Voices of the Lioness: representation of female characters in selected YA Fantasy series by Ursula K Le Guin and Tamora Pierce

by

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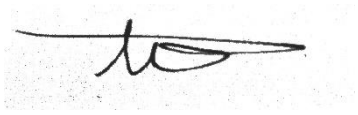
Declaration

I hereby declare that

Voices of the Lioness: representation of female characters in selected YA Fantasy series by Ursula K Le Guin and Tamora Pierce

is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by means of complete references.



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Abstract

Traditionally the hero of any story in the Fantasy genre has been decidedly and overwhelmingly male, with female representation being limited to that of sidekicks and damsels in distress. With the rise of the Second Wave Feminist movement, the call for more active and diverse female representation increased as young women attempted to find ways to assert their autonomy and break free of the gender roles imposed on them by patriarchal society.

This dissertation aims to investigate the ways in which the female heroines in selected novels by Tamora Pierce and Ursula K. Le Guin, both of whom were shaped by second-wave feminism, have contributed to changing these conventions. In examining the female protagonists from Tamora Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* series as well as Ursula Le Guin's *Annals of the Western Shore* and *Earthsea* series, this dissertation compares both authors' brands of female heroism and considers the effect they may have had on the young women reading them. In its conclusion, the dissertation also suggests that the representation of the female hero in Young Adult Fantasy fiction has evolved over time with Pierce's Alanna paving the way for others to extend the boundaries set by conventional gender roles in this genre.

This dissertation thus compares the experiences of Alanna from *Song of the Lioness* and Memer from *Voices* to the traditional hero's journey as established by Joseph Campbell. In so doing, the classic narrative of the male hero is seen to have been revised and adapted in recent Fantasy fiction in which women take on heroic roles. It is argued too that Pierce's brand of heroism is more typically masculine, and closer to the mould of the "male hero's journey" than Le Guin's. Le Guin's brand of heroism is seen to have expanded on the concept of what it means to be a female hero, and given voice instead to a potentially more inclusive female experience. Despite their differences, it is recognised that both authors have had an impact on contemporary works of Young Adult Fantasy by authors such as Holly Black and Naomi Novik, who have been able to construct strong female protagonists on the foundations laid by Pierce and Le Guin.

The research is also significant in that it highlights the importance of representation for the identity formation of young adult readers. Using the work of Allison Waller, it is argued that it is through access to strong, authentic girl characters who wholeheartedly embrace their identities and confidently subvert the gender status quo, that these readers may be encouraged to make changes in their own lives and break free from restrictive cultural expectations.

Key Terms:

1. Fantasy
2. Young Adult Fiction
3. Ursula K. Le Guin
4. Tamora Pierce
5. *Song of the Lioness*
6. *The Earthsea Quartet*
7. *The Other Wind*
8. Joseph Campbell
9. Gender
10. The female hero

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Chapter 1: Coming of age in Fantasy

> We read books to find out who we are. What other people, real or imaginary, do and think and feel... is an essential guide to our understanding of what we ourselves are and may become. (Le Guin, 1979)

Fantasy is an enormously popular genre among adolescents. A considerable amount of research has been done on its merits and usefulness in fostering the development of younger readers (Silva, 2013). According to Mary Hilton and Maria Nikolajeva in their book *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and Culture: the Emergent Adult* (2012), "the construction of adolescence in psychology [is] a time of internal turmoil, of storm and stress...[yet] we find a clear sense of integration between child and emerging adult" (2012: 2). This inner turmoil of the teenager is, I think, the product of a continually changing identity, and the difficult state of liminality between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence is often overlooked as a life-stage, and it can be argued that the presence of YA fiction is a useful tool to encourage the belief in young teens that their existence is seen and it matters.

A key problem raised is that, although adolescent reading patterns show that girls are more avid readers than boys, boys are able to find role models within these texts more easily, as, the protagonists are often male (Loh & Sun, 2019). Up until recently this has proved to be difficult for girl readers, since the female characters in Fantasy have often been reduced to secondary and supportive roles. This is beginning to change in the work of writers like Naomi Novik and Holly Black who are praised for re-negotiating these issues (Greengrass, 2018; McDowell, 2019). However, in this dissertation I hope to demonstrate that women writers of Young Adult (YA) Fantasy began negotiating issues of gender at a much earlier stage than has been generally

recognised by critics. In order to do this, I will look at the *Song of the Lioness* series (1983-1988) by Tamora Pierce as well as the second volume of Ursula Le Guin's *Annals of the Western Shore* series (2004-2007). These works present readers with very different but equally powerful representations of female heroism. Of course, the renegotiation of female characters' agency in other forms of Fantasy began before the publications of these texts (*Wonder Woman's* first appearance was in 1941), but it took a while for these figures to trickle down into Young Adult fiction (Stuller, 2010:13), perhaps because of the strongly conservative nature of much that is written for younger readers.

In *Song of the Lioness,* Alanna of Trebond, a noblewoman in the Fantasy world of Tortall, exchanges places with her twin brother to go to the royal palace and train to be a knight. Alanna becomes "Alan" and disguises herself as a boy, as females in Tortall are forbidden to become knights. Over the four novels, Alanna struggles with gender identity, a term that will be defined in greater detail later in this chapter, going through puberty, as well as trying to prove her abilities as the only female knight in all Tortall.

Le Guin's *Annals of the Western Shore* novels all share the same Fantasy world, but have different protagonists and plots in each of the three novels. *Gifts* (2004) centres on Gry and Orrec, two young people struggling to come to terms with, and gain control over, their psychic or magical abilities. Gry can communicate with animals, and Orrec spends most of his life voluntarily blindfolded and fearful of his gift of "unmaking". The novel explores how Gry and Orrec cope with their gifts throughout their adolescence, and ends with them leaving their home to explore the world at large. Gry and Orrec appear as minor characters in the next book *Voices*, the only novel in the trilogy that has a female protagonist. *Voices* (2006) follows Memer, a girl

living in an occupied country that has been conquered by the Alds, a brutal and superstitious desert people from the east. Memer learns the forbidden skills of reading and writing, and eventually discovers her ability to consult with her people's ancient oracle. This skill, in turn, helps Memer free her people from the oppressive reign of the Alds. Memer, Gry and Orrec all occur as minor characters in the final book of the trilogy, *Powers* (2007), which tells the story of a slave named Gavir who possesses the gift of precognition. He serves as a teacher for a noble family in the city of Etra, until the death of his beloved sister causes him to run away from his household. While being hunted, Gavir struggles with many different types of abuse of power before escaping to live a happy life with the three protagonists from the previous books. My discussion of Le Guin's series will focus on *Voices*, as it is the one novel in the trilogy that deals only with a female protagonist.

Before continuing with this dissertation, it is important to outline some of the key concepts of gender theory and what they mean in relation to this research. Throughout my argument, I will be drawing on the theories of gender critic Judith Butler, as discussed in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler states that gender is not something we are born with, have, or do, but rather something that we *perform* (Butler, 1990). The idea that gender is a dichotomous concept with clear-cut boundaries and rules is a problematic notion that stems from the tenets of heteronormativity – dictating that a human can only fit into two categories – man or woman. While she presents sex as a biological characterization based on a person's reproductive organs, Butler argues that gender is the social elaboration and performance of said sex, and "there is no reason to assume that gender is also confined to only two categories, saying "The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender

to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it" (Butler, 1990:10). Gender is therefore, according to Butler, something that is learned through societal expectations of how a man and a woman should behave, as well as the expectations and experience of the individual; it is not a strict extension of our biological sex[1].

Other feminist critics have also stated that the ideas of a gender binary distinction or that gender can be equated with sex have been perpetuated by patriarchal society in favour of men (Hoberth, 2012:5). This has, in turn, created stereotypes of what femininity and masculinity mean. These binary stereotypes have also been explored by French feminist theorist, Helene Cixous in her essay "The Newly Born Woman" (1975). Cixous argues that society logocentrically organises all concepts into opposites. Philosophical systems have always worked with oppositions such as those of:

Activity/Passivity
Sun/Moon
Culture/Nature
Day/Night
Father/Mother
Head/Heart (Cixous, 1975:37)

Cixous argues that in trying to make sense of these oppositions and these concepts, a hierarchical system is naturally formed as, "the movement through which each couple is set up to make sense is the movement through which the couple is destroyed" (Cixous, 1975: 37). Within this hierarchy, she suggests that male privilege is clear, as all things are organised according to man, and this is shown in the

[1] It can be noted that the definition of "biological sex" is now also under review as more research is done on trans men and women.

concept of *activity* and *passivity.* It is because of this logocentricism that Cixous argues that “woman is always associated with passivity in philosophy...either woman is passive or she does not exist” (Cixous, 1975: 72). Although gender theory is constantly evolving, and our understanding of gender has changed dramatically since the publication of “The Newly Born Woman” (1975), it can be argued that the stereotypes of masculine and feminine can be applied to the texts of today. In *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials* (2000), Diana Kendall highlights these stereotypes by stating that men are traditionally seen as being “strong, rational, dominant, independent, and less concerned with their appearance”. In turn women are seen as “weak, emotional, nurturing, dependent, and anxious about their appearance” (2000: 324). These conclusions offer insight into how gender has been received within patriarchal societies. As Fantasy texts “reflect the world and comment on it as they document events and also imagine them” (Stuller, 2010 :3), it can be argued that the masculine and feminine stereotypes assumed in the worlds constructed by Le Guin and Pearce, are a reflection of those of the world of the reader. Maria Nikolajeva expands on this idea in her book *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers* (2009), where she points out that the societal gender restrictions present in the world of the reader will always have some influence on the construction of literature.

> The use of narrative space is closely connected with the question of genre. Masculine space is frequently perceived as being outdoors while feminine space is closed (“imprisonment is a recurrent trope in women’s fiction); masculine field of activity is away from home, while feminine sphere is home; masculine concern is to conquer nature, while feminine concern is to “understand” and be one with nature . Male characters perceive home as restrictive while female characters perceive it as secure and protective. (2009: 132)

Based on this statement as well as those made by Kendall (2000), it can be argued that the most traditional stereotype, that of the weak, emotional and dependent woman, seems to be the foundation on which classic stereotypes have been built. It makes sense that this is the stereotype that modern culture is most familiar with as it aligns with the patriarchal preoccupation of ensuring men hold the power – bound by this perception, women are left dependent on men to help and feed them, and men are elevated to fulfilling the role of the heroic, virile, gallant and guiding provider. By extension, "literature which presents female literary characters who fit in these categories and who would not be expected to do what real life feminists feel is necessary, namely subvert the existing order (even if only in the realm of the fictive world) is therefore considered as comforting" (Hoberth, 2012: 7).

Yet it would not be fair to state that women are the only victims of unfair stereotyping; it can be argued that men are equally entrapped by patriarchal gender stereotypes, as shown by Kendall's statements. The continuation of patriarchal culture relies heavily on both men and women playing into their respective traditional, stereotypical roles. This is why literature that subverts the existing order and pushes the boundaries of gender representation is so important in these modern times. Judith Butler states that "any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of gender in the presumptions of its own practice sets up exclusionary gender norms within feminism… feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion" (1990: viii). When it comes to YA Fantasy it can be argued that older texts tend to portray stereotypical gender roles that line up with patriarchal thinking compared to more modern texts that are more likely to subvert and challenge the traditional gender situation.

It is important, as I continue with my argument, to bear in mind the ever-changing and fluid expression of gender identity, as I critically engage with both Pierce's and Le Guin's texts. The trend towards new femininities and new masculinities that is apparent in modern gender theory is constantly being remoulded.

> Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purpose at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of individual closure. (Butler, 1990: 22)

Throughout this dissertation, I will be discussing the roles of different expressions of femininity in YA Fantasy Fiction, and their place in the heroic narrative. Alanna, for example, performs what can be referred to as "female masculinity" (Halberstam, 1998). While her sex is female, her performance is often distinctly masculine, both in and out of drag. This, in turn, encourages the young girl reader, as "'heroic masculinity' is a gender expression that we culturally trust and enjoy in entertainment, yet that position is inhabited by males and discouraged in females. Tomboyism, for example, involves the acceptance of gender deviation of women to a certain age when it is no longer tolerated" (Chieffalo, 2021: 115).

Pierce uses the concept of the "female hero in drag"[2] to challenge gender performativity in the *Song of The Lioness* series. Alanna's journey as a female dressing up as a male, challenges her society's expectations of the typical hero, and enables a YA female character to experience the displacement and process of the male hero's journey. The expectations of the female hero will be unpacked later in

[2] "The female hero in drag" refers to the practice of a female to don the garments and traditional traits of a man, in order to usurp the freedoms enjoyed by male society (Aron,2008:1).

this chapter. Compared to Alanna's active skills of swordplay and magic, Memer's brand of heroism does not require her to forgo a traditionally more "feminine" role. Yet, like Alanna, who struggles with gender hybridity, Memer too has a hybrid identity, as she is of mixed race. Both Alanna and Memer also share similarities in that they are adolescent women struggling to establish their identities in male-dominated societies, as well as experiencing the specific pressures of said male-dominated societies. Both authors use their female heroines to challenge gender norms and bring the abilities of women to the forefront of their stories. This dissertation thus intends to examine the ways in which these heroines are represented, especially their search for identity through their differing performances of gender.

Both authors have managed to use the YA Fantasy genre as a means to deconstruct and examine these gender roles. In order to explore how these ideas are successfully portrayed however, the characteristics of the broader Fantasy genre also need to be explored and unpacked to demonstrate how it provides a space in which such revaluation may be more likely to occur.

Defining Fantasy

> The "fantastic" derives from Latin...meaning to make visible or manifest. In this general sense, all imaginary activity is fantastic, all literary works are fantasies. Given such an infinite scope, it has proved difficult to develop an adequate definition of Fantasy as a literary kind. (Jackson, 1981:13)

As Rosemary Jackson indicates, Fantasy as a genre is difficult to define. Ever since JRR Tolkien helped make Fantasy popular with *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of*

the Rings (1954 -1955), definitions of the Fantasy genre have proliferated and been moulded to suit our ever-changing society.

In *Fantasy: the literature of subversion* (1981), Rosemary Jackson, a lecturer in English at the University of East Anglia, defines Fantasy as a story based on that which opposes accepted reality. The term has been applied broadly to narratives that do not prioritise realistic representation, such as myths, folklore, fairy tales and science fiction. Despite this, it has also been argued that the fantastic is not focused on the subversion of social norms, but instead "disturbs" the idea of what is "real". Therefore, according to Jackson, critics have tried to define the Fantasy genre according to how it relates to what is "real" in the empirical world.

In *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), Brian Attebery has sought to define the Fantasy genre by using Tolkien's works as a "mental template", suggesting that a work can be classified as belonging to the Fantasy genre if it in some way resembles *The Lord of The Rings.* This template, Attebery argues, will remain in place "until someone else achieves equal recognition with an alternate conception" (1992:14). Attebery is not unusual in his thinking, as Tolkien's world-building and narrative structure birthed modern Fantasy as we know it, and are still used as touchstones by many contemporary readers. It is also possible that the relatively minor roles accorded to women in Tolkien's trilogy have also played a part in the frequently conservative treatment of female characters in YA Fantasy.

The content essential to any Fantasy work, is "the impossible" or a sense of "the marvellous". In her book *In Defence of Fantasy* (1984), Anne Swinfen defines "the marvellous" as "anything outside the normal space-time continuum of the everyday world…composed of what can never exist in the world of empirical experience"

(1984: 5). This sense of “the marvellous” carries the readers into the secondary world created by the author and grants them the ability to escape their own worlds of consensus reality, and explore, what has been created. In other words, the content of Fantasy demands a break from reality,

Second, the structure of a Fantasy novel must begin with a problem and end with a solution, or resolution of some sorts. Tolkien refers to this eventual evolution of events as a “eucatastrophe” (1965:68). “Death, despair, horror, and betrayal may enter into a Fantasy but they must not be the final word, Tolkien believed every fairy story must have that final turn upwards, to deliverance and a good resolution for the heroes”. (Attebery,1992:15). However, this does not mean that Fantasy requires an entirely happy ending; often the resolution comes at a cost. In *The Lord of the Rings,* Frodo comes back from his journey a completely changed Hobbit from the one who left the Shire (Brown, 2006: 171). The price he pays for destroying the ring is that of pain and exile. Sam returns to marry Rosy and live a charmed, normal Shire life, yet is deprived of the Elven magic and wonder he encountered, and fell in love with, on his quest to Mount Doom.

