of the Rings* are plainly there,

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[53] Heather Attril also notes that similarities exist between trollocs and orcs, Myrddral
and the Black Riders, the Dark Lord and Sauron, Padan Fain and Gollum and Worm
Tongue, Ogier and the Ents, and the Nym and Tom Bombadil (2003: 58).

Jordan does contribute a unique and lively variation on the hero's quest.[54] The

similarities in their basic structure also highlight the ways in which Jordan, through a

much more extended treatment of magical women, presents more fully realized

magical women characters. Their interlace narratives are highly developed and their

stories are often told through their own points of view. However, it also amplifies the

narrative compulsion to integrate these magical women into the hero's own journey, as

the reader is presented with characters whose narratives should be independent, but

instead are reintegrated into the hero's journey, even if this reintegration makes little

sense.

The Prologue to *The Eye of the World* is integral in establishing the way in

which Jordan positions his narrative as myth. He is clear about how he views this

story: it has been told before, and it will be told again. The basic players are always-

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[54] While it is often mentioned in passing as a popular series that follows *The Lord of the Rings*, there is very little critical work on Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*. Matthew Fike's *The One Mind: C. G. Jung and the Future of Literary Criticism* (2014) contains a chapter on *The Wheel of Time* and argues that it represents an amplified secondary world that inspires us "to consider what is not impossible in our own" (2014: 151). Through immersion in the series, the reader may discover a talent, in the same way the characters discover their own talents in the One Power. Fike's goes through several aspects of the series—*ta'avern*, The Pattern, The Dark One, free will, etc.—and demonstrates the ways in which they are amplifications of possible reader experiences: the psychic feats achieved by the characters in *The Wheel of Time* "underscore the reader's own mind's ability to transcend space-time" (2014: 178). Heather Attrill's 2003 article "Lore, Myth, and Meaning for Postmoderns: An Introduction to the Story World of Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* Sequence" carefully describes many of the features that establish not only the world but the different characters found in the series, such as Geography, Talismanic Objects of Power, Important Characters from Outside the Two Rivers, The Light and the Shadow, etc. She concludes that Jordan creates a world that readers are able to treat as a real time and place, "a world vastly complex and nuanced" (2003:76) that also forces them to confront their own world with a new perspective.

already decided, and the ultimate clash is inevitable. This is echoed in the refrain that is repeated throughout the work:

> The Wheel of Time turns, and Ages come and pass, leaving memories that become legend. Legend fades to myth, and even myth is long forgotten when the Age that gave it birth comes again. . . . There are neither beginnings nor endings to the turning of the Wheel of Time. But it was *a* beginning (1990: 1, emphasis in original).

Jordan is explicitly acknowledging what Attebery also notes—the pattern is not new, but each story is different and unique, and that makes all the difference. He also echoes Tolkien's own view, that the fairy-story is one of legend, one that is "very ancient indeed" (Tolkien 1965: 20).

While Rand is our hero, for the purposes of this study I am not terribly concerned with his story. As far as hero journeys go, it is fairly typical: he leaves his rural town with a group of friends, encounters enemies, learns to control his power, performs a series of tasks and fulfills a number of prophecies, deals with loss, falls in love (three times), battles with himself and his new responsibilities, fights the Dark One in the Last Battle (or Tarmon Gai'don), and is victorious. Despite adhering to this formula, Jordan fleshes Rand out more successfully than Tolkien does his own main characters, as Rand is undoubtedly a complex character who experiences real growth and change. His struggles feel real, his losses are devastating, and his choices excruciating. Of course, we spend fourteen books with Rand and his journey, compared to the three comparatively short books we spend with the characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. In addition to expanding and complicating Rand's journey, the

interlace narratives also become more complex, and more time is spent with secondary characters and their development. Many of these characters are women, and nearly all of these women are magical.

That one encounters more magical women characters in *The Wheel of Time* is not entirely surprising: magic plays a much more active role in Jordan's narrative and women play a much more active role with magic. The source of magic is called the One Power. Men and women can both access aspects of it: women access *saidar*; men access *saidin*.[55] Women who can "channel" these weaves are identified when they are young and brought to the White Tower at Tar Valon, where they are trained in the use of *saidar*. Upon graduation, they become Aes Sedai, and join a sisterhood of women who can channel. They are governed by The Amyrlin Seat and choose different ajahs, or groups, to belong to.[56] The Aes Sedai serve as councilors to kings and queens, they broker peace treaties, and they travel the land to discover histories and knowledge. Tar Valon is a powerful city, and the Aes Sedai are a powerful organization. And it is

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[55] The One Power is, in a sense, made up of air, earth, fire, water, and spirit, which manifest as different weaves. A user of this power learns how to manipulate these weaves, creating different patterns that cause different things to happen. While women who can channel are found and trained, men who can channel *saidin* are found and stilled—that is, their ability to access the power is cut off. This is because *saidin* was tainted by the Dark One at the last breaking of the world, so men who channel tend to go insane (Rand cleanses *saidin* in *Winter's Heart*). As men also tend to be stronger in the One Power than women, men who can channel are feared and thought uncontrollably dangerous.
[56] These are denoted by color and each has a different focus that suits different personality types. For example, sisters of the Green Ajah tend to have a skill in battle and strategy, while sisters of the Brown Ajah tend to be more academic and spend their time reading and studying. Some women are more powerful and can channel more of the power than others, while others are more adept at making complex weaves.

filled with, and run by, magical women.[57] Jordan deserves significant credit for

creating a complex organization filled with varied, individual, and powerful women.[58]

And this group of women, who are central to the world of *The Wheel of Time*,

naturally become central to Rand's journey.

This prevalence of magical women, and the power of Aes Sedai within the

world, necessitates that *The Wheel of Time* contain a number of magical women as

important characters. In fact, all of the important secondary female characters are

magical women: Elayne Trakand, Egwene al'Vere, and Nynaeve al'Meara can

channel, study at the White Tower and become Aes Sedai; Aviendha can also channel

and studies to become a Wise One; and Min Farshaw has the ability to read people's

futures by seeing auras and visions that sometimes surround them.[59] Tuon, Faile, and

Moraine are also important female characters but are not as consistently influential as

the others already mentioned. Three of these characters are also clearly types: Elayne

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[57] Aes Sedai are not the only ones who can channel. Unbeknownst to them, many of
the Wise Ones of the Aiel can also use *saidar*. As desert people who live in the Three-
fold land, or Aiel Waste, they have little contact with other nations, until the Last
Battle begins to approach and alliances are made. Much like the Aes Sedai, girls who
can channel are found and trained by other Wise Ones and serve their tribes as healers
and councilors. Additionally, the Windfinders of the Sea Folk, a people who live
primarily on board ships, are usually strong in air and water, the two weaves necessary
to control the weather and ocean. While they occasionally send young girls weak in
the power to the White Tower to prevent any suspicions, the strongest channelers are
kept and become Windfinders. The Sea Folk Windfinders are also accomplished in
weaves the White Tower is unaware even exist.
[58] Jordan deserves even more credit for the larger world of *The Wheel of Time*. There
are several either clearly matriarchal nations, or societies in which women hold
considerable power, including Andor, the Sea Folk, Seanchen, Aiel, and in some
respects the Ogier.
[59] Min's ability is unique within the world of *The Wheel of Time*. Several of the Aes
Sedai remark on different occasions that what Min does is unique and largely
unstudied.

is a refined and politically savvy Princess then Queen; Aviendha is an exotic warrior;

and Min is a rebellious tomboy. All three are, naturally, very beautiful. And, all three

of these characters become Rand's lovers. Looked at one way, the mere fact that

Jordan includes so many magical women characters, who are all different in some

way, from different nations and with distinct personalities, is a testament to the

progress made within the genre concerning the inclusion of female characters since

The Lord of the Rings and the influence of an expanded number of interlace narratives

and a larger volume of works in a given series.[60] However, Elayne, Aviendha, and

Min—no matter how compelling their own narratives—have their story arcs clearly

subordinated to Rand's. So much so that all three of them become his lovers, and

while this may at first seem a cosmopolitan endorsement of polyamorous

relationships, their quartet is clearly posited in terms of satisfying the multiple facets

of Rand's personality.[61] While he is able to explore himself through his romantic

relationships with these three different types of women, they remain monogamous to

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[60] Attril also commends Jordan for his portrayal of so many believable female characters (though she acknowledges they are not free from stereotypes) and notes that "he is one of the first male writers of serious heroic 'epic fantasy' to provide female characters with such numerous strong, leading roles" (2003: 39).

[61] Propp writes that any element of the folktale may be negated twice, so that it may repeat a total of three times. This "trebling" may occur "among individual details . . . among individual functions (pursuit-rescue), groups of functions, and entire moves" (1968: 74). Rand's accumulation of three lovers to fulfill his multi-faceted personality is also an example of the rule of three: the idea that things that come in threes are more satisfying to the reader or listener. Often seen in fairytales (three little pigs, Goldilocks meets three bears, three Billy Goats Gruff) it also appears in popular slogans ("Stop, Drop, and Roll," "*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*," "Stop, Collaborate, and Listen"). The rule of three, or the instinct to treble something, crosses genres and purposes—it seems universally pleasing and effective for memorization and the transfer of maximum knowledge through minimum length. There are also, naturally, echoes of the trinity.

him and do not experience the same type of experimentation or freedom. What their relationships with Rand *do* achieve is a guarantee that their narratives remain subordinated to his personal development and ultimate hero's journey. While they do not gift Rand physical objects, they donate not only their magical abilities, but also their emotional support and their bodies to his character development and emotional growth. It is through his sexual and romantic relationships with these women that Rand both finds the most psychological stability, connections to various groups of people, and maturation and initiation into manhood. Despite their characterization as a shrewd and just Queen, a capable and tough Wise Woman, and a rule-breaking, confident tomboy, their containment within Rand's narrative culminates as the last scene these women appear in shows them standing together, staring into a crowd where Rand is concealed. Rand notes that "All three women at the pyre had turned from it to look at him" (2013: 907). Their gazes, their futures, their attention is centered solely on Rand. As his lovers, one the mother of his twin children, they have effectively been contained, their power directed forever towards Rand. This is not the case for the one magical woman who occupies a crucial role in the narrative as a whole.

Egwene and the Possibility of Resistance

Rand's narrative role as hero effectively subordinates the stories of most of the magical women characters, regardless of their power—they are either his lovers, assist him in some way, or are his enemies. Despite the fact that Jordan and Sanderson have done a truly remarkable job at incorporating an array of interesting, multi-faceted, and influential female characters, there is never any question that all these narratives will

converge on Rand's. But there is one character, a magical woman, who for a majority of the series appears to resist this subordination. Egwene al'Vere is not the hero, but she is also not clearly portrayed as a donor or helper, nor is she his lover or his enemy. While making Egwene a magical woman who is not romantically linked to Rand seems to satisfy the need for magical women to move beyond the donor or periphery of the narrative, the gains made by this character are severely undermined due to the primacy of the hero's journey and the narrative compulsion to subordinate the stories of magical women.[62] *The Wheel of Time*, despite its expanded cast of magical women, and the fact that these women are strong and fully actualized characters, still cannot fully move out from under the narrative structure that would contain these women in some way, even if that containment comes in the last few pages

Egwene is in many ways linked to the quest motif—she is a young woman living in a rural town, who is called to adventure, leaves with a group of friends, faces trials that she overcomes on the way to mastering her own power and sense of self, and encounters and defeats evil. If it was not so obvious that Rand was the chosen hero from the beginning of the first book, the hero's quest might be reimagined as Egwene's. And unlike Rand, Egwene has always thought about leaving the Two Rivers. Part of the draw of becoming a Wisdom (a kind of village healer) in another town is the ability to travel and the promise of adventure, even if it is small. She tells

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[62] There are other magical women who come in and out of the narrative who also retain some autonomy throughout the series, but none feature in a primary role. Cadsuane Sedai is an example of this. While she does help Rand and acts as a mentor, she constantly has her own schemes running. She is also older, thereby automatically removing her as a romantic interest. Unfortunately, she doesn't receive much page space and remains a largely unexplored character.

Rand "Maybe I want to see some of the places I hear about in the stories. Have you ever thought of that?" Rand dismisses her desire for a larger life than what the Two Rivers promises her by responding "Of course I have. I daydream sometimes, but I know the difference between daydreams and what's real." (1990: 37). Even before the adventure begins, Egwene is looking to experience more of the world, to not settle for what is expected, and to challenge herself to achieve her goals.

Indeed, Egwene is at times narratively in the position of hero, who overcomes trials, is betrayed, overcomes this, solidifies her power and fulfills her potential. These trials also serve to further strengthen her separation from Rand's central narrative. While all the main characters face trials in some form—Aviendha's training to become a Wise One is physically and emotionally difficult, Elayne returns to Caemlyn, the capitol city of Andor, after her mother's death and must out-maneuver others' claims to the Lion Throne, Perrin must learn to control his wolf-sense and rescue Faile from the Aiel, and Mat must keep Tuon safe and command the Band of the Red Hand—only Egwene seems to face trials that involve a comparative level of physical and psychological suffering and political maneuvering as Rand. She is clearly the most tested magical woman within the series. She unites a broken White Tower, trains Aes Sedai to fight in the last battle, and is made prisoner by the Seanchan,[63] an experience that forces her to endure both physical and mental torture, but also makes

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[63] In *The Great Hunt*, she is collared by the Seanchan, a civilization located west across the Aryth Ocean that believes women who can channel are dangerous and must be "collared." The collar is put around the neck of a woman who can channel, called a *damane*. The collar is connected to a leash that connects to a bracelet worn by a *sul'dam*. The *damane* is a slave and the *sul'dam* control her. The *sul'dam* control when and how the *damane* channels. An uncollared woman who can channel is called a *marath'damane* and is considered an abomination by the Seanchan.

her strong and resilient.[64] Egwene is never spared physical or emotional pain but manages to persevere.

Egwene's main trials begin with her nomination to the Amrilyn Seat. Elected by an oppositional group of Aes Sedai who no longer recognized the validity of the current Amrylin, Egwene must not only unite the rebel Aes Sedai, but reclaim the White Tower. This trial occupies the bulk of Egwene's narrative from *The Lord of Chaos* (Book 6) until the final battle. In addition to establishing her legitimacy amongst the rebel Aes Sedai, rebuking attempts from older sisters to use her as a pawn, and organizing a resistance movement against the White Tower, Egwene is also betrayed and taken captive. Returned to the White Tower, she is demoted back to novice and expected to observe all of the customs of honorifics that a novice would afford a full sister. Egwene refuses. This earns her several visits to the Mistress of Novices where she suffers physical punishments.[65] Egwene uses these beatings to master her reaction to pain. This is not only a physical trial, but a psychological one as

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[64] Egwene soon learns that whatever pain the sul'dam feels, the damane feels twice as powerfully—this makes hurting or killing your sul'dam in order to escape impossible (*Hunt* 1990: 566). The *sul'dam* may also inflict great pain on the *damane* through the leash. Despite this physical torture, the psychological torture is much worse. *Damane* are treated as pets, less than human, and have their old identities and names stripped from them in order to compel obedience (*Hunt* 1990: 567; 601; 647-48).

[65] In her first visit, she refuses to renounce the title of Amyrlin and gets a mark in the punishments book. The Mistress of Novices says she will "give [her] the night to think about it rather than putting [Egwene] over [her] knee now" (2005: 90). Egwene responds by saying "Do you think you can make me deny who I am with a spanking?" (2005: 90). Egwene is told "There are spankings and spankings" (2005: 90). Egwene is beaten so frequently that she begins to need Healing each day so that the beatings may continue. The Mistress of Novices explains the reason they bother healing her at all: "Else you'll soon be too bruised to spank without bringing blood. But don't think this means I am going easy on you. If you require Healing *three* times a day, I'll just spank all the harder to make up. If need be, I'll go to the strap or with switch" (2005: 552).

well. Egwene can be "forgiven" and accepted back into the White Tower if she simply renounces the title of Amyrlin and stops treating full sisters as equals. If she accepts her position as novice and acts as she is expected to, her betrayal will be forgotten. But she knows she cannot, both because she genuinely believes that her position is legitimate, and because she knows that "Acquiescence would be as sharp a blow to the rebellion as her execution. Maybe sharper" (2005: 90). Her dedication to a cause she believes is just and to the people whom she feels responsible for will not allow her to accept an easy way out, even if it means daily beatings and psychological attacks by other sisters who repeatedly treat her as lesser than she is. Egwene has fully accepted and embraced her new position and the power it affords her and refuses to relinquish these.

Egwene also expressly rejects the common heroine's position of the hero's lover. While Aviendha, Elayne, and Min's romantic relationship with Rand is one of the defining facets of their characters, Jordan seems to go out of his way to eschew traditional power dynamics in Egwene's romantic relationships. In *The Eye of the World* the reader learns that in their small town, Rand and Egwene were always expected to marry. In *The Great Hunt*, Rand, musing about his old life, reveals that "He had grown up thinking he would marry Egwene one day; they both had" (1990: 36). This is curious, since in *The Eye of the World*, when Rand says people shouldn't marry just because they are old enough, Egwene responds "Of course not. Or ever, for that matter" (1990: 37). Egwene then tells Rand that she wants to study to become a Wisdom and that "A Wisdom almost never marries" (1990: 37). While Egwene and

Rand eventually decide they are better off as friends, Egwene is clearly willing to forego a romantic relationship in order to pursue her own ambitions.

Egwene not only rejects a romantic relationship with the hero, she also eschews the traditional marriage plot. While studying at the White Tower, Egwene meets and falls in love with Gawyn Trakand, Elayne's brother; however, they spend much of the series apart, and once Egwene becomes the Amyrlin Seat, she is reluctant to pursue her relationship with Gawyn without clear expectations. This is due in large part to his inability to fully recognize her power and authority as Amyrlin. When he complains that she is acting too formally and stand-offish in their interactions, she tells him that "The Amyrlin cannot be served by those who refuse to see her authority" (2010: 111). When he assures her that he accepts her authority and tells her that it is important for people who know her to see Egwene and not just the Amyrlin, she replies "So long as they know that there is a place for obedience. . . . You aren't ready yet, Gawyn. I'm sorry" (2010: 111). Egwene is explicitly unwilling to cede any of her power or authority, even to the man she loves. This hesitancy to follow a traditional path to marriage is in keeping with her character given Egwene's ambitions and desires. Casey A. Cothran notes that "To achieve heroic status, women often must reject behaviors that would result in social validation" (2014: 130), like marriage. It is not until Gawyn nearly dies thwarting an assassination attempt in *Towers of Midnight* that Egwene bonds him as her Warder[66] (and this is only after he obeyed an order she

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[66] Warders are highly skilled fighters who are also trained at the White Tower in Tar Valon. An Aes Sedai may bond a Warder, or Warders. This bond allows both Aes Sedai and Warder to "sense" each other's emotional state, physical well-being, and general location. The death of an Aes Sedai often results in death for her Warder as he loses the will to live. Sometimes being bonded by another Aes Sedai can prevent this.

gave him that he did not agree with, demonstrating his ability to follow her commands

despite his disagreement). She does not marry him until *A Memory of Light*. The

marriage is almost a non-event in the narrative. It is disclosed in passing:

> He was her husband, now. The marriage had been performed by Silviana in a
>
> simple ceremony the night before. It still felt a bit odd to know that Egwene
>
> had authorized her own wedding. When you were the highest authority, what
>
> else could you do? (2013: 218).

While Egwene's marriage does fully inscribe her into a heteronormative

pairing, this union comes only after very explicit power negotiations in which Egwene

demands that Gawyn accept and obey her as Amyrlin. Even the marriage is posited in

terms of Egwene's power—it is not a patriarchal religion or society that validates their

union, but Egwene herself as the most powerful person available. This makes

containing Egwene's power through a romantic relationship impossible—the romantic

relationship she chooses only augments and foregrounds her power. It also precludes

this as a way to subsume her narrative under that of the hero's—Egwene's relationship

with Gawyn does not benefit Rand in any way.

Egwene consistently operates outside of the influence of Rand as hero, in some

cases working expressly against his goals, and establishes an independent narrative

that does not seem to necessarily depend upon Rand. While she is not the only person

who is occasionally at odds with the hero, she is the only other major character who

holds a position of power that comes close to equaling his. Their pasts also connect

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The death of a Warder causes severe emotional distress for an Aes Sedai that may take
years to recover from. Elayne Trakand bonds Birgitte Silverbow as the series' only
female Warder.

them and allow them to talk as equals—she knows him as Rand the farmboy, not Rand the Dragon Reborn. When he first decides to break the seals that hold the Dark One in prison, Egwene disagrees with this plan, and as Amyrlin begins to strategize a way to stop him. She says

> There may be a time to break the seals, but that time is not at the start of the Last Battle, whatever Rand thinks. We must wait for the right moment, and as the Watcher of the Seals, it is my duty to choose that moment. I won't risk the world on one of Rand's overly dramatic stratagems (2012: 84).

While Egwene recognizes Rand's role and importance, she is unwilling to cede responsibility or power that is rightfully hers simply because Rand occupies a prophesized position as the Dragon Reborn. But despite their disagreements, it is also clear that Egwene and Rand never become enemies.

Elayne, Aviendha, and Min are protected by their romantic relationship to Rand—their narratives clearly work to support his, and their romantic ties place them clearly within the patriarchal system. But Egwene is not. Nearly everything she accomplishes and does is in opposition to a patriarchal ideal that is so often reinforced in Fantasy novels—her romantic relationship, her ascension to power, her fortitude, her prominence within the series, and her unwillingness to acquiesce to Rand as hero all set her apart from the other magical women in the novel. And she is powerful. Not only powerful in magic, but she is strong, resilient, smart, cunning, and compassionate. And she is the leader of the most powerful and influential group that exists, the Aes Sedai. Like Rand, Perrin, Mat, and Nynaeve she leaves a small farming town for a world of greater adventure. She learns to master *saidar*, makes alliances

and forms bonds with others, faces intense trials and perseveres, and fights the forces of evil. This seems a great accomplishment, and leagues of improvement from magical women characters who barely function within the narrative, acting only as donors or helpers along the hero's journey. And in many ways it is—credit should be given to Jordan (and Sanderson) for creating a character as dynamic and strong as Egwene. But, and there is of course a but, *The Wheel of Time* seems unable or unwilling to allow Egwene to co-exist alongside the *real* hero's journey at the culmination of the series. The narrative expectations of the hero's journey, that have already been established as belonging to Rand, require that his quest takes precedence and so, somehow, Egwene's narrative must be re-integrated into his own.

Killing off Women and The Death of Egwene

If interlace narratives typically support the hero's journey, and magical women in particular need to be contained within the narrative, traditional Fantasy narrative expectations say that Egwene ultimately has to be re-integrated and subsumed back under Rand's heroic quest. Because she is not romantically linked with him, and in her interactions with him as Dragon Reborn she is explicitly concerned with the fate of the White Tower independent of whether Rand succeeds or not, her narrative is circumscribed through her death, finally placing Egwene into the role of donor, though a unique one.

Utilizing a female character in this way is not new or uncommon. Killing off women in order to motivate other male characters, or to simply move the plot along, has a long history and continues to be a common trope found in film and television.

Shakespeare arguably does this with Ophelia in *Hamlet*.[67] And, I think, one could also make the argument that Cordelia's death in *King Lear* functions primarily in order to push Lear over the edge—her death gives him the chance for not only revenge, but a more dramatic death (onstage). Bertha's death in Jane Eyre conveniently clears up the main obstacle keeping Jane and Rochester apart, allowing the marriage plot to move forward. As a trope in television, it is particularly popular. This plot device has come under recently renewed scrutiny, as a number of popular female characters were killed off seemingly en masse on a number of different shows and networks in 2016. Carly Lane of *The Mary Sue* writes that what makes a number of these "deaths even more disturbing is that there's every indication they were used to advance the story of the male leads" (2016). Movies also frequently deploy this tactic. Just about all of the Bond women serve this purpose.

One of the most recognized and written about ways this trope manifests is through comics. While there are some obvious differences between the hero of Fantasy and the superhero, they both function as the main protagonist within their respective fantasy narratives and draw heavily on the concept of the hero's journey, which makes the comparison to the comic book world particularly apt. Egwene's death clearly echoes issues of gender in comic books in the way the death of female characters is used by the male hero for motivation, usually as the impetus for him to seek Revenge. This trend is illuminated by comic book author Gail Simone and her list

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[67] The whole of Shakespeare scholarship on these characters is, of course, outside of the scope of this project. While there is doubtless debate over how Ophelia function within stories, there are critics who argue that Ophelia's main function is to motivate Hamlet through her death. See Wagner 1963, and

of "women in refrigerators."[68] Penny Griffin writes that "the verb 'to fridge' refers to the concept of killing off a female character 'solely for the purpose of giving the story's main male hero a reason to angst'" (2015: 126). Simone's website compiles a list of women in comic books who were killed off as a plot device, often to motivate another (male) character, and most commonly, the hero.[69] In this way, female characters, no matter how compelling their plot, are always in a sense "up for grabs" if a male character is in need of motivation. The popularity of this strategy within different genres supports the idea that it is the structural primacy of the hero's journey, and the tradition of casting women as donor/helpers, that encourages authors to put female characters to use in this way.

While I have argued that Egwene's death is primarily a way to re-absorb a narrative that had gained too much primacy in challenging the hero's own journey, it is also ultimately what allows Rand to defeat the Dark One. In this way, her death not only neutralizes her power, it also serves as a necessary facet of the hero's journey, thereby re-integrating the interlace narrative into the main quest—her death becomes an integral part of Rand triumphing over the Dark One. Egwene thus essentially enters the designation of donor, as she gifts Rand her life and, like other helpers, is ultimately

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[68] "Women in Refrigerators" is a rather simple website that consists mainly of a list compiled by Simone. On the homepage, Simone explains that "This is a list I made when it occurred to me that it's not that healthy to be a female character in comics." After compiling the list, Simone contacted a number of comic writers asking for their thoughts on what this list might mean. A number of these responses are included on her website.

[69] The phrase "women in refrigerators" was inspired by the issue of *Green Lantern* where the corpse of the titular character's girlfriend is literally left inside a refrigerator for Green Lantern to find by one of the villains of the series. The list also includes female characters who have been raped, depowered, incapacitated, brainwashed, or otherwise violently treated.

"place[d] . . . at the disposal of the hero" (Propp 1968: 45). Her death in the Last

Battle is heroic and selfless and a great display of power. This in itself is not an unfit

end to a heroic character; however, Egwene is the *only* main character that dies. Rand

and Elayne, Aviendha and Min (his three lovers), Perrin and his wife, Mat and his

future wife, and Nynaeve and her husband, all survive. Egwene's death is also

reintegrated into Rand's quest as motivation for completing his journey, conveniently

casting her as a donor at the last minute. Immediately following the explosion of

power coming from Egwene, Sanderson writes:

> Egwene died.

> Rand screamed in denial, in rage, in sorrow.

> 'Not her! NOT HER!' (2013: 795).

Egwene's death is what pushes Rand over the edge and causes him to momentarily

give up. It is when he lets go of his feelings of responsibility for Egwene, and others

that he was unable to save, that he is able to beat the Dark One. In his moment of

acceptance, Rand "let them be heroes" (2013: 808). This gives Rand the reserves to

finally stand up to the Dark One, ultimately defeating him.[70] Egwene's gift is not a

physical object imbued with her spiritual essence, it is her entire essence, her life, a

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[70] Rand does not "vanquish" the Dark One. Rand and the Dark One battle on a more
metaphysical plain where the Dark One attacks Rand's soul. They fabricate different
visions of the world and what would possibly come if each won the battle. Finally,
Rand creates a world where there is no Dark One; however, there is something wrong
with the people there. The Dark One explains that once men turn to the Dark, they
cannot choose good, and by making a world where people *cannot* choose evil, Rand
has taken something from them. Instead of eradicating the Dark One, Rand reseals the
Bore so he cannot escape and completely take over. Rand realizes that the Dark One's
ability to influence the world was ultimately due to human beings and the choices they
make. He maintains the balance in the Pattern, recognizing that the Dark One is only
as powerful as individual human beings allow him to be.

sacrifice which Rand receives and uses. Thus, Egwene becomes a donor/helper: donating her life (or death) in order to assist the hero with his final trial.

There is more than a little irony to the fact that Egwene's death is literally caused by her acquisition of too much power. And this power comes to her through magic. At the point at which her narrative threatens to challenge the primacy of the hero's journey, or complete its own arc, the narrative is ended, and ended in such a way that the hero can reintegrate her story into his own. The singularity of her death is also striking. She is, as previously noted, the only main character to die. She is also the only main character who ventures so far outside of the narrative umbrella of the hero's journey. What is also striking, is that Egwene's death is largely unnecessary. Of course, death is often used in a meaningful way to create emotional weight through exploring a universal truth of life. And in an ultimate battle between good and evil, it makes sense that not everyone will make it, that there will be heroic sacrifice and painful loss. But killing Egwene, and killing *only* Egwene (out of the main characters), then using her death as the push Rand needs to complete his own journey, is too convenient, especially given her position as the one major magical woman not clearly subsumed under the hero's journey and echoes too clearly the magical woman as donor/helper. Surely the same emotional weight could have been achieved through any of the other character's deaths. What Egwene's death does achieve is the re-establishment of the hero's journey as the primary journey of the Fantasy series. This maintains the narrative effect of clearly foregrounding Rand's battle with The Dark One as the final and most important culmination of the hero's quest, preserving the generic convention that celebrates the male-centered journey.

Egwene's gift to Rand differs significantly from the more traditional gift-exchange other magical women engage in, where, like in *The Lord of the Rings*, magical objects are given in exchange for the hero's eventual triumph. It resembles more clearly the exchange offered by the helper, where time, emotional support, and physical intimacy are given to the hero in order to assist in his eventual triumph. Like Rand's lovers, Egwene donates her body to his quest, allowing him to complete his mission. Thus, Egwene is both donor and helper, but will never receive a reciprocal gift. However, Egwene does not die *for* Rand – her gift was not necessarily *to* him. In fact, there was no thought of Rand for Egwene when she died. She was attempting to save other Aes Sedai, defeat the Foresaken M'Hael, and heal the rifts in the pattern caused by Balefire. It is her solidarity with her sisters that propels her forward: she begins her attack because she sees M'Hael "killing women she loved" (2013: 793). In this way, Rand can never give back to her what it was not explicitly her intention to give him. And yet, he accepts the gift of her death and puts it to use because doing so re-integrates her actions into his own narrative and diminishes her own. Taken outside of the narrative of the hero's journey, her death might be more rightly termed a sacrifice, in that the sacrifice "proposes an offering but only in the form of a destruction against which it exchanges, hopes for, or counts on a benefit" (Derrida 1992: 137). However, I would argue that the fact that the helper may donate her body, and narratively Rand immediately utilizes Egwene's death commodifying it within the gift-exchange, she is effectively re-written as a donor/helper.

As Dégh notes, "The *Märchen* is, in fact, an adventure story with a *single* hero" (1972: 63 emphasis added). Additionally, the epic stories that so clearly

influence Fantasy share this feature. Hector is important in the *Illiad*, but Achilles is our hero. We might know what Telemachus and Penelope are doing, but the tale clearly belongs to Odysseus. There are a number of brave fighters in his retinue, but it is Beowulf alone who can kill the monsters. The same is true in most lore. Merlin and Morgan la Fay, Guinivere and Lancelot are compelling, but Arthur is our King and the tale is his—the other characters serve mainly to shape his journey. If we return to Propp's division of characters into seven different types that correspond to how the characters interact with the structure of the plot of the folk-tale, it is clear that it is too inflexible to account for every tale,[71] but his structuralist approach offers a way to examine how characters in folk-tale must satisfy particular roles within the narrative. Women in general, and magical women in particular, have not made as much headway as one might expect in expanding and challenging their prescribed roles. *The Lord of the Rings* clearly makes use of these character "types" and their functions, as does *The Wheel of Time*, relegating magical women to largely secondary, supportive roles and using them to shore up the hero's journey and experiences.[72] Despite an expanded number of female characters, and a character who clearly breaks with traditional depictions of magical women, *The Wheel of Time* is still unable to completely liberate the magical woman from a mostly secondary role that exists only within the sphere of the hero's journey, even if that recuperation must happen at the very end.

Conclusion

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[71] See Kafalenos 1997 and Bremond and Verrier 1984.

[72] Function is "an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action" (1968: 21). For Propp, function is the fundamental unit of the folktale, and they remain independent of who fulfills them or how they do so.

By way of conclusion, I'd like to return to an example first given in the previous chapter in more depth in order to underscore the pervasiveness of this narrative structure and the compulsion to reintegrate and re-subsume an errant magical woman's narrative, even when the authors are explicitly attempting to create a powerful female character. The character of Tauriel in Peter Jackson's film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* is a clear continuation of this trend, despite the fact that the need for strong female characters was at the forefront in the minds of not only fans and critics, but the creators as well.

Due to the striking lack of female characters in the original novel, Jackson specifically created the character of Tauriel as, according to co-screenwriter Philippa Boyens, "We could feel the weight of that gender imbalance," an imbalance only made more apparent once it was to be put on screen (Sacks 2014). One of the Mirkwood forest elves, Tauriel would both expand this part of the narrative as well as "bring some more female energy to the otherwise male-dominated Hobbit narrative" (Rottenberg 2013). They make Tauriel the head of the Elven Guard and an accomplished fighter. She also fearlessly stands for what she believes is right, despite it going against her King and Legolas, who is both the king's son and her childhood friend. In *The Desolation of Smaug*, Thranduil has implemented a policy of isolation, choosing not to become involved in the outside world. Legolas echoes this when Tauriel attempts to follow the orcs who are hunting Bilbo and the Dwarves. The following exchange takes place:

Legolas: It is not our fight.