The eucatastrophic ending creates a reader response effect that is linked to the third criteria for defining a Fantasy. This effect is one of “wonder”, and such “wonder” comes to the reader after experiencing the defamiliarizing effects of the marvellous secondary world of the novel. Tolkien believed novels could help the reader disconnect from the real world and add illusion or imagination to it, thus “recovering” the wonder of the primary world.

> In order to recover our sense of something like a tree, it is only necessary to envision a dragon curled around its trunk. Or perhaps merely envisioning is not enough. Tree and dragon must be drawn into

> a…story. We must know, too, that our fictional representatives will survive their encounter with the dragon and gain new understanding thereby. (Sandner, 2004: 309)

This format established by Tolkien and applied to the Fantasy genre by Attebery, will be the same template I apply when discussing the texts by Pierce and Le Guin. Tolkien also mentions the concept of reader disconnect from the real world, which is crucial in my analysis of the importance of strong female representation in YA fiction, as seen later on in this chapter.

More recently, Farah Mendelsohn has also explored the construction of Fantasy novels in her book *The Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) in which four constructions of the Fantasy narrative are defined. These constructions are: the *portal quest, the immersive Fantasy, the intrusion Fantasy* and the *liminal one.* The works of Fantasy fiction discussed in this dissertation can all be categorised as Immersive Fantasies. According to Mendelsohn, the author of an Immersive Fantasy merely inserts the reader into the middle of the secondary world without any given context as to the norm, and operates under the assumption that the reader is just as much a part of the created world as the characters within it. The characters in the Immersive Fantasy take for granted the fantastical world in which they live, they are integrated into the world of the text, without any prior explanation or comment being required from the author.

> We do not enter into the Immersive Fantasy, we are assumed to be of it: our cognitive estrangement is both entire and negated. The Immersive Fantasy must be sealed; it cannot, within the confines of the story, be questioned. (Mendelsohn, 2008)

Immersive Fantasies do not often concern themselves with the building up of, or healing of the world, but instead consider its destruction and disfunction. Mendelsohn states that as opposed to the Portal-Quest Fantasy, in which the main character leaves their familiar surroundings through a portal into an unknown place, which in turn focuses on the restoration of grandeur and the healing of the entered world, in Immersive Fantasies “cities and civilizations fall, families follow political systems into moral degradation and decline, absent gods leave men to fend for themselves, worlds once impervious to the external world see their walls breached” (2008: 61). This can be seen in both *Song of the Lioness* and *Annals of the Western Shore.* Since the worlds in these novels have not been discovered by the protagonists, and therefore cannot be built and explored, they must instead be lost. The destruction and abuse of power portrayed in all three novels of *Annals of the Western Shore* portrays this well, as the protagonists all struggle to find meaning and peace in a corrupt political climate. Similarly, Alanna in *Song of the Lioness* strives to heal the strained relationship between the Kingdom of Tortall and the Bazhir – the desert people for whom she becomes shaman.

Fantasy as a genre is used to create distance, and critics like Jackson argue that it simply expels desire by satisfying it and allowing an outlet for it. According to Jackson, Fantasy can function in two ways: it can act as a means of wish-fulfilment, playing directly into the desire of the reader or it can act as something that prohibits the desire of the reader, revealing some sort of cultural disorder

> In many cases fantastic literature fulfils both functions at once, for desire can be ‘expelled’ through having been ‘told of’ and thus vicariously experienced by author and reader. In this way fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which is outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been

> silences, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent' (Jackson, 1981: 3-4).

. I would argue, however, that Fantasy can also destabilize and question social norms and thus prompt a revision of cultural concepts such as gender. The *cognitive estrangement* experienced by the reader, I would suggest, may be used to compare the shared reality[3] of the reader and the author to the world present in a given fiction. Fantasy can thus work as a tool to reflect an alternate world from the empirical environment of the author and the reader. It has the potential to challenge the social structures of the primary world and encourages a shift away from the world around us. Darko Suvin, still one of the leading minds in speculative fiction despite having written nearly fifty years ago, explains this in his book *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979). The author of the text, he claims, creates a world which differs from that of the reader and indeed that of the author. This emergence into a different world creates a feeling of "estrangement" in the reader, which forces the reader to reconsider the world they live in and compare it to the world created by the author. The text thus creates an interrogation of the empirical world of the reader, due to the world of the author being just far enough removed so as not to overwhelm or threaten the reader with its subversive nature, but instead allow for psychological contemplation of the structure of the reader's own world. Suvin aptly states that,

> the world is not necessarily the way our present empirical valley happens to be, and that whoever thinks his valley is the world is blind. Whether island or valley, whether in space or...in time, the new framework is correlative to the new inhabitants. The aliens - utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers - are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one, virgin womb and alchemical dynamo: the mirror is a crucible. (1979: 5)

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[3] While I accept that experience is universal and I do not wish to generalise, culturally some experiences differ between men and women.

The propositions created by the author through the secondary world of the text, challenge the reader's ways of thinking and encourage the demystification of common assumptions the reader has picked up from their empirical world. Through cognitive estrangement, or 'distancing', the text may thus allow for a more intellectual experience and a discussion of the text's themes or social concerns. Patrick Parrinder, a critic of science fiction, simplifies Suvin's theory by saying, "Science fiction employs a particular kind of defamiliarisation [alienation] technique, since it confronts the reader with new and strange conditions of life outside his own likely or possible experience" (1979:149).

Fantasy and science fiction therefore may use *cognitive estrangement* to alert the reader to the fact that the reality of the story is no longer exactly the same as their own; this is done through the presence of *the marvellous* (in Science Fiction it is advanced technology or time machines, in Fantasy magic or mystical creatures serve the same function). The alienation, or distancing that occurs as a result of this estrangement allows for a more subjective, intellectual perspective to form within the reader. The secondary world thus acts as a catalyst by means of which the reader can review social concerns and themes, and explore different modes of thinking. The novum[4] itself becomes a means to provide a background to validate intellectual or ethical exploration and inquiry, and enables the creation of a world or situation through which questions are encouraged. By reading a work of Science Fiction or Fantasy, the reader intentionally takes a step away from reality to engage in a narrative that may use factual information to create a *mimesis* of possibility. Readers

[4] "Novum" refers to a term used by Suvin to describe the scientifically and logically plausible ideas that are conjured up in Science Fiction narratives.

who are drawn to these genres often specifically seek out this estrangement in order to feel removed from their primary world, and inspired by the possibilities shown to them by the secondary world of the novel.

The demand for the female hero

Through their texts, both Pierce and Le Guin are able to challenge the stereotypes perpetuated by society of what a woman is supposed to be. This, in turn, encourages a mimesis of possibility for the girl reader, who is being exposed to other forms of female expression. In her book *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology* (2010), Jennifer Stuller laments the fact that although gender expression in society has evolved, representation of the female experience, whatever it may be, has not.

> Although women's roles have evolved, and in fact, female *and* male roles have changed, modern hero stories, like those of the classic world myth, continue to focus on the male experience in Fantasy; and that women in these stories continue to fill the supporting roles of mothers, wives, temptresses, and goddesses (3).

The archetype of the hero encourages social greatness, striving for change, and inspires healthy psychological growth and development (Donaldson, 2003:9), however, the patriarchal society we, as the readers, live in has encouraged the growth of the male hero and the marginalisation of the female hero.

This in turn has created a cultural sense of diminished female power, only addressed recently by feminist scholars and authors, who, instead of aggrandising the idea of the male hero, have become self-reflective and have started seeking inspiration from

the few female heroic models available to them. According to Eileen Donaldson, the re-emergence of the female hero is crucial for the inspiration of women who need to reject the patriarchal norms that have been forced onto them.

> The Amazon warrior, who is a distinct symbol of female agency and independence, has been feared and reviled as an 'unnatural' phenomenon in patriarchal culture. She is reviled because she does threaten the stability of society through her refusal to become a 'domesticated' woman. However, this refusal to lay down her weapons is precisely what makes the Amazon an unsurpassed example of the female capacity for heroism. (Donaldson, 2003:9)

The figure of the Amazon warrior helped pave the way for more fluid gender expressions, whose more "masculine" energy can be seen as "not a contamination of manliness, but a conjunction of masculinity and femininity. An evolution or progression towards inclusion rather than exclusion: an expression of female masculinity" (Chieffalo, 2021: 109). Alanna deals with this throughout her story, existing as both a woman and a man, and trying to find balance in the performance of her gender, as well as denying the stereotypical expectations forced on her as a woman in a patriarchal society. Her character teaches young girls that they can be more active and independent than the "passive" female characters they have encountered in other forms of literature. Le Guin's Memer, however, does the same for the domestic sphere. In finding affirmative action through the traditionally less virile, and less "active" skills of reading and writing, Le Guin's character helps readers to embrace and value the more traditional role of the woman, and ensures that this is not simply dismissed while a traditionally male model of heroism is affirmed. The *cognitive estrangement* achieved through the distanced secondary worlds of both these narratives, thus ensures that young adolescent female, readers are empowered to start looking at themselves, and

their places in society, more critically. Donaldson highlights the need for the recognition of the female hero in modern society.

> Thus, even while women have been considered incapable of heroic action, for whatever reason, there are those who have battled against society and overthrown patriarchal taboos to claim the status of Warrior Queens. These women demand recognition of the fact that women's position as pacifier and maternal nurturer is certainly not all they are capable of; women can be bloody warriors and uncompromising heroes as well. (Donaldson, 2003:8)

The fact that Fantasy is partially derived from Romance (Frye, 1957) and therefore relies on traditional storytelling forms, can be both a strength and a weakness in terms of challenging cultural norms. The strength comes from the fact that Fantasy has the ability to take these traditional forms and reimagine both character and story, however, these traditional storytelling techniques can also result in the tale digressing into the narrative structures of the past, without questioning them or bringing to light society's ever-changing social structures (Attebery,1992:87). Margery Hourihan, a critic of Children's Literature states in her book *Deconstructing the Hero* (2005) that 19th century hero stories "are often overtly concerned with the question of what it means to be a man – a state which is evidently not easily arrived at" (68). Since these tales are therefore focused on the process of coming of age, the danger to female representation in contemporary Fantasy may come from the lack of equal gender representation in the narratives of the past. Peter Hunt articulates this perfectly when he says, "there is, however, one area of formulaic writing that is increasingly difficult to justify: the treatment of gender. The hero tale, still the staple of contemporary Fantasy, has been essentially a male preserve…women are marginalised or mothers or dangerous" (2001:3). Although

more female heroes have dominated the YA Fantasy market in recent years, it can be argued that the female hero is still not 'normal'.

This unsettled representation of women in the modern Fantasy novel is a throwback to the romance genre, in which the female characters are frequently either represented as *the lady*, who is exalted and worshipped by the hero, or as *the evil enchantress*, who is used to seduce the knight errant and lead him astray from his quest and from his beliefs (Cooper,2004: 18).

In popular post-war fantasies such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956)*,* women as protagonists, or even important characters, are similarly given a stereotypically gendered existence in the secondary world, perhaps because these writers were themselves so enmeshed in the study of medieval epic or romance.

In *The Lord of the Rings,* the role of the woman certainly follows the formulae of romance. The three main female characters in the trilogy are Galadriel, Arwen, and Eowyn. With the exception of Eowyn, who chooses her fate and desires to die in battle and glory, the women of Tolkien's Middle Earth are largely used as vessels for exaltation, like Arwen and Galadriel, or portrayed as housewives and termagants, like Lobelia Sackville-Baggins. Galadriel, "the Lady of Lorien" is exalted and seen as a type of goddess. The fellowship treats her as a being to be admired and feared. "Yet more fair is the living land of Lórien, and the Lady Galadriel is above all the jewels that lie beneath the earth!" (Tolkien, 1954:229). Arwen too plays the role of the lady for Aragorn, and is his main source of inspiration on his quest to help destroy the ring. Arwen as Aragorn's love interest is already considered superior to him due to her status as an elf and an immortal. Both of these characters show no

real depth or development; throughout the trilogy, they remain stock two-dimensional characters, used primarily as inspirational idols by the heroes completing their quests. It is important to note that only men achieve emotional development and fullness by the end of the trilogy, whereas the mythical characters “attain only romanticised futures” (Hatcher, 2007: 44) In her book *Women Among the Inklings* (2001), Candice Frederick states that “Middle-earth is very Inkling-like, in that while women exist in the world, they need not be given significant attention and can, if one is lucky, simply be avoided altogether" (108).

The same can be said of Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* and the characters of Susan and Lucy, who are used as more of a source of inspiration than a force to be reckoned with. Susan and Lucy are not allowed to attend the battle against the white witch, and are the recipients of gifts from Father Christmas that reflect their passive status: a horn that can call for help, and a magic cordial that can heal wounds. They are given a bow and arrow and a dagger for their own protection, but these gifts are intended to be used only for protection, and not action. Aslan, the divine lion, explains this quite clearly:

> ... “And the dagger is to defend yourself at great need. For you also are not to be in the battle.”
>
> “Why sir?” said Lucy. “I think - I don’t know - but I think I could be brave enough”
>
> “That is not the point,” he said. “But battles are ugly when women fight…” (Lewis, [1950] 2000:109)

The trope continues once Susan grows up, and is not allowed back into Narnia. Jill expresses Lewis’ s views on the maturation of young girls into young adults when she states that Susan is “interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick

and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up" (Lewis, 1956: 124). Margery Hourihan expresses her uneasiness over the problem with Susan when she says "for playing a female role, Susan has been denied entrance to heaven. Underlying this is a profound uneasiness about sexuality. Sex has never been a factor in the lives of other children…and Polly condemns Susan's interest in being a sexual creature as silly" (2005:67).

As discussed previously, the template for these female characters as established by Tolkien, is arguably at odds with subsequent changes in attitude and perception in and around the question of gender. Although Eowyn is written to play an active role in the events of Middle Earth, her relationship with Faramir ultimately constrains her "within the bounds of marriage" (Downs, 2014: 72). Tolkien thus ensures that all the women of Middle Earth "accept traditional roles as wives, mothers, healers, and nurturers" (Downs, 2014: 72). Although there is no shame in these roles being chosen and freely performed, it is clear from these examples that in hero stories, where the male/female dichotomy is explored, the male is asserted as the norm. The male hero represents "what it means to be human, and [defines] the female as the other – deviant, different, dangerous" (Hourihan, 2005:68).

The presence of this male norm is also apparent in Le Guin's earlier work *The Wizard of Earthsea* (1968). Ged leaves his Master Ogion due to his own impatience and pride, to study magic at the school in Roke. His arrogance causes conflict and competition with another boy at the school, and in an attempt to demonstrate his superior magical prowess, Ged uses a summoning spell that exceeds his skill-level and in turn lets loose an evil shadow. Ged spends the rest of the novel learning to defend himself against the shadow and travelling around Earthsea in an attempt to evade it. Ged's series of narrow misses eventually lead him back to the village of his

old Master Ogion, he is a changed man, and has learnt the limits and risks of his power. His true Master gives him the advice he needs to finally finish what he started on Roke, and Ged is able to defeat the shadow he has unleashed.

Le Guin's plot clearly follows that of the heroic monomyth, moving from the end of childhood and as Attebery puts it, "a condition of unformedness" (1992:88) into adulthood and the hero's assumption of his powers and proper place in society. This "coming of age" and gradual development of the hero ties the story together. This bias towards one gender can be seen as problematic, as the coming-of-age tale then becomes a very one-sided narrative, perpetuating traditional societal restrictions, and illustrating the uneven expectations placed on young women in comparison to those placed on young men. Le Guin discovered second-wave feminist ideology after publishing the first few books of Earthsea, and later revisited her imagined world by instilling a more active female protagonist in the form of Tehanu and allowing her initially comparatively passive female character Tenar to take on more responsibility and demonstrate increasing agency in the last two novels of the series. This transformation will be discussed further in later chapters.

YA Fantasy writer Diana Wynne Jones spells out more clearly that the female heroic is somewhat problematic in her essay *The Heroic Ideal: A Personal Odyssey* (1989). Wynne-Jones starts off by defining the hero first as the character one identifies with in the story, one who possesses a strong moral code and sense of bravery. She suggests that the male hero often starts off with the advantage of some accident of birth or parentage that sets him apart from everybody else even at a young age. This difference can also cause the hero to be considered disobedient or contemptuous, and he often has to contend with his own physical limitations, or strengths. In *Earthsea,* Ged struggles to learn his limitations, and unleashes an evil that threatens

both him and the world because of it. Despite these struggles the hero still sets out to complete a nearly impossible task, never before done, or achieved. The heroic code is rarely explicitly stated, but is rather discovered by the hero himself through his trials and errors, often completed under the guidance of some mentor. The hero's story either ends in tragedy or in triumph if a sort of *deus ex machina* from a god or powerful mentor helps him prevail (1989:131). This is typical of course, for *male* heroes. However, Wynne-Jones states that she always viewed the females to be "a mess" (131). "There seems to have been an overwhelming acceptance that meekness was the lot of a good woman, until she was goaded into turning evil" (132). This observation from Wynne-Jones highlights the lack of stories of female agency and adventure in YA Fantasy at the time in which Tamora Pierce was working and Le Guin was reassessing her work.

Wynne-Jones also highlights the effect that representation in hero stories can have on children when she says "children do, by nature, status, and instinct, live more in the heroic mode than the rest of humanity. They naturally have the right naive, straightforward approach. And in every playground, there are actual giants to be overcome and the moral issues are usually clearer than they are, say, in politics" (1989:133). Children are more open to the heroic myth, and therefore more susceptible to having their thinking and development influenced by it. The only problem is the child's already present internalisation of the heroic ideal - the idea of the boys being the heroes and the girls being "either wimps or bad" (133). According to Wynne-Jones, boys are less likely to read a book with a girl hero, and girls read the books about boy heroes and "wistfully identify" (133). It is only in recent years that strong female protagonists have ceased to be outliers in popular culture and

have achieved the status of what Wynne-Jones calls the “everywoman” - “a real female hero, one with whom all girls can identify, and through that *all persons*” (133).

A good example of such a hero in YA Fantasy would be Suzanne Collins’s Katniss from *The Hunger Games* series (2008-2010). Katniss fits Wynne-Jones’ typical description of a hero. Although the genre of *The Hunger Games* is more science-fiction/dystopian, her character has helped pave the way for more strong female representation in Fantasy. Katniss comes from nothing, growing up in the slums of District 12, and possesses a talent for archery and hunting. She is ordinary, and has no unnatural abilities, yet her skills and own self-reliance are what help her survive The Games – which are essentially a Battle Royale to the death, with only one victor. The fact that she automatically and willingly takes the place of her sister in The Games, shows she possesses that strong moral code and sense of bravery that Wynne-Jones highlights in her essay.

> For a moment I yearn for something...the idea of us leaving the district...making our way into the woods...but I know I was right about not running off. Because who else would have volunteered for Prim? (Collins, 2008:25)

Throughout the quest, the hero is forced to overcome obstacles and perform deeds that test his abilities and teach him about his limitations and weaknesses. Joseph Campbell describes the hero as “the man of self-achieved submission” ([1949] 2004:15)– meaning he is able to submit to his fate and his sense of the unknown with courage and the ability to not feel overwhelmed. He achieves his quest through his own endeavour and belief in his abilities.

Katniss submits to her fate as soon as she receives her call to action. She completes her quest and achieves her goal (not dying in The Hunger Games) through her own belief in her abilities, her determination to survive and her ability to outsmart her competitors. Her lack of supernatural talent makes her all the more real for awestruck readers. The only thing stopping Katniss Everdeen from becoming a staple for female empowerment everywhere is the fact that, much like Alanna, she struggles with the feminine side of her identity.

> I look, very simply, like a girl. A young one. Fourteen at the most. Innocent. Harmless. Yes, it is shocking that Cinna has pulled this off when you remember I have just won the games. (Collins, 2008: 348)

Despite the rise in contemporary female representation in YA novels, the vast majority of female heroes seem to possess overridingly traditional "masculine" qualities. Katniss's skills are not in what Le Guin refers to as "the language of the household" - skills that are more domestically courageous, such as healing, like her sister Prim or, reading and writing, like Memer in *Voices*. Although Katniss and Alanna prove to young female readers that they too can do just as much as, if not more than, the traditional male hero, they do so by marginalising the more traditional roles of females within society. Girls need to be freed to identify with softer, more nurturing domestic roles without feeling as if they are not empowered unless they can emulate male heroes by wielding weapons like the heroines they read about. Conventional female gender expression, as third-wave feminists have pointed out, can also be considered heroic, and women deserve the right to choose the paths that they desire. Hourihan argues that in Fantasy, the male hero is the norm, and his traditional qualities assert what it means to be human, and what it means to be masculine (2005: 68). This, in turn, others the female. The male hero is encouraged

to show his masculinity through action, bravery, and feats of strength, whilst "softer" pursuits, such as care work are undervalued.

> The essence of the hero's masculinity is his assertion of control over himself, his environment and his world. The world of these texts is a place of Manichean opposites: monsters exist and must be opposed. The hero's life, therefore, consists of a succession of struggles. No victory is sufficient, for the next challenge lies ahead…The final triumph comes only with the end of the story, and what follows the ending is a state as vague as heaven: 'happily ever after'. His struggle is with his own unconscious as much as with external opponents: he puts down things which rise from the inner darkness, because to him they are enemies. Emotions and imagination threaten his control, and threaten to come between him and his goal; therefore, they too must be suppressed. This is the definition of masculinity which the myth imposes. (Hourihan, 2005:68)

The hero, according to Wynne-Jones, comes to the aid of the weak or incompetent, and is typically somehow linked to, or advised by the gods (1989:137). In *Song of the Lioness,* Alanna is protected and influenced by The Goddess. In *Voices,* Memer is guided by The Oracle. The presence of the gods in the young heroes' lives is important as it gives them the extra drive needed to allow them to tap into their sense of heroism. By being in touch with a deity, an extra dimension is added to their existence and helps them to keep in touch with the rest of the universe. The fact that there are gods actively involved in watching them and influencing them also gives the heroes the ability to keep up with the heroic code. This harks back to the romance age when chivalry and courtesy were important for the heroes to succeed in their quests.

Another element of heroism is the element of the heroes' personalities or pasts which lead them to be set apart from the rest, or outcasts from society; despite this, they set out to complete a task or deed that has previously been proven detrimental to others, and they invariably succeed. Wynne-Jones states that the hero's life

consists of a succession of struggles when she says “heroes go into action when the odds are against them. They do this knowingly, often knowing they are going to get killed, and for this reason they impinge (sic) on a hostile world in a way others don’t” (1989:130).

Heroes are therefore born, and raised in a particular culture and must, at least initially subscribe to the restrictions and expectations of the culture and society from which they come. What makes the heroes so different, so spectacular, is that they later diverge from the carefully laid out path society has placed before them.

The heroes’ actions ultimately lead to the enlightenment of and change within societies. This change of societal norms within the secondary world of the story echoes the subversive goals of the author within the primary world of the reader – challenging culture and expressing the author’s viewpoint on certain issues and matters.

> The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally rated, normally human forms. Such as one’s visions, ideas and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence, they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as modern man, but as eternal man – perfected, unspecific, universal man – he has been reborn. His second solemn task and deed therefore … is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson of life renewed. (Campbell, [1949] 2004:18)

The young heroes’ narrative, Campbell argues, is that of displacement, transformation and return. This pattern has been repeated in Fantasy narratives for centuries. In JRR Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1937), Bilbo is displaced from the comfort and predictability of The Shire to go on a quest with Thorin Oakenshield and his company of dwarves. Through his journey, Bilbo discovers the One Ring, completes

the quest to reclaim Erebor from the dragon Smaug, and returns to Bag End transformed from an amiable and relatively naïve young Hobbit, into a seasoned, sombre and adventurous heroic figure. The events occurring in *The Hobbit* (1937) are essentially a record of Bilbo's "coming of age".

This narrative is repeated throughout many Fantasy novels, yet the problem lies once again in the lack of representation for female readers. Although this has improved in recent years, Mary Ann Ferguson discusses the initial difference in development between the male and female narrative progression in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (1983)*:*

> The male *bildungsroman* describes the protagonist's development as spiral; at the end of the novel, the protagonist has more often than not achieved self-realization after his spiritual and psychological journey in the external world. In contrast the female protagonist's development is circular; remaining at home in order to learn the ways of her mother, she does not have the same possibility as her male counterpart to go out into the world to find herself. Women in fiction who violate the norms and refuse to follow this female pattern of development are perceived as rebels and they end up unhappy or insane (1983: 6).

This quote shows the problems faced by female authors at the time when Pierce was writing Alanna's series. It was difficult to present an accurate, representational, coming-of-age, female-oriented narrative, at a time when there was not much to go on. According to Attebery, should a Fantasy writer reinvent such a coming-of-age ritual for herself, she would still deal with "limitations not faced by her male counterparts" (1992:91). The values of female initiation must be considered, without the Fantasy heroine in question becoming just another domesticated, oppressed "tribal mother" or "drudge" (Attebery,1992:91). Essentially, if the author were to use just the male coming-of-age story and apply it to a female role, the authenticity of the female experience would be lost and the lack of representation would still remain. A

coming-of-age story requires an adolescent hero, a successful female-oriented coming-of-age story requires an adolescent heroine who is able to successfully come into her own outside the domestic sphere. This, however, has been proven to be very difficult to achieve due to the cultural limitations applied to a woman's coming of age. Stuller highlights the importance of the representation of all types of female expression as

> this lack of heroic female role models in popular culture can be distressing for a little girl, as well as for a grown woman. We're shown too many images of us as beauty queens, femme fatales, vixens, girlfriends, mothers, and damsels in need of rescuing. We can be these things, but we can also be more (2010:2).

This is therefore a problem for girl readers, who rely on representation and dialogue with society, language, and other people in order to form a sense of self and identity. YA fiction serves as a tool for readers to negotiate and explore the myriad social forces that have defined them throughout time. Through this form of fiction, adolescents are able to negotiate and identify their places within culture and society.

The main focus of this research will thus be to investigate the ways in which the female heroines in selected novels by both Le Guin and Pierce are represented, and how the authors are able to subvert the traditional trope of "The Hero's Journey" into something more female-orientated. The main focus will be on Pierce's "Song of the Lioness" series: *Alanna: The First Adventure* (1983)*, In the Hand of the Goddess* (1984)*, The Woman Who Rides Like a Man* (1986)*, and Lioness Rampant* (1988) and Le Guin's "Annals of the Western Shore" trilogy: *Gifts* (2004), *Voices* (2006), and *Powers* (2007).

Alanna, the protagonist in Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* series, is successful as a female playing a traditionally masculine role. Although there were sword-and-sorcery heroes in print before her, it can be argued that Pierce's Alanna spearheaded her way

into YA popular culture like no other protagonist before her. Pierce broke new ground with her character, who proves she has been able to compete with men on their own terms when she reveals herself as the first female knight of Tortall. However, despite the recognition of Alanna as the best knight in Tortall, she is still referred to as “The Woman Who Rides Like A Man” – masculinising her position.

In contrast to this, the female protagonists in Le Guin’s later novels are recognised for their strength in a traditionally feminine context. Le Guin’s feminine heroines succeed on their own terms – they are able to achieve their goals without subscribing to masculine expectations or norms.

The following chapters will investigate how these novels negotiate the stereotypes associated with the Fantasy genre, and the effect this has had on shaping the emergence of Female YA Fantasy writing. Starting with Pierce, I will analyse Alanna as a heroine fulfilling a traditionally masculine role, and examine her struggle to maintain her feminine identity. The chapter on Le Guin will discuss Le Guin’s re-examination of Earthsea as a female-oriented text, as well as her portrayal of Memer from *Voices* (2008) as a traditionally “feminine” heroine. Overall, this research should successfully outline the way in which these authors have offered a platform from which female writers, and readers could be represented and the ideology constricting their identities could be interrogated and revised, leaving open a broader range of choice for the performance of heroism.

Chapter 2: Tamora Pierce's literature of possibilities

In her article *Fantasy: Why Kids Read it and Why Kids Need it* (1993), Tamora Pierce calls Fantasy "the literature of possibilities...and empowerment". Throughout the years, Pierce has continued to see Fantasy in this way, saying in an interview with *The Guardian* in 2018, "I'm very happy with Fantasy. I can say almost everything I need to say. I've sneaked in a lot of what I think about the modern world, about modern politics… Everybody thinks Fantasy is so safe, because we don't deal with heavy modern issues. Are you kidding? We do this stuff all over the place" (Flood, 2018). According to Pierce, the Fantasy genre gives readers the opportunity to challenge the way things are, and to apply the questions brought up in the realm of the fantastic to everyday life. Whatever character growth and development that happens in Fantasy books can be carried over into reality; the willpower, hard work and determination of the characters are influential forces wherever they are applied, and the hope and optimism experienced by seeing the heroes succeed can colour the way Fantasy readers perceive what is happening around them (Jackson, 1981:5)

Interested in the Fantasy genre's consistent focus on heroism and spirituality, and frustrated by the lack of female representation in modern narratives, Tamora Pierce has created "elaborate, fiery fantasies with "kick-butt" female protagonists who inspire the heroic in any teen" (Spicer, 2013). Her relevance today remains very clear, as theorists and scholars still point to Pierce as a writer worth discussing in terms of her heroines (Flood, 2018). With her realistic, determined female protagonists, Pierce is able to create worlds and heroines that both empower, and energise her readers, encouraging them to question and change the world around

them. *Alanna: The First Adventure* (1983) is Pierce's first published work. It spearheaded a movement towards more realistic female heroines, who aim to create a model of female representation for Young Adult readers everywhere, and expand on the definition of what makes women heroic in Fantasy fiction. In an interview in 2018, Pierce stated that her desire to write female heroes came from the lack of representation in the Fantasy books she was reading at the time, and that of the few female heroes in the Fantasy books she read, most were not realistic enough, "Eowyn from Lord of the Rings, who gave up being a sword slinger to become a wife, mother and healer…why did she give up being able to fight for it all? Why couldn't she do it all? There was Jirel of Joiry by C.L. Moore, who once asked their men at arms why they cowered in the corner like so many women. To me that was dead wrong, we do not diss our own sex" (Signature Views, 2018). Anastasia Salter, an associate professor of interactive media at University of Central Florida writes of the accessibility of Pierce's protagonists in her paper "Closed Minds: Tamora Pierce's teenagers and the Problem of Desire" (2011). Salter argues that:

> In contrast to the popular children's Fantasy novels of JK Rowling and CS Lewis, where girls play second fiddle to the strong male characters and perform very traditional gender roles, Tamora Pierce's novels offer images of complex gender performativity and conflict for consumption by children. (Salter, 2011: 158)

The profound influence that Pierce's Fantasy narratives have had on readers comes up time and time again in reviews, articles, and personal essays (Pisarek, 2014). The representation of female heroism she creates within her stories resonates with critics and young readers alike (Pisarek, 2014). Pierce's protagonists foster feminine agency instead of dependence, and provide female readers with the representation they crave when exploring the empowering world of YA Fantasy fiction. In her book

Bodies That Matter (1993), Judith Butler refers to “agency” as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (xxiii). According to Butler, agency occurs through the reiteration of the performance and practice of one’s gender. However, Butler also points out that agency does not equal free-will, nor does it enable individuals to choose for themselves (xxiii). This means that in order for an individual to subvert dominant societal gender norms, they must first resist these norms. Feminine agency is therefore the practice of females to perform and practice their gender however they see fit, without yielding to the constraints of society’s dominant gender norms. This is important in YA literature, as young adults grow into their power as individuals and learn to take responsibility for their own actions (Seelinger-Trites, 2000: 5). Seelinger-Trites argues that “this need to recognize one’s own agency is a central pattern of adolescent literature; we achieve adulthood more comfortably if we recognize that we have some control over the various subject positions we occupy” (2000: 129). Adolescents gain agency through the navigation of the different forces enacted on them, and by testing the limits of society.