Tauriel: It is our fight. It will not end here. With every victory this evil will

grow. If your father has his way, we will do nothing. We will hide within our

walls, live our lives away from the light and let darkness descend. Are we not

part of this world? Tell me, *mellon*, when did we let evil become stronger than

us? (Jackson 2013)

Given these descriptions of her character, it would seem that Jackson and the writers

have succeeded in their goal—Tauriel is a more than competent fighter, she has strong

moral convictions, and she is not afraid to stand up to those in power for what she

believes is right. She also uses powerful elf magic to heal one of the dwarves who had

been cut with a poison blade. This is exactly what we saw in Egwene—a strong,

compelling, powerful magical woman. Unfortunately, despite their explicitly stated

intentions with adding this character, Jackson is still unable to break free from the

narrative expectations established by Tolkien for magical women.[73] While Tauriel's

re-integration into the male dominated narrative is not achieved through her death, it is

achieved through a common approach—she becomes part of a love triangle and

eventually must be rescued by one of her suitors.[74]

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[73] Comic books also have this particular tendency in common with many Fantasy
novels—strong women, when integrated into male (heroic) narratives have their power
reduced and contained through subsuming her narrative and casting her as helper. As
Gary Westfahl notes, "when Wonder Woman began spending time with other male
heroes, her status and message were considerably altered. Despite her awesome
powers, she joined the Justice Society of America as its 'secretary,' not a full-fledged
member" (1993).

[74] While not a magical woman, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Éowyn suffers a similar fate.
Defying her father and gendered expectations, Éowyn disguises herself as a soldier
and goes to fight with Rohan against Mordor. During the Battle of the Pelennor Fields,
she manages to kill the Witch-king of Angmar, lord of the Nazgül, a prophecy
hundreds of years in the making. After the battle, Faramir falls in love with her and
eventually confesses this to her. She responds "I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor

Tauriel has not only one, but two, love interests within the trilogy. Jess Collett notes that she falls into the Beaton syndrome. Named after Kate Beaton, this describes the tendency for strong women in films to be "pushed into a relationship with one of the convenient men around her for no apparent reason" (2013).[75] And Tauriel finds herself in this love triangle despite the actress Evangeline Lily's request that Jackson specifically not do this. First, Legolas, the Prince of Mirkwood, obviously has feelings for her despite the fact that she is a sylvan elf and his father makes it clear they have no future. Second, she falls for Kili, one of the dwarves in Thorin's company. On the face of things, her relationship with Kili is not completely objectionable and is in keeping with her tendency to defy expectations. Elves and dwarves are not on the friendliest of terms and are not known to fraternize. Tauriel and Kili also have real chemistry and their flirtations are not overplayed. This relationship alone would not have been a major issue. However, Tauriel is not one of the heroes of Middle Earth, Legolas is.

In the final battle between the orcs and the dwarves in *The Battle of Five Armies*, Tauriel single-handedly fights her way through a number of orcs to get to Kili. When they finally find each other, Tauriel is attacked by Bolg, one of the orc leaders, who she battles alone until he gets the upper hand. It is at this point that Kili appears, but Bolg kills Kili while Tauriel watches. As Bolg walks over to kill Tauriel, she grabs him and throws both him and herself off a ledge. While she is lying hurt, Bolg

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vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren" (1955: 943).

[75] Collett also notes that Tauriel is the token woman on display and asks where the elves of Mirkwood are hiding all of their other women (2013).

manages to climb over to her; however, Legolas sees this and walks across a falling tower to fight him and save Tauriel. Legolas manages to kill Bolg, thereby saving Tauriel, and jump to safety. When he looks for Tauriel, she is already gone. Her last scene in the movie is her crying over Kili's body, talking with Thranduil about the pain that sometimes accompanies true love. This scene is also reappropriated by Legolas' narrative, as it serves as the catalyst for him to leave Mirkwood and seek out Aragorn. Tauriel's narrative is thus utilized as motivation for the quest that takes place in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The writers could have kept Tauriel from the clichéd ending of first needing to be rescued and then weeping over the body of her lover. Allowing Tauriel to best Bolg in combat (there are countless indications in both films that Tauriel is as, if not more, of an accomplished fighter as Legolas) would have been more narratively fulfilling and more in keeping with Tauriel's character development than having Legolas come rescue her. But this would not re-focus Tauriel's story and loss through the perspective of one of the male heroes in the way having Legolas rescue her, then seeing her with Kili's body, does. As Collett notes, "All that she does must be joined with a thick line to a man, denying her agency of her own. She does not achieve the noble aim of diversifying Middle Earth" (2013). And it so easily could have been otherwise.

Simple misogyny is not a satisfactory explanation for this compulsion to subjugate the narratives of magical women to their male counterparts. This is especially true given the relative strength and autonomy of these magical women prior to their re-integration into the male hero's journey. Looking at these choices as part of a long narrative tradition of imagining the magical woman in a secondary role as

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donor or helper in order to contain her relative power within the texts helps to explain

the instinct to, in these narratives that borrow so heavily from Tolkien who borrows so

heavily from other fantasy works, value the primacy of the hero's quest above all other

narratives and to see those narratives that do not clearly tie in or support this central

journey as problematic or unresolved, particularly when these narratives feature

magical women.

Chapter 3

"Tell me, how good is Tattersail?": Magical Women in Egalitarian (and Not-So-Egalitarian) Worlds

"Since the earliest days of humanity, witches have been admired, adored, loved, feared, trusted, mistrusted, loathed, persecuted, killed, lusted after, and worshipped. Every culture around the world acknowledges the existence of witches, or at the very least recognizes some kind of witch" (Illes 2010: 7).

In the first chapter, I discussed how the narrative approach of Tolkien in *Lord of the Rings* helped to establish many of the literary conventions of modern Fantasy. And in the second chapter, I examined how these narrative structures encourage the magical woman to be cast as donor/helper, relegating her to archetypal character roles regardless of how progressive her own narrative is. Even though the presence of magical women in Fantasy has become more expansive, the second chapter highlights the tension between relatively powerful, fully developed female characters and the narrative expectations of the genre. In works like the *Wheel of Time*, where the various interlace narratives all converge on the hero's story much like streams feeding into a river, the hero's quest takes clear precedence, forcing all other narrative strains to in some way support his own.[76] This demand to support the hero's quest necessarily overtakes the narratives of secondary characters. This is supported by the traditional functions that most of these characters serve as donor, guide, hero, etc. This is precisely what occurs with Egwene in Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* who,

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[76] Even in works that are lauded for their departure from this central hero's narrative, the impulse to have narrative strains converge in a "final battle" is a strong one. Mark Napolitano argues that even George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series does seem to be approaching a final battle with the Others, given the progression of the titles and the fact he opened the series with the Night's Watch and the Others. Like medieval narratives, this progression has not been linear (2015: 38). While one central overriding narrative/hero is harder to identify, the drive to convergence prohibits diversity and privileges a narrative structure that relies on a male hero.

despite being a fully formed character, was ultimately recast as a magical donor and integrated into the hero's quest.

As I have demonstrated, Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* often reads as "too traditional" and relies too much on the approach laid out by Tolkien and we can perhaps lay some of the blame for Egwene's fate on that fact, but in this chapter I turn to two works that do not suffer this fate, George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*[77] and Steven Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen.*[78] These two series represent the ways in which new structural and narratological approaches work to reject Tolkien-inspired hero narratives.[79] Instead of pulling from folktale and myth, as

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[77] Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* was already a popular series among Fantasy readers before *HBO* released A *Game of Thrones*, but the popularity of the show made Martin a household name. Because of the success of the cable series, there is considerable (at least for a Fantasy work) critical scholarship on Martin's work. While *HBO* is a cable channel, its history of producing quality shows and its ability to reach an audience that does not typically read Fantasy helped to mainstream Martin's work.

[78] While *Malazan Book of the Fallen* might sound like a singular book, it is the name of the entire series. Each book has a separate title, but is part of the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*. Erikson is clearly situating his work in relation to literary culture. In the final book, in the face of apparently certain death, one of the Malazan marines thinks to himself: "*And ignorant historians will write of us, the guise of knowledge. They will argue over our purpose—the things we sought to do . . . The will compose a Book of the Fallen. And then argue over its significance*" (2011: 329). The book is referenced again by the Crippled God himself. As he is chained and in protecting him, the Malzan army is slaughtered around him, he thinks: "*There shall be a Book and it shall be written by my hand*" (2011: 873). Of course, the Crippled God is ultimately killed, leaving Fiddler's prediction as to how the *Malazan Book of the Fallen* came to be. This kind of meta-level self-reflection is not uncommon throughout the series—there are a number of historians and bards who continuously comment on the unreliability of such accounts.

[79] Like most texts in this study, little has been written on *Malazan.* This is particularly unsurprising, as each book averages over 1,000 pages and the core series consists of ten books. The shortest, *Gardens of the Moon*, clocks in at a breezy 666 pages, whereas the last five books exceed 1,200 pages each (page numbers were taken from the mass market paperback editions published by Tor). Peter Melville notes that "Apart from a single journal article published in the now defunct *Studies in Fantasy Literature*, a couple of MA theses, and a handful of academic conference

Tolkien does, Erikson and Martin are influenced by history and gaming, respectively. This encourages both to reject the singular hero's quest for a more complex, multi-narrative approach with no clear central protagonist. However, each work accomplishes something markedly different when it comes to their magical women: Martin's reliance on a historical approach relegates his magical woman to a supporting role more reminiscent of the donor/helper as he replicates many of the patriarchal assumptions concerning the Medieval period, while Erikson, influenced by the more egalitarian structure found in role-playing games, constructs a world in which magical women's narratives are of equal importance and influence to any other character's narrative.

Placing Martin's and Erikson's texts in conversation underscores the ways in which Fantasy is experimenting with complex and innovative narrative structures by expanding the number of point of view characters and eschewing a singular, unifying narrative. Both texts reject the "happily ever after" or "Good triumphs over Evil" expectations that accompany the hero of much fantasy literature. Instead, their stories are gritty and violent, where heroes may die and villains may prosper, where good/evil distinctions are not quite as clear as they once were, and, while battles may be won, there is often no clear resolution, no great victory through which to justify sacrifice,

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presentations, one finds only occasional references and respectful nods to the complexity and depth of Erikson's series within the field of fantasy studies" (2015: 276). He goes on to say that one of the aims of his article on being and bearing witness in the series is "to rekindle the spark of serious academic interest in Erikson's writings in the fantasy genre. For not only do his Malazan novels probe the limits and boundaries of the genre in ways that render them comparable to the works of Michael Moorcock, Patricia A. McKillip, Gene Wolfe, and even China Miéville; but they also productively imagine and contrast subtle yet meaningful philosophical distinctions" (2015: 276).

and nothing that restores the land. If, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the role of magical women is constrained in many Fantasy narratives due to structural and narrative expectations, then works that challenge these expectations should also present new expressions of magical women. But, at least in Martin's case, this chapter will show that simply rejecting the hero's quest as the central organizing aspect of a narrative does not guarantee that no other patriarchal narrative influence will not manifest itself. Because Martin and Erikson both utilize multiple points of view, though to slightly different effects, this chapter will first examine how this approach functions within Fantasy in general and these two works specifically. After outlining Martin's and Erikson's use of point of view narrative, this chapter compares two point of view characters who are also magical women and the ways in which multiple points of view liberate (or don't) these characters. Unfortunately, although Martin's series does re-imagine many of the tropes found in Fantasy texts, he re-inscribes his magical woman, Melisandre, within the patriarchal narrative of "the witch," thereby dulling the liberating effect of his rejection of other narrative impulses. Erikson's magical *women* do not suffer the same fate. To demonstrate this, I will focus on Tattersail, one of the cadre mages of the Malazan army. Despite both authors using multiple points of view and eschewing a clear hero/protagonist, Erikson creates a narrative in which magical women break free from narrative expectations.

As this chapter will demonstrate, this divergence is due to a number of interconnected factors: their point of view narrative approach; their world-building strategies; and, their approach to magic. Multiple point of view narrative strategies, while not uncommon in Fantasy, are put to new and innovative uses in both of these

texts. In their world-building, Martin relies heavily on historical realism, while

Erikson draws from his experiences playing tabletop role-playing games which

imposes different narrative expectations. And, perhaps most importantly for their

female characters, their approach to magic is vastly different: Martin's reliance on

history often overshadows his utilization of magic, while Erikson's world is

extrapolated out from an egalitarian view of magic, leading to more gender parity

throughout his entire world. The complex way each of these different aspects interact

with each other is essential to understanding the very different fates of Martin's and

Erikson's magical women.

Multiple Points of View: Creating Worlds and Perspectives

Telling a story from multiple points of view has a number of benefits, many of

them particularly useful to a work of Fantasy, and even more useful if that work is

secondary world or Epic Fantasy. This is because of the way in which varied points of

view contribute to world-building. Secondary worlds are created worlds, and while

they may resemble places in our world, they are not our world. Making these

secondary worlds believable is one of the core tenets of secondary world-building. It

was of utmost importance to Tolkien, who writes that inside the secondary world

"what [the author] relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You

therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside" (1965: 37). The key is not a

suspension of disbelief, but rather *complete* belief in the truth of the world. And, as a

series expands, so too do many of the worlds. While Tolkien gave the reader Middle-

earth, later series would often create multiple continents and empires that span vast

distances. Each continent and people have different societies and so, to give these

different lands depth and nuance, it is often helpful to have characters from these lands give their perspective.[80] If these lands have particularly hierarchized societies, it might be necessary to give several different points of view from that land in order to flesh out the ways power operates. These points of view act as what Philip Athans terms an observer, giving context for the invented world (2011). For example, in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Connor Goldsmith argues that each new point of view introduces an aspect that no other character would be able to provide, and is therefore essential (2016).[81] Thus, telling these stories from multiple perspectives becomes almost necessary.[82] But utilizing multiple points of view can be a risky undertaking, and what we will eventually see is that while Martin adheres at least structurally to traditional multiple point of view approaches, Erikson rejects all of the conventional wisdom on how to make multiple point-of-view narratives work.

While we often talk in terms of multiple points of view within a narrative, what we are generally referring to are multiple perspectives or focalizers.[83] Point of view

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[80] As Martin has also noted, characters are often hundreds or thousands of miles apart, and this makes sequential chapters difficult as often action is occurring simultaneously, just in different areas (Napolitano 2015: 40). The multiple point of view approach, while often eschewing a strictly chronological progression, allows for a more complete telling of what is happening within the created world.

[81] For example, Theon becomes a major point of view character as he is the only one who can get the reader to the Iron Islands, new point of view characters are introduced in order to show the reader Dorn, and Davos introduces the reader to Stannis and the ways in which he rules, etc. (2016).

[82] Of course, single point of view narratives are also popular, but to those who believe that single point of view is more personal or immediate, Athans warns that it can also be more limiting: "I like to call this trap the John Carter, Arrogant Douchebag of Mars effect. These first-person narratives often backed Mr. Burroughs into a corner in which he had to describe the superhuman awesomeness of his hero in the hero's own voice" (2011).

[83] Perhaps the most in-depth study of focalization is Mieke Bal's analysis of and response to Gerard Genette's 1980 work *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*.

tends to remain constant throughout a work of literature. For example, *Malazan* is told

in a limited third-person omniscient point of view. However, the character through

whose perspective we experience the action, or the focalizer, changes. Because

Erikson shifts so dramatically and without warning between focalizers so that often

the character whose perspective is being shown is hard to determine (sometimes they

are revealed only at the end right before the narrative shifts to another character), the

ability to speak of the third person narrator as well as focalizers is a useful distinction.

While I will use point of view in its commonly used sense to mean perspective, when

Genette argues that a clear distinction between mood and voice has yet to be made. He believes that theorists "have failed to distinguish between '*mood* and *voice*, that is to say, between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective*? and the very different question *who is the narrator*?'" (Culler 1980: 10). The narrator does not necessarily change, but the narrative can be focalized through a character when the narrative is told from the point of view of that particular character. The question of whether this character is also the narrator speaking in first person, or a third person[83] narrator who speaks of the character, is a question of voice, not point of view. Genette further breaks this focalization into three groups: zero focalization "corresponds to what English-language criticism calls narrative with omniscient narrator and Pouillon 'vision from behind,' and which Todorov symbolizes by the formula Narrator > Character (where the narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly, says more than any of the characters knows)"; in internal focalization the "Narrator = Character (the narrator says only what a given character knows)"; finally, in external focalization the "Narrator < Character (the narrator says less than the character knows)" (1980: 188–89). Bal would further clarify the distinction between zero focalization and internal focalization as the agent that sees the story. This would be the narrator in the former, and a character in the latter. Bal eventually winds up with two distinct systems: two types of focalization (internal/character bound and external [zero and external combined]), and two types of things focalized (imperceptible things or "psychological material" and perceptible things that one can see, hear, taste, touch, smell, etc.) (Bal 2006: 18-19). By treating the agents of focalization and voice in isolation, Bal sees a concealing of the "parallelism of their organization in narrative" (2006: 19). *Malazan,* along with most texts that employ third-person narration with shifting focalizers (like *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Wheel of Time*, and *A Song of Ice and Fire*) can most precisely be categorized as a narrative with internal focalization, that is, the story is told from the viewpoint of the character—we see only what they see, and know only what they know.

making a distinction between narrative that is clearly in third person and narrative that

is told through a character's perspective, focalizer becomes a useful term.

Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series follows a fairly traditional multiple

point of view narrative pattern in switching from chapter to chapter, a strategy also

employed by Robert Jordan in *The Wheel of Time*.[84] Each chapter is titled for the

character through whom the narrative is focalized.[85] *A Game of Thrones* has eight

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[84] *The Wheel of Time* also utilized multiple points of view and had a world that was fundamentally imbued with magic, but because of its indebtedness to the single hero's journey, magical women were still constrained. And, as we will see, Martin, like Erikson, will eschew the single hero's journey through multiple points of view narrative, but his particular approach to world-building seems to likewise constrain his magical woman.

[85] There seems to be a general consensus among online forums, fans of fantasy, and writing workshops that multiple points of view should be limited and clearly delineated. Philip Athans cautions that there shouldn't be a new point of view every few paragraphs and suggests that hero, villain, and observer are a good trio of point of views to offer readers. The hero and villain provide two sides to the main conflict, and the observer provides context for this struggle within the invented world. Of course, the length of the work also matters, and Athans writes that "as many as a dozen different well-managed and strongly-motivated POV's in a very long novel is fine" (2011). Goldsmith argues that in most cases writers should not exceed six point of view characters and, if one feels the need for more than six, to make sure every point of view is absolutely necessary for advancing the story (2016). The character whose point of view is presented should be the one who is most emotionally impacted by the event. He uses Martin's *A Game of Thrones* as an example of a novel with more than six point of view characters that works successfully, as Martin only adds a new point of view character when he needs to describe what is happening at a location where he does not already have another point of view present, an argument we will return to momentarily. S.E. Sinkhorn suggests that authors use only one point of view per chapter, "In order to avoid the dreaded head-hopping, which will horribly confuse your reader" (2011). If a shift within a chapter is absolutely necessary, it should be done at a natural scene break and using a line break to signal the shift to the reader. Randy Ingermanson insists that if you do have multiple point of view characters, one of them should be the most important one. He uses as his example *The Lord of the Rings*: "the main character is Frodo. Of course, there was a long stretch in THE TWO TOWERS where we didn't see Frodo. However, we had a stand-in there for him—his two young hobbit friends, Merrie [*sic*] and Pippin. Frodo was never far from their thoughts, and therefore never far from ours" (2010). This approach is obviously replicated in those texts with one hero and supports the integration of interlace

point-of-view characters, *A Clash of Kings* adds an additional point-of-view character for a total of nine, *A Storm of Swords* adds two more for a total of ten, *A Feast for Crows* has thirteen, and *A Dance with Dragons* has eighteen.[86] Throughout the entire series there are thirty unique point of view characters, though some only appear in one book (for example, Ned Stark and Quentyn Martell both die in the same books where they are introduced). Because each character gets their own chapter, the number of chapters equals the number of times point of view shifts back and forth between characters. In order of books, the number of point of view shifts per book are: seventy-two, sixty-one, eighty, forty-five, and sixty-seven (325 shifts in the entire five book series). For comparison, book five of *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, *The Bonehunters*, has seventy unique character points of view, shifting about 400 times (one chapter alone sees almost seventy-five point of view shifts).[87] Of course, having the most focalizers is not a competition, and just because one text has more does not mean it is better. While Martin pushes the number of focalized narrators usually found within Fantasy novels, he still adheres to many of the conventions that make these kinds of novels "easier" to read—each chapter has only one focalized character, and each chapter is clearly titled with the character through whose perspective the reader is

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narratives. While it's clear opinions on multiple point-of-view narrators are varied, most agree that they should not confuse the reader, that it should be easy to determine who is speaking preferably with one point-of-view per chapter, and you should only have as many as you really need to tell your story.

[86] While there are preliminary lists for characters that are planned for *The Winds of Winter*, because this book is not yet completed, it won't factor into these calculations.

[87] As will soon be discussed, it is not always clear who the focalizing character is. For this reason, these numbers are approximate. I used best judgment in assigning when point of view changed and whether or not a section was clearly focalized through a character or served more as simply third-person narration.

about to witness events making shifts between focalized characters clear. Erikson goes even further, taking this fairly common convention and deploying it in a unique, and often destabilizing, way.

Multiple Points of View: Their Effects

Utilizing multiple internal focalization within a text can work in an author's favor, particularly when the story they want to tell has countless moving parts and large numbers of characters as we often see in Epic Fantasy. Martin and Erikson both utilize multiple point of view characters in a number of similar ways. Multiple perspectives help to fully flesh out their created worlds and give their characters depth and complexity. By focalizing the narrative through certain characters, each author is able to relate events that are happening simultaneously, but in places separated by great distances. Each author also utilizes minor characters to present new and different perspectives, which assists in somewhat eschewing a clear hero/good guys and evil one/bad guys, though I would argue in each series it is fairly easy to determine whom one is supposed to root for, despite the fact that even morally ambiguous characters are quite likeable. Both use these characters to increase suspense, forcing the reader to put certain clues together, as focalized characters do not always reveal everything they know, and the reader is able to witness two separate characters operating without knowledge of what each other is doing. As Marc Napolitano demonstrates, having internally focalized point of view characters, who do not always reveal everything they are thinking, is an effective way of creating and prolonging mystery and

tension.[88] Martin makes particular use of the ability of point of view narrators to

influence the fates of other point of view characters despite the fact that their paths

never cross (2015: 39).

Utilizing focalization "as a means of 'restricting' the readers' vision and thus

denying them access to vital plot information" (2015: 47) also allows Martin to not

only generate suspense but also create a build-up to reveals. Napolitano gives the

following convincing example: in Catelyn's first point of view chapter, she overhears

some of the men talking about a dead direwolf found with a broken antler in its throat.

While "dread coiled within her like a snake, . . . she forced herself to smile at this man

she loved, this man who put no faith in signs" (Martin 1996: 21). Though the reader is

not given any further information as to why Catelyn has reacted so strongly to this

information, Napolitano does note that two important clues are revealed: that Catelyn

feels some kind of apprehension regarding the dead wolf and it is connected to the

King's upcoming visit to Winterfell, and that there is some important symbolic

meaning to the direwolf and its death. It is not until later that the reader learns that the

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[88] Napolitano is also careful to make the distinction between Martin's third-person
narrator, and the point of view characters who are not technically narrators. The fact
that the narrator makes little commentary allows it to "disappear behind the colorful
personalities of the POV characters" (2015: 36). It is the POV characters' "ability to
commandeer the narrative's discourse that creates the illusion of narratorial power"
(2015: 36); however, they have no power over events that are out of their control. In
this way, Martin seems to conform to the idea of the "primacy of events." As an
example, Napolitano uses the infamous Red Wedding. While told through Catelyn's
point of view, she has no control over the event itself (2015: 36). However, seeing it
through Catelyn's point of view is essential to conveying the gravity and importance
of the event. Therefore, "the ostensibly 'passive' ability of the POV characters to
perceive and reveal events evolves toward a more significant power: the capacity to
shape, and in fact, create meaning" (2015: 37). Thus, while they do not have the power
to change events, they do have the power to convey to the reader what that event
means and how to interpret it.

sigil of House Baratheon is a stag. However, because this information is revealed in Eddard's point of view chapter, he does not dwell on the possible foreshadowing or omen of the direwolf and stag (2015: 48-49). It is thus left to the reader to make these connections between different point of view narratives and the partial information each reveals in order to more completely comprehend what is happening within the text. Martin may also deny certain characters a point of view in order to maintain the suspense and not reveal information too soon or clearly (2015: 49).

Focalizing the narrative through multiple characters also gives the reader important insight into characters and their motivations. The reader is able to, in a sense, experience the character's choices first-hand. Because the reader is shown the character's thought process, decisions that might appear illogical become understandable. Napolitano points to Sansa Stark as a prime example of the way in which Martin utilizes focalization to engender, if not sympathy, then at least understanding. Despite her selfishness, the reader is at least given a chance to understand why Sansa makes the choices she does (whereas if the reader was given say, only Arya's description, Sansa would certainly fare much worse in the reader's perception).[89] This identification also helps to complicate many of the often unexplored nuances of certain archetypal characters. While it is not unheard of for so-called "evil" characters to be given depth and complexity, they more often than not

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[89] Napolitano likens this technique to Jane Austen, particularly in *Emma*. The fact that people still gravitate towards Emma, even though Austen is often quoted as saying she is making a protagonist no one would like, "has only served to reinforce the power of Austen's narrative technique" (2015: 45). The ability to see things from the character's perspective has a significant effect on the relationship between the reader and character.

remain fairly one dimensional, serving more as an abstracted Evil presence the hero

must confront and overcome.[90] The internally focalized multiple point of view

approach, because it presents the points of view of even unsavory or unlikable

characters, keeps the reader from taking "a fully judgmental position toward the POV

character, as [they] experience [the characters'] moments of self-consciousness, self-

doubt, and even self-loathing," which "facilitates [Martin's] creation of an ambiguous

universe in which monochromatic characters are given a chance to exist in shades of

grey" (Napolitano 2015: 46).[91] By granting point of view chapters to a variety of

characters, both main and secondary, "good" and "bad," likeable and unlikeable,

Martin is departing from one, easily identifiable hero whose main narrative pushes the

story along, into a more complex web of competing, but mutually supporting,

narratives.[92]

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[90] Darken Rahl from Terry Brooks' *Wizards First Rule* is a good example of this. As is the Warlock Lord from *The Sword of Shannara*.

[91] While Martin's text does not follow the traditional hero's quest, I am perhaps less enthusiastic than those who claim his world has no clear good vs. evil dichotomies. I think, especially if one is familiar with Fantasy tropes, that it is fairly easy to distinguish at least a core group of "good guys" and "bad guys." The claim that Martin's world is also amoral or nihilistic is also unconvincing to me. The characters that are easily identifiable as, if not "the hero" then at least the ones we should be rooting for, all have fairly traditional and conservative moral codes. And, while it is certainly possible, I find it unlikely that Jon Snow will not ultimately occupy a role similar to that of hero.

[92] This web of narratives also contributes to the feeling that Martin's text seems to be continually diverging (with the divergence of storylines, the divergence of characters, particularly the Stark children), and, while there will likely be a "climactic convergence," "the slow buildup toward this unification can hardly be described as orderly, particularly according to Tasso's standards" (Napolitano 2015: 39). These shifts between different characters and plotlines recall Italian Renaissance poet Ariosto's claims that suddenly shifting away from the action is motivated by a desire to keep readers entertained, these shifts often occur when the action is getting interesting and, while these interruptions might heighten suspense, the return to that particular story line occurs at such a distance that this effect is largely dissipated.

Erikson also utilizes point of view characters to increase dramatic irony. When it comes to characters' deaths he will often shift focalizers mid scene. Often the story will be focalized through the character that dies, then will shift to a character that is witnessing an unidentifiable person being killed, not realizing who it is. This was done particularly effectively in *Reapers Gale*, when Toc Anaster was killed right when Onos T'oolan comes within visual distance, not realizing he is watching his closest friend die from afar. Or when Tavore kills Sha'ik Reborn in *House of Chains*, never realizing she has just killed her younger sister Felisin. This is particularly heartbreaking given that every decision Tavore makes in the series is with the goal of keeping Felisin safe—she continues to use this as the basis of her choices long after Felisin is dead.

However, Erikson's approach, both narratively and conceptually, is also markedly different from Martin's and most other Fantasy, a fact that is clearly articulated by fans. What is consistently noted is not only the complexity (and difficulty) of Erikson's narrative, but the truly epic nature of his texts. What also contributes to Erikson's unique narrative approach is his impressive scope. The world of Malazan is almost overwhelmingly large, with different regions, cities, and even empires that are so distant as to have never heard of each other. For the first four books the reader follows the exploits of the Malazan army and the expansion of the Malazan Empire. It feels incredibly vast—the army consists of people from a number

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There is also the issue of readers' ability to remember what was last happening with the characters involved in the unfinished story. Rejecting Ariosto's approach to epic poetry, Torquato Tasso attempts to "naturalize" these shifts and emphasizes the importance of a singular plot (Rhu 1993: 42; 119).

of wildly different places. In the fifth book, *Midnight Tides*, Erikson shifts his focus first to Karsa Orlong and the Teblor who live on Genabackis. The book then shifts to an entirely new empire called Lether. The Letherii have never even heard of the Malazan Empire. Nor, it is later revealed, have the Malazan ever heard of the Letherii. Yet each Empire is massive and continually expanding, believing themselves to be the most powerful nation in the world, invading and conquering a host of still other nations and peoples with their own histories and customs. While many works of Fantasy have large, multi-faceted worlds, few authors devote the page length to developing all these unique cultures.

On a message board about multiple points of view series, one user warns: "I've read *Game of Thrones* and had no problem with it. But I dare you to just try a Steven Erikson novel . . . . After the first 100 pages, you won't know who's who or what's what. Heck, I lost track of who were even the 'good guys and the bad guys'" (Mikeackerman 2012). Another reviewer also sums up the intricacy and expansiveness of Erikson's series quite nicely:

> No Fantasy book series is more epic in scope than *The Malazan Book of the Fallen*. His saga combines both military and epic fantasy into a delightful mix. Brilliant prose, epic storylines, gritty realism, fascinating mix of gray characters, Erikson combines the best of George R. Martin with the epic scope of the Greek Classics such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. One word when reading it: epiphany. A refreshing change from the usual Robert Jordan-esque fantasy clones that pop up like weeds these days (Tickld.com).

In his review, Dominic Cilli writes that "Epic is a word often tossed around in the world of fantasy and science fiction, but Steven Erikson has redefined it" (2011), citing the fact that while most Fantasy authors will establish the foundation of their series in part of the first book, or even the entire first book of the series, the foundation of Erikson's series takes almost 4,000 pages to fully develop. Another review on Nethspace.com not only praises the series but also warns that *Malazan's* non-traditional approach to Fantasy might turn-off some readers. The reviewer writes:

> I'm going to state it right out—*The Malazan Book of the Fallen* by Steven Erikson is the most ambitious epic fantasy series ever written—this is both its greatest strength and greatest weakness. Rather than ambition, fans of epic fantasy are much more likely to honor tradition and nostalgia, but the genre has come far from where it was effectively defined by *The Lord of the Rings* and fans have grown as well. These days gritty and subversion seem to be the buzz words of fantasy fans, and while *The Malazan Book of the Fallen* certainly meets both in numerous ways, it really is much more. Ultimately, it's about the human condition and the cost of civilization, but again it's more. The series is also about deception in something of a post-modern, meta-fictional way (2011).

The reviewer goes on to state that while there is foreshadowing in the series, it remains difficult to "see beneath [the] surface." This is because, as another reviewer notes, Erikson rarely recaps or explains why things are happening (ATG Reviews 2016). What most reviewers agree on is that the *Malazan* series is one of the most difficult Fantasy series to read, but that, if one can persevere, is well worth the time.

What also becomes apparent is that, whether good or bad, these reviews generally agree that *Malazan* is lifting the genre into a kind of high literariness. For those that, as the last reviewer noted, respond most to nostalgia, it becomes clear that nostalgia is rooted in those text structures/settings/themes that always already relegate woman to subjection. Erikson manages to take approaches that are staples of the Fantasy genre— large, complex worlds, multiple point of view narratives, an interlace plot—and push them in interesting directions within a series that is squarely within the Epic Fantasy genre.[93]

While the scope of *Malazan* certainly sets it apart from most Fantasy, it is Erikson's approach to multiple point of view narrators that makes the series both so difficult and a truly original contribution to the field (which, as we will soon see, allows for greater variety and innovation in his magical women). As previously mentioned, the frequency with which Erikson switches between focalized characters far outpaces Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (one single book from the *Malazan* series has both more point of view characters and more switches between those characters than Martin's entire five book series). Unlike most other Fantasy authors, like Martin and Jordan, who typically use chapter breaks to switch points of view, Erikson will shift focalized characters multiple times within a chapter. Sometimes, the reader will know almost immediately which character's perspective the narrative has shifted to;

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[93] Out of all the texts dealt with in this dissertation, *Malazan* and *The Wheel of Time* fit the most comfortably within the understood and generally accepted parameters of the Epic Fantasy genre. While no "official" definition exists, Epic Fantasy texts are typically: large in scale, covering the fate of a nation but more often the world of the text; span a long period of time; involve a conflict or conflicts that present a challenge to the protagonist(s); and typically take up several volumes. See: Smith 2013; Jemisin 2010; Clute and Grant 1997.

but often, the reader will not—the narrative will proceed in third person, and it is not

until right before another shift that the character whose perspective the preceding

narrative was focalized through will become clear. Occasionally, the narrative is not

focalized through a character at all, but remains in limited third person, or is split

evenly between two characters whose plots are intertwined at that moment.[94] Erikson

will also sometimes focalize the narrative through animals, though this happens only

rarely.[95] Some characters are introduced and killed within a single focalized section. A

novel like *Ulysses* is probably a more appropriate comparison than *A Song of Ice and

Fire* to the narrative technique Erikson uses, at least as it pertains to the rapidly

shifting multiple point of view narrators.

While Erikson's use of substantially more focalized narrators who shift

frequently is not on its face *better* than other multiple point of view approaches, it

does allow Erikson to achieve a number of things within his text, particularly as it

pertains to including more egalitarian characters. The destabilization that occurs, not

knowing whose point of view is being shown or whether that character is male or

female (one often has to wait for another character to refer to them as "he" or "she"

before their gender is made apparent), keeps the reader from being drawn into the

same old tropes and expectations. This allows Erikson the freedom to create a world

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[94] This is seen in sections focalized through Telorast and Curdle, and Sinn and Grub.
Stormy and Gesler's sections also commonly follow this approach.

[95] During the Awl battle with the Letherii, Erikson begins a section focalized through
Natarkas, but he soon dies. The section then transitions to his horse as focalized
narrator. We follow the horse as it begins running away from the battle with two other
riderless horses. As "the chaos in its heart dwindled, faded, fluttered away" it thinks
"*Free*! *Never*! *Free*! *Never again*!" (2007: 685). Erikson italicizes those thoughts of
freedom, the stylistic shift he uses to indicate characters' inner monologues.

that is less likely to fall into casting characters as types or allowing the plot to become too traditional. With such sustained switching between characters—and so many characters to switch between—a single character's narrative is even harder to point out as "the most important." Erikson creates a work that falls squarely within the Epic Fantasy genre—his secondary world is original, complex, and epic in scope, magic is at the core of the series, and the conflicts that arise have meaningful and lasting consequences—but borrows certain narrative approaches from literary fiction to push the genre in new and interesting directions.

Multiple Points of View: Two Approaches on Magical Women

Unfortunately, using internally focalized, multiple point of view narration does not guarantee a break away from archetypal roles, particularly for magical women. While Martin largely eschews the traditional hero quest narrative, opening up many of the character functions to new, different, and compelling representations, his magical woman is disappointingly predictable—a likely consequence of his world-building and the relative unimportance magic plays in it.[96] Because Martin's magic often feels like

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[96] Daenerys is arguably not a magical woman. While she does bring Kal Drogo back from the dead, the ritual is performed primarily by witches and is presented as one that anyone, if they are willing to assume the risks, could perform. She participates in no other similar acts. Her connection to the dragons brings her closer to being a magical woman, but so far she still seems somewhat unable to communicate with or control them. Nor, does it seem, are her dragons magical. They are mythical creatures, of course, but they themselves do not seem to possess any magic, so her connection to them also does not grant her magical woman status. The *Game of Thrones* fandom wiki does not list Daenerys in their "Notable magical practitioners" section, though Melisandre appears first. The "magic" entry on the *A Song of Ice and Fire* wiki mentions the resurrection of Khal Drogo, but links Daenerys to no other forms of magic. There are hints in *A Dance of Dragons* that Arya might have some kind of warging capabilities, as she seems to dream and see through Nemyria's eyes as well as see through the eyes of the cats in the castle. This is as yet mostly unexplored.

an afterthought (we will see that in many ways it is), it winds up not being terribly

subversive. This does not mean that magic is absent from the world of *A Song of Ice

and Fire*—as Peter O'Leary notes, the three main religions found in the series seem to

align with their own magical systems[97]—and Martin presents the reader with a clear

manifestation of magic through a magical woman, Melisandre.[98] Erikson's magical

women do not suffer the same fate—it is difficult to point to any female character that

falls into a stereotypical portrayal. Tattersail is a clear example of the unique and

multifaceted female characters within *Malazan*. This difference is clearly seen in the

opportunities Martin and Erikson afford these magical women to narrate their own

stories and the ways in which they conform to patriarchal (and often misogynist)

characterizations of magical women. It is impossible to separate out which individual

aspect of their narrative approach results in their disparate approaches to magical

women. By presenting these two texts—that are similar and yet vastly different—next

to each other for comparison, the ways in which the vestiges of patriarchy inform the

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[97] The north worships the old gods of the wood, R'hllor, the Lord of Light, is an almost cult-like religion imported from Essos, and the dominant religion is that of the Seven, with seven gods for seven kingdoms.

[98] Magic is consistently alluded to throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and is constantly seething under the surface, but Martin does not populate his world with wizards, mages, or spellcasters. A Skinchanger (or warg) is certainly some kind of magic, allowing a person to enter the mind of an animal (or in Bran's case, the mind of Hodor), but there is no extended examination of how this works. Jojen Reed has greensight, or prophetic dreams. The godswoods of the old gods clearly possess some kind of magic, but what or how it can be used has yet to be fully explored—the greenseers are said to be able to see through the eyes of the weirwood, and we see some of this with Bran. The Others are more mythical creatures than magical ones. Maester Luwin even tells Bran, "Perhaps magic was once a mighty force in the world, but no longer. What little remains is no more than the wisp of smoke that lingers in the air after a great fire has burned out, and even that is fading" (Martin 1999: 332). One does sense, though, that as the storylines begin to converge, magic in the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* might come to play a larger role as prophecies are fulfilled.

genre are highlighted, even when authors believe they are subverting them. Both

Melisandre and Tattersail represent conventional magical women types found

throughout Fantasy literature, that of the witch and the mage, but their realization by

these two authors is markedly different. The way they are physically portrayed, their

relationships with other characters, the amount of space given for their own point of

view, and their positions within their respective worlds (and the ways in which the

worlds are constructed that necessitates certain attributes) result in one magical

woman being cast back into patriarchal views of magical women, while the other

exists in a narrative that opposes these patriarchal expectations.

Melisandre of Asshai is a priestess of the Lord of Light and adviser to Stannis

Baratheon, a contester for the Iron Throne.[99] She supports Stannis because she

believes him to be the reincarnation of Azor Ahai, an ancient hero who forged a

mythic sword capable of defeating the Others. Stannis thus has the power to unite the

land and drive the Others back into the north, making him the rightful heir to the

throne.[100] And while her character is powerful and without her many of Stannis'

victories would have never come to be, her ultimate goal is to place him on the throne,

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[99] There is some risk in making this assessment when the series is not yet complete. It
is, of course, completely possible that Martin will ultimately do something unexpected
with Melisandre's character. Indeed, Martin has eluded to something more than
Melisandre being relegated to side-kick to further Stannis' claim to the throne when in
an interview he stated: "Melisandre has gone to Stannis entirely on her own, and has
her own agenda" (Asshai.com 2012). Unfortunately, we have yet to learn of that
agenda or what specifically sent her to Stannis, other than a vision of him as Ahai.
Giving her a larger role in the last two books would also not erase the fact that she has
spent the previous five books of the series with one point of view chapter and little
else to do but Stannis' or R'hllor's bidding.
[100] Stannis' other claim is that he is the next in line in the Baratheon family, as
Cersei's children are the result of her incestuous affair with her brother, and not
Robert's true heirs.

to assist in male ascension to power. Her power comes from the male deity, R'hllor, the Lord of Light. She is also given only one point of view chapter in the series so far, despite playing an integral part in a number of plot lines.

The first time the reader is introduced to Melisandre is through Maester Cressen's focalized prologue in *A Clash of Kings*. Cressen's view of Melisandre is anything but flattering. Given that she is taking his place as Stannis's most trusted advisor *and* replacing the gods he has served his whole life, this is not completely surprising. Nor is Cressen's portrayal of Melisandre as a temptress, a corrupting and seductive force in Stannis' life. Cressen first notes that Melisandre has turned both the Lady Selyse, Stannis' wife, and their daughter, Shireen, to the worship of the Lord of Light (1999: 4, 13). Melisandre's mysterious, evil, force in the castle leads the servants to name her "the red woman, afraid to speak her name" (1999: 15). One of the most extended descriptions Cressen gives of Melisandre focuses specifically on the way she looks. Martin writes:

> As ever, she wore red head to heel, a long loose gown of flowing silk as bright as fire, with dagged sleeves and deep slashes in the bodice that showed glimpses of a darker bloodred fabric beneath. Around her throat was a red gold choker tighter than any maester's chain, ornamented with a single great ruby. Her hair was not the orange or strawberry color of common red-haired men, but a deep burnished copper that shone in the light of the torches. Even her eyes were red … but her skin was smooth and white, unblemished, pale as cream. Slender she was, graceful, taller than most knights, with full breasts and narrow waist and a heart-shaped face. Men's eyes that once found her did not

quickly look away, not even a maester's eyes. Many called her beautiful. She

was not beautiful. She was red, and terrible, and red. (1999: 17).

Cressen's description is of a woman who is other-worldly—pale and slender, with full

breasts, but unnatural. Red is not only the color of flame, the symbol of the Lord of

Light, but also of passion, anger, the devil, and, of course, blood. Her danger, and her

power, are inextricably tied to her physical presentation. Her description recalls the

supernatural beauty of the haunting specter of Poe's *Ligeia* or the dark-haired, pale-

skinned vampire. The next extensive treatment Melisandre receives in the text is

through another chapter focalized through a male character: Davos Seaworthy. Davos'

description is at times a bit more sympathetic than Cressen's (though just as often it is

as scathing) and he often seems ambivalent towards Melisandre's position in Stannis'

inner circle. But his description of her still focuses on her physical body as a site of

perversion and sexuality. Even Davos' characterization of her relationship with

Stannis is presented in a sexual way. He thinks: "*She has broken him, as a man breaks

a horse. She would ride him to power if she could*" (1999: 455). Melisandre has

broken Stannis, domesticated him, and the image of her riding him to power clearly

evokes an image of sexual domination. All of this is interesting, especially given the

fact that it is Melisandre's power that Stannis has relied on for nearly every victory he

has achieved. As he continues to lose support, "religion will become his last hope to

win the Iron Throne" (Ruiz 2016: 44). And while Stannis claims to have no need for

religion, he knows he needs Melisandre's power in order to succeed (2016: 44). So it

seems in many ways Stannis needs her more than she needs him.

One of Melisandre's most powerful magical scenes—giving birth to the shadow demon that attacks Storm's End—is focalized through Davos, turning Melisandre into a perverted image of motherhood, highlighting her body. He observes: Melisandre was "naked, and huge with child. Swollen breasts hung heavy against her chest, and her belly bulged as if near to bursting. . . . Panting, she squatted and spread her legs. Blood ran down her thighs, black as ink. Her cry might have been agony or ecstasy or both" (Martin 1999: 468). But she does not birth a child: "Two arms wriggled free, grasping, black fingers coiling around Melisandre's straining thighs, pushing, until the whole of the shadow slid out into the world" (1999: 468). The scene, focalized through Davos, is both horrifying and erotic and the shadow she births wreaks absolute destruction on Storm's End.[101] Melisandre is undeniably powerful here, but her power is inextricably linked to her body and her sexuality, as all descriptions of her so far have been focalized through male characters.

Of course, this is not inherently an issue. As was discussed above, Martin often presents a character one way through the eyes of others before giving the readers a closer glimpse into their psyche through focalized chapters of their own (as in Sansa's case). But Melisandre's first, and only, focalized chapter does not come until the fifth book, *A Dance with Dragons* (2011). And it leaves quite a bit to be desired. Valerie Estelle Frankel notes that Melisandre isn't "seen displaying Theon's angst or conflict: She has a mission to serve her god and Stannis, so that's what she'll do. Even in her

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[101] She had previously conjured one in order to kill Renly. When he is assassinated, Catelyn Stark proclaims that he was killed by "Sorcery, some dark magic, there was a shadow, a *shadow*" (1999: 378). When Davos asks Melisandre who rowed her to Renly, as he was rowing her closer to Storm's End, she replies "There was no need, ... He was unprotected" (1999: 467).

book's point of view scene, she's calm and certain" (2014: 41). We learn very little of Melisandre. We learn, as Frankel points out, that she is devoted to the service of her god, which in some ways challenges the assumption that her actions are rooted in her own ambition. The reader also learns that she is careful not to let her own desires cloud what she sees in the flames. She is less uncaring than Cressen and Davos often present her, as she requested Devan Seaworthy to attend her because Davos has already sacrificed his four other sons and the boy would be safer with her than with Stannis. We get bits and pieces of a prophecy she does not fully understand: she is still searching for the grey girl on the dying horse, and she "*pray*[s] *for a glimpse of Azor Ahai, and R'hllor shows me only Snow*" (2011: 407), thereby setting up Jon Snow, not Stannis, as the possible reincarnation of this ancient savior. But the chapter is short, and if part of Martin's success in his point of view chapters is to let us better understand character choices, even bad ones, we don't get this with Melisandre. We do not see her weighing options, or mulling over possible consequences, or reconciling inner doubts as we do with other characters. We learn things about her— she apparently does not need to eat food anymore—but we do not learn much about who she is.

Tattersail's relationship to her focalized sections are markedly different. For one, the first time the reader is introduced to Tattersail is in the first book of the series, *Gardens of the Moon*, through her own focalized section. Instead of others talking about her and presenting her through their own biased viewpoint, the reader learns about her through her own thoughts. She is standing amongst burned and broken weapons and armor, the aftermath of a deadly battle. Immediately, her rank and ability

are noted: "Her arms were crossed, tight against her chest. The burgundy cloak with its silver emblem betokening her command of the 2nd Army's wizard cadre now hung from her round shoulders stained and scorched" (1999: 57). What is immediately notable about Tattersail is not only the fact that she is a magical woman, but that she both has a command position in the military and is subject to the danger that her fellow soldiers are, sporting the stains and burns of battle—this is the importance her clothing signifies. She then participates in a meeting with the commander of the Malazan army and the other mages, offering suggestions, commentary, and comebacks. It is never remarked on that she is a woman, or that it is strange that she is there—it is simply taken as a given. Indeed, the first major battle the reader is shown is focalized through Tattersail.

While Melisandre's sexuality was often portrayed as perverse or perverting—when presented largely by the men who describe her through gossip, conjecture, and judgment—Tattersail's romantic relationships are introduced through her own point of view, and they are portrayed as complicated and real. Her relationships are not idealized romantic encounters between a hero and a princess, or an ill-fated cursed love affair, or the seduction and disgracing of a previously noble married man. They are rather mundane, but in their realness are emotionally impactful. Tattersail has been sleeping with Calot for a few months and, like any relationship, it is complicated. Because this section is focalized through Tattersail, the reader is able to see the ways in which she herself navigates complex human interactions. Erikson writes:

> She'd been sleeping with Calot the past four months: a little diversionary
> pleasure to ease the boredom of a siege that wasn't going anywhere. At least,

that was how she explained to herself their unprofessional conduct. It was more than that, of course, much more. But being honest with herself had never been one of Tattersail's strengths (1999: 61).

That the reader is introduced to the "casual" relationship with Calot through Tattersail's perspective is significant—the relationship is revealed in a way that affects how Tattersail is perceived sexually. Calot is killed protecting Tattersail, and while she feels great sadness, she continues to fight and, when the battle is over, begins investigating what led to so many deaths, becoming entwined in the plots of several other main characters. And yet, she is not overcome with a desire for revenge, or paralyzed by grief, but continues to shrewdly weigh all information she uncovers. She is not solely defined through her relationship to a man: she is a whole person. Thus, with Calot's death Tattersail is not condemned to the role of bereaved lover. She eventually meets and starts a relationship with Ganoes Paran after being attacked by a Hound of Shadow and defeating it, something High Mage Tayschrenn is forced to admit he himself might not have been able to do in a clear indication of Tattersail's power (1999: 215).

While Melisandre's physical description is reminiscent of a number of evil seductresses, Tattersail's appearance is revealed when necessary, as an additional description to the scene, or simply in passing, not as an initial and therefore important introduction to her character. She also references her own appearance, and thus displays an ownership of her own body and physical portrayal, instead of being described purely by the male gaze. For example, as she is lying in bed with Calot, Erikson writes that Calot's "small but well-proportioned body was snug in the many

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soft pillows of her flesh" (1999: 62). Or, before doing a reading from the Deck of

Dragons, she "lowered her bulk slowly into a kneeling position" (1999: 92). From

descriptions like these we know Tattersail is, frankly, a bit fat. But this is not posited

as some kind of failing (it gets about as much attention and importance as the fact that

Quick Ben is quite skinny, or that Kalam is quite large). Her body and its size are

simply part of her persona, one that she is perfectly comfortable with, and one that is

often seen as desirable but not fetishized.[102] It also puts her outside of the common

description of women in Fantasy as being slender or waifish. When Ganoes Paran, her

eventual lover, sees her for the first time out of battle garb, he remarks: "My, he

thought wonderingly, she's not bad, if you like them big, that is. He half grinned"

(1999: 219). Her size does not prevent her from being seen as sexually attractive, and

it is part of what potentially makes her so attractive, but is not sexualized in the way

Melisandre's body is.[103] Indeed, Tattersail and Paran soon begin a romantic

relationship. The connection between the two is expressly mutual, even though Paran

is a much more typical Fantasy hero (young, handsome, a soldier who is swept along

by fate, is given a powerful role, and learns to stand on his own). Erikson writes "the

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[102] Toc, a soldier in the Malazan army, also comments on her considerable wardrobe.
However, what could easily turn into a commentary on her vanity or her frivolous love
of clothing (both gendered), actually serves as a moment of light-hearted ribbing and
bonding. He tells Tattersail, "I'm afraid you've provided a standing joke in the
Second. Anything surprising, be it an ambush or an unplanned skirmish—the enemy
invariably came from your traveling wardrobe, Sorceress" (1999: 221).
[103] After Paran and Tattersail begin their relationship, Paran tells Toc that he failed to
make some connection with something Tattersail told him saying "I should have made
the connection sooner, but she . . . distracted me" (1999: 235). Toc's reply is to nod
knowingly and say "I'm sure she did" (1999: 235). Tattersail's attractiveness is not an
anomaly or a strange fetish. It is treated as perfectly normal that many men are quite
attracted to her.

attraction was obvious even now, with her back to the man, she sensed a taut thread between them" (1999: 217). Moreover, their relationship is explicitly physical. After visiting Paran in hiding, Tattersail laments her exhaustion. When Paran asks how thorough her exhaustion is, "She felt the heat in his words triggering a smoldering fire beneath her stomach" (1999: 228). This is a stark contrast to Melisandre, whose sexuality and conventional attractiveness is often posited as supernatural or perverse. Tattersail is engaged in a quite normal and unexceptional sexual relationship, unless one counts their exceptional equality.

One of the main effects of having Tattersail focalize so many of her own sections is that it equips the reader with a better understanding of her than even other characters have. Thus, when Fiddler, one of the Malazan marines, questions Tattersail's abilities and commitment, the reader already knows his assessment is wrong. It is also notable that his concerns are gendered. Fiddler remarks that Tattersail has "gone soft" after the battle at Pale where they suffered heavy losses, including Calot. He continues, saying that "It's like she's ready to cry, right on the edge, every single minute. I'm thinking she's lost her backbone, Sarge" (1999: 117). He goes on to say that if she's questioned, "she's liable to squeal" (1999: 117). Fiddler's concerns about Tattersail—that she is weak, that she might at any moment start crying—are gendered: among these hardened, grizzled marines, he sees the sorceress as a potential liability. However, readers have already seen Tattersail stand up to Tayschrenn and lead him astray (something neither Fiddler nor any of the marines are aware of), and, because of the sections focalized through her character, have a much more nuanced understanding of what she is experiencing. Instead of seeing weakness, Tattersail is

more accurately viewed as a thoughtful and complex character. Whiskeyjack also corrects Fiddler, telling him that he has underestimated her, saying: "It's not common news, but she's been offered the title of High Mage more than once and she won't accept. It doesn't show, but a head-to-head between her and Tayschrenn would be a close thing. She's a Master of her Warren, and you don't acquire that with a weak spine" (1999: 117). Learning this from Whiskeyjack would not have been as impactful without the focalized chapters from Tattersail. Instead of other (male) characters talking *about* her, Erikson lets the reader get to know her through her own thoughts and feelings. Tattersail does not need a male character to vouch for her in the eyes of the reader. In fact, the reader actually knows more about Tattersail's resilience and cunning than Whiskeyjack. This technique echoes the one Marc Napolitano points out with Sansa Stark—focalized narratives allow the reader to understand motivations and engenders the reader to different characters (2015: 45)—but that was largely absent in Martin's depiction of Melisandre.

Magical Women and World-Building: Narrative Influences on the Approach to Focalization

While Martin's and Erikson's approach to focalization and multiple point of view narration results in different characterizations of their magical women, it is not solely this choice of narrative approach that results in the disparities between their two works. Their narrative approaches are also largely influenced by their concepts of world-building, which exert their own narrative frameworks. Multiple and expansive points of view characters do not necessarily mean that magical women will be able to break free from archetypal characters if the world-building does not also allow this

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narrative freedom. Despite his subversion of many Fantasy tropes, Martin finds inspiration for his world from medieval history. This is why Melisandre displays many of the markers of a medieval witch and this conception of the magical woman comes with it certain characterizations that find their way into Martin's work. What Erikson achieves in *Malazan* is a result of a combination of multiple focalizers and an approach to world-building that presents female characters as equal to male characters, with equal opportunities thanks to their access to magic that finds its inspiration from tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs).

The foundations of Martin's series are rooted in history. Instead of building a magical world in which to set his story, Martin first began with the story itself. Martin's process is in many ways an inversion of Tolkien's that we saw in the first chapter: the world is built around the plot. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, Martin explains that *A Song of Ice and Fire* began with Martin imagining a single scene—Bran watching the beheading of the deserter from the Wall and then finding the direwolves in the snow—and then he just began writing. He explains: "It all occurs at the same time with me. I don't build the world first, then write in it. I just write the story, and then put it together. Drawing a map took me, I don't know, a half-hour" (Gilmore 2014).[104] And for his story he pulls much of his inspiration from actual history. Martin says that at one point he considered writing a War of the Roses novel, without including any of the fantasy elements (Gilmore 2014). He goes on to say that "the problem with straight historical fiction is you know what's going to happen. If

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[104] This perhaps explains why Westeros is in the West, Essos is in the East, and Sothoryos is, surprise, in the south.

you know anything about the Wars of the Roses, you know that the princes in the tower aren't going to escape. I wanted to make it more unexpected, bring in some more twists and turns" (Gilmore 2014). While the genre of Fantasy allows Martin to introduce an element of possibility into a context that would otherwise be overdetermined, his general narrative framework is influenced by historical occurrences. While he knew he wanted the Targaryn's sigil to be a dragon, he was initially unsure as to whether or not to include *actual* dragons. He tells Rolling Stones: "I was discussing this with a friend, writer Phyllis Eisenstein—I dedicated the third book to her—and she said, 'George, it's a fantasy—you've got to put in the dragons.' She convinced me, and it was the right decision" (Gilmore 2014). This approach to world-building also helps to explain why magic is so sporadic in Martin's world and, apart from Stannis and Melisandre, magic does not move much of the action along— Martin's main concern seems to be a fantastic retelling of the War of the Roses.[105]

This also explains Martin's insistence on the gritty "realness" of his world which often manifests in his treatment towards female characters. When questioned about the violence against women, Martin gives the following explanation: "The

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[105] Martin also draws from other historic events. One of the most shocking scenes in the series is the Red Wedding. In an interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, Martin says that the Red Wedding was inspired by a number of events from Scottish history. The first is The Black Dinner where the King of Scotland invites the Earl of Douglas, part of the Black Douglas clan with whom the king was fighting, to Edinburgh Castle. At the end of the feast, a plate with a black boar's head was brought out, and set in front of the Earl (the boar being a symbol of death). The Earl and his men were then dragged out and put to death in the courtyard. The second is the Glencoe Massacre, when Clan MacDonald stayed overnight with the Campbell clan. While the laws of hospitality supposedly applied "the Campbell's arose and started butchering every MacDonald they could get their hands on" (Hibberd 2015). Martin concludes that "No matter how much I make up, there's stuff in history that's just as bad, or worse" (Hibberd 2015).

books reflect a patriarchal society based on the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages were not a time of sexual egalitarianism. It was very classist . . . . And they had strong ideas about the roles of women" (Hibberd 2015).[106] Martin continues:

> Now there are people who will say to that, 'Well, he's not writing history, he's writing fantasy—he put in dragons, he should have made an egalitarian society.' Just because you put in dragons doesn't mean you can put in anything you want. If pigs could fly, then that's your book. But that doesn't mean you also want people walking on their hands instead of their feet. If you're going to do [a fantasy element], it's best to only do one of them, or a few. I wanted my books to be strongly grounded in history and to show what medieval society was like, and I was also reacting to a lot of fantasy fiction. Most stories depict what I call the 'Disneyland Middle Ages'—there are princes and princesses and knights in shining armor, but they didn't want to show what those societies meant and how they functioned (Hibberd 2015).[107]

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[106] Medieval historian Kelly DeVries writes that despite his fans (and sometimes his own) claims to realism, Martin's series is not very realistic. He writes: "As a historian of the period, I can assure you that the real Middle Ages were very boring—and if Martin's epic were truly historically accurate, it would be very boring too" (2012). DeVries goes on, noting that while peasants' lives were mundane and boring, they were not necessarily harsh. He points to *The Canterbury Tales* and the fact that Chaucer does not show the lower classes' daily existence as terrible. He argues that "the merciless brutality regularly suffered by the lower orders in fantasy works such as Martin's does not reflect reality—not least because it would have been economically ludicrous for nobles to so abuse the people on whose productivity their own livelihoods depended" (2012). While the nobles had it a bit better, "their lives were still boring" (2012). Violence was unlikely to be frequent. He writes: "There was no incest (at least none recorded), no dwarves, few assassinations" (2012). While some characters and incidents are drawn from medieval history, but Martin makes them "far more action-packed than its historic counterparts" (2012).

[107] In the same *Entertainment Weekly* interview, Martin also addresses the concerns critics and fans have raised about the sexual violence in his work. He responds: "And

Martin maps fantasy onto an already created, historically based world—the magic

itself is not as important or fundamental to his world-building as representing how he

views medieval times and the power structures he sees in play.

The blog *The Critical Dragon* (run by A.P. Canavan writing as RibaldRemark)

offers a clear rebuttal of the justifications Martin gives for the abundance of violence

against women. Canavan breaks Martin's defense into three major arcs: first,

Temporal Realism (it happened in the Middle Ages, so it is justified to include it in the

series); second, Balancing Realism and Fantasy (just because it's Fantasy doesn't

mean you can change everything); and third, Realism of the Human Condition (it's

dishonest to pretend things like rape don't exist) (Canavan 2015). He goes on to rebut

each claim, but the crux of the argument is the first defense. Canavan notes that there

are 214 rapes in the series to date, and 117 rape victims. With the exception of

Maester Kerwin and the victims of Septon Utt, all other rapes are of women. This is

important because "If Martin wants to make the argument that his world building is

gritty and realistic and follows a more believable pattern of the medieval time period

then he has some very skewed perceptions about rape and sexual violence" (2015).

Canavan uses the example of the Wall to make his point, arguing that to say the

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then there's the whole issue of sexual violence, which I've been criticized for as well.
I'm writing about war, which what almost all epic fantasy is about. But if you're going
to write about war, and you just want to include all the cool battles and heroes killing a
lot of orcs and things like that and you don't portray [sexual violence], then there's
something fundamentally dishonest about that. Rape, unfortunately, is still a part of
war today. It's not a strong testament to the human race, but I don't think we should
pretend it doesn't exist" (Hibberd 2015). Martin is not wrong—many works of fantasy
elide the more violent consequences of war. And while I appreciate Martin's desire to
portray a grittier and darker fantasy world, what I think is often missed is not *that*
Martin includes sexual violence, but the *way in which* he writes about it.

Night's Watch, a collection of cast-offs and criminals who are secluded from other people, never sexually assault or rape each other strains believability. This is especially true given what we know of male rape, particularly in the armed forces and prison. This demonstrates that "there is a strong authorial bias toward sexual violence against women that far outweighs and overshadows any of the sexual violence against men" (2015): Martin's choice to focus on sexual violence against women is just that, an authorial choice. Following this, his other arguments fall apart. If he is seeking to depict the dark side of humanity, and to deny that rape happens is "fundamentally dishonest," one might ask if his aversion to depicting male rape is also fundamentally dishonest (2015). Of course, Canavan clarifies that he is not advocating for more male rape, but rather asks if it is at all necessary to depict any kind of rape over thirty times per average per book (2015).[108] Martin seems to want it both ways: to get out of the logical conclusions of history and then blame history for what he "has to" do to women. This also helps to explain why his magical woman, Melisandre, so faithfully embodies the medieval conception of the witch: in this case, the historical narrative aligns with a patriarchal depiction of magical women.[109] Despite her lack of interest in

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[108] In an interview with *The Critical Dragon*, Steven Erikson also responded to Martin's justifications, saying: "I did read an essay by Martin that offered up one of the strangest takes on medieval history I've ever seen. To argue that a Feminist theme to a series is impossible if female characters are raped in that series, is just plain ignorant. What matters is how those rapes are dealt with in the narrative. It's hard for me to respond to lazy thinking (in terms of motivation), so I'll leave it at that" (Canavan *Interview Part 1* 2016).

[109] *The Historical Dictionary of Fantasy Literature* defines the "witch" as "A practitioner of magic, usually an informally educated female of relatively low status (unlike wizards)" (2005: 436). Brian Stableford notes that early depictions of witches are divided between femme fatales (e.g. Circe and Medea) and hagwives (Pamphile, Dipsas, and Erichtho). Jess Bergman notes that "witch" has its etymological roots in the Old English wicce, "Written accounts of women who practice magic are as old as

removing penises (a trait repeatedly assigned to medieval witches), Melisandre is a

fairly typical witch: her powers come from a male deity associated with the color red

and fire; she has the ability to prognosticate; she is a temptress; she corrupts

motherhood and births demons; she is immune to poison; she glamours herself and

others; there is a focus on her physical (but supernatural) beauty and sexuality; and she

seduces a powerful man. She is also associated with fire and burning people alive,

though with an important reversal—it is Melisandre who condemns others to burn. As

we have previously seen, her one focalized chapter does little to challenge or

complicate these basic character traits. In Martin's case, the use of focalization does

not in any substantial way stand up to Melisandre's characterization as influenced by

her position as a witch in a medieval inspired world.

A More Equal World

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recorded history, and continue to the present day" (2015). Vladimir Propp's
Morphology of the Folktale clearly delineates the functional roles witches play in
these stories. The figure is introduced along with the list of villains who enter the tale
in order "to disturb the peace of a happy family, to cause some form of misfortune,
damage, or harm" (1968: 27). The following pages detail the different ways the witch
(along with other villain figures) seeks to deceive by assuming disguises, sets the tale
in motion through some evil act, and torments people. As discussed in a previous
chapter, the witch can also serve as magical donor. The witch-as-donor tests the hero,
attempts to destroy the hero or engages him in combat (the hero generally succeeds by
turning the tables on the witch, e.g. he makes her climb into the oven to show him
how), and then gifts him, intentionally or not, a magical gift. Witches also often
function as helpers, guiding the hero (again, intentionally or not) out of or into a new
location (1968: 81). Witches in Propp's estimation are exclusively female and
overwhelmingly evil. *The Malleus Maleficarum* gives an exhaustive list of the
characteristic of witches. There is a clear focus on the perversion of motherhood and
childbirth, the bestowing of power on the witch through her pact with the Devil, the
ability to sway the minds of men, and the corruption of innocents. There is also a clear
obsession with the idea that a witch may remove, or shrink, penises. This last attribute
thankfully does not seem to be a part of Martin's witch.

In creating the world and characters of *Malazan*, Erikson relies on an

approach to world-building inspired by tabletop role-playing games.[110] These TRPGs

not only allow more narrative points of view that are each legitimate and sympathetic,

but also utilizes dice rolls that randomize outcomes freeing the narrative from

influences like The Hero's Quest. Erikson's pairs this with the "what if" approach to

world-building often deployed by Science Fiction authors: starting with the premise

that magic is available to everyone, Erikson and Ian Cameron Esslemont,[111]

extrapolated out from there in order to build the foundations of *Malazan*. This

combination of world-building that takes as a premise an egalitarian and logical

approach to magic and the fast-paced shifting focalized narration are essential to the

ways in which magical women are portrayed within the work. And it is evident in the

way in which Tattersail is able to navigate the world. *Malazan* is proof that one can

have a gritty, dark, violent, and complex world that also has gender parity without

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[110] Erikson's assertion that many Fantasy authors completely bypass Tolkien and are
more influenced by role-playing games is evident in the way in which mages appear
within his work. In an essay for *The New York Review of Science Fiction* Erikson
writes, "I sidestepped Tolkien entirely, finding my inspiration and pleasure in the
genre through Howard, Burroughs, and Leiber. And as with many of my fellow epic
fantasy writers, our first experience of the Tolkien tropes of epic fantasy came not
from books, but from *Dungeons & Dragons* roleplaying games, which extracted vast
amounts from Tolkien in its creation of settings for its game system" (2012: 5). He
goes on to say that "my rejection of Tolkien's fantasy creation came within the
framework of *gaming*" (2012: 5). Erikson's claim that he "sidestepped Tolkien
entirely" might be technically true, in that *The Lord of the Rings* was not a formative
Fantasy book; however, if he is claiming that role-playing games, particularly
Dungeons and Dragons did influence his thinking about Fantasy (even if it was to
point out what he would later reject), he is not entirely sidestepping Tolkien. As Helen
Young notes "Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson's 1974 *Dungeons & Dragons* imitated
Tolkien's work so closely that it infringed copyright and elements had to be changed
for later editions under threat of legal action" (2014: 18).
[111] While Erikson is the sole author of *Malazan*, he did much of the world-building
with Esslemont, who has also published books set in the Malazan world.

turning it into a bland, egalitarian utopia: having strong female representation and conflict are not mutually exclusive.