A space is made by Pierce for female heroes not limited by the expectations set upon them to conform to the gender binary. This space creates an opportunity for young female readers to explore their identities or abilities, question the world around them, and learn to assert their agency.

> When I was young, Alanna reinforced the idea that it was okay to be me, even if “me” wasn’t the norm, or what people expected. She does this for other young women too, telling them that it’s fine to be different. It’s alright to be yourself...She was so different, so unique, and achieved so much (Pisarek, 2014: 8).

The realism of Pierce's characters "serves as a beacon for young readers who want to see themselves as heroes" (Spicer, 2013). The depictions of sexuality and violence in Pierce's writing is frank, and often harsh, the way she tackles real issues such as menstruation and puberty is not sugar-coated or skimmed over, but addressed head on. When questioned on how she managed to get writing dealing with what were sensitive topics at the time published, Pierce stated "This is a medieval setting – teenagers were not children. It's not believable if I don't tell it the way it was. Readers wanted the rawness of reality" (Flood, 2018). This rawness of reality that can be found throughout Pierce's extensive body of work earned her the Margaret A. Edwards award in 2013 for her "significant and lasting contribution to young adult literature", and for "helping adolescents become aware of themselves" (Flood, 2018).

In an interview, Pierce stated that having protagonists with normal human flaws is one of the main things readers write to her about, "I try very hard to make it so that people can feel they can turn a corner and find my characters there and hang out with them" (Spicer: 2013). This is very obvious in Pierce's stories. Alanna in *Song of the Lioness* is hot-headed and impulsive, yet also plagued by self-doubt. Her habit of pushing herself too far and passing out lands her in trouble throughout the books, and her sensitivity over being teased makes it easy for the reader to identify with her. Kel in *Protector of the Small,* a sequel series to *Song of the Lioness* is equally realistic. She is constantly teased for being bigger than other girls, and hides her intense emotions under a polite and expressionless mask. Her strong sense of justice gets her into trouble throughout her knight training, and her fear of heights is something she struggles to overcome. Both Kel and Alanna are able to express their gender in ways that do not entirely conform to the gender binary.

The role of the female hero as an agent for change and independence, is an important one in modern fiction, and has inspired many female protagonists such as Le Guin's Tenar[5], Cassandra Clare's Clary[6], and Garth Nix's Sabriel[7]. The second-wave feminist movement that opened up a space for the girl warrior, pioneered by Pierce's Alanna, has provided generations of young female readers with the motivation required to challenge the world around them, and has spawned a new form of Fantasy fiction - one that is focused on the rise of what Tess Grogan, a critic from Smith University calls "the subversive heroine".

> I see a subversive heroine as having the sense, benevolence, and self-possession...who does not seek to impose her will on everything she meets, whose sense of identity is in flux, who stands up for herself without dominating others. She can be confident and courageous, but also contemplative and creative. She might value pragmatism above pride. She sees sexuality as power rather than weakness, taking one lover or many. She prefers creation to destruction, yet conventionally masculine traits are not off-limits to her; she can be stoic, gallant, and brave (Grogan, 2014: 8)

Tamora Pierce's brand of frank and deliberate heroism ticks all these boxes. Of the six series of books set in the universe of Tortall, all the protagonists are female, and all six are skilled and conscientious in their determination to achieve recognition in their male-dominated vocations. Her stories follow the structure of a Fantasy Bildungsroman, in which the heroines themselves learn to overcome adversity through discovering their strengths, and exploring their identities.

[5] From the *Earthsea* series (1968-2001) by Ursula Le Guin
[6] From The Mortal Instruments (2007-2014) by Cassandra Clare
[7] From the Old Kingdom (1995 – present) series by Garth Nix

Alanna's active heroism

Alanna in *Song of the Lioness* (1983-1988) acts as a pioneer for the rest of Pierce's universe. She establishes herself as the resourceful and determined protagonist of the series when she switches places with her twin brother Thom, and disguises herself as a boy in order to fulfil her dream of becoming a knight of Tortall with the help of her manservant, Coram. In the capital city of Corus, Alanna (or Alan as she is now known), befriends several characters, such as Prince Jonathan, his friends Gary and Raoul, her teacher-turned-mentor Sir Myles of Olau, and the King of Thieves, George Cooper. She makes enemies of the palace bully Ralon, as well as Prince Jonathan's uncle, Duke Roger. Alanna and Thom have both been blessed with the gift of magic, although Alanna is terrified of using her gift, despite her natural ability for healing. In the first book of the quartet *First Adventure* (1983), Alanna starts her training as a knight, and keeps up the pretence of being the hot-headed, yet small-in-stature, Alan of Trebond. She learns to stand up for herself against the bully, Ralon, and Jonathan eventually discovers her true identity when they both defeat the Ysandir, ancient threats living in the Black City. This victory requires Alanna to overcome any lingering doubts she may have had about herself as the following extract demonstrates:

> She is a girl. She is weak. She will give way and where will you be?"
>
> It was the same voice that taunted Alanna from within whenever she faced a taller, stronger opponent.
>
> "You think so?" she shouted furiously. "Then try *this* on for size!"
>
> A slender thread of fire snaked through the wall, wrapping itself around Ylira's throat and tightening. The immortal did not even have the chance to scream before she fell to the ground and vanished. (Pierce, 1983: 201)

Alanna proves to herself, to Jonathan, and to the Ysandir that her gender is inconsequential and in turn Jonathan selects Alanna as his squire regardless of his discovery of her sex.

In the second book of the series *In the Hand of the Goddess*[8] (1984), Alanna is given tasks by The Goddess, one of the two deities worshipped in Tortall, and the patron saint of Women and Healing. The Goddess blesses Alanna with a supernatural cat, or familiar, called Faithful and instructs her to learn to overcome her fear of love - the love of Jonathan, of George the rogue, and the parental love of Sir Myles of Olau, as well as her fear of the Chamber of Ordeal (the final test to undergo before becoming a knight) and her fear of Duke Roger. Throughout the novel, Roger's designs on the throne become clear, and at the end of the second book Alanna defeats him in single-combat and reveals her true identity to the court.

The third book *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*[9] (1986) deals with Alanna travelling to the nomadic tribe of the Bazhir in the Southern Desert after she is knighted. Here she is able to train her own magical gift, as well as three adolescents in the art of "shamanry". Jonathan proposes to her, leading to Alanna ending their affair and entering a relationship with George Cooper. She negotiates a peace treaty between Tortall and the Bazhir tribes by helping Jonathan become "the voice of the tribes" and therefore linking the two opposing cultures. In the final book of the quartet, *Lioness Rampant*[10] (1988) Alanna goes on a quest for the Dominion Jewel in order to bring it back to Tortall and prove to herself that she is worthy of King

[8] From here on *In the Hand of the Goddess* will be abbreviated to *Goddess.*
[9] From here on *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man* will be abbreviated to *Woman*
[10] From here on *Lioness Rampant* will be abbreviated to *Lioness*

Jonathan's court. She travels and trains with Liam the Shang Dragon, a master at martial arts, and has a brief affair with him. She also encounters the princess Thayet, who will become the eventual queen of Tortall. When she returns to Corus she discovers that Thom, her twin brother, has raised Duke Roger from the dead. Roger then makes one final attempt on Jonathan's life and the throne of Tortall, but Alanna kills him once again. The quartet ends with Roger finally, officially being defeated by Alanna, but not without a few casualties. Both Liam the Shang Dragon and Alanna's familiar, Faithful, are killed in the final battle. The book ends with Alanna settling down to marry George Cooper and becoming Baroness of his estate, as well as being appointed King's Champion by Jonathan.

In analysing Alanna's coming of age story, I will be using Kathleen Noble's model of the heroine's journey as set out in *The Sound of a Silver Horn: Reclaiming the Heroism in Contemporary Women's Lives* (1994). Noble has taken Joseph Campbell's male-centred heroic monomyth that sees the hero's journey in terms of *separation - initiation - return* and has reviewed it through a female lens in order to produce a more accurate reflection of the process the female hero undergoes. If we examine Alanna's development more closely, we can see that her journey does mimic that of the Campbell's male hero, and can be roughly divided into nine parts. These parts are the period of stasis, the call to adventure, the crossing of the threshold, initiation, transformation, the elixir, flight, return, and the freedom to live. I will therefore be using both theorists in my analysis, as Campbell is the foundation from which Noble has built her ideas.

The period of stasis starts with Alanna in her familiar space, in Trebond. The first book of the quartet starts with Alanna lamenting to Thom that she does not want to be a lady, and wants to be a knight. Her desire to change the world around her and

the circumstances in which she finds herself is indicative of her place as a potential heroine. According to Joseph Campbell, the typical hero “must champion a heroic ethic” (Donaldson, 2003: 3), meaning that the hero must rebel against societal norms, or act in a way that subverts societal expectations in order to pursue a truth within themselves. The hero must then find the courage to complete her action to the end, and, in doing so, she forces society to change its ways and expand (Campbell, [1949] 2004:243). Donaldson writes that “the heroic action, in whatever form it may take, should ultimately lead to the enlightenment or encouragement of society, which should lead to our liberation from the dark” (2003: 41). The protagonists of an immersive Fantasy therefore challenge the world around them, “[they] make their worlds by saying ‘it doesn’t have to be this way’” (Mendelsohn, 2008: 67).

On the first page of Alanna’s story, she does just this. Pacing the floor in front of her brother Thom she exclaims “there has to be another way” (Pierce, 1983: 1). By questioning the world around her in a way no one else does, Alanna asserts herself as the subversive heroine, the girl warrior who wishes to change the terms of her reality, and therefore the reality of the world around her.

The call to adventure

This period of stasis, stagnancy, and displeasure that Alanna finds herself in, pushes her towards answering “The Call to Adventure” to become Tortall’s first lady knight. Alanna is afraid of the ritualized life she is expected to have as a lady, one of marriage and the activities of a noblewoman. Her eagerness to embark on her quest shows her willingness and ability to actively shape the situation to fit her end goals.

Despite some reservations about her decision, Alanna takes control of her adventure from the very beginning.

Once her decision is made, and the call to adventure is answered, Alanna moves from the familiar place of Fief Trebond, with its own social expectations, and into the city of Corus, knight training and the physical change of dressing as a male. From this point of crossing, Alanna reaches the stage of her "Initiation".

In this stage, Alanna demonstrates what gender theorists refer to as "female masculinity". Literary critic Joe Goodwill defines female masculinity in *The New Female Action Hero* (2012) as:

> …a particular expression or performance of masculinity, an expression or performance that is entirely authentic, and that consists in female-bodied persons engaging in ways of thought and behaviour that have traditionally been considered masculine, such as claiming the right to authority, or displaying strength, courage, assertiveness, leadership, physicality (and sometimes violence), and very often heroism. Thus, female masculinity consists in female-bodied persons expressing characteristics that have traditionally been considered quintessentially masculine (10).

Through cross-dressing as a man, Alanna's performance is distinctly masculine, despite her biological sex being that of a female. Alanna's performance of masculinity is what Judith (Jack) Halberstam refers to as "heroic masculinity" in their book *Female Masculinity* (1998). This heroic masculinity is often shown in popular culture and is encouraged more in males than females. However, Halberstam argues that "what we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies" (1998:1). Although Alanna dresses and acts like a man throughout the first two books of the series, she does not only display traditionally male characteristics, thus "broadening the hero archetype in a way that

is transformative, transgressive and liberatory" (Goodwill, 2012:17). This will be discussed later in this chapter.

Alanna's dragons of initiation

In order for Alanna to achieve the transformation needed to complete her quest, she must undergo a series of physical and psychological tests. These tests are either psychological or symbolic, and always involve overcoming some sort of physical challenge (Campbell, [1994] 2004: 96).

For Young Adult Fantasy and the coming-of-age story, the psychological transformation is more important than the physical one. It enables the heroine to discover her untapped and undiscovered potential, which in turn gives her the strength to complete her quest and transform the world she is living in. Kathleen Noble has divided the initiation tests into six categories[11]. Namely, The Self, Depression, Passivity, Prejudice, Over-extension of Oneself, and Reality of Loss and Mortality. In order for the heroine to achieve true "transformation" she must face and overcome these six challenges, or "dragons" as Noble calls them.

The first dragon, The Self, refers to the hero's confrontation of her innermost characteristics, abilities and weaknesses. In order to move past this period of initiation, the hero must face her misgivings and self-doubt with a sense of maturity. Throughout the series, Alanna is faced with the challenge to overcome her fear of her magic, and her impulsivity and hot-headedness when faced with adversity.

[11] Tess Grogan originally applied the format in Noble's book to her interpretation of Alanna in her paper "A Quiet War: Revising Heroism in Tamora Pierce's Tortall" (2014) which I have been influenced by in writing this dissertation.

> The greatest temptation this first dragon presents a woman is the refusal to look into the depths of herself and return instead to the familiarity and ignorance of her former life. The pull of old patterns...can indeed be ferocious, but the quester must move forward even when she wants only to cling to the past. (Noble, 1994)

The most human characteristic Alanna possesses is her hot-headedness, and she never really learns to fully control her temper. Although Alanna's skills are often unmatched, it regularly "[takes] all her self-control to keep from losing her temper completely and making a fatal mistake" (Pierce,1986:5). Throughout the novels she struggles with her short temper, which can be a hindrance while in battle, and when jokes are made at her expense. Alanna's mastery of her temper, however, is one of the tasks she must face in order to complete her hero's journey.

This mastery of oneself is very typical of the male hero, according to Brian Attebery, for the more feminine hero "the problem is unleashing rather than mastering herself, and outside rather than within the institutional constraints of her culture" (1992:89). If this is the case, then Alanna does not have anything to unleash, her self-confidence and belief in herself is decidedly masculine. This is probably due to the fact that she has already proved her abilities before she is revealed to be female.

The other challenge of The Self Alanna must overcome is her magic. Alanna's magic is an intrinsic part of her, just as much as her fiery red hair and her quick temper and stubbornness. She is regularly frightened by it, is reluctant to use it, or when she does, overestimates her abilities and overexerts herself. Throughout the series Alanna learns that her magic is not a threat or something to hide away from, but is instead something to master and can be used as a tool, much like a sword. Just as Alanna has to practice her swordplay, so does she have to practice her magic and learn to control it. Alanna overcomes that fear in *Woman* (1986) when she

encounters a crystal sword, that's been bewitched with evil magic. Despite its nature, Alanna learns to control it; through this she discovers that "by forcing another spot out of the sword's make up…[her] gift gets stronger" (Pierce,1986: 129). At the end of the novel, she confirms her transformation to Coram when she says:

> Have you ever noticed when you try to deny some part of yourself, things fall out so you need that part more than any other? I was afraid of magic, partly because I was sure it couldn't be controlled. But the crystal sword taught me it can...guess I'm not afraid of my gift anymore. *I'm* the one who wields it - my gift doesn't wield me. And now I can help the people I swore to help with my abilities. (Pierce, 1986: 213)

The second dragon Noble discusses, is Depression. The stage of Depression often comes at the low point of the adventure, and in order for it to be defeated, the heroine must tap into her reserves of self-confidence and reaffirm her goals. Throughout her quest to become the First Lady Knight of Tortall, Alanna attempts to give up on her quest multiple times. As a Page she realises that the path to knighthood is much harder than expected, and, especially when she is revealed to be a woman, she fears the court gossip and opinions of her actions. For this reason, she leaves Corus and stays away until she learns to ignore the expectations of the Court. In *Woman,* Alanna refuses George's invitation to join him in the capital city. She remarks that "I can't go back to Corus...If I go to the palace, they'll be after me to dress like a lady and get married and forget I ever won my shield" (Pierce, 1986: 206).

Alanna often isolates herself when undergoing this kind of adversity. She laments the fact that her friends and companions will not leave her alone in situations like this. Coram and Faithful are especially persistent allies when Alanna tries to go off and adventure by herself; despite her disregard for the needs and opinions of others, she cannot shake her allies.