In utilizing TRPGs, Erikson was able to not only map out the core of the world, but also the way in which individual characters might navigate through that world.[112] TRPGs owe much of their current form to Fantasy literature. TRPG's began as war games, that used miniature battlefields and counters to represent troops, and added dice rolls to introduce an element of random chance to determine how battles progressed (Cover 2010: 8).[113] In the 1970s, Dave Arneson began incorporating the fantasy of Tolkien into the gaming worlds and started "shift[ing] the focus from controlling entire armies to controlling a single character" (Cover 2010: 8). He later teamed up with avid war-gamer and fellow Fantasy buff Gary Gygax. In 1974 they would release the first copy of the *Dungeons and Dragons* (*D&D*) rule book (Cover 2010: 8-9). TRPGs like *D&D* are run by a Dungeon Master (DM), who presents players with situations. The DM asks the players "What do you do?" and the players then offer up actions for their characters. The dice roll determines whether or not these actions succeed (Cover 2010: 6). This randomness helps to free up TRPGs from rigid narrative formulas.

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[112] Erikson asserts that "RPG's both as table-top and computer/console versions are seminal in the development of Modern Fantasy literature" (Canavan 2016). Canavan argues that Fantasy RPGs and the various offshoots they have created serve as a meta-text with which to more effectively analyze Genre Fantasy (2011: 6). He writes: "the RPG has distilled and adapted perceived rules and conventions of fantasy literature into a codified and systemised framework or formula and thereby described the mega-text of genre fantasy" (2011: 6). He goes on to argue that the RPG "can therefore be read as a codified form of genre cliché and convention" (2011: 26).
[113] Created by Herr von Reiswitz, one of the first war games *Kriegspiel*, was intended to educate Prussian military officers. War games moved into the popular sphere in the late-Victorian era with H.G. Wells' popular game *Little Wars* (Cover 2010: 8).

One of the most important aspects of *D&D* that can be seen in Erikson's narrative approach to Fantasy is that "There is no 'winning' in a TRPG, although characters do gain experience points for completing certain challenges, and in an ongoing game, those experience points allow the player to continue building his or her character" (Cover 2010: 6). In this way, the narrative is created through interaction—each player has a certain amount of freedom to make their own choices concerning their character, regardless of the choices of others. Of course, it often makes sense to coordinate game play, but it is not structurally required by the game itself. While the game board and rule book offer some infrastructure, their very nature prompts revision by the players (Baker 2017: 83). TRPGs present "'participatory worlds' with settings and rules expressly designed to encourage, indeed teach, player alteration" (Baker 2017: 83). Neal Baker notes that even in the fifth edition of *D&D*'s *Player's Handbook*, there is a premium placed on "DIY personality and background" and that the *Dungeon Master's Guide* says "Every DM is the creator of his or her own campaign world. Whether you invent a world, adapt a world from a favorite movie or novel, or use a published setting the *D&D* game, you make that world your own over the course of a campaign" (2017). Michael J. Tresca notes that the frame of reference for the world in a novel comes through the narrator, but in "role-playing every player interprets the game experience uniquely—the importance of the character's experience is defined as much as by what is shared about the universe as what isn't shared" (2011: 7). This approach to narrative—the interweaving of a number of equally important and unique narrative streams that do not necessarily rely on each other or experience the world in the same way—is precisely what Erikson uses in *Malazan*.

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Tresca continues, noting that "It's entirely possible for different players to have different or even contrary knowledge within a game universe" (2011: 7). Indeed, we see this in *Malazan*, where there are a number of characters who have no knowledge of what other characters are doing, or even what is happening in other parts of the world. Instead of the impulse to contain all narratives as either part of the hero's quest, or to usher them all to the same final destination, "From a narrative perspective, role-playing has always been about invisible limits" (Tresca 2011: 202). If the players are not aware of boundaries, then their characters will not act in ways that reinforce these boundaries. Narratively this plays out in *Malazan*, as a number of characters have completely independent arcs, many stories that occupy major space within the series are left completely unresolved or even in the middle of major action by the series' end.

Despite the relative narrative freedom afforded by TRPGs like *D&D*, Erikson still felt constrained by the influence of Fantasy tropes. He writes that he felt as if there was a kind of feedback loop between Fantasy literature and TRPGs: "the quest group . . . ; the standardization of good and evil—the actual birth of the Dark Lord cliché was right there in front of us . . .; and of course the un-killable hero. It was as if the two forms of entertainment were doing little more than reinforcing each other, on virtually every level" (Erikson "The World of Malazan"). Though he and Esslemont moved onto more adaptable gaming systems like GURPS,[114] they still felt as though they were seeing a "reworking of every fantasy cliché imaginable" (Erikson). From these games, Erikson and Esslemont took the most basic tenets of gaming, but

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[114] GURPS stands for Generic Universal RolePlaying System. Developed by Steve Jackson, this system allows you to play in multiple different settings as any number of characters. See http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/

discarded those parts that didn't work and focused more on story and background. He writes:

> we created characters, assigned values to their basic attributes, physical and mental; we selected from a list of talents and skills and put 'points' into them to shape our character's abilities. We invented stories and plotlines involving contests and goals, and to gauge success we rolled the damned die (Erikson).

Role-playing games served as a sort of meta-Fantasy structure that highlighted the problems and limitations of the genre that Erikson and Esslemont then set off to subvert, while also somewhat contradictorily providing a framework for narrative freedom rooted in multiple, independent narratives, and limitless parameters within which the action might take place. TRPGs allowed them to create a viable Fantasy world, while "spic[ing] it with other stuff" from history, literature, film, etc. (Erikson).

If Erikson and Esslemont took from TRPGs a narrative approach to their characters and stories, then it was from Science Fiction that they took the approach to initially creating the world in which these characters and plots would take place. One of the most influential aspects of their world is the way in which they conceived their magical system and then extrapolated out from that, following the "what if" formula. In the world of *Malazan*, magic can be learned, and it exists everywhere. And, because healing magic exists, almost everyone can access it, though the "quality" of the healing varies by skill level and often price. And this is where magic becomes absolutely essential for the feminist quality of Erikson's work. Extrapolating out from

this simple assertion means that people lived longer,[115] men and women remained

fertile for longer, infant mortality rates would lower, so birth rates would drop as

people felt less pressure to have more children. As a consequence of having fewer

children, women's roles were not as rigidly tied to the home or to being baby-

producers, so this view of women never ossified. And so, "as a direct result of magic,

in particular healing magic, . . . women were completely emancipated" (Canavan

2016). Erikson himself explains that he and Esslemont "took a meritocratic approach

to magic and society, and that approach can only lead in one direction, and that

direction quickly dispenses with institutional sexism and the suppression of rights

based on gender, race or whatever" (Canavan *Interview Part 1* 2016). This is evident

in the series, as there are essentially no jobs or character types that are not available to

women. Often, it is impossible to tell if a character is male or female until a pronoun is

used.

Given the influence of TRPGs and Science Fiction on Erikson's narrative

approach to Fantasy, it is not surprising that he believes that women don't have to be

oppressed in any kind of Fantasy to make it work *as* Fantasy. Approaching world-

building by extrapolating out from the magical system—something decidedly not real

or historical and thus somewhat untouched by patriarchy—and not constraining that

magic with preconceived, gendered expectations, one can create a more egalitarian

world. And thus, the world of *Malazan* sees little gender based proscriptions. The

narrative approach Erikson employs in his novels supports and expands upon the

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[115] Tattersail, the subject of the latter part of this chapter, is two hundred and nineteen
years old (Erikson 1999: 78).

fundamentally egalitarian aspect of the series. By making magic foundational to his world-building and employing a narrative approach that allows readers to identify with a multitude of characters, eschewing a single hero, magical women who are able to live outside of patriarchal structures seen in Tolkien and Martin's more popular work and find the narrative space to be fully independent, unique characters.

In many ways, Tattersail is able to develop in a way that Egwene, as part of a more traditional Fantasy narrative, is not. Because it is not narratively necessary for Tattersail to in some way be subsumed under a young, male hero's narrative, it is therefore unnecessary to make her a romantic side-interest (young, nubile, conventionally attractive, an emotional or social support) or a wise mentor (aged, grey, full of cryptic teachings), or the femme-fatale (evil, tortured, beautiful but dangerous). And, because there is no single hero's journey, her actions also do not need to be recuperated into a main narrative. Thus, Tattersail is able to develop as a wholly independent and unique character. As we have seen, one of the more noticeable ways that Tattersail diverges from most depictions of magical women (who are not evil witches, hagwives, or villains) is that she is not conventionally attractive or young (playing with the age of the magical woman is an effective way to begin breaking with stereotypical expectations and is a strategy we will also see in the next chapter). While she does "die," the function that her death plays within the narrative is vastly different. She is not re-cast as a donor whose death spurs the hero on to save the day, nor is she a dramatic martyr, sacrificing herself for the cause/another. Her death is as much in her control as one's death can be, and through magic and her wit, she is able to find a loophole and "save" herself.

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While the mage, like the witch, is a staple Fantasy character,[116] Erikson is able

to avoid casting Tattersail in a stereotypical way because there is no need. Erikson is

not looking back to Medieval or mythical inspirations, but rather has allowed the

world to develop without limits or rigid expectations. It was also a group effort,

largely influenced by actually role-playing characters within the world of *Malazan*.

The influence of TRPGs, and his desire to push this freedom even further, freed

Erikson from many of the patriarchal narrative expectations often found in Fantasy

literature. Pair this with the overwhelming number of focalized narrators, each unique

and independent, and Erikson's magical women function within the series as any other

character type would, with their progress determined only by their skills. This is why

virtually any magical woman character within Malazan breaks from conventional

expectations. Even those characters who might be pigeonholed by a basic

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[116] The mage figure of course has ties to perhaps the most famous wizard of fantasy literature, Merlin. As Frank P. Riga notes, Merlin serves as a seminal figure, "the point of departure for creative explorations of the concepts associated with wizardry" and "Since Merlin is the most ubiquitous wizard figure from medieval times until the present, he is certainly implied by references to wizards and wizardry" (2008: 22). Riga goes on to argue that the figure of Gandalf (perhaps the second most famous wizard) "draws on the Merlin tradition while transforming it in significant ways" (2008: 22). However, unlike Merlin, Gandalf: does not predict the future (though he has strong premonitions); does not often use his magic and does so only under great duress; does not find his downfall at the hands of women (it is Saruman who betrays him, and the Balrog that kills him); and must refuse ultimate power in order to help save Middle-earth (2008: 34-37). Most importantly, while Gandalf is, like Merlin, a teacher, he does not try to bend the will of people but rather attempts to bestow knowledge so others can make decisions and help themselves (2008: 39). While it is outside the scope of this project, Riga goes on to outline the representative texts of the Merlin tradition. After this survey, he concludes that Merlin is "most frequently shown to have come from ambiguous origins, both good and evil, and to have immense magical and occult powers. He has accurate and even astounding abilities to know the past and predict the future, a feature common to almost all accounts and variations" (2008: 31). Gandalf shares many of these attributes.

description—Lady Envy, for example, in the most pared down way, is the beautiful, but evil, sorceress with a grudge to settle—avoids this fate due to the fact that she is allowed focalized narratives through which this basic description is challenged, expanded, and often overturned, thus making that basic description misleading at best. This is in large part what Martin achieves with many of his non-magical women characters—Brienne is the warrior-woman, the girl who puts on armor and fights because she cannot be a "princess," a Fantasy trope as old as Britomart in *The Faerie Queene*; Cersei is the mad queen; Catelyn is the devoted wife and mother, etc.—but their focalized chapters help to push these descriptors and present each woman as a particular character, not just a trope. Melisandre does not (or at least has not yet) received such attention. This is peculiar given her influence on a number of the most prominent storylines and events, and disappointing, given that the characterization of her we do get is not only stereotypical, but casts her back within the patriarchal narrative of Medieval witch.

Conclusion

What Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* demonstrates is that even with a series that eschews the hero's quest, presenting a less traditional narrative by utilizing multiple point of view characters to push the narrative away from a clear battle between good and evil, the magical woman can still be constrained, and, quite easily. In Martin's case, much of this is an effect of his world-building. There is a reason Melisandre displays many of the markers of a medieval witch: that is the world Martin was in large part creating; this allowed certain stereotypes and narrative structures to reassert themselves. While Melisandre is powerful and captivating, she is not given

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space within the narrative to develop in the same ways as other characters.[117] What is

also interesting is that, while Martin falls back on stereotypical Fantasy women's roles

more often than I would prefer, it's impossible to argue that he does not create

incredibly captivating, charismatic, and powerful female characters. Why this did not

extend to Melisandre appears to be an effect of the narrative influence of the witch

exerting unnecessary influence on her characterization.

Like *A Song of Ice and Fire, Malazan Book of the Fallen* has some of the most

dynamic, fierce, multi-faceted female characters in Epic Fantasy. And it is not

surprising that that extends to the magical women, who are not only witches, but also

soldier mages, soletaken, gods, Eleint, and bonecasters. While Tattersail herself dies in

Gardens of the Moon, Silverfox—her "reincarnated" form—plays a major role in later

books, particularly *Memories of Ice*. Furthermore, Erikson presents a number of

magical women of various powers and skill levels: Pully and Skwish are Shake

witches who perform mostly blood magic; Lady Envy and her sister Lady Spite are

both sorceresses and daughters of an Elder god; Korlat is a soletaken dragon and Tiste

Andii; Samar Dev is a witch well-versed in binding souls; Olar Ethil is a T'lann Imass

Bonecaster (a kind of shaman); Sister Reverence and Belie are just two of the female

Forkrul Assail, an Elder race that uses the Hold of Ahkrast Korvelain; while not

human, the K'Chain Che'Malle are a matriarchy and ruled by a matron; Felisin is

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[117] It is important to note that I am not arguing that Melisandre should have more
focalized chapters so that the reader may "like" her more. Martin demonstrates how a
character can be wholly unlikeable but through focalized chapters is demonstrated to
be complex and interesting, as in the case of Cersei. Melisandre is not given this
narrative space. Her characterization remains largely determined by the judgment of
the men around her.

Sha'ik Reborn and receives premonitions and power from the Whirlwind Goddess; and so on. Each magical woman adds to the ways in which these characters are imagined within a work of Epic Fantasy—none are archetypal representations. Indeed, nearly every single one of these characters could have served as a case study for this chapter, though Tattersail, as one of the first major focalizing characters, so obviously exists outside the bounds of a traditional magical woman that she was a natural first choice.

And yet, despite all of the strong, interesting, and dynamic female characters, the *Malazan* series does still feel somewhat masculine. Part of that is likely due to the fact that it is in large part devoted to military maneuvers, battles, and marching. While in the world of *Malazan*, the military is an egalitarian institution, for the readers, the military is still coded largely as male. Additionally, many female characters are given numerous focalized sections, but the overall series numbers still skew male. In *The Bonehunters*, there are seventeen unique female characters and fifty-three unique male characters. There are roughly ninety-seven sections focalized through female characters, but around three hundred focalized by male characters. In *The Crippled God*, the final book of the series, there are fifty unique female characters with focalized sections compared to eighty-nine unique male characters with focalized sections. Of these sections, almost three hundred are focalized through male characters while just under two-hundred are focalized through female characters—Martin, proportionally wise, actually fares slightly better, with 204 chapters focalized through male characters, and 140 focalized through female characters. While Erikson and Esselmont gamed many of the characters, those were also overwhelmingly male. Out

of all the characters they gamed for the series, only two were female (the Empress Laseen and the goddess T'riss) (*Role-playing game*). In exploring this world further, Erikson is also writing companion trilogies. *The Karkhanas Trilogy* focuses on the story of the Tiste Andii, in particular Anomander Rake, and he has plans to write a trilogy on Karsa Orlong (a male Toblakai). Both of these characters played important roles in the *Malazan* series—much of Rake's life occurred before the events in the series, and the series leaves Karsa Orlong's story unresolved—so adding on to these characters' narratives would expand the world in interesting ways, both pre and post *Malazan*. Writers are also, of course, allowed to have favored characters whose lives they want to explore more fully, but it is unfortunate that both of the characters Erikson has chosen to give more page space to are male. Especially given that there are a number of dynamic female characters whose stories remain likewise unexplored and unresolved. Despite this, *Malazan* is decidedly a feminist work that rejects placing women in secondary roles, whether due to outdated structural requirements or a misplaced faithfulness to a certain version of history.[118]

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[118] I find it necessary to stress that these are comparatively light critiques of Erikson's gendered choices. It is unarguable that he has provided Epic Fantasy with some of its most diverse and captivating female characters.

Chapter 4

"Roads were made for young men": The Magical Woman as Questing Female Hero

"Having found the grail, male and female heroes recognize that they are fully human and
fundamentally alike. This humane and egalitarian heroic vision is the ethical foundation
for the transformed kingdom" (Pearson and Pope 1981: 15).

In chapter two, I argued that the tendency of casting magical women as donors

or helpers in a secondary position to the male hero's journey has been a powerful trend

in literary fantasy. This narrative approach was adopted by Tolkien and, despite some

clear progress in the complexity of magical women characters, made its way into the

modern genre of Fantasy. In chapter three, I demonstrated that by discarding a

narrative approach that foregrounds a single hero's journey and implementing multiple

points of view that prevent the identification of a single hero, magical women's stories

can become equal to those of other male characters. No longer subsumed under the

primary narrative with which all other narratives must eventually intersect, magical

women's story arcs break free from their secondary, supportive roles and tired tropes.

In this chapter, I examine Lois McMaster Bujold's *A Paladin of Souls*, the second

book in the *Chalion* series, a narrative that returns to the primacy of the hero's

journey, but, instead of this quest belonging to a young man who sets out to find

himself and become a hero, this quest belongs to a magical woman. While Bujold's

magical woman hero, Royina Ista, adheres to many of the so-called stages outlined by

studies of female heroes, Ista also demonstrates the ways in which the genre of

Fantasy, with its use of magic, offers the magical woman as questing hero access to a

power outside patriarchal society. Her magic allows her to manipulate the world

around her, and gives her an ability that will not be contained by gendered

prescriptions. It is this power that allows Ista to overcome many of the obstacles that

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limit or restrict the female hero's journey in more realistic literature, resulting in a

singular female hero who completes her quest.[119]

The role (plight?) of the female hero has been a topic of interest for a number

of critics working in a range of different genres. From Science Fiction and comics to

realistic novels, the female hero, her journey, her characteristics, and her agency, have

all been issues of concern. Unfortunately, what most of these studies find is that, with

few exceptions, the female hero is ultimately unable to complete all stages of the

quest. Her journey does, however, offer a unique hero's story that has clear

commonalities across genres and time periods.[120] What happens, then, when the

female hero is also a magical woman operating within a genre that has typically

foregrounded traditional male hero quests? Bujold's *Paladin of Souls* addresses this

question by constructing a basic hero's quest: our protagonist sets out with a group of

travelers, faces trials, learns to control her power, falls in love, fights a force of evil,

and triumphs. Variations of this pattern are found throughout fantasy literature, most

notably in classical epics and folk tales. But Bujold's story is much more than that—

she takes the traditional progression of the hero's journey and reimagines it with a

magical woman who is older, a mother, and a widow. Bujold maintains the basic

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[119] It is important to note that in their study, *Female Heroes in American and British Literature*, Pearson and Pope do not rely only on the realist novel, but draw from a number of non-realist genres, like science fiction and other sub-genres of Fantasy. They do not, however, address the genre of Epic Fantasy (also often referred to as High or secondary world Fantasy). This is curious, because, as we have seen, the Epic Fantasy sub-genre tends to most faithfully adhere to the traditional quest structure, making any of these works with a female protagonist an interesting and, I would argue, essential addition to their study.

[120] While a number of genres utilize the male hero quest, few adhere so closely to mythic conceptions of the hero's journey, his trials, battles, and compatriots with the same faithfulness as modern Fantasy.

structure of the hero's quest while adapting its specifics to a reimagined hero as a magical woman whose magical abilities allow her to circumvent many of the pitfalls that often befall other female heroes, such as containment through marriage.

In imagining a secondary world in which the magical woman may serve as questing hero, the inclination might be to present a world in which gendered relationships are more or less equal, making her quest less of a challenge to the world's social structures. This is not what Bujold does. Instead, she presents a world that is clearly patriarchal. This allows the reader to experience the ways in which Ista, the magical woman hero, is subject to the same kinds of gendered expectations and limitations as all women who exist in patriarchal societies. In placing the hero in a patriarchal world, the ways in which Ista is able to subvert these societal prescriptions become clear. Moreover, by placing the magical woman as hero in a patriarchal society, Bujold demonstrates that the subjugation of female characters is not a necessary consequence of Fantasy works that take place in patriarchal societies. Because so much of Fantasy is set in quasi-medieval worlds (Bujold draws inspirations from medieval Spain, though much Fantasy is set in worlds inspired by medieval England), the sexism inherent in these works is often justified as simply a by-product of the gendered relations present in historical reality, an argument we saw articulated by George R.R. Martin in the previous chapter. Dan Wohl summarizes this type of argument when he writes that when he raises the issue of sexism in Fantasy with other readers, the reply is always something like: "Sexism in (to pick the most obvious example) medieval fantasy is okay or even desirable, the thinking goes, because in the real European Middle Ages sexism was the status quo" (2012). Wohl

comes to the conclusion that many others have: that's just not a good enough reason to persistently present female characters that are clearly secondary and have no major role in the action. The claim is also generically dubious. While Fantasy relies on mimesis to create worlds that feel familiar and "real," as previously discussed, its defining feature is a *departure* from consensus reality, and secondary world Fantasy in particular creates entirely new worlds. It seems suspiciously convenient that authors would somehow become constrained by the "realities" of the gendered historical situations within which many Fantasies are set, while modifying or discarding any number of other realistic aspects of the world. Somehow dragons and unicorns are allowable, but portraying gendered relationships as different from what they historically were goes a step too far. Gender seems to be the point at which some Fantasy authors forget that their stories are historically inspired, not actual histories.

In a more cynical reading, this offers authors an easy out for their conscious desires to present a world in which women are put "in their place" and "men can be men." But even this impulse to create male-centered, macho worlds seemingly inspired by the real world largely ignores historical realities. Tansy Rayner Roberts questions what exactly the "history" fans and even authors often point to as justification consists of. She writes:

> History is not a long series of centuries in which men did all the interesting/important things and women stayed home and twiddled their thumbs in between pushing out babies, making soup and dying in childbirth. History is actually a long series of centuries of men writing down what they thought was important and interesting, and FORGETTING TO WRITE

ABOUT WOMEN. It's also a long series of centuries of women's work and

women's writing being actively denigrated by men (2012).

She stresses that history is the recording of the facts, not the facts themselves, of what

happened in the past. Simply because history does not focus on the contributions and

lives of women, does not mean that they were not doing interesting and important

things. For example, to say that women were not important to or involved in politics

only focuses on one aspect of politics, the public one. She points out that

> Even when the political careers are solely male, those men have wives and
>
> families who have a stake in the proceedings and the outcomes, they have risks
>
> to take and campaigns to wage every bit as much as the men. And if the
>
> women's politics are happening in salons rather than assembly halls… maybe
>
> you should be peeking into those salons. I can guarantee political DYNAMITE
>
> is going on in there (2012).

Even in the early 15th C, books like Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*

demonstrated the contributions women made throughout history and were able to

make within a medieval society. Bujold's *Chalion* series presents a clear refutation of

many of these excuses. Her world is undeniably patriarchal, and yet her female

characters are not simple victims of their society.

While Bujold's *Chalion* series consists of three books, it is not necessarily a

trilogy in the traditional sense. One may read the second or third book in the series

without reading the previous book(s)—while each novel builds on the world, they can

also stand alone as single works. However, *The Curse of Chalion* is important in

framing Ista's quest as both a magical woman and female hero in *Paladin of Souls*.

Because the first book gives readers a male protagonist without placing him in a traditional quest story, whereas the second gives us a female protagonist within a traditional quest story, it establishes many of the gendered expectations of the world Ista will face on her later quest and highlights the fact that it is the female character who is given the role of questing hero. *The Curse of Chalion* also does much of the work of world-building that the second novel relies upon, particularly as concerns the oppressively patriarchal society that is Chalion.

In order to argue, as I do here, that *Paladin of Souls* reimagines not only the male hero's quest, but also the female hero's quest by positing a magical woman as questing hero whose access to magic allows her to circumvent many of pitfalls suffered by other female almost-heroes, this chapter will first examine the traditional hero's quest. This will establish the characteristics of the male hero and his relationship to the society that celebrates him that will later be transformed by female heroes. It would be nearly impossible to discuss critical work on the hero without addressing Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, a work that has effected an outsized influence on conceptions of the hero and his quest, and so, while several other iterations of the hero will be examined, we will invariably return to Campbell time and again. By examining the male hero, we can more clearly recognize the traditional mythology surrounding the hero and his quest, consequently highlighting the obstacles female characters will encounter in taking up the mantle of hero. With the characteristics of the male hero established, this chapter will then review the critical work that has already been done on the female hero, paying particular attention to works like Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope's *The Female*

Hero in American and British Literature (1981) that carefully engage with the hero pattern established by Campbell. While these studies tend to focus on either recuperating the goddesses of classical myth or examining the lives of female protagonists in realistic fiction, they offer insights into the ways in which the traditional male hero's quest can be modified to reflect a female hero as well as underline the push to redefine what and who the hero is/can be (along with, of course, the tensions that arise out of this transition). Despite the breadth of works on female heroes in literature more generally, there have been only sporadic studies of female heroes in Fantasy literature. This marks a rather striking deficiency in the critical analyses of female heroes—as a genre, we have already seen that much modern Fantasy shares elements with not only epic works but also folk tales, particularly in their representations of heroes and quests. It then follows that Fantasy works with female protagonists should have something to say about the female hero. The few studies that do exist, while exciting and long overdue, either stress ways in which the female hero of Fantasy can complete her quest as part of a partnership in a duomyth or focus on YA literature and quasi-heroes.[121] With the breadth of work on heroes, both male and female and within Fantasy and without, being well-established, this chapter will conclude with an examination of the hero as magical woman in Fantasy. In Bujold's *Paladin of Souls*, we encounter Ista's quest, a journey which not only reflects the experiences of other female heroes, but also demonstrates the ways that an access

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[121] Most of the studies on a female hero as part of a duomyth focus on Patricia A. McKillips' *Riddlemaster* trilogy. Other critical works dealing specifically with fantasy are found in *A Quest of Her Own: The Female Hero in Modern Fantasy* edited by Lori M. Campbell. As will be discussed further on in this chapter, this compilation tends to focus on YA female heroes or side-kicks and villains as heroes.

to magic allows the magical woman as female hero in Fantasy to succeed where other female heroes often fail.

The (Male) Hero and His Quest

The hero is a figure that appears in our earliest literature and whose grip on our collective consciousness has yet to wane. Victor Brombert argues that "so long as man projects an image of himself in myth and art, so long as he somehow tries to justify this image or to deplore it, the notion of the hero is certain to stay alive. . . . The very concept of man is bound up with that of the hero" (1969: 11). While the hero remains as a figure in our myths, literature, television, movies, and society, who he is undergoes frequent modifications. For Brombert, the hero is not only (or always) a representation of the divine, but represents "the historical and political realities of our civilization" (1969: 11). And naturally, as those historical and political realities change, so too must the hero. But what endures is the draw of these figures, the impulse to look to heroes, to see someone who struggles, who fails, who both finds and loses hope, and who represents the worst and the best of us. The hero represents these desires, to come into our own (Attebery 1980: 13), to save the day, to become more than we are. Whether it be a Hobbit from the Shire, a Greek warrior defending his honor, or a genius billionaire playboy who builds himself a meccha, the hero, though ever-changing, remains a profoundly powerful figure of the human imagination.

My use of the pronoun "he" in this section so far is a conscious choice: early conceptions of the hero imagined him almost exclusively as male. Even in those works that conceded the existence of female heroes, the subsequent analysis made it clear

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that these critics were not truly interested in examining female heroes with the same

rigor with which they approached their male counterparts. Part of this is, of course,

due both to the materials many theorists used as their exemplars of heroes and what

their heroes were meant to accomplish, whether in literature or the mundane world.

Two such examples of this are the idea of the hero as a Great Man,[122] popular in the

19th C, and the Romantic, or Byronic, hero[123] of literature, who emerged in the

Romantic period but remains popular today. The hero as Great Man necessarily takes

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[122] In this sense, the hero is more clearly a historical and social figure, and, subsequently, a male one. In *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1840) Thomas Carlyle writes: "They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or attain" (1840: 3). He identifies six classes of heroes through which we may glimpse "into the very marrow of the world's history," such as the Prophet and the King (1840). Carlyle ends his study by telling the reader that this subject of heroes "enters deeply . . . into the secret of Mankind's ways and vitalest interests in this world, and is well worth explaining at present" (1840: 287). The Great Man was also of interest to Georg Wilhelm Freidrich Hegel. In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel argues that historical men, those "whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirit. They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purposes and their vocation" (1900: 30). These men, "the Heroes of an epoch," are the best of that time, but their purposes are to satisfy themselves, not others. Others follows these great men because "they feel the irresistible power of their own inner Spirit thus embodied" (1900: 31). Critics like Herbert Spencer would disagree with Carlyle's focus on Great Men as heroes, pointing to the fact that these rulers and generals could not have accomplished their great feats without troops in the present, and what they inherited from those who came before them (1880: 35).

[123] This hero has ambition, aspiration, aggressive individualism, and a "Promethean spark" (Stein 2004: 1). According to Atara Stein, the Byronic hero "creates his own rules and his own moral code, and while he may break the law in pursuit of his goals, he takes responsibility for his actions. With his superior capabilities, the Byronic hero . . . provides his audience with a satisfying vicarious experience of power *and* empowerment, autonomy, mastery, and defiance of oppressive authority" (2004: 1-2). On the other hand, the Byronic hero also "doesn't know how to relate to other people, he is a self-absorbed egotist, and he makes annoying, gratuitous displays of his powers, unaware of any other means of human interaction" (2004: 2). Like the hero as a Great Man, these heroes "fulfill a fantasy of the powerful leader who will make the right decisions and take decisive action on the side of justice" (Stein 2004: 4).

as its subject male heroes as it looks to leaders of men and figures throughout history

such as the Priest, Prophet, and King (roles that have historically excluded women).

These critics view the hero as one who inspires or leads other men to greatness.

Likewise, the Byronic hero is also imagined as always male. And, while there are

conceptions of the Byronic heroine,[124] the Byronic hero remains an almost exclusively

male character. The tendency to imagine heroes as exclusively male extends to the

studies on heroes that are of most consequence to this chapter, the questing hero found

throughout the literatures of the world.

One of the first meta-studies of the hero as a figure in literature is Lord

Raglan's 1936 study *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama*. He examines

a number of traditional stories[125] from Robin Hood to Norse Sagas, from the Irish

traditional hero Cuchulainn to the story of Troy, in order to establish the hero

archetype through a list of incidents that occur in a majority of the stories he

studied.[126] There are twenty-two in all[127]: he applies this pattern to Oedipus, Theseus,

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[124] Joanna E. Rapf notes that while interest in the Byronic heroine was sparked by the women's movement in the second half of the 20th century, she is still ultimately defined by her relationship to the Byronic hero (1981: 638).

[125] Raglan writes that he is interested in tradition, which is different from history. The traditional narrative is one that has "really been handed down by word of mouth from time immemorial" (1956: 17). He takes several well-known traditional figures and shows that "there is no good reason to believe that any of them had a historical existence" (1956: 45).

[126] Raglan is also concerned with the differences between and interconnectedness of stories, history, and myth. He argues that the heroes of traditional stories are really heroes of myth, and the saga is also based on myth (1956: 117). If traditional heroes have no claim to historicity, Raglan concludes that they were not men, but gods, and their stories were not accounts of fact, but rather of myth.

[127] Raglan's traits of the hero are as follows: 1) his mother is a royal virgin, and 2) his father is a king, 3) who is often a near relative of his mother; 4) the circumstances of his conception are unusual, and 5) he is reputed to be son of a god; 6) at birth an attempt is made to kill him (often by his father), but 7) he is spirited away and 8)

Romulus, Heracles, Perseus, Jason, Bellerophon, Pelops, Asclepios, Dionysus, Apollo, Zeus, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Watu Gunung, Nyikang, Sigurd or Siegfried, Llew Llawgyffes, Arthur, and Robin Hood. From this extensive list, one conclusion we can gather is that Raglan has a propensity for male heroes. While he does acknowledge the heroine as an important aspect of maintaining the prosperity of the people—"in ritual the queen is as important, or nearly as important, as the king" (1956: 147)—his interest is decidedly only in the hero as a specifically male figure.

This focus on the hero in myth would culminate in the most widely-known work on the hero's journey, Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Like Lord Raglan, Campbell takes a comparative approach to examining myths.[128] He sees a common course that runs through all myths, regardless of the culture from which they emerged—the hero journeys, sacrifices, and returns reborn.[129] In a televised interview, Campbell says that

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raised by foster parents in far country; 9) we're told nothing of his childhood, but 10) on reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom; 11) after victory over a king and/or giant, dragon, wild beast, etc., he 12) marries a princess, 13) becomes king, 14) rules uneventfully, and 15) prescribes laws; he then 16) loses favor with gods and/or subjects and 17) is driven from throne and city; 18) finally, he meets a mysterious death, 19) often at the top of a hill; 20) his children, if any, do not succeed him, and, 21) his body is not buried, but 22) he has one or more holy sepulchers (1956: 174-75).

[128] Campbell believed that scholars tended to overspecialize, which is one of the reasons he left his own PhD program. However, as Mary R. Lefkowitz notes, specialization has its merits, as Campbell's desire to prove that myths are "valid for life" leads him to get some of the facts wrong and to bend the specifics of certain myths to conform to his own interpretations (1990: 430-31). She uses as one of her examples his mistaken attribution of Menelaus' journey to ask Proteus for a way home, to Telemachus, claiming he was asking where his father was.

[129] For Carl Jung this was further proof of a collective unconscious manifesting itself through the archetype of the hero. For Jung, the personal unconscious, the one that was of interest to Freud, rested upon a much deeper, inborn, collective unconscious which is universal, not individual (Jung 1972: 2). The content of the collective

there is a certain typical hero sequence of actions which can be detected in

stories from all over the world and from many periods of history. Essentially, it

might even be said there is but one archetypal mythic hero whose life has been

replicated in many lands by many, many people. (Campbell 1991: 166)

From his study of a number of myths, from Classical Greece, to Native American, to

Indian, Campbell works out a basic journey pattern that each of his heroes progresses

through. While each stage is divided into more specific sub-sets, the general

progression is departure—initiation—return. Campbell's analysis of the hero's journey

would have widespread impacts, though perhaps the most notable and openly

acknowledged is his influence on film. In a telling anecdote, Bill Moyers describes

Joseph Campbell's excitement over the *Star Wars* movies, with Campbell exclaiming

that George Lucas "'has put the newest and most powerful spin' to the classic story of

the hero," foregrounding the idea that the hero's journey is not about self-

aggrandizement or an affront to reason, but rather "by overcoming the dark passions,

the hero symbolizes our ability to control the irrational savage within us" (Campbell

1991: xiii).[130]

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unconscious is the archetype, which is altered and influenced by the individual when
they become conscious. Myth is one of the ways that these unconscious archetype's
attain conscious form. However, through a feminist reading of Jung's theories, Naomi
R. Goldenberg convincingly argues that Jung is much more concerned with the male
archetype and devolves into stereotypes of femininity and masculinity (1976). Ronwin
Goodsir Thomas writes that "It is arguable . . . that what, in fact, he has delineated for
us are stereotypes, the types of human psyches repeated without change because the
basic situations within which they have developed have not changed" (1983: 160).
Thus, because Western society is patriarchal, the male and female "archetypes" Jung
discusses can be viewed instead as stereotypes.
[130] Campbell's influence on film is widely recognized. See Rensma 2009: viii-ix;
Moyers 1991; and Kerr 1999.

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* has been an indispensable study of the monomyth of heroes and their journeys to my own work and countless others. However, I am not the first to recognize that, while Campbell claims that the hero's journey may be undertaken by a woman, his work does not reflect that through his use of almost exclusively male heroes and deployment of the male pronoun.[131] He writes that "Woman . . . represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know" (1949: 116), assigning women the role of *being* discovered, and the hero the act *of* discovering. Indeed, when questioned directly about whether or not all heroes are men, Campbell responds:

> Oh, no. The male usually has the more conspicuous role, just because of the conditions of life. He is out there in the world, and the woman is in the home…. Giving birth is definitely a heroic deed, in that it is the giving over of oneself to the life of another (qtd in Frontgia 1991: 15).

Of course, those ambiguous "conditions of life" are largely socially determined by those in power, namely men. As Terri Frontgia notes, this is also problematic as it resurrects a kind of biological determinism in recognizing a general and simplistic truth—women give birth and men do not.[132] She concludes that, while equating heroism with motherhood is good recognition, it "imprisons women in an all-too familiar conceptual and representation 'box'" (1991: 15). Campbell also precludes the female hero specifically from the quest, as it fundamentally requires one to be "out

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[131] See Pearson and Pope 1981: 4; Lichtman 1996: 10; Lefkowitz 1990; Mains 2005: 25; and Heller 1990: 1.

[132] This biologically determined way of looking at the female hero also limits access to heroism to those women who are biologically able to have children, and who then also choose to do so.

there" and not confined to the home. Women are further excluded from the hero's journey in the way Campbell emphasizes not only an external, physical journey, but also an "inner journey" or "quest for identity"—this is why so many works of modern Fantasy so closely resemble the *Bildungsroman*. However, Campbell's conception of a girl's passage to maturity is one of inevitability. Frontgia writes that:

> His perception of a girl's becoming a woman, on the other hand, involves none
> of these prescriptive implications of a cultural rite of passage into maturity.
> The actual possibility of the hero's journey, and therefore heroism, is thus
> implicitly denied women, for they have supposedly reached their maturity,
> their developmental being, through the advent of normal reproductive
> functions. If there is no separation and journey, no choices to be made and
> trials to face, no revelation and acquired boon to bestow upon the return, then
> there can be no heroine. Also, since there is no journey, there is no real identity
> quest either: biology has already provided the ready-made answer to a
> woman's identity. Coming from the mother and soon becoming the mother, her
> identity described and inscribed in a closed loop, she does not need to 'start
> forth' to find her 'father,' her own character and destiny, for these are already
> predetermined by biology: girl-woman-mother. (1991: 16)

The hero must be able to have adventures, to discover himself and prove his abilities, in order to become a hero and return with their prize. Campbell's claim that motherhood is the equivalent of male heroism falls apart almost immediately. And so, despite his claims that women can also be heroes, it is functionally improbable.

Campbell's influence on modern conceptions of the hero's journey makes him an inescapable figure in any study of the questing hero. His casting of the hero's journey as departure—initiation—return is replicated over and over, particularly in works of Fantasy. Indeed, Rand al'Thor's journey in *The Wheel of Time* follows almost exactly Campbell's breakdown of the different stages of the quest. It is also not surprising that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy follows this broad outline, as Tolkien and Campbell utilize many of the same mythical texts as inspiration and examples, respectively. It is a foregone conclusion, then, that similar issues with female agency arise in their work. However, as works with female protagonists became more popular in the 18th C coupled with an influx of women writers in the 19th and 20th centuries, the study of the female hero would find a strong foothold.

The Female Hero and Her Quest

If, as I stated earlier, the hero represents our desires to come into our own, to save the day, to become more than we are, then it matters *who* the hero is. As C.M. Bowra writes, "Their stories are the more absorbing because they themselves are what they are" (1969: 22). A personal identification with the hero, not just the stages of the hero's quest, is essential—we must see ourselves in the hero-as-person via the details of their lives, thoughts, and emotions in order for their sacrifices and triumphs to more effectively affect us. With the wealth of new literature featuring female protagonists, the female hero becomes an undeniably possible figure, though the specifics of her quest are necessarily different from her male counterpart. The working through of the social issues that constrain the female quest in literature has "led to the development of a separate tradition of quest-romance, a distinct history of female heroes and an

equally distinct, although more recent, feminization of quest form that has made viable woman's unique pattern of human development" (Heller 1990: 9). The heroic woman is in a position to challenge societal conceptions of not only the hero, but also of power. The male hero's isolation is impermanent, in that he will never pose a real threat to patriarchal authority. He will not "divide power from sex, gender from honor, strength from violence, and society from male supremacy"—male heroism is a strategy of containment, as, while things might be rearranged, the central terms of order are maintained (1984: 9). But the female hero challenges these relationships, and thus poses more of a risk to traditional power structures. Because the quest involves both an internal self-discovery and a journey outward, women living within patriarchal societies face obstacles their male counterparts never do.[133] In response, the female hero's quest presents a unique structural model that does not simply exchange the genders in Campbell's monomyth, but also takes into account the societal, historical, and political obstacles female heroes face.

Some theorists have approached the female hero in the same way that Lord Raglan maps out the numerous character traits of the male hero, finding that, while different, the female hero does in fact display a pattern to her life story.[134] Other

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[133] Heller argues that "Rather than opening new territories and creating new alternatives to social convention, the female quester develops in accordance with a society that confines her, reshapes her aspirations, makes her aware of limitations, and leads her to resolve her quest only in socially available terms" (1990: 26). While this tends to hold true for early female heroes of realistic novels, it will become apparent that the magical woman as female hero of the Fantasy novel is able to resist this type of resolution.

[134] After attempting to apply Lord Raglan's hero traits to various female heroes and finding his structure insufficient, Mary Anne Jezewski compiled her own list of eighteen traits that comprise a consistent pattern found in Greek female heroes. Those traits are: 1) her parents are royal or godlike, and 2) they are often related; 3) there is a

theorists of the female hero take as their paradigmatic example Apuleius' Psyche

before moving on to the female protagonists of realistic novels, attempting to reclaim

the title "hero" for female characters.[135] These theorists argue that women in early

myths were often presented on the sidelines—as the hero's mother, an obstacle he had

to overcome or destroy in the specter of female sexuality, or the prize to be won

(Lichtman 1996: 11)—but Apuleius' Psyche is clearly the protagonist of her tale as

she is faced with a number of trials to complete in order to gain her ultimate prize,

whatever it is. Psyche represents heroism that is not based on external actions alone

(actions which are often based on feats of strength, military prowess, or social or

political power—areas where women are often limited due to physiology or culture)

(Edwards 1984: 11). Dana A. Heller also points to Psyche as an example that a search

for prototypes of the female hero does not reveal a scarcity of bold women, but rather

a teleology that undervalues female heroism (1990: 22). This bias is the only reason

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mystery surrounding her conception and/or birth; 4) little is known of her childhood; 5) she herself is a ruler or goddess; 6) she is charming and beautiful; 7) she uses men for political purposes; 8) she also controls men in matters of love and sex; 9) she is married; and 10) she has a child or children; 11) she has lovers; 12) her child succeeds her; 13) she does a man's job or deed; 14) she prescribes law; 15) there are conflicting views of her goodness; 16) her legend contains the Andromeda theme; and 17) the subsequent resolution of this theme is by treacherous means resulting in untimely death, exile, incarceration, etc; and 18) her death is uneventful and may not be mentioned in her legend (1984: 57-58). By applying these traits to various female heroes, both literary and historical, Jezewski demonstrates that not only are Raglan's hero traits not gender-neutral, but that the female hero does in fact display a pattern in her life story.

[135] Mary R. Lefkowitz has a less flattering reading of Psyche's story, noting that, unlike her male counterparts, Psyche can accomplish nothing without assistance, and her story ends after her child is born (1981: 45). While Lefkowitz's criticism concerning the coincidence of of Psyche's heroic quest and her entrance into motherhood is valid, it is important to remember that no heroes complete their quests without significant assistance.

Psyche's story has remained largely in the shadows of both literary criticism of the hero and popular imagination.[136] Even Joseph Campbell points to Psyche as completing a successful hero's quest; however, he also calls it the "most charming" example of the tasks and trials a hero must often face, trivializing her quest (Campbell 1949: 97). For feminist critics like Heller and Edwards, Psyche stands as an important figure in studies of the female hero—among Odysseus, Achilles, Jason, and Heracles, Psyche also sets out, completes her quests, and gains her ultimate boon, demonstrating that "hero" is an available archetype for female characters.

The societal obstacles faced by 19th century female almost-heroes would also prevent many of the would-be quests of the growing number of female protagonists in late 19th and 20th century works from achieving completion. For example, characters like Jane Austen's Emma, or Susan Warner's Ellen Montgomery can be called heroines, but they don't quite achieve hero status, for they remain trapped by social restrictions and ideas of female "goodness."[137] In these instances, social prescriptions on femininity and womanhood prohibit a completion of the entire hero's quest that has

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[136] Psyche's story also foregrounds the power of love. All heroism, Edwards claims, is an appeal to love. This love, as Edwards notes, does not have to be sexual or romantic. *The Iliad* ends not with Hector's bloody body, but with Achilles and Priam "joined in prayer, reconciled, if only for a moment." It is a social, not private, impulse that "seeks expression in public form and brings about a change from an old idea of community to a new ideal" (1984: 13).

[137] Heller notes that feminist critics have identified an absence of "heroic female self-image." She attributes this to the fact that "Women have been blocked from identifying themselves with the active subject of the quest-romance because they have internalized an image of themselves as passive objects, framed by the classic structure of myth, removed from the very symbols and activities the quest traditionally evokes" (1990: 6). This further reinforces the idea that the figure of the hero, being able to see oneself in the personality of the hero themselves, is an integral and important act in demonstrating to readers available ways of being.

historically been made available to male characters and, consequently, has reflected

the possibilities open to male readers but not female ones. While many of these

protagonists come close to satisfying some of the facets of the female hero, they are

typically constrained in some way. If they manage the first stages of the quest, they are

typically thwarted at the end of their journeys, often through marriage (Heller 1990:

26). Jane Eyre is a paradigmatic example of this: she is able to venture out and embark

on a journey of self-discovery, overcoming several obstacles, but in the end, marries,

and by marrying Mr. Rochester and becoming Mrs. Rochester, Jane accepts her new

social role as wife and ultimately becomes not a hero, but a heroine. For Edwards, this

serves only to take rebellious and intellectually aggressive women and reinforce their

subordination.[138] Edwards also argues that the female almost-heroes are "defeated by

the authors' sense that the tests involved are impossible for the would-be hero to

perform" (1984: 16).[139] In later works, instead of marriage, many female almost-

heroes experience suicide, madness, or fatal illness before completing all stages of

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[138] Edwards notes that, while Psyche's tale also ends in a happy marriage and a child, Psyche moves from an earthly realm to a heavenly one and gives birth to a daughter, while Emma, Jane, and Dorothea remain worldly beings and all give birth to sons. Edwards explains that "the sex of their offspring serves to suggest the abatement of their power. Trapped between their husbands and their sons, Emma, Jane, and Dorothea are reduced to fit the narrow dimensions of their final role"—not the hero, but the heroine (1984: 103).

[139] Edwards gives *Jude the Obscure*, *The Awakening*, and *The Portrait of a Lady*, as examples of this type of marriage. In these works, the traditional, conventionalizing power of marriage is shown in the ways this power destroys the autonomy of the female characters and warps their sexuality (1984: 109). What is unique about this approach is that this "bad" marriage is not a transitional phase to a future, more enlightened union.

their quest.[140] As women gained more power politically, it seems that more drastic measures had to be taken outside of marriage to curtail their quests.

By the twentieth-century, authors begin inventing maneuvers whereby their hero can break out into the world—a necessary step in the hero's quest and the one most frequently blocked, or resolved, by marriage or insanity. This was largely engendered by the new historical opportunities for women to venture more confidently out into society, giving female protagonists new things to do and giving new shapes to the plots in which they find themselves (Edwards 1984: 145). The new possibility of work outside the home, allowing not only for economic compensation, but also for a communal structure as a replacement for domesticity, left these newly heroic figures "free to invent new modes of human intercourse, [moving] from the periphery of a hostile society to the center of a new communal form" (Edwards 1984: 236). Finally, this ability to venture out, one of the foundational moves of the hero's journey, becomes more available to female characters as women themselves are able to venture out of the private sphere.

However disappointing the earlier aborted quests of female almost-heroes may be, they serve as important steps to achieving a female hero that completes all the stages of the hero's quest. Each addition or attempt at a female hero quest reveals the obstacles that confront the female hero, and each text plays out "one move in an ongoing game and makes the attentive reader conscious, as the hero is conscious, that

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[140] Rather than viewing these as failures, Heller sees "a flight into strategic self destruction as women writers struggle to discover an authentic expression of woman's plight in patriarchal society. Death, in this sense, must be understood as no mere gesture of defeat but as a cry for action and an appeal to readers" (1990: 30).

future moves must require untried strategies" (Edwards 1984: 16).[141] With this, we see a forward momentum in the ability of the female hero to alter structures of power and complete a quest that mirrors in its general structure that of the male hero. Likewise, Lichtman notes that it is only recently that women writers have had an opportunity as seeing themselves as heroes, and have begun imagining alternatives to an end in marriage or death (1996: 9).[142] It is evident from these studies that the ability for women to accomplish the stages of the traditional hero's quest, imagined as undertaken by a male figure, necessitates a certain socio-political status for women in the actual world. This highlights a reciprocal, recursive relationship between literature and life: as women in the "real" world are given more opportunities, female heroes have more space to branch out, and the female heroes of literature show women in the "real" world myriad possibilities for enlarging their sphere and having adventures. As women continually gain more equality and opportunity, the hero's quest becomes more attainable in realistic fiction, making "hero," like "mother" and "wife," a viable label for female protagonists.

One of the most expansive studies of the female hero is Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope's *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* (1981). What makes Pearson and Pope's work so appealing to this study is that they replicate

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[141] A chronological investigation of female heroes in modern Fantasy would be an interesting and worthwhile endeavor. I predict one would find a similar forward momentum, but accomplished in unique ways within the confines of the genre.
[142] Lichtman is particularly interested in examining the remnants of the Goddess worshipping matrilineal cultures that patriarchal societies would displace and "the denigration of female consciousness that leaves control over the life processes to the male" (1996: 24)—a character who is an archetypal hero that passes through the three stages of virgin, mother, crone.

Campbell's basic division of departure—initiation—return, but (re)imagine them

through the lens of the female hero. Pearson and Pope's study is one of reclamation.

They write that "The present book is itself an example of literary criticism that

reclaims the female heroes of traditional literature and reinterprets them in the light of

feminist analysis" (1981: 8).[143] However, like previous studies of the female hero, they

acknowledge that in prefeminist literature it is often difficult for authors to resolve the

female hero's quest or to supply her with a plot that allows for her to fully realize her

potential.[144] Often the female hero must compromise. But before a female character

can even consider beginning her journey, Pearson and Pope note that she must identify

four main myths—or "dragons" that must be slain—that serve to "leave the potential

hero content with being a heroine only" (1981: 18).[145] Once the female protagonist

slays these dragons "she recognizes that she is not what 'they' say she is, and that she

is in fact valuable and strong" (1981: 67). If these dragons are overcome, the female

hero may start her journey. Pearson and Pope mirror Campbell's division of the quest

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[143] As a primary example they give the fallacious assumption that female protagonists rarely travel (departure, of course, being the first stage of the hero's quest). In fact, female protagonists travel all the time, and often great distances. Geoffrey Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Shakespeare's Rosalind, Defoe's Moll Flanders, Doris Lessing's Martha Quest all embark on often multiple journeys. Of course, Dorothy goes to OZ and Alice travels through the looking glass (1981: 9).

[144] They write that realistic literature "in order to seem credible, must conform to people's beliefs about reality" (1981: 11). Thus, even though many early works have female protagonists who travel, their main concern is courtship and marriage and thus conform to versions of the love story.

[145] Edwards makes a similar observation concerning the heroine. She writes: "A primary character, the hero inspires and requires followers; the heroine obeys, falls into line, takes second place. Although a hero can theoretically exist in a narrative without a heroine, the reverse is not the case…. The hero possesses vision, daring, and power: to charm, move, break with the past, endure hardship and privation, journey into the unknown, risk death and survive—at least in spirit. The hero dances in the spotlight. The heroine is eclipsed, upstaged, in darkness" (1984: 5-6).

into three broad phases of departure—initiation—return but reimagine them: departure

becomes Exit from the Garden; the Emperor's New Clothes and A Woman is Her

Mother serve as the initiation stage; and return is cast as New Family and The

Kingdom Transformed. Within each phase "the protagonist is faced with a powerful

figure to interpret, a dragon to slay, and a treasure to win" (1981: 68).[146] Because they

so clearly divide the female hero's quest into discrete stages, and they use a wide

breadth of literature, Pearson and Pope's terminology and the ways in which they

describe the structure of the hero's quest for the female hero are useful for analyzing

Ista's quest and the ways in which it both echoes and diverges from the male hero and

female hero's quest.[147] I will refer to their study frequently as it enables me to clearly

contrast Campbell's hero stages with the stages experienced by a female hero.

Studies of the Female Hero in Modern Fantasy

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[146] The female hero exits the garden when she realizes that those figures who had previously served as guides for her life are in fact her captors. These figures include parents, husbands, and religious or political authorities. In order to free herself, she "must leave the garden of dependency . . . slay the dragon of the virginity myth, and assume the role of spiritual orphan" (1981: 68). In the second stage she meets the seducer. While he often introduces her to a world of experience, he ultimately turns out to be another captor, thus requiring the hero to "slay the dragon of romantic love and demythologize the seducer" (1981: 68). Once she discovers that sexuality and independence—qualities society defines as male—are hers, she achieves autonomy and wholeness. In the third stage, the hero travels to her ancestral home (literally or symbolically) in search of her father, only to discover that it is her "mother with whom she seeks to be rejoined" (1981: 68). The hero, with an aid, frees herself from the myth of female inferiority and identifies a "viable female tradition" (1981: 68).
[147] For the purposes of this study, Pearson and Pope are perhaps too quick to bestow the label of "hero" onto the female protagonists they study. Any female protagonist that completes even a portion of the hero's journey is eligible for the designation "hero," whereas I am more interested in female characters who clearly complete every stage of the journey, as their male counterparts have been doing for centuries.

If the female protagonists of more realistic literature find their hero's quest interrupted or curtailed by the societal expectations of the time in which the protagonists lived, then a genre that is not limited by realistic expectations of world-building should offer more creative opportunities for female protagonists to become female heroes, particularly if that genre is also intensely interested in the hero's quest. Unfortunately, as we have seen, Fantasy is not immune to replicating gendered relations and expectations, even within entirely created secondary worlds—Fantasy authors are, of course, still products of their own times and biases. Like realistic literature, however, Fantasy has also come a long way in presenting female heroes. This makes the sporadic way in which female heroes in Fantasy have been addressed in critical scholarship, while not surprising, certainly disappointing.

In studies on the female hero in Fantasy, the work of Patricia McKillip often arises as an example of an author who presents more or less successful female heroes; however, her female heroes are not completely successful in completing their quests. Sharon Emmerichs writes that

> In her fantasy fiction, McKillip quite clearly maps heroic qualities upon her female heroes, but at the same time makes an extremely self-conscious effort to keep them within "traditional" high fantasy conventions, thereby avoiding the tendency to portray female heroes as "modified male[s]" playing "traditional male roles" (Spivack 8). In this way, McKillip also avoids the danger described by Honor McKitrick Wallace, who states that, '[s]tories [. . .] pose serious problems for feminist narrative theories,' which in turn 'precludes desire and action' (176) for female heroes. (2005: 207)

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And yet, despite her portrayal of strong female characters, her female heroes are often conflicted, as their function as hero and their gender as woman do not in that combination fit into the genre without some tension (2005: 208). This is perhaps why, according to Emmerichs, McKillip soon returns to science fiction, distancing her science fiction female characters from her Fantasy ones.

McKillip is also credited with presenting a female hero as part of a duomyth in her *Riddlemaster* trilogy. Christina Mains argues that "after undertaking a journey towards identity no less difficult than that of her male counterpart, [Raederle] realizes both a sense of her own power within the community and a loving relationship in which both are equal partners" (2005: 24). Mains goes on to write that the quest is "shared equally between a male and a female hero who together achieve not only a sense of selfhood and autonomy but also a loving union with the other" (2005: 24).[148] But even the duomyth does not completely elevate Raederle to female hero: Morgon, his attainment of his crown, his journey to claim Raederle as his prize, and the trials he faces on this journey, occupy the entire first volume of the trilogy; the Riddlemaster of the series title is Morgon, who wins his crown in a riddle game with the ghost of a cursed king; and the reader is still left with a "not-quite-happily-ever-after" as Raederle, while equal in strength and magical ability to Morgon, does not hold the equal position of High One he does, "her status would seem to be that of the High

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[148] The duomyth is still the story of the quest of one hero at the structural (i.e., surface) level, split between two characters, with each character assuming multiple roles and functions (Mains 2005: 29). The duomyth suggests that mastery might be found in the union between equals and not in the mastery of a single hero.

One's wife or partner" (Mains 2005: 31).[149] While reading the trilogy as a duomyth is

perhaps more satisfactory, it takes some creative re-imagining of the first book of the

trilogy and the title itself to sustain Raederle as an equal hero.

The most extended treatment of female heroes in modern Fantasy is Lori M.

Campbell's collection of essays titled *A Quest of Her Own: Female Heroes in Modern*

Fantasy (2014). In this collection, we find: a number of essays that examine women in

folktales and romance; several that attempt to reclaim or recast female characters from

the work of Tolkien; a section on villains and villain-heroes; as well as one on

sidekicks and helpers.[150] The section that should have most clearly examined the

questing female hero, "Underestimated Overachievers: Unlikely and Unstoppable

Female Heroes," contains essays almost exclusively on YA or children's fantasy

works.[151] The first essay most clearly deals with a potential female hero from Ursula

K. LeGuin's *Tehanu*.[152] Here, Erin Wyble Newcomb makes a compelling argument

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[149] Mains herself acknowledges this complication to the reading of *Riddlemaster* as a duomyth. However, this ending does in fact make sense if one acknowledges that the hero of the trilogy has always been Morgon, the Riddlemaster himself.

[150] All of these essays are important and thought-provoking analyses of works of modern Fantasy and add much needed dimension to studies of the female hero, yet, for the purposes of this study, none clearly address the female questing hero, a figure that is so prevalent when the questing hero is male.

[151] The one exception is Erin Wyble Newcomb's "'Weak as woman's magic': Empowering Care Work in Ursula Le Guin's *Tehanu*" and, while I appreciate the need to recast these kinds of labors as heroic actions, I am reminded of Edward's admonition of Campbell's claim that motherhood is woman's most heroic act, relying on stereotypically feminine roles in order claim heroic status. Somewhere I would like to see recognition of the female hero venturing out as the male hero has always done.

[152] Newcomb notes that the critical consensus is that Le Guin returns to *Earthsea* as part of her burgeoning feminist consciousness. *Tehanu* deals with the importance of female experience and knowledge in order to act as a feminist intervention in the *Earthsea* world. She accomplishes this by placing Tenar at the center of the text (2014: 95).

for seeing Tenar, the central figure in this addition to the *Earthsea* series, as not only a reconsideration of the Fantasy genre but also of the hero itself. According to Newcomb, *Tehanu* "simultaneously destabilizes the male monopoly of heroism and elevates ordinary women's work to the potentially extraordinary. Tenar is a female hero, however seemingly unlikely, precisely because of her commitment to care" (2014: 96). Through utilizing theories of feminist ethics of care, Newcomb convincingly makes this point. While it may be useful to imagine new types of heroes and new ways to be heroic, I am also hesitant to put all my faith in reimagining female heroes through tasks that are traditionally gendered as feminine.

All of the critical works discussed above offer nuanced readings of different sub-genres of Fantasy, and work like this on the wide array and vast diversity of women characters in Fantasy is long overdue; however, literature in general, and Fantasy in particular, is replete with stories of male heroes who participate in successful quests. While many of these studies make compelling arguments for seeing certain female characters as heroic, the works that posit a female character as *the* hero seem to in some way qualify her heroism. What the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate is that the female hero, one who participates in the same type of quest as the male hero, does exist in Fantasy. In fact, Fantasy is the most natural place for her to exist. It is structurally based on traditional quest narratives, and the use of magic allows the female hero of Fantasy an advantage her realistic counterparts do not have: access to a power outside of patriarchal control.

Chalion, or Bujold's Patriarchal World

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While I am specifically interested in the female hero's quest as undertaken by Ista in the second book of the series, *Paladin of Souls*, understanding the first novel adds an integral dimension to the way in which Ista's journey unfolds and its importance not only within the world of Chalion, but meta-textually within the Fantasy genre itself.[153] *The Curse of Chalion* is a story that focuses mostly on political intrigue and interpersonal relationships. Lupe dy Cazaril, after a betrayal that sends him to the slave ships of the Roknari, returns to the Royacy of Chalion and the family he served as a young boy hoping for some minor position within the household. Recognized by the old Royina, his vast academic and experiential skills are put to use as he is appointed head tutor to the Royesse Iselle. Eventually, Iselle and her brother, Teidez, are called to the capital city by their half-brother, the current, and ineffectual, Roya Orico. While there, Iselle's brother (next in line to the throne) proves over and over again how unfit he is to rule: he is easily flattered, petulant, and manipulated. Contrary to Teidez, Iselle quickly learns the intricacies of court life, discerning who is a danger and who is a potential ally, and she demonstrates quick wit and intelligence as well as a mastery of the languages of neighboring realms (though Teidez's claim to the throne is never questioned). In an attempt to gain power, Orico's most trusted advisor, Martou dy Jironal, arranges a marriage between Iselle and his younger brother Dondo, who, by all accounts, is a vile and cruel man. When Dondo is killed, Iselle knows she must secure her own fate. In secret, she sends Cazaril to negotiate her marriage to the young prince of a neighboring kingdom. She succeeds and manages to

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[153] The third book in the series, *The Hallowed Hunt* (2005), takes place in a different land called the Weald, and while it features the Five Gods and speaks of Chalion and Ibra, it is in no way connected to the events in those nations.

thwart dy Jironal's attempt to take the throne. Iselle's union turns out to be advantageous, as she manages to maintain her own title of Royesse of Chalion, striking a much more egalitarian bargain than any that awaited her in Chalion.[154]

Throughout the novel, Iselle is reminded repeatedly of her place and worth within the social structure of Chalion. The expectations for Iselle are clearly outlined: "An attractive, fresh young royesse was a pawn, not a player, in the politics of Chalion. Her bride-price would come high, but a politically and financially favorable marriage might not necessarily prove a good one in more intimate senses" (2001: 31). In explaining the relative disinterest many of the young men at court have for Iselle, Cazaril explains that "They all know she must be sold out of court, probably out of Chalion altogether, and is not meant for them" (2001: 122). Indeed, Iselle originally has no say in who she is married to, as her half-brother Orico may arrange whatever marriage he pleases to gain the most political advantage. And he does, pledging her to Dondo, a man she has made clear she despises, telling her that "A lady of your rank does not marry to please herself, but to bring advantage to her house" (2001: 166). As has been made clear, Iselle is nothing more than an object for trade, valued only for the advantageous marriage she might one day make.

The Curse of Chalion is not a quest Fantasy. In fact, nearly the entirety of the novel takes place within the castle walls and its concern lies mostly with character development and interpersonal relationships. And while the plot can be relayed, as I

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[154] The kingdom of Ibra, while still a monarchy ruled by kings with a male line of succession, is notably more egalitarian than Chalion. Very little of the book is spent there, but through Cazaril's interactions with the king and prince we learn that women often ride into battle and command troops. Cazaril notes that the "royse's mother won two sieges" (2001: 344).

have done above, without mentioning magic, magic is what drives nearly all the action. The royal house is under a curse, a curse that can only be broken if someone willingly dies for them three times. In order to save Iselle from her fate as Dondo dy Jironal's future wife, Cazaril performs death magic, a ritual that is supposed to kill both the caster and their victim, but, while dy Jironal dies, Cazaril is brought back to life as a saint, with the ability to see not only the black shroud of the curse that surrounds the members of the royal family, but also the glow of other saints. He dies once more when he is stabbed with a sword during Martou dy Jironal's attempt to reclaim Iselle. It is later revealed that Royse Bergon of Ibra, the prince Iselle marries, was in fact a young boy Cazaril met on the slave ship, whose life Cazaril saved by sacrificing his own (though he was later revived). This makes three times Cazaril willingly sacrifices his own life for the royal family, thus breaking the curse. He is able to accomplish many of these things because after performing death magic, Cazaril opens himself to the Mother, one of the five gods of Chalion, and becomes a saint.

The use of magic in *The Curse of Chalion* is an important precursor to *Paladin of Souls*, particularly the relationship between magic and the male protagonist. Cazaril's stint as a saint (he loses his powers after his third death) is characterized as one of sacrifice. It is not necessarily a gaining of power, but of emptying, of surrendering and allowing one's body to become a vessel. A fellow saint explains to Cazaril that "A saint is not a virtuous soul, but an empty one. He—or she—freely gives the gift of their will to their god. And in renouncing action, makes action possible" (2001: 199). Through Cazaril's working of death magic, Dondo's spirit, along with the demon who was to claim it, becomes trapped within Cazaril. Cazaril

thus literally becomes a vessel, not only for the god who uses him, but also for the soul of dy Jironal and the demon itself.[155] The "tumor" containing these two spirits is held within Cazaril's belly and its relation to pregnancy is a clear one. When Cazaril expresses disgust with his new role as vessel, Beatriz (Iselle's close friend and Cazaril's love interest) reminds him that "you can't expect us to get all squeamish just because you're…inhabited. I mean…[women are] expected to share our bodies someday. Doesn't make *us* horrible" (2001: 282). Cazaril's history as a young castellar, beloved by his men and friends, who bravely defends his post against unbeatable odds, is betrayed twice and sent to suffer on a slave galley, but overcomes all of this and makes it back to a place that was once his home would normally make up the bulk of a modern Fantasy novel. However, this narrative is relegated to backstory, revealed in asides and through dialogue, while in the story's present, he spends most of his time in the company not of soldiers or fellow travelers, but of two young women.

Cazaril and his willingness to submit, sacrifice, and to host powers that are not his are the focus of *The Curse of Chalion*. Such passive or feminine attributes do not tend to be the defining characteristics of the fantasy hero, and to do these things not during a clear battle between good and some great evil, but rather to help a young girl who he has been tasked to mentor and protect from an unhappy marriage is even more peculiar to the genre. This presentation of the protagonist in the first novel helps to distinguish Royina Ista's unique relationship to magic, making the second novel—the

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[155] We have again a manifestation of the trinity: Cazaril is three "beings" in one.

one whose protagonist is not a dashing young castellar but an older, widowed mother—the Fantasy hero's quest.

Royina Ista, or the Mad Woman in the Attic

We first meet Royina Ista in *The Curse of Chalion*, though only through her very brief encounters with Cazaril and through second-hand accounts. This is because her family believes her mad, and largely confines her to her rooms in the castle towers. Cazaril notes that, while marriage tends to be a one-way journey for the bride, "the dowager royina had returned…*broken*," and he becomes concerned that perhaps madness runs in the family (2001: 56). Before Cazaril himself becomes a saint, he runs into Ista in the garden. She asks him a somewhat vague question, if the lost dead visit him in his dreams, as they visit her in hers. Cazaril finds her not mad, though "a trifle elliptical" but "had no trouble catching her meaning, which would surely not be the case if she were mad" (2001: 81). They speak for a few more moments about ghosts and death, until Ista's attendant returns and Cazaril observes that

> If Ista spoke to very many of her duller company with the cryptic leaps of
> thought she'd sprung on him, it was little wonder rumors circulated of
> madness, and yet…her occasional opacity of discourse felt more like cipher
> than babble to him. Of an elusive internal consistency, if only one held the key
> to it (2001: 84).