According to Noble, the heroine needs to understand that a true hero cannot succeed by herself. She must rely on the help of others to complete her quest. There is power in community and in seeking assistance. Although Alanna has her moments of solitude, she grows throughout the series and recognises that her friends and family are central to her success.

> She headed for the open desert alone, wishing there was a way to ride so hard and fast that she left puzzles and heartaches behind. To be free - really free, she thought grimly...to never worry about anything or anybody, to go where I want without thinking about other people at all...I wish the only one I ever carried with me was me. Hoofbeats sounded behind her; she wheeled Moonlight...Then she smiled ruefully as she recognised Coram and his bay gelding.
>
> I daresay I wouldn't be happy if I had no one but myself, she thought with a sigh, waiting for him to catch up. (Pierce, 1986:141)

The third dragon Noble discusses is the dragon of Passivity. This dragon affects all heroes who have accepted the call to adventure, but more so female heroes. This is due to the cultural expectation that women are considered to be the more passive of the two conventionally recognised genders due to the biological destiny that masculinist societies have forged for them. In order for the heroine to overcome this stage of initiation, she must resist external pressures that expect her to domesticate herself and become the passive housewife, or noblewoman.

Once Alanna chooses to start performing her femininity, she struggles with this dragon and is often found comparing herself to the other ladies of the court. Despite Alanna's desire to be a warrior first she is still jealous of their grace and beauty. These insecurities are often exacerbated by other characters. In *Goddess,* Alanna comes into contact with Lady Delia, a lady at court who has her sights on Prince Jonathan. Because Alanna's true gender is not yet known by anyone but Jon and George, she has to watch Jonathan's mild courtship of Lady Delia while struggling

with her romantic feelings for Jon. Thinking of Delia sends Alanna “to the wooden chest she kept at the foot of her bed...Opening it, she drew out her pretty clothes...She dressed and admired herself in the mirror. She wasn’t a beauty like Delia, but she wasn’t a hag either” (Pierce,1984:192). As soon as Alanna puts on her feminine garb she feels “bold and wonderful”. This in itself implies that Alanna is never truly herself as “Alan the squire”, and that her full potential and self lies in her original female identity. As soon as Alanna becomes unapologetically female, she becomes immediately more exceptional and powerful, she becomes *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man.* This is because she is able to reckon the two halves of herself, and merge both Alan the Squire and Alanna of Trebond into one full identity. By embracing her femaleness, Alanna’s confidence improves as she no longer has to hide a crucial part of who she is.

Jonathan’s expectations of her role within court, and in relation to him as a lover also contribute to Alanna’s lack of self-confidence when it comes to the regal expectations set upon her. When Jonathan proposes to Alanna in *Woman,* not only does he assume her response will be a positive one, he also pressures her more by saying “the duty of any noble wife is to give her husband an heir” (1986: 159). Once again Alanna has been subjected to the patriarchal expectations of her as a woman. It is only when Alanna moves away from the court, and she reaches the Bazhir tribe in *Woman*, that she is asked to prove her worth as a woman in a traditionally male role, instead of as a woman who must fulfil patriarchal expectations. The headman of the tribe states that, “She rides as a man, goes unveiled as a man, fights as a man. Let her prove herself worthy as a man, worthy of her weapons, and of our friendship” (18).

The fourth dragon of initiation is the dragon of Prejudice. This is the dragon that undermines the heroine's achievements and abilities because she is a woman. Noble states that this fourth dragon "tells women they cannot have great desires or great possibilities because they are female" (1994:79). This exclusion from the glory and recognition of heroism discriminates against those who do not conform to the cultural expectations or stereotypes they are confined by. As Coram remarks in *Woman* "Have you not discovered that when people, men and women, find a woman who acts intelligently, they say she acts like a man?" (1986:42) Coram shows the prejudice against women who act in a traditionally "heroic" manner.

This resistance to female masculinity has been tackled by critics such as Judith Halberstam, who argues that Alanna's display of female masculinity poses a threat to male dominance in society. Halberstam explains that "female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing" (1998:1). By enforcing prejudice against the female hero for asserting her right to authority, she remains in a position of subservience. Ursula Le Guin touches on the gendered state of the hero by arguing that "in our hero-tales of the Western world, heroism has been gendered: The hero is a man. Women may be good and brave, but with rare exceptions…women are not heroes" (1993:5).

Alanna herself is confined by her own prejudice against her gender. She often sees her feminine side as a weakness and struggles to embrace her true gender. In *Lioness* Alanna exclaims "I'm not a lady - I'm a knight", as if being both would take away from her achievements, or disadvantage her in some way. Alanna eventually learns to balance these two sides of her identity, but the journey to get there spans the entire quartet. Pearson and Pope address this in their book *The Female Hero in*

American and British Literature (1981) by saying that "because of women's powerlessness in society, traditional women identify, not with other women, but with the powerful, "superior" male" (112). Although this research was conducted some time ago, it is still relevant to discussions of Alanna as it was written around the time that the Lioness Quartet was published. It also shows the internalized misogyny that Alanna deals with as a woman in a predominantly male world, and her battle to assert her femininity whilst still being heroic.

> They try to escape by identifying with the oppressor, living through him, gaining status and identity from his ego, his power, his accomplishments. And by not identifying with other "empty vessels" like themselves, women resist relating on all levels to other women who will reflect their own oppression, their own secondary status, their own self-hate. For to confront another woman is finally to confront one's self - the self we have gone to such lengths to avoid. And in that mirror we know we cannot really respect and love that which we have been made to be. (Pearson and Pope, 1981: 113)

Alanna develops her physical abilities to try and fit in with the other boys at the castle, and often laments her small build and lack of physical strength. She equates maleness with physical strength, and laments that "this wouldn't have happened to a *real* boy*"* (1983: 62) when she is beaten by the palace bully. According to Nicole Brugger-Dethers in her chapter "Cross-Dressing and Performativity" (2012), "[Alanna's] performance continually revolves around trying to live up to a physical ideal of manliness" (2012: 81).

Pierce uses Alanna's struggle with her gender identity to suggest its performativity. When Alanna switches places with her brother, she uses her body language, pre-pubescent features and masculine dress to convince her teachers and peers that she is male. Alanna is aware that her performance of masculinity gives her an advantage she would never have had as a female. Once she puts on her royal

uniform, she remarks that “she had never looked so fine...the royal uniform gave her the courage to unbolt the door and step into the hall. She could never have done it in her battered old clothes” (Pierce, 1983: 26). Her new identity as a man enables her to tap into a traditionally male sense of courageousness. By becoming Alan the Squire, Alanna sheds her female persona and perpetuates “the inference that identity is inextricably linked to appearance, which affects the relationship between an individual and the community in which he or she lives” (Brugger-Dethers, 2012: 79). Although it has been mentioned previously that Alanna feels “bold and wonderful” in her traditionally feminine garb, it can be argued that the performance of her gender in which she feels the most powerful, changes according to her circumstances, as gender expression is fluid (Butler, 1990). Whether Alanna is masquerading as a boy, or feeling “bold and powerful” in her skirts, the way she expresses her gender is her choice. Through this, she becomes “a female-bodied person who freely chooses from a range of hitherto gender-linked behaviours to create a new mix that enables her to be a new kind of hero. She comes a specifically female hero, not just a woman behaving like an archetypal male hero” (Goodwill, 2012: 82).

However, as stated previously, it takes a long time for Alanna to reckon with her performance of gender. At the start of the quartet, Alanna’s prejudice against her own body can be seen as problematic. This is shown when Alanna reaches puberty and she is forced to confront her identity as a woman and take extra precautions to ensure she is not found out. When she first menstruates, she resents her female anatomy for inconveniencing her, and laments that “it’s bad enough [her] chest keeps growing, now something like this happens” (1983:137).

Alanna's struggle with her female identity is made more difficult by the increased level of suspicion and disbelief she endures once her true identity is revealed. In *Woman* when she spends time with the Bazhir she is referred to as a "terrifying creature" (1986:43). Ali Mukhtab comments on Alanna's subversiveness when he says "You do not take place in your father's tent, letting men make your decisions. You ride as a man, you fight as a man, and you think as a man" [12](1986:43). The Bazhir people in Tortall have more stringent customs in terms of women's rights, yet their expectations that women must tend to their husbands and are not acceptable warriors are mirrored by the customs of Tortall. This is shown in *Protector of the Small* when a Bazhir page looks at Kel and states "Girls have no business in the affairs of men. This one should go home" (1999:33). Noble comments on this by saying "Most, if not all, cultures discourage women from the full exercise of their capacities or the full development of their potentials, so when we do attempt to do so we are often perceived as deviant or unusual" (1994: 81). This further solidifies the need for female masculinity in YA fiction, as the value of this representation in popular culture provides a gateway for female masculinity to be honoured and acknowledged in real life, as "the resistance to female masculinity must be overcome, for it stands in the way of true gender equality" (Goodwill, 2012: 50).

Alanna proves herself worthy enough to become the shaman of the Bazhir tribe, despite the prejudice against her gender. This gives her the opportunity to teach two girls in the tribe how to hone and use their magical gifts and become shamans themselves. The prejudices Alanna and her apprentices face are so great that even the women of the tribe turn their backs on them. Alanna observes that "it was the

[12] Pierce stated in a tweet in December 2019 that Alanna can actually be considered 'gender-fluid', but that this term was not yet in existence when she was being written, as trans-activism had yet to manifest itself. (Pierce, 2019)

women who held back that night, and the next, and the next, serving the girls and Alanna with an abruptness that would have been rude if Halef Seif had not been watching" (1986:77). It is only once Alanna perseveres and proves the value of her charges that the women of the tribe start accepting this change in custom. Through Alanna's strong resolve she is able to help the tribespeople of the Bazhir accept and understand that females have just as much value, skill and worth as leaders and shamans, as men do. Noble states that this unwavering faith and perseverance is what ultimately defeats prejudice, and that "it takes enormous courage to confront [it] in whatever form it appears. This is not the false courage of bravado or denial but the courage of deep and determined self-knowledge and an unflinching awareness of this dragon's existence. From such fortitude can evolve a constellation of inner resources that empower and enable our continued resistance" (1994:86).

Significantly, the slaying of this dragon is not a once off challenge, but something the heroine must tackle again and again. Just because the heroine has "conquer[ed] the dragon once doesn't mean she has banished it forever. The female hero's growth of character continues past her tests, because confronting her home world often means confronting prejudices or judgement that even still test the lessons she has learned on her adventure" (Danehy, 2007: 41). An important lesson for the heroine to learn is that the prejudices of her world are not reflective of the hero's worth, but rather of society's own shortcomings (Noble, 1994: 41). Alanna eventually recognises that she deserves her place in the king's court, and is just as good a knight as any man, despite her seemingly "inferior" position in society as a woman.

The fifth dragon, the tendency to overextend oneself, to take on too much in an attempt to complete the quest or save the world, is something of which Alanna is certainly guilty. In society, women in general are often typified as people who are

"supposed to nurture and care for others - to be a maternal presence" (Danehy, 2007: 42). Goodwill elaborates on this social conditioning by arguing that:

> in the traditional view of the gender binary, women are effectively precluded from heroism because they are assumed to be biologically programmed to take care of and protect their families, with the concomitant flaw of having minds so limited by domesticity that they are unable to act for the sake of the 'big picture' (2012:75).

However, I argue that this expectation can be seen as an advantage. Alanna's concern for others and willingness to help and care for the people around her makes the female hero a worthy protagonist, one who is able to blend the traditionally masculine traits that enable her to save the world, with feminine traits of empathy and care that enable her to heal and connect with the world with a certain level of vulnerability. However, this desire to help can cause problems for her and the people around her if she does not pay attention to her own limitations. The heroine needs to practise agency and independence when it comes to prioritising herself and her health and abilities, she must "insist upon her right to choose when and how she will respond to the people, institutions, and situations in her life" (Noble, 1994: 93). What the heroine attends to when she is being pulled in multiple directions by many different causes is up to her.

Overcoming the dragon of overexertion is dependent on how well the heroine has accepted her limitations and what her priorities are. It is possible for the heroine to save everyone, but not by herself. She requires time and allies at her disposal, and even then, some might not be spared. In the final battle against Duke Roger in *Lioness,* Alanna suffers some losses. The most difficult is that of her ex-lover, training master, and friend, Liam the Shang Dragon, as well as Faithful, her familiar.

It is clear that Alanna feels these deaths are something she is responsible for in some way, as indicated when she discovers Liam's body at the end of the battle.

> The altar itself had been cleared to make room for the body of Liam Ironarm...Her eyes burned, but she was all cried out. Helplessly she plucked at his sleeve, wishing she could bring him back. Crying would have helped. (1988: 344)

Alanna's biggest source of overexertion is her magic. Her gift for healing is used to protect her loved ones and she often "overextend[s], using more of her Gift than she [can] afford to give away" (1996:105). Eventually by the end of the quartet, after overexerting herself to the point of exhaustion and passing out, Alanna learns to save her magic for the sake of the greater good. This overexertion and self-sacrifice are a product of the hero trying to save others from "the fate she may see as solely her own, even if the desire is short-lived and impractical" (Danehy,2007:43). This fate of the hero is either the completion of the quest, the defeat of some antagonising force, or of course, death.

The acceptance of loss and death is the final dragon the hero must conquer before her initiation is complete and her transformation can begin. The presence of faith or spirituality can help the female hero in her journey to acceptance. As Faithful says to Alanna "you won't always be able to stand between another person and his fate...You mustn't think that you can look after the world" (1986:91). Alanna is of the belief that all death is a loss and is worthless. Liam's death is the one that changes her mind, as his death results in the lives of everyone else being spared. Jon explains to Alanna that "Liam took the arrows meant for me. He didn't even falter, until the last...It isn't much consolation, I know, but they'll sing about the Dragon's last fight for centuries" (1988: 350). In order for the hero to reach full transformation,

she must accept the inevitability of death. For herself and her peers, especially if it means achieving the greater good. Campbell discusses this in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* when he says, “Needless to say, the hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror; the first condition is reconciliation to the grave” ([1949] 2004:329). The acceptance of her fate, *amor fati,* is linked to the hero’s return in the cycle and will be discussed later on in reference to the hero’s return.

Transformation and the elixir

According to Campbell, the transformation of the hero occurs “when [s]he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, [s]he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains [her] reward...intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being” ([1949] 2004:227). The “nadir” refers to the most unsuccessful point in the hero’s journey, the lowest point the hero must undergo. The transformation represents the point in the cycle of the heroic narrative where the story line moves upwards towards the hero’s return.

The elixir is part of the transformation and is “the item or metaphysical trophy the hero earns as a result of the quest” (Danehy, 2007:46). The obtainment of this “ultimate boon” means the hero is then “commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society” (Campbell, [1949] 2004: 182). Not only does the return of this elixir restore society, and fulfils the hero’s quest, it also fulfils the physical and psychological transformation within the hero. For Alanna, the “elixir” she brings back to Tortall is the “Dominion Jewel”. Alanna believes this prize will bring glory, not only to Tortall, but to herself, and will be the proof she needs for herself and for the court that she is worthy of her title of “knight”.

> If I win it and return home bringing the Dominion Jewel for the glory of Tortall, no one can suggest that I got my shield with magic and trickery. Instead of being his Majesty's most talked-of knight, I'll be the honoured vassal who brought a prize to honour his reign. (Pierce, 1988:44)

Therefore, the elixir is not only an object, but a psychological transformation and realisation - the realisation that the tools the hero needs to complete her quest and bring glory and transformation to her world were in her all along. According to Danehy "it may also be an acceptance of new qualities she has gained from her guides, allies, or experiences themselves on her adventure" (2007:47). Alanna returns to Tortall with the Dominion Jewel as a more comfortable and disciplined version of herself. On her travels she has learnt to merge her two identities, Alan and Alanna, into one, as well as achieve mastery over her magic and has learnt not to fear the love of other people. This is shown when Alanna wants to present the retrieved Dominion Jewel to the court at the end of the final book of the quartet, Pierce uses her clothing as a way to unify Alanna's masculine and feminine sides. When Alanna consults a seamstress in preparation, the seamstress remarks that a "lady's gown" would be better than the "indecent and disrespectful" garb of a knight. For previous court appearances and banquets, Alanna has worn a gown, yet when taking credit for her achievements, Alanna prefers to be recognized as a knight. Eventually Alanna is able to construct a costume that hybridizes the practical side of masculine clothing with the grace of feminine dress - "a shirt and tunic with soft, full breeches instead of hose. The tunic was longer than usual, coming to the knee, yet splits in the side to the waist ensured the wearer's freedom of movement" this was paired with solemn black pearl earrings (1988: 215). Alanna's choice of a hybridised costume for the ceremony of her return symbolises the peace she has made with both sides of her identity. Alanna has managed to blend her gender roles to create a

revised form of heroism, further proving the point made by Halberstam that masculinity is not only performed by male-bodied people, but that females can challenge the gender binary by expressing their own masculinity.