Thus, the truth of Ista's "madness" is already suspect to Cazaril and to the reader. It will become more so after Cazaril becomes a saint.

In the Zangre, the castle in the capitol of Chalion where Cazaril becomes a saint, he is able to see the ghosts that inhabit the castle as well as the aura of other

saints and the curse that shrouds itself around the royal family. Upon returning to

Baocia, Cazaril asks Ista if she can see anything different about him. She replies "I see

only with my eyes, now. I've been blind for years, you see. *You* see?" (2001: 317).

While others take this to be mad rambling, Cazaril understands that at one time Ista

had also been a saint—had seen the ghosts in the Zangre, could see the aura of other

saints, and knows of the curse that surrounds her family—because he experiences the

same thing. She reveals that at one point she did try to tell her family the truth of what

had happened to her and what she saw. Ista tells Cazaril:

> I tried to tell [my mother], once. She decided I was truly mad. It's not a bad
>
> life, being mad, you know. It has its advantages. You don't have to make any
>
> decisions. What to eat, what to wear, where to go…who lives, who dies…You
>
> can try it yourself, if you like. Just tell the truth. Tell people you are pregnant
>
> with a demon and a ghost, and you have a tumor that talks vilely to you, and
>
> the gods guard your steps, and see what happens next (2001: 324-25).

Ista, then, had never been mad. She had simply experienced something that others did

not understand, and her attempts to tell them were seen as madness and she was

treated accordingly—isolated, patronized, always supervised.[156]

    Paladin of Souls opens with Ista's mother's death, as the responsibility for her

continued imprisonment is passed on to the castle warder. She remarks that her

mother's keys had been "handed back for permanent safekeeping not to [Ista], but to

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[156] Ista's ordeal with her family is reminiscent of Cassandra, King Priam and Queen
Hecuba's daughter, gifted with second sight by Apollo, but cursed so that no one
would believe her prophecies. Cassandra's family, like Ista's, views her as a
madwoman.

good, old, honest dy Ferrej. Keys to lock out all danger…and, if necessary, Ista in"

(2003: 1). Ista has been deemed mad by those around her, and yet, it is her isolation,

her confinement to the home and domesticity, that is stifling her. Cazaril himself

wonders what she does all day. He notes that "She did not sew, apparently, nor did she

seem much of a reader, nor did she keep musicians of her own. Cazaril had seen her

sporadically at prayers . . . Other times weeks would pass when she seemed to keep no

observances to the gods at all" (2001: 82). But it is through Cazaril that we know Ista

never was mad to begin with. Distraught and overcome with grief for a period of time,

but never mad. However, this perceived madness becomes integral to how she

manages to begin her quest.

Departure, or The Journey Begins

Traditionally, the hero's departure begins with a call to adventure, often

signified by some type of herald. Campbell notes that the call may come in the form of

a blunder, or "one may be only casually strolling, when some passing phenomenon

catches the wandering eye and lures one away" (1949: 58). For those who do not

refuse the call, [157] the journey often begins with a protective figure "who provides the

adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" and who

signifies a kind of protective power (1949: 69; 71-72). Once the hero (with his guide)

begins the journey, he comes to the first threshold, whose guardian stands "for the

limits of the hero's present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond them is darkness, the

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[157] Some heroes may refuse the call. The refusal is not one of adventure, per se, but rather the hero's refusal to give up his own interest or to make secure the present system of ideals, virtues, and goals (1949: 60).

unknown, and danger" (1949: 77). The hero must journey out beyond the safe

boundaries of the village, or depart, for his quest to truly begin.

The initial stages of Ista's quest closely resemble those outlined by Campbell

and, by extension, Pearson and Pope, for whom the safe village is reimagined as a

garden, and the first step of the female hero's journey is the exit from this garden

(though this garden is often imagined as a confining house). While they acknowledge

that the heroic exit is available to women at any stage of their lives, it is often old age

that seems to encourage, rather than prohibit, this exit. Of course, the exit does not

promise a happy ending, but it does provide independence, integrity, and self-respect

(1981: 83). It is clear that Ista experiences the stifling nature of a confining house.

After her mother's death and the transfer of the keys to the castle warder, Ista "knew

what she feared—to be locked up in some dark, narrow place by people who loved

her" (2003: 1). It is literal confinement, believed by those who love her to be a

protection for her in her madness. Her age and position as a widowed mother in a

patriarchal society also serve to unmoor her. For her entire life, she has been defined

by her relationship to those around her. She realizes: "The duties that had defined her,

all accomplished. Once, she had been her parents' daughter. Then great, unlucky Ias's

wife. Her children's mother. At the last, her mother's keeper. *Well, I am none of these

things now*" (2003: 2). Those ties that are generally used to define women within

patriarchal societies—as daughter, wife, mother, caretaker—no longer apply. Ista is

simultaneously freed from certain expectations and left without the identity conferred

by her relationships. It is freeing in its erasure.

While the traditional hero's quest begins with the call to adventure, the female

hero's quest often begins with "a single voice . . . telling her that she is worthwhile,

that she has a right to happiness and fulfillment, and that she has the ability to find it"

(1981: 83). While in both cases the hero is prompted to begin their quest, for the

female hero this quest is explicitly linked to her own worth, to a kind of impulse to

move beyond proscribed limitations. Ista's desire to begin her quest starts with a

"commanding impulse from within" (Pearson and Pope 1981: 84) when a well-

meaning attendant assumes Ista is contemplating suicide because she is standing too

close to the edge of a battlement. After being coaxed away from the edge, Ista thinks:

"*Content you, woman. I do not desire the stones. I desire the road*" (2003: 3). This

sudden realization takes her completely by surprise, but the call to adventure for the

female hero is often "a change in circumstances, which forces the hero to move

beyond the familiar and secure life" (Pearson and Pope 1981: 85). Often, as in Ista's

case, the female hero requires an encounter that gives her courage to begin her quest,

the reminder of her loving imprisonment, and the fact that everyone around her views

her as a danger to herself. Bujold also explicitly recalls the traditional quest narrative

of modern Fantasy—and Ista's divergence from it—when Ista begins puzzling over

her new desire:

> But how could *she* gain the road? Roads were made for young men, not
>
> middle-aged women. The poor orphan boy packed his sack and started off
>
> down the road to seek his heart's hope . . . a thousand tales began that way. She
>
> was not poor, she was not a boy, and her heart was surely as stripped of all
>
> hope as life and death could render it. (2003: 3)

This makes clear that this quest will not function in the same way as much Fantasy, with the stereotypical and common hero's journey. Indeed, Ista's first attempt is poorly planned and soon aborted. After feeling this sudden urge to take to the road, she simply begins walking, in her mourning dress, down the road. After about an hour of stumbling in the mud with no provisions, no money, and no plan, she is found by the castle warder, loaded onto a groom's horse, and brought back to the keep. This is not an uncommon first misstep, as "without the necessary confidence and determination, the hero may exit for a time and then return prematurely to the garden" (Pearson and Pope 1981: 88). But it is on this premature exit and return that Ista begins devising her plan to begin her quest.

According to Pearson and Pope, the exit becomes possible once the female hero identifies the specific figures who have worked to restrict her and who have convinced her that she must doubt and repress herself. These figures are often, in a sense, captors: parents and husbands or lovers are common figures (1981: 104). Ista is in large part freed from her primary captors by their deaths. What now constricts her is the belief that she is mad. She does not need to necessarily "convert her captor" or free herself from her "dependence on the love and approval of her captors" (Pearson and Pope 1981: 104), she needs only to find a way to liberate herself from their careful, watchful eyes. Her literal imprisonment necessitates more than simply her desire for adventure or her ability to cast off the expectations of others: she must literally find a way to escape, or at least to trick them into letting her go. Her plan comes from a

widow she met on her first, failed exit.[158] Ista's cover is a religious pilgrimage, for who could refuse a grieving daughter a pilgrimage in humility?

While in many of the works Pearson and Pope examine, the journey moves from innocence and unconsciousness to consciousness, Ista's age and life experience also modifies this transition. Most heroines (and heroes) begin their quests in their youth. Indeed, part of the quest is in fact this transition to adulthood. However, Ista is well past her girlhood, and so, marriage and motherhood are already markers of womanhood that she has achieved and moved past. Her age thus also expands the idea of the female hero. Much like the way Cazaril's journey is relegated to backstory, so too is Ista's past (a series of events that by themselves would often constitute their own novel in a Fantasy series). Ista has already fallen in love, borne children, been betrayed, faced a trial, and suffered loss. She has little faith in the myths of "happily ever after." However, all of these actions were done still within a patriarchal structure, while fulfilling expected roles of wife and mother. It is this new journey in which find a new identity, one that is not reliant on these previous relations.

Initiation, or the Trials of the Hero

For both the male and female hero, once they have begun their journey, they must face a series of tests before encountering the final trial. The initiation stage comprises the journey proper, where the hero is out in the world encountering various trials. These may be tasks to be completed or minor trials to be overcome, but they are "preliminary victories, unretainable ecstasies, and momentary glimpses of the

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[158] It is certainly no coincidence that her method for escape is given to her by another older (not)woman.

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wonderful land" (Campbell 1949: 109). It is during these trials that the hero also often falls in love. This act of romantic love is important for both Campbell's male hero and Pearson and Pope's female hero. Because women are more constrained by the expectations of patriarchal society concerning romantic partnerships, her journey through this stage of initiation is also crucial to her journey. In this stage, which Pearson and Pope title "The Emperor's New Clothes," the female hero experiences "a fall from innocence into experience" (1981: 142). Also like the male hero, the female hero faces a number of seducers that lure the hero into a new situation and teach her an important lesson. These seducers, who can be individual people, groups, or philosophies, ultimately leave her disappointed. In the case of the female hero, her seducers are typically men, "Because women are expected to find their primary fulfillment through love and marriage" (1981: 143). The inability of these different things to fulfill her keep the female hero moving down her path and continuing on her journey. Once she realizes that her liberation will not come from a man, she is able to take responsibility for her own life. For the female hero, because of societal expectations of purity and marriage, many of the trials she must face during initiation deal in some way with sexuality. Often for the female hero, the encounter with a seducer is not an entirely negative experience because it often results in an awakening of her sexuality. This allows her to recognize realms of experience outside of the mundane (1981: 155).[159]

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[159] Pearson and Pope also note that the would-be-husband will often appear to "rescue" the female hero from the male seducer; however, the two wind up being more similar than different, as they both threaten the female hero's autonomy (1981: 161). What these two seemingly different male figures combined represent is the dualistic

The theme of romantic love and sexuality are essential to Ista's journey, though with some important twists. Bujold effectively sets up, then knocks down or inverts, familiar Fantasy romantic narratives. As a mother and widower, Ista has already fulfilled most of the stringent requirements of her sex. However, as a widow, she is of course, expected to remain chaste for the rest of her days. Though not something she had given much thought to before leaving the confines of her mother's home, once she has begun her journey, love becomes a possibility once again. While on her pilgrimage, her company is attacked by raiders from an enemy state. In typical Fantasy fashion, a lone horse-man comes to her rescue. Upon first seeing him, "Ista's breath caught in a chill, or was that a thrill?" (2003: 114). Bujold then devotes several pages to Ista's rescue, paying particular attention to not only the horseman's features, but his impressive skill with his sword and Ista's apparent admiration.[160] On their ride back to his keep, Ista has a chance to study him more fully. Impressed by both his level-headedness, skill, and appearance, Ista thinks:

> A stunning first impression was not the same thing as love at first sight. But
>
> surely it was an invitation to consider the matter. What of her and love, after
>
> all? At eighteen she had been lifted up by Lord dy Lutez into the bright, easy,
>
> poisoned triumph of her high marriage to Roya Ias. . . . For all the relentless
>
> idealism surrounding virginity, fidelity, and celibacy—for women—Ista had

nature of available female approaches to sexuality—that one may be either sexual, or virtuous. Both reader and hero must learn to reject that duality.

[160] The encounter, however, is not without some comedy, as immediately after being cut free, Ista must find some bushes behind which to relive herself, as her captors had not stopped during the night.

known plenty of ladies of rank in Ias's court who had taken lovers, openly or in secret. She had only the vaguest idea how they'd gone about it." (2003: 123) In true chivalric, knight-rescuing fashion, when Ista's horse becomes tired, her rescuer picks her up and places her in the saddle in front of him. While Ista believes herself past or incapable of seriously considering love, for just a minute on their ride back she thinks she might "dream of love with a handsome officer. When the ride was done, the dream would be over" (2003: 123). Her rescuer turns out to be Arhys dy Lutez, March of Porifors, who is also very happily married to a beautiful woman, thus ending Ista's first moderate foray into a new romantic relationship.

Dy Lutez clearly represents the archetypal knight-hero, and his meeting with Ista is framed in a fairly stereotypical manner: he appears on his horse to save her from kidnappers, expertly battling those who detained her, swinging her onto his horse, and riding back to his castle. And it is in response to this that Ista begins to imagine that she might somehow experience romantic love again. Unfortunately for Ista, this cannot be, but while this first "seducer" "leave[s] her disappointed" (Pearson and Pope 1981: 142), she has discovered an important part of herself: her desire and capacity for love is not completely gone. Bujold takes this rejection of the archetypal knight-hero as romantic savior a step further—it turns out that dy Lutez is actually dead. Even if he was not married and already in love, his physical body no longer lives. It turns out that dy Lutez was mortally injured, but his wife, unwilling to lose him, made a deal with a demon: dy Lutez would be kept alive, but at the expense of his half-brother Illvin. In effect, dy Lutez was stealing his brother's life force, leaving

Illvin incapacitated as in a coma for all but a few hours a day, when dy Lutez would resume his "death" so Illvin could eat and drink. Neither man was aware of this.

But Ista does find love. In a reversal of the Sleeping Beauty trope, it is Illvin who Ista "wakes" and eventually falls in love with. She first sees him, "sleeping," in bed: "He rested atop the counterpane not like a man in a sickbed, but like a man who had lain down for but a moment in the middle of a busy day. Or like a corpse laid out in best garb for his funeral" (2003: 187). Ista is first brought to see Illvin by his caretaker, who demands that Ista kiss him. When she asks him to explain himself he says: "It was a princess put him here. I thought maybe you could wake him. Being a royina and all" (2003: 18). Despite telling him that that was only a children's story, Ista is convinced by his desperation to give it a shot, and allows herself to believe, for a moment, that it might work. It does not. Ista *is* eventually able to save him, but only after she manages to overcome the trial of her magic.[161] Pearson and Pope note that after the female hero rejects "both the man she finds and the idea of being a helpmate, object, or symbol in his heroic journey, she elects instead to develop within herself the heroic qualities society has seen as male" (1981: 177). For Ista, in a fantasy hero's quest, this means mastering her magical ability.

Magic and the Power Within

The nature of magic in Chalion was introduced in the first book, *The Curse of Chalion*. While Ista is blessed by a god (The Bastard) in the same way Cazaril was, their experiences and choices are markedly different. Cazaril's experience with being

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[161] Bujold repeatedly makes it clear that Illvin is second to his brother. The demon sent to entrap Illvin, upon seeing dy Lutez says "Why settle for second-best, for second-in-command" (2003: 340), an uncommon choice for the hero of a Fantasy novel.

a saint would, if experienced by Ista, threaten her new autonomy. His experience, if you recall, was one of sacrifice, of emptying himself out to allow another to work through him, to literally become a vessel. But these traditionally coded feminine traits are exactly what Ista's quest is attempting to set aside: she wants to take control of her own life and destiny, to begin making her own decisions. Cazaril himself makes clear the distinction between his experience with sainthood and why Ista's was (and would be) different. He tells her: "It has to do with the shape of your soul, not its worthiness. You have to make a cup of yourself, to receive that pouring out. You are a sword" (2001: 441). Cazaril uses explicitly gendered imagery, the cup and the sword, but inverts the traditional relationships. If, in *The Curse of Chalion*, Cazaril was able to make of himself a cup, then Ista's hero quest would finally make of her a sword.[162]

Ista also challenges the traditional version of the devout, saintly woman. She initially rejects any attention from the gods. Instead of reverence, Ista openly defies them. Realizing that she has somehow been ensnared in their schemes, she thinks:

> *So, You dragged me here, whichever of You harries me. But you cannot force*
> *me through that door. Nor can you open it yourselves. You cannot lift so much*
> *as a leaf; bending iron or my will is a task equally beyond your capacities.*
> They were at a stand, she and the gods. She could defy them all day long.
> (2003: 167, emphasis in original)

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[162] Before the final battle, Ista is again visited by a god, this time the Father of Winter, who makes of her a doorway for dy Lutez's soul to pass through after his actual death. Ista agrees to this one act of passivity, serving as the conduit between dy Lutez and the Father of Winter, but she does this to reward dy Lutez's sacrifice.

Unlike Cazaril, Ista is unwilling to bend to the will of another, even one of the gods. But Ista cannot defy them in her dreams, and this is where the Bastard visits her. In this visit, Ista experiences another call to adventure: the Bastard calls for her to do what others would not for her son who died from an infected wound and help to save Illvin. He kisses her brow, giving her back her second sight: "Direct, unguided perception of the world of spirit. *His* realm (2003: 170).[163] With this second sight, Ista is able to determine the strange relationship between dy Lutez, his seemingly waking death, and his brother Illvin's illness.

As Ista learns more about Illvin and dy Lutez's connection, her ability to control her new powers also grows. While Cazaril experiences only passive displays of power, like his ability to contain a demon and soul within his belly, Ista learns how to manipulate the connection between Illvin and dy Lutez: the transfer of Illvin's life force to dy Lutez presents itself as "a whispy line of white fire, sluggishly drifting from one body to another" (2003: 304). Ista is able to shift it from Illvin to dy Lutez's wife, Cattilara, the one responsible for making the bargain with the demon. A power that was presented as entirely passive in the first book (when "controlled" by a man) becomes active in Ista's hands. Learning to embrace the Bastard's gift and utilize her magical ability is one of the most difficult trials Ista overcomes, and it is precisely this overcoming that equips her for her final trial.

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[163] Ista was given second sight by the Mother when she was married to Ias in an attempt to break the curse on her family. The terrible outcome of that experience—dy Lutez's death—and the death of her son have led Ista to mistrust the intentions of the gods to help her.

In the traditional hero's quest, the final trial is often the battle with a great force of evil. After Ista has rejected a traditional love object, accepted, for a second time, a call to adventure, opened herself up to the possibility of romantic love, learned to control her power, and saved Illvin, she is prepared to face her final trial. And it is only Ista who can face this enemy. Somehow, the Roknari Dowager Princess Joen and Prince Sordso have harnessed the power of several demons and managed to link together the sorcerers containing them, multiplying their power. Dy Lutez is mortally wounded attempting to kill these sorcerers and his link must be cut and his soul released. Upon his death, the demon Cattilara was using attempts to take control of her, but Ista, trusting in her new powers, "lifts" the demon out of Cattilara's body and eats it, sending it back to where it came from. Unlike Cazaril, who has a demon put inside him, Ista actively consumes. She now has the skills and practice to face the Roknari.

Before the final confrontation, Ista momentarily thinks about passing on her responsibility to a man but emphatically denies this possibility. Prior to leaving to face the Dowager Princess, Ista must fight "back an impulse to fling herself upon [dy Cabon] and beg him to take her place" but she quickly decides "*No. I have paid for this place. I am emptied out with the cost of it. I will not give it up for any man*" (2003: 398, emphasis in original). Ista's final trial, like many traditional heroes, does not consist only in facing a powerful enemy, but also of overcoming her own fears and self-doubts. When she finally arrives at the Roknari camp, Ista realizes that her second-sight is gone and that she no longer feels the power she once had. And yet, Ista does not falter. She faces Joen and her powers suddenly return:

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> Her second sight burst anew upon Ista's mind like a dazzling lightning stroke,
>
> brilliant beyond hope, revealing an eerie landscape. She saw it all in one
>
> glance: the dozen demons, the swirling, crackling lines of power, the agonized
>
> souls, Joen's dark, dense, writhing passenger. The thirteenth demon, spinning
>
> wildly through the air toward her, trailing its evil umbilicus. Ista opened her
>
> jaws in a fierce grin, and took it in a gulp. "Welcome to mine, Joen of Jakona,"
>
> said Ista. "I am the Mouth of Hell." (2003: 407)

Ista proceeds to swallow all of the demons.[164] Unlike Cazaril, Ista does not hold the

demons within her, becoming a host or vessel, but rather banishes them back to hell,

or the realm of the Bastard; her interaction with them is both active and destructive.

During her silent battle with the demons, the Bastard is there with her, guiding

and encouraging her as any trusted guide or mentor would for a male hero. When she

finishes eating the demons and passing them through herself and onto the Bastard, Ista

notes that "A great calm filled her. No pain, no terror, no regret. Their immense

absences seemed to leave room for . . . something. Something new, something never

dreamed before" (2003: 414). Ista learns that she now has the ability to find demons,

separate them from the bodies and souls they are inhabiting, and return them to the

Bastard's realm. Indeed, this is the task that is set out before her. While the male hero

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[164] Ista's ability to lift a demon out of another person and swallow it conjures images
of the devouring mother as described by Carl Jung. Jung believed that within the
human subconscious resided archetypes, or underlying mythic or archaic forms, whose
specific manifestation is determined by culture, history, and personal context. One
such archetypal figure is the mother. The mother archetype can be positive, negative,
or ambivalent. The negative side of the mother archetype lies anything secret, hidden
or dark, the abyss, the world of the dead, or anything that devours, seduces, and
poisons or that is terrible and inescapable (1959: 81).

receives a boon to bring back to his community, Ista's boon is her ability to finally control her magical powers, and it is this ability that allows her to take control of her own life and set the terms of her future.

Return, or The Hero Comes Home

The last stage of the hero's journey as described by Campbell is return, where the hero brings the boon back to the community, nation, planet, etc., in order to transform and renew it (1949: 193).[165] In "The Crossing of the Return Threshold," the hero comes back from the darkness to the land we know, but, what winds up being revealed is that the two kingdoms are the same and the hero's ultimate task is figuring out how to render what he has learned into language our world will understand. Finally, the hero acknowledges that he lives in the current moment, without fear and anxiety over the future or past. This does not always end in the hero's happiness, as he is changed, able to reconcile individual consciousness and universal will, but his community has not always changed with him.

The female hero's return is markedly different. While the female hero returns transformed, it is the discovery of her whole and authentic self that is the treasure she claims (Pearson and Pope 1981: 223). Having fully discovered her self, "the hero even more firmly refuses to conform to the patriarchal myths of ideal womanhood" (1981: 225). While the kingdom might not be transformed, the female hero usually finds community on a smaller scale. However, because culture restrains the female hero in

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[165] Campbell notes that if the hero's triumph is achieved with the blessing of the gods, then they support him in his return; if it was not, then he is often (comically) obstructed. Occasionally, the hero will still need assistance from without to make his return, "For the bliss of the deep abode is not lightly abandoned in favor of the self-scattering of the wakened state" (1949: 207).

specific ways, she often does not succeed in finding a community, because her views

of her place are so divergent.[166] For this reason, the female hero might transform only

her immediate world, might leave her environment in search of a less repressive one,

or may settle for some kind of accommodation (usually in the form of a slightly more

egalitarian marriage). While this reflects the plight of the male hero who finds an

estrangement from his community, it is exacerbated in the case of the female hero, due

to "the tendency of patriarchal society to exclude women from roles of autonomy and

leadership, the female faces a greater discrepancy between social myths and her own

heroic experience and feelings" (1981: 238). Thus, the female hero of a realistic novel

compromises in order to achieve as much happiness as possible and does what she can

within cultural constraints to change institutions and ideas, but often she does not

manage to change society at large.

Upon returning to the castle after defeating the Roknari demons, Ista is met by

her brother and her old retinue from her mother's house. It is clear from their

interactions that Ista has changed and will no longer acquiesce to a life of imprisoned

solitude. Wanting to ride out to check on Illvin and the others, Ista demands that her

old attendant, Lady dy Hueltar, find her a riding dress. Dy Hueltar returns, not with

riding clothes, but with gowns and informs Ista that she will be joining everyone for

breakfast. When Ista objects, dy Hueltar responds "'Lady Ista, you mustn't be so

wild!' Her voice grew hushed. 'You wouldn't want people thinking you had been

overtaken by your *old troubles* again, after all'" (2003: 435, emphasis in original). Dy

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[166] Pearson and Pope note that this is why the female heroes of mythology often die at
the end: the level of female power that they attain simply cannot be accepted by their
respective societies (1981: 226).

Hueltar is attempting to reestablish old relations of power: Ista is to behave in a

certain, appropriate, submissive way, lest others believe her mad.[167] But Ista does not

relent. She demands that either riding clothes be brought to her or she will beg them

from others, ride in her nightgown, or naked if need be. Once she is reunited with the

members of her original travelling party, she reveals that her task is not yet over, that

she "expects to form a traveling court, small and adaptable" and travel throughout

Chalion, "exorcising" the remaining demons that Dowager Princess Joen released into

the world. Ista recruits for this travelling party the community of members who

accompanied her in her transformation and were transformed with her: Liss, the

messenger who will be raised to Lady of Labra; Foix, who is now a sorcerer; dy

Cabon, the priest of the Bastard's order; and Illvin, the man who accepts and supports

her new role. Illvin's inclusion is noteworthy, as the importance of romantic love as a

vehicle for exploring the female hero's journey toward wholeness is a popular one, but

the author who does this must find some kind of fitting ending. Pearson and Pope note

that "Most often, the author kills the hero rather than detailing a compromising

accommodation to a patriarchal society inimical to female heroism" (1981: 175). The

only way a female hero can avoid this domination is by viewing her sexuality and

spirituality as inseparable, and with Illvin, Ista has finally found this. Ista pointedly

leaves behind those attendants from her mother's house, those who do not, or cannot,

accept the new Ista. Ista reflects that "I have come very late to everything. To

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[167] In a telling twist of fate, Liss, a messenger who early on joined Ista's group and
travelled with them, actually believes Lady dy Hueltar is mad. After attempting to
explain to Lady dy Hueltar that Ista would continue travelling, and hearing dy
Hueltar's vocal objections, Less tells Ista "'It's all right. I had a great-aunt who grew
very confused in her age like this, poor thing'" (2003: 449).

forgiveness. To love. To my god. Even to my own life" (2003: 416), but Ista's life is finally her own, and she has discovered her full and authentic self.

Pearson and Pope end the female hero's return with the idea of "The Kingdom Transfigured." While the female hero returns to enjoy a new community, though often a small one, she still embodies the ideas that might transform the entire kingdom. This "transfigured kingdom" is the one often described in feminist utopias. While *Paladin of Souls* is not one of these utopian works, considering the ending of this novel, along with what is revealed about Iselle and Bergon in the first novel, it seems that Chalion is closer to becoming a truly egalitarian society than the one detailed in *The Curse of Chalion*. In the first book, Iselle was able to negotiate a much more egalitarian marriage with Bergon, retaining control of her own lands. In *Paladin of Souls* we learn that she is fighting alongside her husband. And Ista is now the most powerful saint in Chalion, who has finally found the self-confidence to demand for herself what she truly desires.

Conclusion

What is compelling about Bujold's *Chalion* series is that not only is Ista a magical woman, but that she is also middle aged, widowed, and a mother, all of which fall outside of the typical descriptors of female characters in Fantasy. Moreover, she participates in what is structurally a traditional quest narrative that is more often undertaken by a young male character. Through Ista, Bujold gives the reader a plot that follows the basic structure of the traditional male quest—departure—initiation—return—but does not simply swap out a male character for a female one. What she does is modify the specifics of the quest to fit that of the female hero, thus heavily

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echoing the female hero found in more conventional literature. The commonalities between Ista's hero quest and that of the female hero in more conventional literature highlights the universal struggles and barriers that women face in patriarchal societies. However, the fact that Ista can use magic gives her an advantage over her counterparts in more realistic literature: if anyone attempts to return Ista to her confinement or dictate the shape of her life, she could easily resist them. Her magic also gives her a clear and continuing mission, one that demands she continue travelling and not be returned to a domestic space. She is the only one in Chalion equipped to fight the demons released by the Roknari and, as such, is clearly necessary to the survival and safety of the kingdom.

The trend of Fantasy works with female protagonists continues to grow in popularity. Kristin Cashore's *Graceling* series (sometimes categorized as YA),[168] Jeff Wheeler's *The Banished of Muirwood*, some of Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series books, Ellen Kushner's *The Privilege of the Sword*, Sarah J. Maas' *Throne of Glass*, and *The Halfblood Chronicles* by Andre Norton and Mercedes Lackey all feature female protagonists, to name just a few. And yet, the typical Fantasy hero is still imagined as male. Bujold, and others like her who imagine a female hero's quest in Epic Fantasy demonstrate that the elements of the hero's journey that seem inherently patriarchal can be transformed to allow for a true female hero's quest. Works that

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[168] From a cursory investigation, the prevalence of strong, female leads (magical or not) seems to have caught on more consistently in YA fantasy literature. Robin Mckinley's *The Hero and The Crown*, *The Vampire Academy* series by Richelle Mead, Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series, Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments*, *The Snow White* trilogy by Salla Simukka, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, among countless others all feature strong, female characters.

successfully depict the female hero's journey only further expose the gendered assumptions of the traditional hero's journey found in Fantasy. These texts do in Fantasy what early feminist Science Fiction writers accomplished with their works, which "not only told a different story, a feminist story; [but] also showed that the story told by conventional texts in that genre is also a specific story, told from a particular perspective, a patriarchal one" (Cranny-Francis 1993: 96).

While all of the work on Fantasy that foregrounds the importance and complexity of female characters and female heroes, in particular, is both exciting and long overdue, the hero quest should not be abandoned or watered down in favor of other, mediated types of heroes. Reframing heroism through care work, finding female heroes in children's and YA fantasy, examining the female villains as possible heroes (who are often the most complex female characters within Fantasy works) all offer ways to view Fantasy as a rich, complex, critically valid genre with strong, interesting, and important female characters. But readers also deserve a female hero who quests, who journeys out, gains power, defeats evil, and does so, yes, with the help of others, but without doubt as to who is going to save the day. And Fantasy needs these characters.[169] If it is to remain relevant, to find new readers, and to keep those of us

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[169] Once again, a clear manifestation of this tension is found in modern, popular film. Two of the most recent and well-known examples are Black Widow from the Marvel Universe, and Rey from Star Wars. The fact that Black Widow does not yet, and appears never will, have her own movie has not gone unnoticed. Brian P. Rubin notes that even though Johansson was the highest-grossing star of all time in 2016 and fans voted overwhelmingly for a Black Widow movie over any other supporting Marvel Universe character, Black Widow will never be given her own movie. While he goes on to give a variety of further explanations—Black Widow has no actual superpowers, she works better as a foil for other (male) characters, she is not iconic enough, Johansson will be 35 (gasp!) by the time a Black Widow movie could be made—that may in some ways get Marvel off the hook, it still does not account for the way Black

who started reading Fantasy at a young age, more space must be made for others to complete the hero's quest—women, disabled characters, queer characters, people of color—all must have an equal shot at journeying out and saving the world. The recent critical and commercial success of the Wonder Woman movie, and the even more recent early success of *Black Panther*, is a testament to this idea. The magical woman is perfectly poised to be one of these heroes and this analysis clearly demonstrates that it is not only possible to have a questing female hero, it is necessary in order to not only expand the genre of Fantasy and maintain its validity as anything more than an outdated genre, but to present readers with new ways to imagine the hero and new opportunities to see within themselves the heroic.

Widow was treated in marketing and merchandizing campaigns. Black Widow's lack of merchandising has long been a sore spot for fans (See Robinson 2015; Frevele 2015; and Chittal 2015).

It seems that the newest addition to the Star Wars franchise did not learn from Marvel's mistakes with its female hero. While the hero of the movie *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* is clearly Rey (played by Daisy Ridley), a young woman who was left on the planet Rakku as a child, she was largely excluded from Star Wars toys and merchandising. Hasbro, the company responsible for making the toys, claimed the lack of Rey toys was in order to avoid movie spoilers. As Erik Kain notes, "That rings a little hollow, since we all knew before the movie came out that Rey was a major character in it and it isn't exactly difficult to release toys that don't contain spoilers" (2016). This is reinforced by an industry insider who was present at merchandising meetings and who revealed that they were told, "No boy wants to be given a product with a female character on it" (Davis). Heroic Girls founder John Marcotte also revealed that in speaking with Disney's people, he was told that they had expected Kylo Ren to be the breakout role and were blindsided by Rey's popularity (Davis 2016). Why they imagined that the character aligned with the dark side who appears in significantly less of the film would be more popular than the obvious hero is confounding.

Chapter 5

"I paint a picture": Postcolonial Fantasy and The Magical Woman

"Fantasy—despite, or even perhaps because of, its long reception as a genre designed to 'serve rather than subvert the dominant ideology'—has considerable power to dig up long-buried histories of colonization and imperialism and to challenge the assumptions on which their power structures rely by offering new perspectives" (Young 2016: 114).

Throughout this study we have encountered different types of magical women who manage to break free not only from the narrative constraints of Epic Fantasy but also the limiting archetypal expectations of the hero (as male) and the hero's journey (as a male quest that follows the basic steps outlined by Joseph Campbell). The magical women of *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, particularly Tattersail, demonstrate what is possible when an author combines a narrative that eschews a single hero and adopts a boundary-pushing approach to point of view with egalitarian world-building. Where Erikson creates space for alternatives, in *Paladin of Souls*, Bujold presents what first appears to be a traditional quest narrative that adheres to Campbell's basic outline of separation—initiation—return. Instead, Bujold modifies the specifics of the quest to more fully reflect a female hero's journey. Simultaneously, Bujold modifies the character of the hero herself, presenting not a young boy, but an older woman. Bujold's female hero's journey is unique in that, as a user of magic, the female hero is able to overcome many of the constraints that her counterparts in more realistic literature experience. In this final chapter, I will examine a work that presents the reader with not only a new way of imagining Epic Fantasy through setting and the central conflict, but puts at the center of the story a protagonist that explicitly challenges general preconceptions of who Fantasy is for and what socio-political issues Fantasy engages with.

N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Kingdom* reimagines many of the tropes of Epic

Fantasy.[170] The protagonist, the world, the conflict, and the resolution all push Fantasy

in new and exciting directions. *The Broken Kingdom* is the second book in Jemisin's

Inheritance Trilogy and both *The Broken Kingdom* and the first book of the series, *The*

Hundred Thousand Kingdoms, feature women as the protagonist. Both are outsiders

who must learn how to maneuver within the complicated structures of power that have

been put in place by the world's ruling family called the Arameri. In *The Broken*

Kingdoms, Jemisin more fully investigates relations of power through a protagonist

that in nearly all ways is stripped of power—Oree Shoth is black, a woman, blind,

poor, and from a conquered and nearly destroyed people. But Oree has magic, a fact

that makes her a danger to the Arameri and the godlings, and a potential weapon for

those that might try to wage war against the gods.[171] Far from being a pawn, Oree

must work within and fight against the multi-layered structures of power that order her

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[170] So much so that there is often debate surrounding what sub-genre of Fantasy her work rightly fits into. Jeffrey Ford calls the first two novels "Urban Fantasy" because they lack the traditional quest of Epic Fantasy (Roundtable 2011). However, Jemisin identifies her work as in the Epic Fantasy tradition. See Jemisin "What is Epic Fantasy" 2010.

[171] Oree's depiction as a black, disabled character who also uses magic might, on first glance, conjure images of the magical-negro. Typically seen in cinema, the magical-negro is a trope that also appears in literature. According to David Ikard, the magical-negro "tends to be self-sacrificial to a pathological extent, existing almost exclusively to usher whites through emotional, social, or economic crisis (2017: 10). Ikard goes on to note that this trope is "designed to erase blacks' complex humanity, authenticate white paternalism, and explain away, if not justify, white domination" (2017: 11). It becomes quickly apparent that Oree reflects none of these characteristics: she is not self-sacrificial, but makes decisions that she feels are best for not only others, but also herself; she is in no way a side-kick, inserted into the narrative to support a white protagonist; her humanity and past are integral parts of the novel, and, as the first-person narrator it is her journey we are interested in; and, far from authenticating white paternalism and domination, Oree's experiences explicitly challenge these racial assumptions.

world. Her position as a black woman from a colonized people highlights the ways in which race and gender work to determine her place in the world. Jemisin examines these issues in her created world, making use of secondary-world Fantasy's ability to create space to explore tensions and disparities that exist in our world, thereby preparing us to "look the world's harsh realities in the face" (Webb 2007).[172] Unlike Martin, who utilized historical realities to create his world and at times became constrained by this choice, Jemisin takes abstract issues that exist in our world and places them in an original and separate Fantasy world. By placing this particular character at the center of the novel, Jemisin not only challenges Epic Fantasy's tendency towards male heroes, but also puts front and center issues of race and the colonial project.[173]

Fantasy, Whiteness, and Colonialism

In his 2014 book *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, Brian Attebery argues that between the 1970s and 1990s the wealth of literature coming from former colonies, and the popularity of theorists such as Edward Said, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Gayatri Spivak, demonstrated that the most challenging articulations of power dynamics and resistance often came from marginalized groups. And "Fantasy no less than other literary modes was radically altered by this decentering" (2014: 169). His example par excellence is Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight*

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[172] While Suvin has fairly negative views of most Fantasy fiction, this resembles his theory of return in Science Fiction, and Tolkien's concept of recovery. See Suvin 1979 and Tolkien 1964.

[173] Of course, colonialism is rampant in Fantasy, especially those works that tend towards militaristic approaches. Both the Letherii and Malazan Empire of Erikson's *Malazan* series were colonial powers, invading, occupying, and incorporating lands and peoples with vastly different cultures within their sphere of influence.

Robber, which blends Caribbean and Yoruba culture within a technologically

advanced, science-fictional setting. Hopkinson writes primarily speculative fiction,

and *Midnight Robber* falls within the purview of Science Fiction. Attebery goes on to

further invoke the very rich field of fantastic literature and magical realism. He

surveys a number of fantastic literatures that deal with a range of postcolonial

experiences, from the aforementioned Hopkinson, to Native American and Aboriginal

literature. But what of Epic Fantasy? If, according to Attebery, these theorists "taught

the world how to listen to those voices and why the most important explorations of

power and most eloquent expressions of resistance might be coming from formerly

marginalized groups" (2014: 169), then works like Jemisin's, which engages openly

with critiques of colonialism and the postcolonial experience,[174] should be at the

forefront of both postcolonial and Fantasy criticism, especially given that Epic Fantasy

has been slower than its fantastic fiction counterparts in clearly addressing these kinds

of concerns.[175]

      Helen Young argues that the lack of attention paid to Fantasy dealing

specifically with colonialism is due to a number of factors. First, she argues that it

receives less attention than Science Fiction largely due to the legacy of Marxist

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[174] I agree with John C. Hawley's assertion that any term like "postcolonial that presumes to describe a matrix of shifting components and extreme complexity must fall short" (2001: 2). However, as Leela Ghandi notes, the term is useful as "a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath," and, as Ania Loomba writes, the term is useful "in indicating a general process with some shared features across the globe" (qtd in Hawley 2001: 2). I use the term in that sense, to refer to the general features of societies who have experienced, or are experiencing, colonization and the theories that seek to explore or explain these relationships.
[175] Some critical attention has been paid to Robin Hobb's *Soldier Son* trilogy. See Young 2014.

thought that labeled fantasy as "reactionary and nostalgic" as we saw with Suvin in the

first chapter (2014: 33). Without the novum of Science Fiction, Suvin argues that

Fantasy engenders only melancholy and political paralysis, offering a way for its

readers to essentially bury their heads in the sand (Suvin 2016: xxxiii). Secondly,

Fantasy has long been considered a Eurocentric genre, one that is "by, for, and about

White people" (Young 2016: 1).[176] Thus, Fantasy works were widely assumed to be

"uninterested in, and therefore uninteresting to, non-white audiences, and non-white

writers" (Young 2014: 33).[177] Young utilizes Sara Ahmed's concept of "habit worlds"

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[176] Young goes on to argue that early in the genre-culture, Fantasy formed "habits" of
Whiteness and those habits take multiple forms, whether in the bodies that dominate
its spaces in both the real and imagined worlds, or with the voices that are most
audible. Fantasy is now struggling to break these habits (2016: 10). She uses habit
instead of convention when referring to anything more than the features of the textual
material, so the entire cultural and popular milieu surrounding Fantasy texts. Likewise,
Laura Miller writes that "a casual observer might assume that big, continent-spanning
sagas with magic in them are always set in some imaginary variation on Medieval
Britain. . . . there often aren't any black- or brown-skinned people, and those who do
appear are decidedly peripheral; in "The Lord of the Rings," they all seem to work for
the bad guys. Our hypothetical casual observer might therefore also conclude that epic
fantasy—one of today's most popular genres—would hold little interest for African-
American readers and even less for African-American writers" (Miller 2011).
[177] This idea has been challenged, most famously by RaceFail, a primarily online
conversation encompassing discussions of race/racism, appropriation, and
representation in science fiction and Fantasy, in 2009. While it's hard to pinpoint an
exact start or a clear timeline—the conversation eventually spanned a number of social
media platforms, blogs, conventions, and websites—it is typically traced back to a
response Elizabeth Bear wrote to Jay Lake (his post was itself a response to a post on
The Edge of the American West) in which he writes the following concerning cultural
appropriation: "By this logic, the only culture I have 'standing' to comment on is
middle aged, middle class, WASP male American culture. If I stuck to writing about
that, I'd either be John Updike or unpublished. (Which of those possibilities is the
more likely I leave as an exercise for the reader.) This line of thinking says I cannot
write about female characters because I am not a woman, or Jewish characters because
I am a Gentile. That way lies madness. Our field, at its best, is about Writing the
Other" (2009). While Bear's post has long been deleted, it inspired a number of
responses. Author Willow on the blog *Seeking Avalon* responded, pointing out the
slew of men of color in science fiction and fantasy and the ways in which their

where "she argues that 'if habits are about what bodies do, in ways that are repeated, then they might also shape what bodies *can* do'" and that "spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that 'inhabit' them'" (2016: 11).[178] Habits often become seen as permanent or innate to the genre-culture.[179] Of course, they are not, but they are rarely easily broken. The habits of contemporary popular Fantasy are inherited from "the twentieth century society in which it was founded" and whose key authors were "all themselves British or American white men who drew heavily on European myths, literature, and history for inspiration, and who populated their worlds largely with White protagonists" (2016: 11).[180] Thus the "habit worlds" of Fantasy, the texts and characters, the authors, the assumed audience, are read as Eurocentric/White. This influences expectations and structures that begin to seem innate and unchangeable. In

characters are prevented from having the fully realized lives of their white counterparts (among other things—the post is expansive in its archeological catalogue of this phenomenon). The conversation ballooned out from there. *Seeking Avalon* has put together an incredibly useful timeline charting the main posts and responses ("A Timeline" 2009). N.K. Jemisin would later say: "RaceFail was a good thing. In fact, I think it was a necessary thing—not just for me and other writers/fans of color, but for the SFF field as a whole" ("Why I Think" 2010).

[178] While Young is, of course, using this theory to discuss race in Fantasy, it can also be applied to gender in this case. Instead of the racialized body of Young's study, the gendered body also faces proscriptions—if Fantasy consistently portrays the male body as inhabiting certain roles, then those roles become coded as male, and it becomes more difficult to imagine a differently gendered body performing the same acts.

[179] Young prefers the term genre-culture as a way to emphasize that "neither would exist without the other" (2016: 5). Genre-culture is a material-semiotic system, which includes "both material 'things' and semiotic 'concepts'" (2016: 5).

[180] Young quotes Samuel Delany in reminding us that much of Fantasy and science fiction's early years took place in magazines and authors were known only by their names. And, in a field and during a time when pen names were more popular than using one's real name, "we simply have no way of knowing if one, or three, or seven of them—or even many more—were blacks, Hispanics, women, Native American, Asians or whatever" (qtd in Young 2016: 15). However, as Young reminds us, the authors who were most visibly influential were White men.

her introduction, Young concludes that "Fantasy creates worlds structured by imperialist nostalgia. For much of its history, the Fantasy genre has avoided engaging with imperialism and colonialism in any critical way, as has most Western popular culture" (2016: 12). Jemisin herself speaks to this idea when she states:

> All people who grew up with science fiction, and fantasy, and horror went through the whole acculturation process of the genre. We were all told to read the golden age writers. We were all told Heinlein, and Asimov, and all these straight, white male, although some of them were Jewish. Some of them may have been queer, but not out. We were all told to read the same kinds of stuff. To some degree some of us actually just want to read more of that stuff. There's the comfort fiction factor, even if it is writers of color writing about straight, white guys. Well, we ought to have the right to write about straight, white guys too if we really want. That said, I mean, it took me until the age of thirty before I tried to write a black woman. You write what you are acculturated to write. You write what you learn how to write. If you're reading almost nothing but science fiction containing straight, white guys going forth and doing straight, white guy things, then you're going to feel weird, you're not going to know how to write those own voices. It takes practice. It takes practice to do anything unique within this field, period, in writing, practice doing anything unique in writing. (White 2016)

What Jemisin calls acculturation is clearly related to Ahmed's "habit worlds." Jemisin points to not only *who* was writing these stories, but *what kinds of characters* they were writing about and how each of these shape expectations of what this literature

looks like and what bodies within it can do. Breaking out of these "habits of whiteness," even for an author who is a Black woman, goes against generic expectations. Young concludes that twenty-first century Fantasy has only just begun to critique colonialism, imperialism, and their legacies.[181]

This does not mean that there are no texts or authors in Fantasy that have worked against convention, tropes, and motifs, but as Young notes "they were not widely recognized or taken into account in genre stereotypes" (2014: 34). If the habit-world of Fantasy makes it appear that the genre is for and about white people, it is not surprising that the topic of colonialism as seen from the marginalized person's perspective has not been addressed sufficiently by authors. However, the past decade in particular has seen shifts in "the long-held pattern of fantasy" where colonialism has moved from a common facet of world-building to a subject of critique for both critics and authors. In writing *The Inheritance Trilogy*, N.K. Jemisin specifically points to her experience reading postcolonial works, such as Nalo Hopkinson's *So Long Been Dreaming*, and the ways in which her broadened familiarity with these kinds of texts affected her world-building. She traces this shift through the differences between the

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[181] Young points to a number of issues that delayed the investigation of these kind of social and historical issues within the Fantasy genre: as already discussed, the genre was/is largely coded as White; mass marketing prioritized works that more closely resembled those of Tolkien (2014: 58); there is a proclivity for medieval settings (2014: 115); and the tendency in Fantasy to link biology to physical and psychological traits (2014: 41). Young also notes that Fantasy is "not alone in this failing" (2014: 114). She quotes Kent A. Ono, and his study of how modern media engages with colonial history, who concludes: "Not only is colonialism not commonly recognized as part of contemporary culture, . . . processes of forgetting colonialism have taken place in the nation's [America} history that make trying to piece together the history of colonialism difficult" (2014: 114).

first draft of the *Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* and the second, revised twelve years later. She points to five major differences between these two versions:

1. In the first version, the world was happily Itempan; in the revised version, people remember the force and coercion required to *make* the world. Itempan and most cultures retain pockets of their old faith, even if it is practiced in secret;

2. In the first version, all races had been assimilated and mixed so all but the Amn were "vaguely uniform brown"; in the revised version, cultures had been forcibly assimilated but retained some of "their own language, their own customs kept in secret, their own phenotype—and [were] poorer as the direct result of policies implemented by the Amn and global bias against those cultures deemed 'darkling' (those that had been forced to assimilate, versus voluntarily doing so)";

3. In the first version, the enefadeh (the gods imprisoned and forced to serve the Arameri) while treated as weapons, were still given honorifics like "lord" and "lady"; in the revised version, "The Arameri make a calculated and sustained effort to disrespect and dehumanize the captive gods—not just abusing them physically and sexually, but destroying their worshippers and maligning their contributions in doctrine and history, and even refusing to acknowledge that they *are* gods";

4. In the first version, the protagonist was male; in the revised version, there was a female protagonist that allowed Jemisin to more fully explore the ways in which Darren sexual and reproductive customs were altered to suit

the Arameri (this also makes Dekarta's sin not marrying below her station, but interbreeding with the other);

5. In the first version, gods are gods; in the revised version, gods are still gods, but they are also a sentient species sharing the planet with all the cultural and power-balance implications that implies (2011).

Of course, these changes to the world-building for the first book in the trilogy set the stage for the way in which the second book of the trilogy, *The Broken Kingdoms*, would unfold. The changes to the world in one and two would become integral to the way in which Oree Shoth interacts with the Arameri as a colonial subject.[182]
It is impossible to deny the influence of postcolonial thought and the colonial experience on Jemisin's work. In creating her world, Jemisin attributes to it a number postcolonial features: an imperial family that expands their power and control over other lands through military and economic might; violent suppression and destruction of any people that oppose their power; a concentration of power in the metropole; and, a linguistic, religious, and cultural assimilation project.[183] Oree's history in particular telegraphs a postcolonial and marginalized experience: her people were largely wiped

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[182] In *The Broken Kingdoms* it is not yet common knowledge that the Arameri have lost their captive gods. While they no longer have the gods' power at their disposal, they are still undoubtedly the most powerful people both militarily and economically. Much of what occurs in *The Broken Kingdoms* is a result of the Arameri attempting to maintain the power they have been able to amass over the past two thousand years, but finding new ways to do this without having recourse to their enslaved gods. While Oree becomes aware that the power of the Arameri is not absolute, the rest of the world does not.
[183] Young devotes some space to discussing the inner workings of the Arameri imperial family in the first book and the ways in which they justify their colonization of the world (2014: 131-33).

out by the Arameri's overwhelming force after a failed uprising, their current land

exists as a reservation given to them by the Arameri, and they are physically marked

as different. That Yeine and Oree are both outsiders, from nations that are significantly

less powerful than the Arameri, allows Jemisin to investigate power in a way unique to

Epic Fantasy. The ability to create a secondary-world is central to Jemisin's ability to

interrogate these power structures. Science Fiction and Fantasy author Juliet McKenna

notes that in some ways "familiarity can breed speed-reading"—e.g. if a novel is set in

Manchester, the readers mind "latches on to familiar elements" and fills in the rest

with their pre-conceived understanding of Manchesterness (2014). The worlds of

speculative fiction are unfamiliar, forcing readers to latch on to the details that would

help them make sense of this strange world. This makes speculative fiction uniquely

poised to tackle current issues. McKenna writes:

> Setting a story in another place or another time enables speculative fiction to
>
> explore ideas that literary fiction might really struggle with. I'm interested in
>
> divided societies; my father's Irish, my mother's English and the versions of
>
> Irish history I learned at my Granny McKenna's knee and at a girls' grammar
>
> school in Dorset in the 1970s were pretty radically different. I have friends
>
> who've lived and worked in Yugoslavia, as it was, and later in Croatia and
>
> Bosnia. I know diplomats who've had dealings with Israelis and Palestinians. A
>
> literary novelist dealing with any of those intractable, complex conflicts faces
>
> countless challenges and pitfalls. Write a fantasy novel centered on a fractious,
>
> fractured country, where arrogant aristocrats pursue their ambition heedless of
>
> ordinary people's suffering and you can explore the rights and responsibilities

of power, the uses and abuses of privilege and the importance of people of

every class getting involved in managing their own destiny. (2014)

While McKenna was writing about speculative fiction in general, she points

specifically to the ability of Fantasy to explore issues that exist in our world by

representing them in a created world. Young also echoes this sentiment, arguing that

Fantasy's "inherently non-mimetic nature creates a space which is at least nominally

not 'the real world' and is therefore safer for cultural work around fraught issues. . . .

This is not to suggest that the imagined worlds of Fantasy are separate from reality,

but rather that the inclusion of an impossible element . . . constructs rhetorical distance

between one and the other" (2014: 2). The liminal space of Fantasy—like our world

but not our world—makes Fantasy uniquely capable of interrogating complex issues.

Jemisin displays this throughout *The Inheritance Trilogy*.

The Inheritance Trilogy's Outsider Protagonists

The Inheritance Trilogy takes place in a world that drastically departs from

medieval inspired Fantasy. In the beginning there was the Maelstrom, and from the

Maelstrom was born Nahadoth, the Night Lord. Alone for a millennium until Bright

Itempas joined him, they then spent a millenium *together*. Then from the Maelstrom,

Enefa was also born, and Nahadoth and Itempas loved her and each other. And Enefa

began to create worlds and life. They later had many children, called godlings.[184] The

Three (Nahadoth, Itempas, and Enefa) are neither male nor female, though Itempas

seems to prefer a male form and Enefa a female one. Nahadoth passes back and forth.

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[184] When Yeine becomes one of the three, she retains her human form (though it is
often remarked that she has not been a god for long, and the longer she is immortal,
the less she will hold onto her mortal trappings).

Their relationship is both one of family and lovers, so godlings had any number of combinations of parents—Nahadoth and Itempas, Itempas and Enefa, or Nahadoth and Enefa. But at some point, Enefa and Nahadoth forgot Itempas, and he experiences solitude for the first time. Convinced that Enefa had taken Nahadoth from him, he kills her. Nahadoth and many of the other godlings rose up against Itempas, but lost what would be known as the God's War. As punishment, Itempas condemns Nahadoth (along with some of the godlings who sided against him) to thousands of years as the slaves of the Arameri, a human family who ruled a small part of the world. The Arameri use the power of their god-slaves to assert themselves as absolute rulers. They established Bright Itempas as the land's only god and punish those who defy them. It was a time of peace. Or oppression. As Jemisin so artfully demonstrates by using Oree as a first-person narrator, it's all a matter of perspective.

The first novel in the series takes us inside Sky, the palace of the Arameri. Our first-person narrator in this novel is Yeine, a Darre woman and blood relative of the Arameri. She is summoned to Sky in order to take part in a ritual of succession, where a new leader of the Arameri family is chosen. While in Sky, Yeine meets the imprisoned gods Nahadoth and Sieh. She falls in love with both of them, and is convinced to take part in their plan to break free from their imprisonment. The plan succeeds in freeing the gods from Arameri control, but also has the unintended side-effect of turning Yeine into one of the three. Yeine begins the novel as a pawn of the Arameri, forced to participate in their crowning of a new monarch—an act that requires Yeine give her life—and she ends the novel as one of the three most powerful beings in the universe, effectively breaking the Arameri control over the enslaved

gods. As a punishment for condemning them to thousands of years of imprisonment and abuse, Bright Itempas is banished to the mortal realm, to live among people without his powers. This is where the second book, *The Broken Kingdom*, picks up. Ten years after his banishment, Itempas is found in a muckbin by the second novel's first-person narrator, Oree Shoth.

On first glance Oree presents much more like the traditional magical helper. A Black woman, she works as an artist hawking her wares at the bottom of Sky, near the World Tree, in what is now called Shadow. Oree is also blind. If, as I have been arguing in this study and will continue arguing particularly in this chapter, Fantasy can and should respond to power imbalances, tackling important, complex, and meaningful real world issues like patriarchal influence on women's stories and opportunities, sexism, racism, and colonialism, it is necessary to take a moment to address Jemisin's choices concerning Oree's blindness. While Oree is otherwise completely blind, she is able to "see" magic—it appears as a glow in what is otherwise darkness. She is also able to see her magical paintings. Jemisin herself admits that she made a mistake in linking blindness and magic in this way. While Oree is clearly a capable character, Jemisin is very forthcoming in the fact that she did make the inheritance of magic "a kind of code for disability" thus playing into the stereotype of "the magical disabled person" (Jemisin "Why is Oree" 2011). She credits her attendance at a workshop at Readercon called "What Good Writers Still Get Wrong About Blind People" presented by Kestrell Alicia Verlager for bringing this issue to her attention. Upon reflecting, Jesmisin states that she should have severed Oree's magic from her sight, so that one did not cause the other. While she wanted Oree's

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blindness to be simply another part of her, "by constructing her blindness as the result of her magic, [Jemisin] not only made it remarkable, [she] emphasized its abnormality" (2011). Jemisin closes saying: "Too late to change the book, but not too late to learn from the mistake. I am determined to do better next time—and there will be a next time" (2011). Jemisin also pushes back slightly against the question "*Why* is Oree blind?" She feels that asking this—along with "Why is Oree a woman?" or "Why is Oree black?"—reveals reader assumptions about who belongs in Fantasy novels, and who doesn't. Jemisin clearly believes that Fantasy also has a responsibility to tackle social issues like gender, race, and disability, and her willingness to admit when she's gotten it wrong (and pledge to do better) while still acknowledging that Fantasy needs more diverse characters, makes her an important new voice in Fantasy that explicitly recognizes the genres ability to tackle important issues in new and unique ways

Despite the problematics surrounding Jemisin's linking of blindness to magic, Oree still pushes the boundaries for the representation of various marginalized groups within Fantasy, and, perhaps most importantly, the story is undeniably hers. She is not a soothsayer or someone the hero consults on his quest, which, given her gender, disability, social class, and profession, would be a more traditional choice. This story is Oree's. She comes from a people who were conquered, and very nearly annihilated, by the Arameri and she occupies a complex position as not only a colonial subject, but as a member of a people who suffered a genocide and whose collective trauma is still felt. This position affects the ways in which she interacts with power, particularly the Arameri and their religious police force, the Order-Keepers. But she is also a magical

woman, and her unique power—what she can do, for whom she is willing to use magic, how she gained her power, and what she ultimately is willing to sacrifice—are all informed by her positioning in the world of the Arameri Empire.

Oree as Colonial Subject: How the Arameri Conquered the World

Oree Shoth comes to Shadow, the city under the Arameri capitol and palace of Sky, to not only escape the memories of her past (both her own and her people's) but to be part of a bustling metropole. She works as an artist, selling trinkets to tourists who come to see the Life Tree. Prior to when the reader meets her in the book, she had been in a relationship with Madding, one of the many godlings who live in Shadow, though they are currently separated. One day, Oree finds a strange man in a muckbin and takes him in. He turns out to be the much diminished form of Bright Itempas. She names him Shiny. When godlings start dying, Oree becomes tangled up with the Order Keepers—Itempan priests who enforce order and proper worship—and the New Lights—a renegade Itempan order with a much more sinister goal. When they discover that she is a demon, the New Lights kidnap her in order to use her blood to create weapons to kill Nahadoth. Now that the god slaves are no longer under the control of the Arameri, the New Lights see them as a threat, and desire a way to equal their power. In attempting to free her, Madding is killed. Oree is eventually able to escape and kill the leader of the New Lights by using her magic to momentarily restore Shiny to his full form as Bright Itempas. Shiny eventually comes to love Oree, but Nahadoth feels as though he has not suffered enough and so Shiny is forced to leave her. At the end of the novel it is revealed that Oree is pregnant with Shiny's child.

Perhaps one of the clearest nods to post-coloniality is Oree's retelling of her people's conquering by the Arameri. Shortly after the Arameri acquired their new god-slaves, the Maroland revolted. They marched their armies to meet the Arameri, and were destroyed. Oree tells the reader/audience:[185]

> The hundred clans of my people—called just 'Maro' then, not 'Maroneh'—were plentiful and powerful . . . There was a rebellion of some sort. A great army marched across the Maroland, intent upon overthrowing the Arameri. Stupid, I know, but such things happened in those days. It would have been just another massacre, just another footnote in history, if one of the Arameri's weapons hadn't gotten loose. He was the Nightlord . . . he punched a hole in the earth, causing earthquakes and tsunamis that tore the Maroland apart. The whole continent sank into the sea, and nearly all its people died. The few Maro who survived settled on a tiny peninsula of the Senm continent, granted to them by the Arameri in condolence for our loss. We began to call ourselves Maroneh, which meant 'those who weep for Maro' in the common language we once spoke (2010: 127).

The Arameri conquered the world with overwhelming military force and new "weapons" whose power could not be equaled. While their weapons were gods, the dynamic is similar to real world colonization efforts, where superior technology and overwhelming force nearly annihilates or subjugates another people. And the results—

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[185] The point of view is first-person with frequent addresses to a "you." It is not until the end of the book that the reader learns that the story they just read was in fact Oree narrating the events of her life and how she met Shiny/Itempas to their unborn child. Godlings and demons are self-aware while in the womb.

the destruction of homelands, the near-eradication of a people, the resettling of the survivors—mirror many of the colonial exploits carried out through history.

After establishing their military might, the Arameri set about colonizing the world. One of the first things the Arameri did was to abolish worship of any god other than Itempas, even though other nations had previously worshipped any number of other gods. Oree explains that in the thousands of years that the Arameri have ruled "they had imposed the Bright on every continent, every kingdom, every race. Those who'd worshipped other gods were given a simple command: convert. Those who disobeyed were annihilated, their names and works forgotten" (2010: 158). Temple attendance was mandatory, and The Order of Itempas was established to enforce compliance. They also forced nations to first teach Semn, the Arameri language, before teaching their own.[186] Upon meeting the mortal form of Bright Itempas, the Arameri were shocked to see that he resembled a Maroneh man. They had always

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[186] The implementation of the colonizers language and the eradication of native langauges is a long standing colonization tactic. Sociolinguist Peter Trugdill writes that "linguistic subjugation (or unification, depending on one's point of view) is . . . an important strategy in implementing political subjugation (or unification)" (1983: 152). In the introduction to *The Empire Writes Back*, the authors write that "One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities. . . . Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (1989: 7). Postcolonial authors educated under colonization often recall "how students were demoted, humiliated, or even beaten for speaking their native language in colonial schools" (Shakib 2011: 117). Frantz Fanon famously writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* that "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of civilization" (1967: 8). Thus, a large portion of the postcolonial project is to wrest language from the dominant European culture (Ashcroft, et al. 1989: 7).

been taught that he was Arameri (2010: 324)—it is hard not to see in this a reflection of the contemporary push to reimagine Jesus as the middle-eastern man he undoubtedly was and not the blonde-haired blue-eyed man depicted in much Western iconography. Of course, these are the standard approaches to wiping out, or at least suppressing, native cultures. Jemisin is clearly invoking through the Arameri many of the approaches taken by colonizers.

Jemisin's decision to cast as her protagonist a magical woman and a person of color was a deliberate one that becomes central to how Oree is perceived by others and how she sees her place in the world. And it is decidedly not an afterthought. Jemisin repeatedly telegraphs Oree's racial phenotype, making explicit references to those features most commonly associated with people of African descent. For example, Oree consistently mentions her hair. When she touches Shiny's hair, she notes that, like her own hair, it is "soft-curled, dense but yielding, thick enough to lose my fingers in . . . only Maroneh had such hair" (2010: 19). Oree has a "storm of hair" (2010: 24) with "coils" (2010: 65). The shampoo given to her by the Arameri is astringent and thus "not ideal for Maroneh hair" (2010: 162). While held captive by the New Order Keepers, someone ties her hair "back into a puff in an effort to control it" (2010: 257). These "reminders" of Oree's race are important given the habits of whiteness formed in Fantasy literature. The expectation that the protagonist is Caucasian or light skinned is so ingrained in many readers that when authors expressly make their characters non-white, that fact does not always take. For example, the wizard Ged from Ursula K. Le Guin's 1968 work *The Wizard of Earthsea*, comes from a place called Gont. The people there are described as having "dark copper-brown" skin (1968: 19) and Ged

himself is described as having skin that is "red-brown" (1968: 45). However, as Helen

Young notes, despite *Earthsea's* critical acclaim and influence on the genre—Le Guin

introduced concepts that would become tropes like the school of magic and that

speech acts hold power—the political elements of her novel, specifically having a dark

skinned main character with lighter skinned characters on the periphery, didn't inspire

much imitation (2016: 40). In fact, some did not even notice that Ged had darker

skin.[187] This is evidenced by the fact that the TV adaptation cast Shawn Ashmore, a

White actor with dark blonde hair and blue eyes, in the role of Ged.[188] And ignoring

Ged's skin color is not hard to do—there is little in the work that depends upon his

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[187] Le Guin writes, "I think it is possible that some readers never even notice what color the people in the story are. Don't notice, don't care. Whites of course have the privilege of not caring, of being 'colorblind.' Nobody else does. I have heard, not often, but very memorably, from readers of color who told me that the *Earthsea* books were the only books in the genre that they felt included in—and how much this meant to them, particularly as adolescents, when they'd found nothing to read in fantasy and science fiction except the adventures of white people in white worlds" (2004). One of those authors was a young N.K. Jemisin, who cites Le Guin's *Earthsea* as an important influence (Miller 2011).

[188] Le Guin herself wrote a scathing review of the adaptation, pointing out that "My protagonist is Ged, a boy with red-brown skin. In the film, he's a petulant white kid" (2004). She goes on to explain the process by which she was cut out of most of the planning from the film. Le Guin makes clear that "most of the characters in [her] fantasy and far-future science fiction books are not white" (2004). She goes on to say, "My color scheme was conscious and deliberate from the start. . . . I didn't see why everybody in heroic fantasy had to be white (and why all the leading women had 'violet eyes')" (2004). Le Guin also notes that she often had difficulty with cover art, saying that "The first British *Wizard* was this pallid, droopy, lily-like guy" and that the response to her push to put a nonwhite face on the cover was often "Hurts sales, hurts sales" (2004). This also recalls the outrage spread across social media when Rue, one of the tributes from Susan Collin's *Hunger Games* trilogy, was cast with a young African-American girl. And though Collins had been fairly explicit about the race of Rue (and Thresh, the other tribute from her district), fans of the book were apparently easily able to imagine Rue as white though she is described as having "bright, dark eyes and satiny brown skin" (Collins 2008: 98). For a summary of social media reactions, see: Holmes 2012.

physical characteristics: he does not face racism at the school, nor is he ostracized in any way because he is from Gont (neither is Vetch, his dark skinned best friend). Oree, however, cannot escape what marks her as a Maroneh and the past that her physical body carries with it. This fact is compounded by her gender, and, instead of being simply another uncomplicated thing about her, her position as Maroneh, as part of a people both destroyed and oppressed, is present in all her interactions. Her lived experience as a person-of-color is thus markedly different than Ged's and becomes central to the work.

Oree also experiences colonization's effects on the way in which her own body is perceived by the dominant culture. As Laura Mulvey writes of cinema, "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure" (1999: 837). She goes on: "Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motiff [sic] of erotic spectacle" (1999: 837). The novel begins with a description of how the Arameri, a people with pale skin, perceive Oree's body and, more specifically, how the Arameri men who are sexually interested in her interact with her body. While Oree technically has the same rights as others in the Arameri empire, her position as a colonial subject in the metropole evokes these power dynamics, particularly in the way she is treated by her Arameri lovers. Hsu-Ming Teo notes that while European women were not permitted to have sexual relationships with "native" men, that proscription did not apply to European men and "native" women. This is because "men's sexual relations with a 'native' woman symbolised colonial conquest. In the age of empire, the female body symbolised the gendered boundaries of the imperial nation" (2011: 22-23). Oree notes how she is admired, but only in parts: "Men praise parts of me endlessly—always the

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parts, mind you, never the whole." Oree's objectification is highlighted when she

adds: "'Lovely,' they would say, and sometimes they wanted to take me home and

admire me in private" where they "positioned and posed and polished" her (2010: 23).