Alanna's flight and return

Once the Elixir is in the hero's possession, the stage in the Hero's journey that Campbell refers to as the "Magic Flight" can begin ([1949] 2004:182). There is often a race to the hero's home country once the prize has been obtained. This can be due to some threat affecting the home world or she is being pursued by hostile forces. It is the final evil the heroine must defeat. In Alanna's case, she feels the need to rush back to Corus to save Jonathan from the return of his evil uncle, Duke Roger. Although Alanna defeats Roger at the end of *Goddess*, her brother Thom brings him back from the dead. Although Roger is not an immediate threat as he claims to have lost all his magical abilities, on her journey to retrieve the Jewel, Alanna has recurring nightmares about Roger and Jonathan that make her anxious to return home with it.

> The dream was so clear it scared her:
>
> Jonathan stood beside a coffin that held his mother, Queen Lianne.
>
> "She was not strong." Roger stood on the opposite side of the coffin, his face emotionless. "Her time had come."
>
> Jon's eyes here tired. "She was healthy, before you sent the Sweating Sickness. Before you tried to kill her with your spells."
>
> "That was another lifetime for me," Roger said. Thom was a shadow at Roger's side. "I have no more magic," Jonathan's cousin went on. "I did not kill her." Jonathan looked at his mother's face. "I know you didn't". (Pierce, 1988:147)

Alanna's increasing suspicion of Duke Roger leads to her decision to fetch the Dominion Jewel in the middle of a snow storm, and come face to face with its guardian, Chitral. Having used up all her magic to keep herself warm, and suffering injuries on her way up to "the roof of the world" where the jewel is kept, Alanna has to face Chitral in bad shape. Alanna manages to disarm Chitral and when she picks up his sword, she feels blinding pain. Overcome by her injuries, Alanna tells Chitral that she doesn't want to kill him and he can keep the jewel.

> Now that I think of it, I don't know how the famous heroes of the past were able to take things from the entities that guarded them, not if they were as noble as the stories claim. When you look at it right it is stealing. (Pierce, 1988: 161).

Alanna's display of nobility and chivalry convinces Chitral to give her the Dominion Jewel, stating that he "shall be entertained by [her] visit for centuries of human time". Campbell states that "if the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with the elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron" ([1949] 2004: 182). Having received Chitral's blessing and the right to possess the jewel, Alanna's return to Tortall is free of any trouble, as her final battle with Duke Roger looms. Danehy states that it is critical the hero "take an active part in her own return" (2007: 49). This shows that through her trials of initiation she has grown into someone who can enact lasting change on her world. The hero must want to return to her home state, just as she wanted to embark on her adventure. Alanna's place of return however, is not Fief Trebond, the place she left to become a knight, but instead it is the city of Corus and the country of Tortall, the place she left to prove herself worthy of being a knight. When discussing their next step after retrieving the jewel, "no one was surprised when Alanna said, 'I

still can't shake this feeling Coram and I are needed at home. Neither of us seems able to make contact with anyone. But I have this sense of trouble there" (Pierce, 1988:177). After this decision has been made, the return stage of the hero's journey can commence.

As stated previously, the hero must make an active decision to return to her home world upon receiving the elixir and experiencing the initiation stages that are imperative to her transformation. The return in itself can be a test for the hero, who may find the adjustment between the home world and the world of transformation difficult. Alanna, who has been living in the desert with the nomadic Bazhir tribes for several years, comes back to Corus where she is expected to play by the rules of the court. She also returns to a much-altered Tortall. Both the king and queen have died, leaving Prince Jonathan to rule, and her brother has successfully brought Duke Roger, Alanna's nemesis who had previously tried to kill both her and Prince Jonathan, back from the dead. Alanna's upcoming confrontation with Duke Roger causes her anxiety, as does the prospect of seeing her old lover Jon, however, "to prove her true heroic mettle...she must return, accepting the costs to herself in light of the greater good her Elixir will bring" (Danehy, 2007: 50). Alanna must return to Tortall to defeat Roger for the last time, restore balance to Corus, save her brother Thom, and provide Jonathan with the jewel that will enable him to have a prosperous reign.

Even though Alanna has returned to court, because of the tests she had to go through in order to achieve her transformation, she can never truly reconcile the two worlds in which she has lived.

> The female hero who has survived both worlds and carries knowledge of each can act as a bridge between them, physically acting as an ambassador of sorts if passing between worlds presents no future problem, or metaphorically, by using her gained knowledge of the Underworld to help improve her own world after the completion of her immediate adventure. (2007:51)

For Alanna, this bridge is created when she successfully merges the kingdom of Tortall with the nomadic Bazhir tribes by negotiating for Jonathan to be "The Voice of the Tribes" for the Bazhir - having the Prince of Tortall become the voice of wisdom for the Bazhir encourages peace amongst the two worlds of Alanna's development.

This is stated in *Woman* when it is said "...if Prince Jonathan were to become the Voice of the Tribes, he would be King one day - a Bazhir King. He would know us as we do ourselves. The tribes you call 'renegade' would make peace, for none may war against the Voice of the Tribes. They will make peace, and the Voice will bring them into Tortall without bloodshed" (Pierce, 1986:51). Another example of Alanna merging her worlds is when she instigates the union between Jonathan and Thayet, the princess from the distant country of Sirain Alanna meets on her travels. Thayet has fled her country due to its poor treatment of women, Thayet confesses to Alanna that all her life she's "been worthless, the one who should have been a male and an heir" (1988:166). Alanna brings Thayet with her back to Tortall and orchestrates a meeting between her and Jonathan. She gives Jonathan her blessing to marry Thayet and, in doing so acts as the bridge between her two worlds once again, and is able to let Jonathan go once and for all.

> Jonathan caught her hand, his eyes serious. 'I love you too Alanna. You're a part of me, my sword arm."
>
> She kissed his forehead. 'Fine. I like that. But you need a queen too. Thayet would be a good one. (1988:281)

Once Roger is defeated and Alanna has returned to Tortall with the Dominion Jewel, securing Jonathan's reign and her respect as a worthy knight, the final step in the cycle of the hero's journey must be completed. This is the return to stasis, or normality for the hero. Danehy states that "the hero's quest forever changes the hero, but it may also affect her life path, giving her a different one to lead than the one she might have expected before her adventure" (2007: 53). For Alanna, her adventure is complete and her life changes entirely, with a new kind of lifestyle to look forward to. She has become a respected knight throughout Tortall, is given the title of "king's champion" and finds love with George Cooper, which is something she never expected and was reluctant to pursue at the start of her journey. This, however is not like *The Lord of the Rings,* where Eowyn marries Faramir in an attempted re-establishment of the gender status quo – where the strong lady warrior subscribes to the expected gender norms of settling down and finding a husband. Instead, George accepts Alanna for who she is and what she has accomplished as a Lady Knight. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

The heroic coming of age story comes to a close with the hero learning how to continue past the "happily ever after" in a state of existence that has been altered because of her actions. Alanna is able to move forward with her life having gained the respect of her peers and country.

Alanna as an exemplified female hero

Due to the fact that Fantasy is based on Romance in which the female often plays the role of "damsel in distress" and because, as Ursula Le of the fact that culture is

male, and therefore the tale of the hero is typically male, it can be said that the female hero starts her journey on the back foot (Russ,1995: 81-82; Le Guin, 1993: 5). The patriarchal culture she has been written into puts her at a disadvantage, and she has so much more to prove than if she were male. In order for the female hero to succeed as an example she needs to be complex, and believable. In order for young readers to engage with her she cannot be too perfect, brave, intelligent or too much of a leader, as this may make it difficult for the reader to relate to her. Tamora Pierce is able to achieve this with Alanna, who is intuitive, discerning, and sharp, but suffers from a short temper, stubbornness and a tendency to overthink things, which often hurts her emotionally. Alanna's display of both virtue and vice makes her a well-written character to whom the young reader can relate. However, the question remains as to whether this makes her a good hero. According to Danehy, the characteristics of a female hero are that she:

> must be richly drawn as a complex character; there must be precedents of strong women or at least the potential path for female heroism in her world; the nature of a young woman's physical and emotional adolescence and puberty should be addressed or explained in some manner; the problem or fact of gender equality must either be confronted or explained; and the hero herself needs the support of guides, allies or the supernatural, especially through the vehicle of the animal companion. (2007: 56)

In essence, the female hero needs to undergo the same, or similar trials that any normal girl in the primary world of the reader would have to undergo. Puberty, gender inequality, emotional growth are all things that need to be addressed in order for the heroine to remain a plausible role model in a coming-of-age story.

For Alanna, her supernatural support comes in the form of the "Great Mother Goddess" as well as her familiar, Faithful. The Goddess is one of two deities worshipped in Tortall, the other being Mithros, the god of war, law, fire, and mage-

craft. The Great Mother Goddess acts as a “protector, advocate and mother to Alanna” (Danehy, 2007:58). In *Goddess* (1984), Alanna meets her in a forest and she is gifted with Faithful, a cat and her familiar, and a magic crystal of protection that Alanna uses throughout the quartet to determine whether there is magic around her. Much as the lady would do a knight in a classic Romance text, the Goddess tasks Alanna, with overcoming her fear of The Chamber of Ordeal, her fear of love, as well as her fear of Duke Roger. This interaction with the Goddess, and the knowledge that she has the Goddess’s protection and blessing makes Alanna trust in herself more. The Goddess’s standing as a deity also helps Alanna be more accepted in her world. She has been chosen by the gods to be “the first woman knight in more than a hundred years” (Pierce, 1984), making her role in the world of Tortall more than credible. Alanna’s familiar, Faithful is also a gift from the Goddess. With eyes the exact same shade of purple as Alanna’s and the ability to communicate when he wants to, Faithful watches over Alanna until his death during the final battle against Duke Roger in *Lioness.* Faithful acts as Alanna’s confidante at times, with his own whims, opinions, advice and personality. He often rebukes Alanna for her actions, reminding her how dangerous her love affair with Jonathan is while she’s still disguised as a boy, “do you enjoy snuggling up to Jonathan like a lovesick girl?” (Pierce, 1984:84). Faithful also offers comic relief; with his backhanded comments and sense of humour, he is able to call Alanna out on her flaws, and adds an extra layer of complexity to her character.

Alanna’s approachability as a protagonist is also encouraged by her physiological and emotional struggles. It would not be a female coming of age story if Alanna did not have to deal with the trials of puberty. According to Danehy “this theme does not have to be a central issue, but as these heroes are largely teenagers, confronting,

even briefly, themes of sexuality, physical appearance and puberty, physical attraction, and love, it makes sense for these issues to be addressed in the fiction" (Danehy, 2007:59). Both Alanna and Kel in *Protector of the Small* (1999-2002) are dismayed when they get their periods. The fact that Alanna has never learnt about her reproductive system and the changes her body would undergo in puberty is a very real issue in modern times for young women. The struggle with self-confidence experienced by both Kel and Alanna because of their body types is also very relevant to young girls of today. Alanna believes that she is the "shortest skinniest boy in the palace" and that "no one will want a weakling like [her] for a squire" (Pierce, 1982: 181). Kel suffers through merciless teasing and is even called "the Lump" by some of her crueller peers due to her height and body type. Just because the teenage are sheroes does not mean that they do not have to deal with the very real issues of coming of age and growing up.

The heroines start their journeys by learning the ways of the world, which includes gender inequality. The issue must be faced in some manner in order for the book and character to make any impact on young readers. Danehy states that "either there is an approximation of gender equality, which allows the hero to be accepted regardless of her gender, or the hero who wishes to take a heroic path more traditionally reserved for men must face the gender inequality issue as a part of the tests she must overcome or the society she must change with her elixir" (2007:60). For Alanna, it is the latter. In order to become a revered and respected knight, she has to prove herself worthy of the title, especially once her identity as a woman has been revealed. This prejudice continues even past Alanna's quartet and leaks into Kel's. Alanna is not allowed to assist Kel in becoming a knight and is told "if you help the girl, it will be said that you eased her path in some special way. There are

rumours that your successes are due to your magical Gift" (Pierce, 1999: 17). Although the path Alanna has cleared by becoming a knight allows for the rules in Tortall to change so that people of any and all genders may be accepted for training as knights, Kel is still put on probation because she is a girl and the inequality still has to be fought. Nevertheless, Alanna's story does give hope that people's beliefs will eventually change with time.

Pierce's writing focuses on the issues faced by young women in modern times, transferred into a Fantasy narrative. Her subject matter deals with very modern problems, such as maths lessons, bullies and romantic crushes, but integrated into the courtly world of Romance and Fantasy, with chivalry and medieval customs. The environment in which Alanna becomes a knight is structured very much like a high school. Alanna spends her time learning lessons with her peers until eventually she "graduates" into the real world and discovers she has not learnt nearly enough of what it takes to survive in the outside world away from the comfort of her structured upbringing. Readers can easily identify with this as it brings in elements of the school narrative. Pierce has "deliberately combine[d] modern elements with aspects of a medieval setting to forge a world that is both familiar and interesting to school-age readers" (Danehy, 2007:75). Pierce's tackling of Alanna's debut into the world of love, sex, and relationships was pioneering for young adult books of that time. Given my readings of the text, Alanna's many love interests and Pierce's unflinching discussion of mature themes may make the Quartet relevant and transformative for young readers.

Alanna's love life is complex throughout the series. The first love affair she experiences is with Jon, and, like most teenage relationships, this is highly focused on the physical side of things instead of the practical, as they do not fully consider

the long-term implications of entering a relationship. When Jon proposes to Alanna, she refuses him, simply because she is too loyal to her sense of “the greater good”, despite Jon’s protest that he “want[s] what [he] want[s], not just what’s good for Tortall” (Pierce, 1986: 115). Alanna discusses it with him at the end of *Lioness* when she says “I love you, Jon... But what we want from life...you like this king business. I like action. I like to say what I think” (1988:280). Jonathan’s marriage proposal to her also conforms to the narrative of the typical heroic Fantasy, in which the main female characters often marry powerful men. Grogan states that “when Jon asks Alanna to become Queen, he has all the coercive power of the Fantasy tradition behind him. It therefore takes extraordinary will and self-knowledge for Alanna to refuse” (2014: 31). In her refusal, Alanna reminds Jon that he is going against tradition in wanting to marry her, that he needs a “princess who will bring him power and gold...a virgin” (1986:114). Jon’s response is that “[he’s] spent [his] entire life watching what [he] say[s] and do[es], for fear of upsetting the merchants, or the Gallans, or the priests, or *anyone*” (1986:115). Jon’s rebellion is not only against the Tortallian customs, but also against the genre in which he exists. Alanna’s protests and annoyance with the Prince for automatically assuming her acceptance, show her rejection of the Princess narrative in favour of the heroic one. Alanna has worked too hard to become a knight errant of Tortall to give it up to become a modest and diplomatic queen.

It is this tenacity and drive that attracts Liam Ironarm to Alanna. Liam does not want to change Alanna the way Jonathan does, but accepts her for who she is, however, his nomadic lifestyle makes it difficult for Alanna who feels as if she wants to settle down eventually. George’s love for her has not wavered since the beginning, which Alanna reflects on in *Goddess* when the thought crosses her mind that “George

vowed to love [her] without ever seeing [her] in skirts" (1984:149). Alanna is scared that loving George will cause her to lose a part of herself. She expresses this preference to The Goddess as early as the second book when she says, "I just want to be a warrior maiden and go on adventures. I don't want to fall in love, especially not with George or Jon. They'll ask me to give them parts of *me.* I want to keep me for myself" (Pierce, 1984:12).

Alanna and her lovers all engage in a student-teacher dynamic when interacting with each other. Not only does Alanna become Jon's squire, but he is also one of her first guides in navigating palace life. He is several years her senior, and therefore instructs her in some of the skills of knighthood. Even when their relationship transforms into a romantic one, "Jon t[eaches] her about loving" (Pierce, 1984:142). George also sweeps Alanna under his wing and acts as a mentor. When learning to defeat Ralon, the palace bully, Alanna seeks George's help with fighting skills. Upon meeting Liam, the Shang Dragon, Alanna becomes his pupil in martial arts, undertaking morning lessons under his skilled eye.

Despite Alanna's superiority in her professional life, her confirmation as the only and first female knight of the realm, and the eventual King's Champion, her relationships with her lovers position her as inferior. Alanna is often in awe of Jon when he speaks of the duties and burdens of being a ruler, complementing his arrogance with her own naivete. George often outwits Alanna, leaving her to ask herself rhetorical questions about him such as "Was there anything George didn't understand about her?" (1984:159) and "Would she ever outwit him?" (1984:253). Although George's shrewdness does pose a challenge for Alanna, it is very rare that she does the same for him. This sentiment is posed to Liam as well when she states "It isn't fair. You know everything about me" (1988:13). Alanna's thoughts, feelings, dreams and

intentions are very rarely a mystery to her lovers, yet her lovers' intentions are often a mystery to her, naturally leaving Alanna in an inferior position.

The protectiveness of Alanna's lovers can also be an indication of a power imbalance. Alanna still falls into the Romance trope of "the lady" or "damsel in distress" in the eyes of her romantic prospects. Debates surrounding Alanna's abilities come up between every pairing of men in Alanna's inner circle. Jon, George, Liam, Coram, Thom, even Alanna's cat Faithful all have conversations with each other discussing Alanna's self-sufficiency. Alanna is astonished by Jon, at the "strange new protectiveness" (1984: 90) displayed by him when he hints that he'd rather she stayed in her tent than went into battle. Liam diminishes her nickname "Lioness" with the pet name "kitten". He also uses it to infantilise and patronise her - "Don't scowl so, kitten. You've got me shaking in my boots" (1988:59) and "I'll tell you someday kitten - if you're *very* good" (1988:13) are two examples. Even Faithful joins in by implying that he, as a cat, is more capable than his owner. This is shown in the final book when Liam asks, "Don't you know enough to stay out of trouble?" to which Faithful responds, "his tail switching irritably. '*We do, the man and I. She doesn't*'" (1988:35-36). This constant questioning and the patronising responses to Alanna and her abilities, which she has proven tenfold, diminish her character as a heroine.

Despite all this, Alanna does eventually find love with George, and learns not to see it as a sacrifice, but as a compromise. She corrects George when he says "I've finally tamed me a Lioness" by saying "I wouldn't call it *tamed,* laddy-me-love. [Your lady] shouldn't be *tame*" (1988:308). Having learnt to love, Alanna ends the cycle of her heroic journey by learning to accept who she is. Throughout the quartet Alanna struggles with merging her two identities into one.

She enlists Mistress Cooper to help her express her feminine side more often by encouraging her to don more feminine dress when in private. Upon discovering her true identity, George insists on calling her Alanna, instead of Alan when they are alone, and remarks “I think you should be reminded of who you are” (1983:140). However, even as Alanna, the knight-errant of Tortall, she still struggles to express a conventionally feminine identity. As is the case with her performance of masculinity, Alanna’s approach to “hav[ing] to be a girl someday” is to begin practising. It is only through this practise, at first in private with Mistress Cooper and then more boldly in public, that Alanna starts to feel “bold and wonderful” (137) in her dresses.

This shows that for Alanna, gender is something to learn and practise. Eleni Cooper predicts that relearning her femininity will not be easy for her, and perhaps even harder for Alanna to master than masculinity - asserting Alanna’s gender as performative, not biological. The act of donning female dress is furthermore referred to in combative terms - Eleni calls this dress “women’s gear”, and Alanna refers to the exploration of her identity as “an adventure”.

This reaction hardly changes, even by the third book when Alanna is an old hand at the art of women’s wear, it still alters the way she is perceived. Jonathan asks who she is wearing her gown for in the fourth book, to which she responds “for myself” (1988: 239). Liam the Shang Dragon, her lover and martial arts trainer in *Lioness Rampant* (1988) remarks “I suppose you’ll want earbobs next, and bracelets and other frippery ... a noble-born husband and court intrigues”, as he sees Alanna’s dabbling in women’s clothing as a gateway to a conventional female lifestyle of domesticity and regular court appearances. Alanna defends her choices to both men, regardless of whether their attentions are admiring or scornful. Grogan states that “these exchanges emphasise the way that the male gaze dictates and defines

Alanna's female performance" (2014: 21). Once again, Alanna's performance of gender has been questioned and defined by patriarchal expectations. It is clear that as soon as Alanna expresses her conventionally feminine side by donning "bracelets and other frippery", she is taken less seriously by Liam.

Alanna is, in some ways, the expected female hero. Her rejection of classic femininity and her prowess at physical activities such as swordplay and combat put her in a typically masculine role. Despite the fact that she must hide her feminine qualities in order to achieve her quest to become a knight, Pierce has given her very masculine qualities. If we use Goodwill's previously discussed definition of masculinity, it is clear that Alanna claims "the right to authority, or displaying strength, courage, assertiveness, leadership, physicality (and sometimes violence), and very often heroism" (2012: 63).

Even from a young age, Alanna is given the quirk of being a 'tomboy'. Her hobbies and interests are decidedly male, and she has no interest in the classical domestic and passive 'female' activities around the castle.

Throughout her journey Alanna learns not to reject her feminine side, but to embrace and use it. Alanna's magic not only symbolises her acceptance of her gifted abilities, but also her acceptance of her feminine side. Before she leaves Fief Trebond, Maude, the village healer tells her that she has a gift for healing "greater than mine, greater than any I have ever known. And you've other magic, power you'll learn to use" (1983: 10). This more traditionally feminine skill contrasts with Alanna's more traditionally masculine combat skills. Her denial of this 'feminine' gift in favour of more physically demanding and aggressive abilities can be seen as Alanna also rejecting the softer, female side of herself. The lesson of Alanna accepting her magic

coincides with Alanna accepting herself as both a lady and a knight. Although Alanna's return to her World Navel is to Corus, the real period of stasis she must return to is to her natural self, Alanna of Trebond and Olau, not Alan the Squire.

At the end of *Lioness,* Alanna fully returns to her true, female self. She is able to move on to her new life with George, with the acceptance that she has done all she could as Alan, and can do so much more as Alanna the Lady Knight. Alanna's realisation that it is possible to be both *woman* and *knight* without sacrificing either reality entirely is a realisation that is clearly reflected in real life, and is a lesson the reader can starkly see when dramatised against the imaginative backdrop of Alanna's Fantasy world (Danehy, 2007: 79).Through the use of the removed Fantastic realm, readers are encouraged to dismantle the gender binary and gain inspiration for their own lives from this new revised form of heroism that Pierce has introduced. Alanna's expression of her gender moves the hero's journey from being an entirely "masculine" one to one that can include "feminine traits" – bringing in the presence of empathy, sharing, communication and maternal instinct. Goodwill states the importance of this position, stating that it showcases "a new type of heroism, in which heroes share their power, and in so doing empower other people to be heroes, or at least to rise to their fullest potential" (2012:142).

Alanna follows the typical heroic narrative. Due to her heroic actions, her desire to seek out her truth and her conviction to stick with it until its conclusion, when we leave her, it is with the suggestion of a changed Tortall. This new, expanded Tortall is one that is no longer as male-dominated as it was at the start of Alanna's journey. Bazhir girls have started devoting themselves to becoming warriors, and children dress like Alanna in the streets. Pierce returned to the Tortall universe sixteen years later to revise and reconsider the problems of the promised transformed kingdom.

Due to Alanna's work as a pioneer, Pierce is able to challenge the conventional heroic narrative structure by building on the foundation laid by Alanna, her struggle with gender identity, and her conviction that women can do just as well as men.

Chapter 3: Ursula Le Guin's hero of the household

Ursula Le Guin's literary career and pieces of work successfully reflect the effect feminism has had on the world of speculative fiction. Throughout her career, Le Guin wrote highly influential works of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Children's Literature, feminist literature, and literary theory. Her science fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) was a pioneering work in terms of gender representation. Despite all this, Le Guin was slow to embrace feminism. According to Le Guin, the movement was "too general, too often anti-male, and too middle class" (Clarke, 2010: 6). Sexism, seemed to her to be, "an injustice which is less evident than many others" (Clarke, 2010: 6). However, by the 1970s, Le Guin had come to feel that feminism "liberated [her] from ways of thinking and being that [she] didn't even realize [she] was caught in" (2010: 6). This is evident in her early work, some of which centres on men and only features women on the peripheries of the narrative. Unlike Tamora Pierce, whose work is always centred on the inspirational, yet flawed, female hero, Le Guin started her career in the 1960s while second-wave feminism was just getting started. She began her Fantasy career writing "the typical hero story: linear, conflict-oriented and centred on a heroic male" (Clarke, 2010: 7). After Le Guin's exposure to feminism increased, she started exploring the concept of "woman's writing". According to Le Guin, woman's writing "means stories about women, told in non-linear fashion, about non-heroic people, and using what Le Guin calls the "mother tongue", the language of the household" (Clarke, 2010:7). This type of writing is evident in Le Guin's other work like *Lavinia* (2008), which tells the story of Lavinia, a minor character in Virgil's *The Aeneid.* Lavinia is the daughter of a king whose marriage to Aeneas sets off the war that features as the climax of *The Aeneid.*

Despite the fact that she does not speak throughout Virgil's epic poem, Le Guin gives Lavinia a voice in this novel.

Although this dissertation examines the female heroism displayed in *Voices* (2006), it would be unwise not to at least partially unpack Le Guin's most successful Fantasy series, *The Tales of Earthsea* (1968-2001), which arguably set a foundation for Le Guin's subsequent explorations into female heroism. Earthsea started out as a male-centric hero story, following the tale of Ged, a young magician who learns the limits of his power. However, as Le Guin discovered second-wave feminism, she was able to challenge the hero-tale's patriarchal preoccupations with a new kind of hero – one who was heroic through her domestic duties and care for others. In *Earthsea Revisioned* (1993), Le Guin states that,

> Women's work, as usual is the maintenance of order and cleanliness, house-keeping, feeding and clothing people, childbearing, care of babies and children, nursing and healing of animals and people, care of the dying, funeral rites – those unimportant matters of life and death, not part of history or of story. What women do is invisible (1993: 15-16).

This chapter will explore this kind of female representation, which was started by Le Guin in *Earthsea* and continued and expand on in *Voices,* as another example of how female heroism can be portrayed in YA Fiction.

The second book *The Tombs of Atuan* (1972) is about a young priestess named Tenar. Tenar is believed to be the reincarnation of the High Priestess of the Tombs of Atuan, and is taken from her family as a young child and raised by the other priestesses of the Tombs. After undergoing a sacrificial ceremony at the age of six, Tenar becomes known as "Arha", or "the eaten one". Tenar losing her identity, and even her name, to be in service to others can be metonymically linked to the way in

which women are socialised to think of others and encouraged to conform to supporting roles. This enforced and expected role of women will be discussed later in the chapter.

Arha's life is disrupted by the appearance of Ged, a mage, who has come to seek the treasure buried there. Arha and Ged become friends. Ged tells Arha many stories of the world outside, which leads Arha to start questioning her existence as High Priestess of the Tombs, and the faith that comes with it. Eventually it is decided they need to escape together. Arha is able to lead Ged out of the labyrinth safely before the Tombs of Atuan collapse. Arha reverts back to her old name, Tenar by the end of the book.

The tale of Tenar was only picked up again by Le Guin 16 years later in the fourth book of the series, *Tehanu* (1990). *Tehanu* starts by informing us about the life led by Tenar after her departure from the Tombs of Atuan. She leaves Havnor and goes to stay with Ged's old master, Ogion, for a while. Instead of accepting Ogion's offer to teach her magic, Tenar marries a local farmer named Flint and has two children with him – Apple and Spark. It can be argued that, in a way, Tenar gets eaten again – losing the part of her that is magical and powerful to her husband and children, and once again fulfilling that expected role of servitude.

At the start of the book, Flint is dead and Tenar's children have grown up. An injured child whom Tenar later names "Therru" is brought to Tenar's home. Tenar helps save the child's life but Therru is left permanently disfigured with scars on one side of her face and one hand fixed permanently into a claw. Ged arrives a little later, unconscious and carried on the back of a dragon called Kalessin. Ged has spent all his magic trying to seal a portal between Earthsea and the underworld. Because

Ged's magic is spent, he returns to Tenar's home with her and lives as a goatherd. Tenar and Ged confess their love for each other and begin a relationship, something they were unable to do before because, according to Le Guin, "wizards give up one great power, sex, in order to get another, magic" (1993:986). Later. Kalessin the Dragon reveals herself to be "a double being, half human, half dragon" (Petty, 2004:) as well as Therru's mother. She reveals that Therru's true name is Tehanu. The story ends with Tehanu choosing to stay with Ged and Tenar, and all three of them settling down to a simple life of farming and goat herding, a life that is free of magic.

It has been argued by critics that Le Guin's Tenar cannot count as a feminist heroine because she lives her life according to patriarchal power structures (Kinsey, 2007: 2). When Le Guin first wrote Tenar in *The Tombs of Atuan*, it is clear that she attempted to write a feminist heroine by putting Tenar into a matriarchal environment of priestesses. However, throughout the novel it can be argued that Tenar is dominated by Ged. Le Guin herself has critiqued Tenar as a female hero in *Earthsea Revisioned* (1993) by stating that Tenar "is not a free agent. She is trapped in her situation. And when the hero comes, she becomes complementary to him. She cannot get free of the Tombs without him…I had not yet thought what a female hero might be" (983). It took Le Guin 16 years to tell Tenar's story from a female perspective. Although *Tombs of Atuan* is narrated by Tenar, the focus is mainly on Ged, for it is Ged who starts the action in the book. *Tehanu* is still based in the same male-dominated, hierarchical world of Earthsea but "instead of using the pseudo-genderless male viewpoint of the heroic tradition, the world is seen through a woman's eyes" (Le Guin,1993:984). When we meet up with Tenar in *Tehanu*, she has not chosen the path that was expected of her when she sailed with Ged to Havnor. When they reunite, Ged tells her that he was disappointed by her decision to

marry a farmer and become his wife. Tenar's response shows the type of heroism Le Guin has tried to reshape – one that finds strength through "women's work".

> I used to think, I could be dressed up as a warrior, with a lance and a sword and a plume and all, but it wouldn't fit would it? What would I do with the sword? Would it make me a hero? I'd be myself in clothes that didn't fit, is all, hardly able to walk…So I took it all off…and put on my own clothes. (Le Guin, 1990: 560)

It is clear that Tenar's decisions are not influenced by others' expectations of her, but instead by her relationship with herself and with the people around her. It can be argued that by subscribing to what is expected of her by patriarchal society, by not asserting herself as an independent and powerful woman in this male-dominated world, she is not doing any justice to her sex. However, Le Guin argues that by making this choice for herself, despite the pressure to be overtly great, independent and glorious, Tenar helps to instill the belief that the choices and affairs of women are important, no matter what they might be (1993:988). Although Tenar has the opportunity to gain power and be an active hero in her world, her decision to remain authentic is its own act of bravery. It is clear that Tenar has to reclaim the "ordinary" life that was taken from her when she became the Eaten One, before she can accept herself as both woman and powerful. In *Tehanu,* Tenar is clearly faced with the victimisation of young women, especially when it comes to the way Therru is treated based on her appearance, and the discrimination that comes with the separation of men and women into different spheres. Le Guin establishes Tenar's status as a female hero not through any form of "heroic masculinity", but through her commitment to caring for others, and achieving justice through care work (Newcomb, 2014: 95). Le Guin concludes the story of Tenar and Ged in the fifth and final book of the *Earthsea series* entitled *The Other Wind* (2001).