That she might be admired, like a prized object, is also dependent upon the isolation of

her body, that she be seen as parts and not a whole person. There is also an isolation of

her from the public: Oree is not openly adored but hidden away as a kind of exotic

secret. This kind of objectification of the female body is, of course, not new nor

limited to post-colonial texts.[189]

Oree reveals that her body is not only objectified as gendered other, but also

exoticized as racial other. The "erotic spectacle" of her body is complicated by the

fetishization of her race. She notes that "Most of the men in Shadow were Amn, so

they also commented on my smooth, near-black Maro skin" (2010: 24). It doesn't

matter that, as Oree notes, "there were half a million other women in the world with

the same feature" (2010: 24). This situation, a man from the culture of the colonizer

objectifying, with specific reference to the color of her skin, a woman from the culture

of the colonized clearly echoes the power dynamics of colonialism. This is true

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[189] Scopophilia, or the desire to look, is one of the first things Freud identifies that involves other people as sexual objects (1962: 58). And of course, Laura Mulvey's famous essay "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," which asserts that the image of woman in film served as the site of erotic pleasure. This pleasure was derived through looking, or scopophilia. While this drive is modified by a number of other factors, "it continues to exist as the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object" (1999: 835). Mulvey argues that while cinema satisfies the primordial desire for pleasurable looking, it also develops the more narcissistic aspects of scopophilia. Because the world is ordered by sexual imbalance, Mulvey also notes that "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (1999: 837).

particularly for Black women, whose bodies are routinely fetishized by Western cultures.[190] The erotic appeal of Oree's "otherness" through her body is clear.

Despite the tendency for the Arameri to objectify Oree's body and eroticize her dark skin, Jemisin is careful to empower her protagonist. While she understands what the Arameri men are doing to her and her body, Oree remains firmly in charge of her own sexual agency. Oree says that when these men wanted to take her home she "would let them, if [she] felt lonely enough" (2010: 23). Mulvey reminds us that "looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at" (1999: 835). While she sometimes allows herself to be objectified, it is clear that Oree is in charge of when and how she chooses to participate physically with those who objectify her and that she is entirely aware of why they find her physically attractive. But because she cannot see the humans she sleeps with, this pleasure is not available to her. However, because she can see magic, she can see godlings. This is only a part of her mutually satisfying, but complicated and complex relationship with Madding, one of the godlings now living in Shadow.[191] Oree is clear about the difference in experiencing the exoticization of the Arameri men and that of Madding. She says: "Naked before Madding, I felt for the first time that someone saw the whole of me, not just my parts. He found my eyes fascinating, but he also waxed eloquent about my elbows. He liked it all" (2010: 79). Their relationship is

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[190] It is, of course, not *only* Black women who face fetishization by Western cultures.
[191] It seems no coincidence that one of the shared themes between all four of the main magical women of this study is a reimagining of their romantic relationships and, in at least two explicit cases, sexual relationships entered into outside of marriage that are rooted in equality and personal choice.

sexual—Oree enthusiastically participates in their lovemaking[192]—but also one of

equals, despite Madding's considerable power. This relationship is a reminder that

power differentials do not always result in exploitation, as they do with the Arameri.

But Madding, as a godling, has no interest in the social, economic, or sexual

exploitation of humans. The fragmentation of Oree's body into parts that signify

certain racial and ethnic history, and her person, leads to objectification and power

imbalance, but her relationship with Madding shows the opposite to be true—his

acceptance of her whole person, not dependent upon racialized or exoticized

fetishization, allows him to see her as a whole, unique, person.

The Arameri's response to their colonization of the world also echoes claims

made by many Western nations in their search for a justification for the violence they

enact on other cultures and peoples. While talking with Oree, an Arameri full-blood

tells her that "Now only a few feeble lies keep the populace from realizing we could

all go the way of the Maro" (2010: 171). She is referring to the fact that, now that

Nahadoth is free, it is possible that he might destroy the Arameri as they once

destroyed the Maro. The Arameri are, of course, hiding the fact that the gods have

been freed. In response to her statement, Oree notes that "She referred to the

destruction of my people—her family's fault—with neither rancor nor shame, and it

made me seethe. But that was how the Arameri were: they shrugged off their errors,

when they could even be persuaded to admit them" (2010: 171). In fact, the Arameri

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[192] Sex scenes are notoriously vague in Fantasy novels (if they occur at all), but
Jemisin includes more explicit scenes than is typical. This is an important choice, as it
foregrounds the fact that Oree (and Yeine in the first novel) are not, and should not, be
ashamed of their sexual desires. It is simply another part of their multi-faceted lives.

generally tend to regard their conquering of the world as an overwhelmingly positive thing. Lady Serymn, a full-blood Arameri, explains to Oree that "the world has enjoyed the longest period of peace and prosperity in its history" (2010: 189). While she admits that there have "been losses" she believes they have "been outweighed by the gains" (2010: 189). This, of course, echoes the claims made by colonizers throughout history. The idea that colonization and subjugation are justified, because the colonizing force is bringing peace/God/culture/technology to the world, is a well-worn argument. However, because the book is narrated through a first-person perspective and our protagonist is one of those people who count as some "losses," her response to this line of thinking by one of the colonizers is swift and accusatory:

> How many nations and races have the Arameri wiped out of existence? . . .
> How many heretics have been executed, how many families slaughtered? How
> many poor people have been beaten to death by Order-Keepers for the crime of
> not knowing our place? . . . The Bright is *your* peace. *Your* prosperity. Not
> anyone else's (emphasis in original 2010: 189-90).

Thus, the proclaimed benefits of colonization are subjective and depend entirely on one's position as colonizer or colonized. Indeed, despite the fact that something has clearly changed—godlings have returned to the Earth, a large tree has grown into Sky creating the city of Shadow, there is more magic in the world—the Arameri hope "to convince the rest of mortalkind that the world is as it should be. That despite the presence of all our new gods, nothing *else* should change—politically speaking. That we should feel happy… safe… complacent" (2010: 175). Despite their loss of power, the Arameri remain convinced that power structures should remain as they have

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always been—with their complete and total dominance.[193] What the Arameri desire, a single "benevolent" ruler also reflects the tendency for Fantasy to uphold this same idea— "Genre conventions . . . suggest a single rule" (Young 2014: 134). The great king, the chosen one who ascends the throne, the emperor (or, less commonly, the empress) all suggest that stability comes from the anointed single ruler. Jemisin reveals that this type of rule does not, and likely cannot, represent the diversity of the worlds these rulers conquer and preside over.

Oree herself displays the lasting traumas of a colonized people, despite her desire to distance her present from her people's past. Oree tells us that the Maroneh people named their children in response to the trauma her people suffered. Her own name comes from the "cry of the southeastern weeper-bird. . . . It seems to sob as it calls, *oree*, gasp, *oree*, gasp. Most Maroneh girls are named for such sorrowful things. It could be worse; the boys are named for vengeance" (2010: 17). The destruction her people faced at the hands of the Arameri was not only a past event, but an ever-present threat that hangs over not only the Maroneh but all people under Arameri rule. And the Maroneh reproduce this disempowerment through the gendered expectations they place upon their children: women weep and men take revenge. Except that revenge is not possible, not while it is believed the Arameri still possess the power of the gods, and so her people are in a sense, stuck. Oree also reveals that

Maroneh parents do not tell comforting bedtime tales. Just as we name our

children for sorrow and rage, we also tell them stories that will make them cry

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[193] The third book of the trilogy, *The Kingdom of Gods*, demonstrates that the Arameri's control is not as complete as they believed when a plot is revealed to use magic to kill the royal members of the Arameri family.

and awaken in the night, shivering with nightmares. We *want* our children to

be afraid and to never forget, because that way they will be prepared if the

Nightlord should ever come again" (2010: 174).

Despite Oree's insistence that the destruction of the Maroland "happened to my

ancestors, not to me," much of her and her people's lives are dictated by the effects of

that "long-ago tragedy" (2010: 162). And her people have never recovered. They still

live on the "reservation" of the Nimaro peninsula, that Oree notes was given to her

people "as a 'humanitarian gesture'—not an apology" (2010: 232). Part of Oree's

story is claiming for herself a fate that is not dictated by this history, though she can

never escape it. Oree does not spend the novel "weeping"—she is strong, resilient, and

resourceful, and, while we may not call what she gets "vengeance" she does begin the

long process of stripping the Arameri of their power over the world.

The fact that Jemisin chooses to write in first person is also intimately tied to

the ways in which the reader experiences the world of the Hundred Thousand

Kingdoms. The story is told through Oree's thoughts and perspective, and we are more

likely to identify with her experience of the colonial project. Oree's blindness also

serves as an effective strategy to introduce readers to the city and all it holds. While

Oree's magical sight allows her to see things others can't, the fact that she is blind also

means she is sometimes caught off guard by what's happening around her and is, in a

sense, figuring it out with the reader. This narrative "of the outsider navigating the

halls of more dominant powers—both the Arameri and the pantheon of gods . . .

[feels] more convincing and contemporary than the farm-boy-goes-questing-and-

gains-political-power narrative that is so common in epic fantasy" (Roundtable 2011).

Jemisin's deviation from this model also introduces uncertainty into the narrative—it is often unclear exactly "what it is [the characters] are supposed to succeed at. . . . There is no prophecy to fulfill and no simplistic wrong to be righted" (Roundtable 2011). Oree navigates through a cosmopolitan city and, through her first-person narration, takes the reader along with her.

By orienting the narrative through Oree, Jemisin fleshes out the ways in which, as a gendered and racialized colonial subject, she navigates the power dynamics present in Shadow. While in the first book Yeine laid bare the insidious ways in which the Arameri royal family abuses and exploits their god-slaves in order to impose their rule across the entire world, Oree highlights the ways in which actual subjects experience this often times brutal colonization. Given her position as both a woman and a woman of color,[194] whose physical body telegraphs her connection to her people's colonial past and present, Oree cannot escape the ways in which power sets up not only inequalities but also circumscribes opportunities. While as an artist living amongst the lower socio-economic caste in Shadow Oree finds a sense of community, the power and influence of the Arameri still infiltrate even that isolated community. Oree's position as gendered and racialized colonial subject are inescapable aspects of her character, not simply afterthoughts. Discarding them would fundamentally change

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[194] While Oree is, technically, a demon, she is interpellated into Arameri society as a Maroneh woman. Being a demon is not recognizable, to humans or godlings: it is not physically apparent like her skin color, nor is it noticeable like her gender. She is not othered because she is a demon. Being a demon is also not racialized or gendered— anyone from any region could potentially be a demon. No one can tell she is a demon until she uses her magic.

the way in which her character interacts with not only other characters but also the world.

What's Magic Got to Do with It?

Understanding Oree's position as a colonial subject is crucial to understanding not only how her magic is perceived but also how it is used as well as the consequences of both. In colonial constructions, the metropole is the seat of political, economic, and military power. In *The Broken Kingdoms*, it is also the seat of magic, and it is this magic that "called to [her]" (2010: 373). In Jemisin's novel, magic is always in some way explicitly tied to power, and within the colonial framework of the world Jemisin has built, power plays an unavoidable role in all interactions. This makes it unsurprising that magic is one of the primary ways in which the Arameri not only maintain their power but also why Oree's ability to use magic is such a threat to established power structures.

After the God's War, all godlings had to return to the God's Realm, leaving only Nahadoth, Sieh, Kurue, and Zakkarn, the gods enslaved by the Arameri, on Earth. This also leaves the Arameri in control of the most powerful magic left in the world. After Yeine becomes the Grey Lady by absorbing what is left of Enefa's soul and the enslaved gods are freed, the other godlings are allowed to return to Earth; however, fearing their destructive tendencies, Yeine decrees that they cannot leave Shadow. This concentrates magic within the borders of the capital city of the Arameri. However, gods are obviously not the only ones with magic. The Arameri also train scriveners who use sigils to enact small acts of magic. There are also those who seem to naturally possess the ability to perform magic—Oree notes that "Many mortals had

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magic; that was where scriveners . . . came from" (2010: 105). While magical ability was spread throughout the world, Oree explains, "Magic was power meant for those with other kinds of power: Arameri, nobles, scriveners, the Order, the wealthy. It was illegal for commonfolk, even though we all used a little magic now and again in secret" (2010: 40). General practice of magic would challenge the monopoly the Arameri hold over this power, thus they closely guard its use. In the same way the Arameri, and other colonial powers, replace languages, religions, and educational systems, magic becomes a closely guarded resource whose use by colonized people is forbidden.

If Itempan priests, known as Order-Keepers, find you using magic, the result is often death, and their presence is ubiquitous. Oree says that "Everyone, no matter their nation or race or tribe or class, knew Itempan priests on sight. They wore shining white uniforms and they ruled the world" (2010: 38). Aside from visible regulation from above, there is also self-regulation of magic. The dangers for Oree revealing her magic were drilled into her at a young age by her parents. Her father also possessed magic, though his manifested through song. Oree remembers that

> The beauty and magic that I loved in him was an easily perceptible thing, though no one else ever seemed to see it. Yet they noticed *something* about him, whether they understood it or not. His power permeated the space around him, like warmth. . . . So on that long-ago day, when power changed the world and everyone from senile elders to infants felt it, they all discovered that special sense, and then they noticed my father and understood at last what he

was. But what I had always perceived as glory, they had seen as a threat.

(2010: 191)

Upon realizing that Oree's father had magic, the townspeople stone him to death. While the family-head of the Arameri was in many ways like a monarch, and the Order-Keepers were far spread, the Arameri empire is so vast that the proscription to punish necessarily was spread out amongst not only empire officials but also amongst the people themselves. This, of course, clearly recalls Foucault's theory of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*. In the prison, prisoners can be constantly watched and taught to be good citizens by monitoring themselves and each other. Foucault writes that "He who is subject to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (1977: 202-03). When this extends out into society, all subjects play a role in disciplining not only themselves, but each other. This allows the Arameri to more effectively govern their empire. The threat of retribution from the Arameri, their tendency to punish swiftly and completely, creates a fear of difference, a desire to self-correct any person who might bring the wrath of the Arameri down on the entire community.

As with all things, control is not absolute. While the Arameri control the most powerful magic, they cannot completely prevent others from accessing something that is available in a largely intangible way. Small magic is performed by many: "Every woman knew the sigil to prevent pregnancy, and every neighborhood had someone who could draw the scripts for minor healing or hiding valuables in plain sight" (2010:

40). Before he was killed, Oree's father would often sing to her using his magic. With the return of the godlings to Shadow, magic is harder for the Order-Keepers to police, as it is often difficult to tell godlings and mortals apart (2010: 40). However, as Oree notes, "That still didn't make it smart to do certain things right under their noses" (2010: 11), and so Oree tries to hide her magic.

Magic in *The Inheritance Trilogy* is, in its simplest form, possibility. As long as one believes, one can create anything (2010: 349). The gods do this effortlessly, simply willing things to be. Mortals often require more practice or a workaround—the magical sigils of scriveners, for instance—in order to achieve similar results. Mortals gain this power through their ancestry: before the God's War, gods, godlings, and humans lived together and also interbred. Madding tells Oree that these children "could dance among the stars as we do; they had the same magic. Yet they grew old and died, no matter how powerful they were. It made them…very strange" (2010: 115). When it was discovered that the blood of these children could kill gods, they were hunted down and mating with mortals was forbidden. Miscegenation is a theme that runs throughout this novel and also echoes colonial concerns. Oree's relationship with Madding is viewed as an abomination by those in the New Lights. Despite the attempt by the gods to eradicate all demons, magic had already come to mortalkind. Not all the demons were killed and Oree is the descendant of one of these god-human hybrids referred to as demons. Oree's magic manifests in her ability to paint "doorways." That is, she paints a picture, and then wills it into being. Oree's magic is also more powerful than most mortals'. The gods opened the door for humans to use magic, "but in most mortals that door is barely ajar. Yet there are some few . . . who

are born with more. In those mortals, the door is *wide open*. [They] need no sigils, no years of study. Magic is ingrained in [their] very flesh" (2010: 213). While Oree's demon ancestry gives her the ability to use magic, it also inscribes her into another power struggle with the Arameri—their magical resources are still larger, and stronger, than her own. It also aligns her with another destroyed people, a group that was hunted down and killed because they could possibly upset the established power structures of the gods. Oree quickly learns to better control her magic, eventually progressing to where she doesn't need to paint something, but simply will it into existence.

This tenuous relationship to the power structures at play in the work—her magic poses a threat to the Arameri ruling class, and her blood poses a threat to the gods—collide when the New Lights realize what she is and how they can use her. The New Lights kidnap her and begin draining and distilling her blood in order to create a weapon against the gods.[195] Because the Arameri have lost their god-slaves, demon blood and its ability to kill gods would act as leverage in order to maintain their position of authority over the gods. But it is this same blood that gives her her magical ability, and, because of her friendly relationship with the godlings, she is willing to use her power to save them. Because magic is nothing more than willing something into being and then believing that it is, Oree is able to call forth the full form of Bright Itempas into the punished, diminished form of Shiny. Yeine tells her that she "bent the

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[195] The New Lights witness Oree using magic when she is cornered and they begin beating Shiny. She panics, and accidentally kills some of the Order Keepers by momentarily opening a portal in a painting she made on the ground. Unfortunately, she only keeps it open long enough for half of their bodies to pass through before it closes.

chains we placed on Itempas and released his true power, even if only for a moment"
(2010: 374). Oree's magic challenges not only the Arameri monopoly on magic, but
also the gods' own decrees: Shiny was not supposed to be able to access his true form
(Bright Itempas), but Oree was able to restore him, if only for a moment.

Oree's magic did not defeat the great evil plaguing the land—it would be hard
to identify exactly what, precisely, the great evil is. Certainly the Arameri would be up
for that distinction, but overthrowing the Arameri would not suddenly "restore the
land" or return good to the world—despite their rationalizations, they are correct in
that if people learn that the Arameri can be defeated, "*Every* noble clan and ruling
council and elected minister will want the chance to rule the Hundred Thousand
Kingdoms. And if they all strive for it at once . . . There will be war" (2010: 176).
Especially those the Arameri forcibly converted to the worship of Itempas "have never
forgotten, or forgiven, what [the Arameri] did to them" (2010: 177). Oree's defeat of
the New Lights and the discovery that the Arameri no longer possess their god-slaves
did not topple the Arameri Empire, or even significantly weaken its hold over the
Hundred Thousand Kingdoms. The Arameri remain in control, and their weakened
state is kept secret. She also does not heal the rift between Itempas and the other gods,
ending his banishment.

This uncertainty underscores the ways in which Jemisin is complicating the
genre of Epic Fantasy: Oree succeeds in a number of ways—she saves Shiny, foils the
plot to use demon blood to kill the gods, and exposes the New Lights—but the world
is too complex for a single heroic act to suddenly right all wrongs and redress all
injuries. And while Oree might not have vanquished the "dark one," her perseverance,

sacrifice, bravery, and love do have lasting impacts. When Nahadoth and Yeine come to tell her that Shiny has to leave, Oree is already pregnant. She notes that, as the god who creates, there's no way Yeine would not have realized this. And yet, despite the fact that her child would be a demon, Yeine does nothing. Oree gives birth to a girl who plays a major role in the next book of the series. Then, in a short novella called *The Awakened Kingdom*, Jemisin reveals that far in the future those with magic are trained to be enulai, or guardians and companions to the godlings living on earth. Eventually, humans themselves are able to become gods. However, even with this progress, Jemisin does not present a utopia—there are those who are still subjugated, who still have no say in their futures, no rights to make their own choices—and there are those who are still cruel "because that's what people are, sometimes" (2014).

Conclusion

If success can be measured by the number of people you piss off, then Jemisin has been very successful. In 2013, upset about the seeming trend the Hugo Awards (Fantasy and Science Fiction's highest honors) were taking towards more literary or "politically correct" works, disgruntled fans decided to try to form a voting bloc in order to nominate more "swashbuckling" and "space adventure" novels. Many quickly discerned that their real issue was that "nominees for the Hugo awards have become substantially less white and less male" (Berlatsky 2015). The initial group that spearheaded this attempt was called the Sad Puppies, but later branched out into the Rabid Puppies who nominated similar, but not always overlapping, authors. While they often claim not to be racist or sexist, but suggest they are merely advocating for overlooked authors of Science Fiction and Fantasy that are being ignored in favor of

more social justice type works, the following quote from Theodore Beale (aka Vox Day), the founder of the Rabid Puppies, in response to a speech Jemisin gave in which she called for a reconciliation within Science Fiction and Fantasy,[196] speaks largely for itself:

> Being an educated, but ignorant half-savage, with little more understanding of what it took to build a new literature by "a bunch of beardy old middle-class middle-American guys" than an illiterate Igbotu tribesman has of how to build a jet engine, Jemisin clearly does not understand that her dishonest call for "reconciliation" and even more diversity within SF/F is tantamount to a call for its decline into irrelevance (2013).

In the same post he also clarifies that "it is not that I, and others, do not view her [Jemisin] as human, (although genetic science presently suggests that we are not equally homo sapiens sapiens), it is that we simply do not view her as being fully civilized for the obvious historical reason that she is not" (2013).[197]

In response to this backlash against her and authors like her, Jemisin is able to see a positive side to the Puppies, both Rabid and Sad. She says,

> What I find heartening, . . . is the sheer amount of laughter the Puppies are engendering as they demand that what they call 'affirmative action' works no longer be considered, but really at the same time, they're putting only their own friends on the ballot. So they're actually asking for their form of

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[196] A transcript of her speech can be found on her website, in a post titled "Continuum GoH Speech" (2013).
[197] Day's post includes a number of other offensive remarks he claims are not. See Day 2013.

affirmative action to replace what they think of as affirmative action. And everyone is realising it. People are looking at these authors [like Vox Day and Puppies leader Brad Torgerson], who they once took seriously, and now just pointing and laughing. (Berlatsky 2015)

And Jemisin seems to be right—the Sad and Rabid Puppies, while they were able to get a number of their selected works nominated, have not managed to meaningfully sway the results. In fact, in 2017 women won in nearly every category (Jemisin won another Hugo for Best Novel for *The Obelisk Gate*, the sequel to *The Fifth Season*, which also won the award in 2016). The clear trend seems to be for more diversity within both Science Fiction and Fantasy, and this seems to be translating into more diversity in characters. Jemisin succinctly summarizes the potential of Epic Fantasy, saying that "The genre can go many, many more places than it has gone" (Miller 2011).

I examine Jemisin's novel in the final chapter of this study because it is representative of this important turn in Fantasy and it is imagined through the figure of the magical woman. Jemisin's work is decidedly engaged in conversations surrounding colonialism, power, white supremacy, race, and trauma. It demonstrates with clarity that Fantasy works can retain their sense of epicness and magic and adventure while rejecting the "habits of whiteness" that much of the genre still operates within. Jemisin herself notes that in many ways "it does take an outsider to a degree to come in and look around and read the stuff that's key in the genre and be

like, whoa something is really missing here" (Newkirk 2016).[198] She brings her own

experiences of the world as a black woman to her work in apparent and destabilizing

ways.

But reworking a genre with a long and ingrained way of imagining itself is no

easy task. Jemisin has been extremely forthcoming in her own struggles writing

convincing black female characters. In an interview with Laura Miller, Jemisin recalls

that she read almost exclusively male authors, and, when challenged by her father to

write a story with a black female protagonist, found she couldn't do it (2011). This led

her to a more active search for more innovative authors like Octavia Butler, who is a

groundbreaking figure in the genre of Science Fiction. Miller goes on to note that

while the idea of envisioning different futures is essential to the form of Epic Fantasy,

Science Fiction is more known for black authors like Butler and Samuel Delany, while

much of Epic Fantasy remains more conservative, hearkening, like Tolkien did, to a

preindustrial world and all the power structures that entails (2011). Though some

authors have expanded the borders of Fantasy—Le Guin's *Earthsea* books are a

common example, though, as we have already seen, the change she inspired did not

seem to extend to the racial identity of Fantasy characters—Jemisin admits that when

she attempted to write Epic Fantasy in graduate school, "she found herself abiding by

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[198] Jemisin was explicitly referring to her Hugo Award winning science fiction novel,
The Fifth Season. Discussing science fiction, Jemisin adds: "But I don't think that I
was the first outsider to do so by any stretch. Most of the writers of color who have
come into the genre have come and looked around and had that moment. Of course,
Octavia Butler being the first and foremost who came in and looked at the alien
colonization story and said, 'Oh, hey it's a lot like what happened to [black people]!
Why don't we just make all that stuff explicit? Instead of rape, why don't we include
aliens trying to assimilate our genes?'" (Newkirk 2016).

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some of the genre's most shopworn conventions" (2011). Jemisin says of this first attempt: "I was thinking it had to have a quest in it, with a MacGuffin of Power being brought to a Place of Significance," and the main character was a man (Miller 2011). The book didn't work. When she returned to it years later, she made a number of changes that have already been detailed in this chapter. Most significantly, she made the main character a black woman. She says of this rewrite: "I knew that what I was writing was inherently defiant of the tropes of epic fantasy, and I wasn't sure it would be accepted" (Miller 2011).

What Jemisin is implicitly (and often explicitly) doing is questioning the ways in which Epic Fantasy has been received and created as a genre. She says, "it doesn't make any sense to write a monochromatic or monocultural story, unless you're doing something extremely small—a locked room-style story. But very few fantasy worlds ever do that. In fact, epic fantasy should not do that" (Berlatsky 2015). And so, the idea that Fantasy worlds should be restricted to a replication of Western, medieval landscapes makes no sense,[199] especially if that Fantasy wants to do something new, to stop recycling many of the old tropes and stories. Jemisin notes that "As a black woman, I have no particular interest in maintaining the status quo. Why would I? The status quo is harmful, the status quo is significantly racist and sexist and a whole bunch of other things that I think need to change" (Berlatsky 2015). With *The Broken Kingdoms*, Jemisin attempts to make those changes, not only through her world-

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[199] Authors like Saladin Ahmed are also working within the Fantasy genre to present alternatives to white, medieval works. His novel *Throne of the Crescent Moon*, is set in a Middle Eastern city, and his protagonist, Dr. Adoulla Makhslood, is old and overweight.

building and mythology, but through her protagonist, a black magical woman. Oree is for all intents and purposes traditionally powerless—she is black, a woman, poor, blind, and from a nearly destroyed people. Oree's very person highlights the disparate power structures at play in *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* and the ways in which this power operates on bodies. Through her magic Oree is able to challenge these power structures, but it is not her magic alone that makes Oree a compelling character. At the end of the novel, Oree has lost her magical ability (a side effect of staring too long at the full form of Bright Itempas), but this story is being told because Oree is telling it to her and Shiny's child—a daughter, another magical woman and one of many new demons. This allows Oree to reclaim the storytelling tradition of her people, one that was perverted by the destruction of her homeland by the Arameri. Oree's story is one of tragedy and sadness, of death and exploitation, but it is also one of hope. Changing power structures that have been in place for thousands of years will take generations, but it can be achieved. However, as the novella *The Awakened Kingdom* shows, while one avenue of power relations might shift and change, another can easily take its place.

Conclusion

"Roads go ever on": The Future Possibilities of Epic Fantasy

"People tell me they don't read fantasy 'because it's all just made up,' but the material of fantasy is far more permanent, more universal, than the social customs realism deals with. Whether fantasy is set in the real world or an invented one, its substance is psychic stuff, human constants, imageries we recognise. It seems to be a fact that everybody, everywhere, even if they haven't met one before, recognises a dragon" (Le Guin 2016: 19).

Throughout this study I have shown that Fantasy experiments with interesting, innovative, and genre-busting narrative structures and approaches and, in so doing, challenges the patriarchal narratives that are widely seen as intrinsic to the genre. For my point of intervention, I utilize the magical woman, a figure that appears throughout the genre and is in a unique position, through her access to the power of magic, to embody new feminist narratives. And the features of Epic Fantasy—secondary worlds, magic, and plots that deal with grand concerns—create unique opportunities to imagine not only alternatives to patriarchal narratives but also to reimagine the archetypes available to female characters. The magical women in this study are compelling examples that demonstrate the ways in which Fantasy has the ability to expand narratives available to female characters while exposing those same narratives' gendered assumptions, e.g. the questing hero as male. At the same time I have explicitly argued for the more widespread inclusion of Fantasy within critical academic studies. While studies grouping Fantasy with other fantastic texts may shed light on the ways in which departures from consensus reality function across genres, limiting the study of Fantasy to these types of approaches does a disservice to Fantasy as a genre. This is not in small part due to the tendency to treat Fantasy texts that exist at the edges of the genre, and not those works that exist at the core, namely Epic

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Fantasy. This study adds to the growing body of literary criticism that treats Fantasy as a distinct and important genre.

Each work I examine has something to say about the position of the magical woman within Fantasy. Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* is exemplary of those works of traditional Fantasy who feature strong, independent, and powerful magical women, but are compelled by narrative expectations to subsume their stories in favor of the male hero's thereby containing the magical woman's challenge to patriarchal narratives. What the third chapter demonstrates in comparing George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Steven Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, is that even when certain narrative and generic features are modified, the magical woman is not necessarily able to completely break free from patriarchal expectations. While both works are representative of a grittier approach to Fantasy and a repudiation of Tolkien-inspired narratives, Martin's Melisandre is still confined within a narrative that relies too much on "historical" inspirations, while Erikson's approach to focalized narrators and world-building encouraged him to discard patriarchal expectations that might have inhibited his magical women. In *Paladin of Souls*, Lois McMaster Bujold takes Fantasy's most fundamental narrative structure—the hero's quest—and reimagines it with a magical woman as hero. In so doing, she not only modifies the specifics of the quest itself, but also demonstrates that the magical woman as questing hero is not only a viable approach, but a successful one. Finally, the fifth chapter demonstrates the ways in which race and gender intersect through the character Oree, the magical woman protagonist of N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Kingdoms*. Her unique position as marginalized Other exposes the ways in which power operates within the colonial

project, but her position as magical woman also demonstrates the ways in which one might work within and challenge these powers.

The works in this study belong clearly in the genre of Epic Fantasy and yet they do not simply repeat a tired, old formula. Many of them take generic conventions and subvert, or modify, them. Fantasy, even more traditional or conservative Fantasy, has always been about power: who has it, how they got it, whether they deserve it, what they do with it, accepting the consequences of power, etc. But the nature of this power has changed. Authors are increasingly interested in challenging ideas of the virtuous hero, the good king, the triumph of good and evil, and the dominance of patriarchal narratives. Along with this comes a reimagining of archetypal roles that makes available new narratives and functions for female characters.

When I began this study, my intention was not to organize the chapters chronologically, as I was wary of implying a kind of teleological progress within the genre ending in a triumphant victory over patriarchal narratives. This would be disingenuous—there are feminist works that appear throughout the history of the genre and there are decidedly not feminist works that are appearing now. And there is, of course, still mixed progress. It would be wrong to consider the status of the magical woman within a text as a kind of litmus test. There are works that can, and do, present magical women as fully independent, capable characters, who do not type-cast her or contain her power through narrative structures, that still miss the mark. One recent example is Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (2006-08). The story follows Vin, a young Allomancer (one who can use metals to enhance physical or mental abilities) who can use every metal, and is known as a Mistborn (most can use only one metal).

The first book is narratively split fairly evenly between Vin and Kelsier, an older

Mistborn and her mentor, though it is clear that it is Vin's story that is most

compelling (this is confirmed when Kelsier is killed at the end). And while Vin herself

is a complex character—strong, vulnerable, smart, powerful—whose inner and outer

life Sanderson explores fully, she is, for all intents and purposes, the only woman in

the series.[200] And the absence of other women is baffling. The first book sees a motley

crew assembled in order to take down the Lord Ruler—they are all men. In the second

book, as the new king seeks to establish a just and fair kingdom, much attention is

paid to class differences with literally no mention of gender equality.[201] He establishes

an assembly made of the different classes—naturally, they are all men. Female

characters are scarce, and when they do appear are nearly always love interests, do not

further the plot in any important way, and are given only minimal opportunities to

speak while a number of influential and important male characters exist within the

work. This reliance on female exceptionalism—that a female character is only

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[200] In the first book, *Mistborn*, there is a woman who comes to cut Vin's hair, a court gossip, and a romantic rival who, combined, get maybe two pages of dialogue before they disappear from the text. Tindwyl fares slightly better in the second book in terms of page length. She is brought in to tutor the new king and becomes the love interest of one of the main characters. Of course, she dies near the end of the book, causing him to re-evaluate his philosophical convictions and her conversations with Vin revolve nearly entirely around Vin and Elend's romantic relationship. The second book also hints that Allriane, a noble-woman (and love interest of a different character) might play a bigger role in the third book, but she does not. One other woman, Beldre, makes a few appearances, but is again a love interest and does not do much of note. Vin eventually sacrifices herself and it is revealed that she never was the Hero of Ages (the true Hero of Ages turns out to be a scholar, a conclusion I am not entirely opposed to).
[201] Racial equality also does not register, but, as the world seems to consist of only two races (the small numbers of remaining Terrismen and literally everyone else), that is not surprising, though troubling for other reasons.

important if she is exceptional in some way while no other female characters are given substantial page space—is troubling.

Powerful women have always existed in Fantasy. While in this study I examine the figure of the magical woman, other female characters would also offer interesting and complementary sites of feminist analysis. The warrior woman, the princess, and the thief are just a few character types found throughout the genre that inhabit their own stories and rely on their own unique access to power (e.g. impressive fighting skills, political and social influence, the ability to sneak, and knowledge of the underground). The hero's narrative also offers an almost limitless field of analysis in Fantasy. While I demonstrated how casting a magical woman necessarily modified the hero's quest as white male endeavor, investigations of heroes of color, queer heroes, and disabled heroes would all produce interesting variations on what is considered heroic and who is called hero.

These evolutions have been met with resistance. As the genre becomes more hospitable to non-white, non-male authors and at the same time non-white, non-male characters, those who find comfort and power in traditional patriarchal, colonial, ableist, and racist narratives have voiced their displeasure. But despite this pushback, Epic Fantasy is moving in new and exciting directions, without discarding those features of the genre that make it the core of Fantasy literature. Great adventures and quests are no longer the purview of white male heroes and powerful women no longer need be contained within the narrative.

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