Le Guin originally intended *Tehanu* to be the final instalment of the *Earthsea* series. She stated on her website that, “I really thought the story was done; Tenar had finally got her second inning, and Ged and Tenar were obviously happy-ever-after, and if I didn't know exactly who or what Tehanu was, it didn't bother me. But then it began to bother me” (Le Guin, n.d.).

In the final novel from Le Guin’s Earthsea collection, Tenar, Ged, and Tehanu’s story is continued, and ultimately, concluded. The plot of *The Other Wind* centres on Alder, a sorcerer who has been plagued by dreams that bring him to the barrier wall between the living and the dead, where the souls of the dead, including his wife, beg him to be set free. Alder seeks help with the wizards on Roke, who advise him to find Ged. The dragon Kalessin, Tehanu’s mother,then arrives to explain to the council on Havmnor why there is an imbalance of forces currently afflicting Earthsea. Kalessin states that humans and dragons once belonged to the same race, but evolved separately over time.

A party of representatives, including King Lebannen, Tenar, Tehanu (a human who is also a dragon), Irian (a dragon who is also a human), and Alder travel to Roke, the center of Earthsea, to resolve the problem. Once in Roke it is decided that the wall of stones surrounding the Dry Land must be torn down, in order to restore the natural cycle of life and death. Once the wall has been demolished, the dead rush out to restore balance to Earthsea, and Tehanu transforms into a dragon, who is whole and unmaimed, and joins Irian and Kalessin. Once the balance is restored on Earthsea, Tenar returns to Ged on Gont, without Tehanu.

Le Guin breaks down the construction of gender, and redefines the heroic narrative, through Tenar’s care for others, and the fact that *Tehanu*’s preoccupations are not

with sword-wielding heroes, but with the concerns and domesticities of a community of women. Due to the fact that Tenar and Ged are already fully- developed characters by the time of *The Other Wind,* as well as the fact that Ged hardly features in the novel, it can be argued that the final book of the *Earthsea* series is mainly focused on the development of Tehanu. Her connection to the dragons and the insight she provides to the council prove to be invaluable and her transformation at the end of the novel shows just how far she has come since the start of *Tehanu.* It is made clear that the exposure of sexism and gender power dynamics in *Tehanu* paves the way for transformation in *The Other Wind*, as it is not Ged who is sent for by the King when the crisis arises, but Tenar and Tehanu. Susan Bernardo and Graham Murphy state in *Ursula K. Le Guin: A Critical Companion* (2006) that "the normal categories of class, sex, and race do not act as a determinative for Lebannen. He recognizes the need to get beyond the limitation that society might still have because he needs to rule, and to rule he needs knowledge that cannot come from only one source" (164). Despite his inclusivity and acceptance of women, however, King Lebannen struggles to accept the Kargish princess, Seserakh as his bride. Seserakh has clearly been treated as inferior for most of her life and has been victim of political games played by her father. Upon her arrival in Lebannen's court, Seserakh hides under a veil and does not speak. Tenar, who knows from experience what it is to be hidden and rendered voiceless, recognizes the strength of the princess and befriends her. She discovers that the princess believes that if she were to say her true name to the King, he would steal her soul. She then encourages Seserakh to learn Hardic, the language that Lebannen speaks. This in turn boosts Seserakh's confidence and leads to her casting off her veils and taking on the

responsibilities of a future queen, one who is capable of entering into an equal partnership with Lebannen.

Tenar acts as a bridge of communication between the King and Seserakh as she encourages Lebannen to bring with the princess with him on the journey to Roke. This is crucial, as Seserakh's stories from her native land of Kargad are the key to unlocking the mystery of the imbalance in Earthsea. Just as Alanna in *Song of the Lioness* acts as a mentor and advocate for Thayet in encouraging the marriage between her and Prince Jonathan, so too does Tenar bridge the gap between Lebannen and Seserakh. Tenar's recognition of the quiet power hidden behind Seserakh's oppression, and the connection she forms with the princess lead to a marriage of equals that helps heal the world of Earthsea, and bridge the political divide between the West and the East.

In contrast to this inclusivity, when Lebannen's party travels to Roke to restore balance to Earthsea, they are met with resistance by the wizards that inhabit the island. This is because the magic and power of women in Earthsea is thought of as "weak and wicked" (Le Guin, 1993), as it is associated with what Le Guin calls "the old magic" or "earth magic". This is different from the 'true wizardry' that is practiced by the misogynistic colony of Wizards on Roke. The mages on Roke create a distinction between the 'true wizardry' of masculine magic and the 'mere witchery' of feminine magic. This distinction is false and clearly misogynistic and therefore, by not using both powers and by treating magic as something that is not gendered, the mages on Roke are not as powerful as they could be. Bernardo and Murphy argue that "in the unmaking there is great freedom and rejoining as well as loss. Tenar grieves for the loss of Tehanu, who goes off to fly on the other wind, though she celebrates Tehanu's wholeness" (2006:167). It is clear from the end of the novel,

however, that Le Guin is sending a powerful message to the reader - as the balance of Earthsea is restored and the metaphorical barriers of race, gender, and culture are brought down; there may be a feeling of loss, but there is an equally powerful feeling of community and hope.

As stated previously, Tenar finds her transformative power when she manages to escape the Tombs of Atuan with Ged. Some critics have argued that the fact that Tenar needs Ged's help to escape her oppressive situation, is a violation of feminist representation. However, it can be argued that by letting Tenar and Ged depend on each other to escape the Tombs of Atuan, "Le Guin establishes a dialectic synthesis between masculine and feminine forces that is the foundation of social harmony" (Douglas & Byrne, 2014: 2). By having Ged enter the undertomb and accept the feminine powers that limit and impose on his masculine ones, Le Guin is able to deconstruct the systems of gender hierarchy, and encourage a new, more equitable dynamic. The magic in Earthsea is also an important insight into Le Guin's feminism. The attitudes to men's magic as opposed to women's magic in the world of Earthsea, give a clear indication of the kind of heroism that Le Guin portrays in her female characters. Whereas men's magic seeks control and power, the power of women does not seek such dominance. The wizards on Roke see feminine magic as 'dirty', as it comes from the earth. Douglas and Byrne (2014) state that "the term 'dirty' in itself carries gender implications that bespeak the way patriarchy sidelines the power of women" (3). They argue that the connection of women's magic to the earth in Earthsea means that:

> It is personified as a place that possesses character, power and holiness, where healing powers can be found where needed…it is also a place of transformation, a place where roots go deep, seeds are sown and change occurs. As discarded, dirty elements encounter the living tomb, they magically take on a new shape and emerge restored

> and whole, changed and healed, bearing life…the feminine power to bring forth life. No matter how it has been neglected, suppressed and thwarted, the power still exists. (Douglas & Byrne, 2014: 4)

The fact that Ged acknowledges Tenar's power, and that of the old powers that rule over the Tombs of Atuan, which, as stated, are worshipped by women, shows that he is willing to embrace the power of the feminine (2014: 6). The fact that Tenar and Ged need each other to escape the tombs is indicative of Le Guin's aim to close the gap of the gender divide. At the end of *Tehanu* (1990), when Tenar and Ged give up their former lives and settle down on Ogion's farm, they do so as equals. Neither Ged, nor Tenar are giving up a part of themselves in choosing this path, as Ged has already decided to give up magic and Tenar has chosen a simple life of connection over power before the start of the novel. It can be said that "Tenar and Ged come together fully as man and woman, giving themselves to one another freely and openly in a marriage of equal minds, hearts and bodies" (Douglas & Byrne, 2014: 7). Through this union of Ged and Tenar, Le Guin reminds the young reader that although patriarchal powers are still in place, there are still men who are willing to recognize, admire, and respect the restorative power of women.

Memer's passive heroism

These less conventional qualities of heroism in Tenar can also be seen in the protagonist Memer in Le Guin's *Voices* (2006). *Voices* is the second book in the trilogy *Annals of the Western Shore,* but can stand alone as its own novel. Memer is a young girl who lives in the fictional city of Ansul. Ansul was once considered a centre of learning but it has been overrun and invaded by an uneducated and superstitious race of desert people, called the Alds. The Alds consider reading and

writing to be evil and therefore do not tolerate any displays of it. Memer is born after her mother is raped by an Ald soldier and therefore, like Alanna in *Song of the Lioness* she struggles with her identity. Due to her being half-Ansulian and half-Ald she often refers to herself as a "halfbreed" and battles to accept the Ald part of her, as her hatred for the race is too great. Memer lives with the Waylord[13] Sulter Gava, who teaches her to read in secret when he finds out she has discovered how to enter his hidden library. On Memer's seventeenth birthday she meets Orrec and Gry, the protagonists of the previous novel in the trilogy, *Gifts* (2004). Orrec is a famous storyteller and a poet and has been invited to Ansul to perform and Memer invites both Orrec and Gry to stay at the Waylord's house, Galvamand. Orrec reveals that their true reason for coming to Ansul is not to perform, but to visit Galvamand and the rumoured ancient library within it. Memer tells Orrec and Gry that Galvamand used to be known as the Oracle house, but she is unsure why it is called that. It is revealed once Orrec is asked to help facilitate an uprising in Ansul against the Alds, that an Oracle resides in Galvamand and is consulted by the Waylord, who uses his skills at reading and writing to understand it, as the Oracle delivers messages to certain books in the library. It is revealed to Memer that she is destined to become the voice of the Oracle, something she is reluctant to accept. The Waylord consults the Oracle about a rebellion, and Memer receives the message "Broken mend broken" in a book as the response. Orrec offers to help the Waylord negotiate with the Gand, the leader of the Alds. But rebels set the Gand's tent on fire, sparking violence in the city that culminates in the courtyard of Galvamand where people have

[13] Waylords were the trade ambassadors between Ansul and other cities before the Ald invasion. Memer explains it to Orrec and Gry by saying that the Waylords were elected by the city council, and then had to travel between cities, arranging trade deals and keeping the merchants in check. Waylords held great status and honour in the communities. (*Voices,* 2007: 92)

fled to safety. Memer is used by the Oracle as a vessel to convey the message “Let them set free”. Eventually the Alds retreat and plans are made for a new Ansulian government, including a library that will be built in Galvamand. The novel ends with a transformed Ansul and Memer agreeing to accompany Orrec and Gry on their travels.

Although Orrec and Gry are key characters in the narrative, the plot is essentially a story about Memer’s coming of age, and her realisation of the power of words, language and stories - a power to which she has access. *Voices* also examines the treatment of women in society and enslavement. Whenever Memer leaves the house she has to dress up as a man to protect herself, as the Alds see women and “unbelievers” as inferior members of society. Memer’s coming of age features her making peace with, and accepting, the concept of the Oracle, something she has always feared whenever she entered the hidden library, as well as putting to rest her deep hatred of the Alds, and therefore her hatred of half of herself. Memer’s transformation is seen in her journey towards emancipation and freedom (Covarr, 2015:138).

> Only in being able to recreate an identity for herself in the present, through enlarging her perception of others, acquiring more worldly knowledge (through the act of reading and the power of the story), and through accepting her cultural hybridity, is she able to move into a new identity. (Covarr, 2015: 138).

Memer’s coming of age Fantasy story features less action than Alanna’s in *Song of the Lioness*. Her training is not in the palace practice courts, but at home, in the domestic sphere, surrounded by books. Her development may be a less physical one, but it is equally important in terms of female representation in YA Fantasy fiction. If we compare the circumstances of Alanna’s performance of gender to

Memer's, the similarities are apparent. Both must conceal their identities in order to avoid the judgemental gaze of the patriarchy. The only difference however, is Memer's performance of masculinity protects her from male violence and violation, whereas Alanna dresses up in drag to ensure her place in the King's court. Both have to deal with some sort of prejudice, yet Memer's is more desperate, and more dangerous.

Memer's journey presents to the reader a hero who performs her gender in a slightly more traditionally "feminine" way than Alanna. Although Alanna's story allows the girl reader to share in a heroic journey of displacement, transformation and return usually reserved for male heroes, it can be argued that this representation is not enough. As Diana Wynne Jones points out, many female Fantasy writers want "a narrative structure which [does] not simply put a female in a male's place" (1989:135).

Although there is a place for Alanna in YA Fantasy, and her role is important as a female who asserts herself in battles and performs "female masculinity", it is important "for there to be female heroes of all sorts, ones that are complex and unique and not simply repetitions of previous models or of male versions" (Lucyk, 2011: 175). If the stereotype of the heroine in Fantasy novels is that of someone who needs to be rescued by the male hero, or a female hero in drag, this enforces the restrictive view of women in patriarchal societies. In her book *If Women Rose Rooted* (2016), psychologist Sharon Blackie attributes many of the world's atrocities to the fact that women have not had the chance to develop a heroic narrative for themselves.

> If the foundation of stories of our culture show (sic) women as weak and inferior, then however much we may rail against it, we will be treated as if we are weak and inferior. Our voices will have no traction. But if the mythology and history of our culture includes women who are wise, women who are powerful and strong, it opens up a space for women to live up to those stories: to become wise and powerful and strong. To be taken seriously and to have our voices heard (Blackie, 2016:19).

Blackie further argues that ancestrally, and in Celtic culture and mythology, women have been associated with the healing and wellbeing of "the Earth and the survival of its inhabitants" (2016:20). She argues that the female hero is still active, just in a different way from the more masculine warriors, "she is the one who determines who is fit to rule, she is the guardian and protector of the land, the bearer of wisdom, the root of spiritual and moral authority for the tribe" (2016: 21).

In order for this kind of female representation to be present, a new heroic myth should be constructed. Memer's journey does not follow the typical heroic cycle of displacement, transformation and return. This makes sense from a narrative perspective as Joseph Campbell did not include women in the hero's journey. Campbell believed "women in the picture language of mythology, represent the totality of that which can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know" (Campbell, [1949] 2004: 106). From this quote it is clear that, according Campbell, although the male hero possesses a thousand faces, the female hero does not have any.

It can be argued that even though Memer does not follow the typical Hero's journey, as she does not embark on any sort of quest, her journey can still be considered as heroic. Memer's journey physically starts, develops, and ends in Galvamand, but her internal transformation and realisation of her personal, feminine power is where her

hero's journey occurs. With this in mind, Noble's model of the dragons of initiation is still applicable to Memer's journey.

The call to awaken

Memer's call to awaken occurs over a period of years leading up to her encounter with Orrec and Gry. Memer's journey starts when the Waylord agrees to teach her to read; without this skill she would be unable to read what the Oracle has to say, and spark the revolution of her people against the Alds. Memer learns "to read very quickly, as if [she] had been waiting and more than ready, like a starving person given dinner" (Le Guin, 2006:20). This is the start of Memer's call to awaken, as each female hero has "to embark on her quest without knowing where it [will] lead, and each ha[s] to depend upon depths, resources and strengths within herself, the existence of which she may never ha[ve] expected until she answer[s] her call" (Noble, 1994:25). By asking the Waylord to teach her to read, Memer is accepting a new challenge and a new way of life, one which defies the Alds and helps emancipate her, and the people around her, from oppression.

Memer does not follow the expected journey from the world of stasis into the underworld or the world of initiation, which is one of the factors that differentiates her narrative from that of the traditional heroic journey. Yet the dragons of The Self, Depression, Passivity, Prejudice, and Loss discussed previously are still very present throughout Memer's transformation and help her to face her final test - embracing the powers of the Oracle and overcoming the Alds - with a new, more mature perspective.

Memer's dragons of initiation

Throughout the novel, Memer struggles with her hybrid identity as both an Ald and an Ansulian. Her anger towards the Alds seems to be partly due to losing her mother young, but also due to the fact that her sense of identity is split because of them. She often uses oppressive language by referring to herself as a "half-breed" (Le Guin, 2006: 318). Like Alanna, Memer must recon with two separate sides of herself, however this reckoning is not one of gender, but of race. It is only once Memer learns to accept both sides of her identity that she is able to use her gift of reading the Oracle to save Ansul and encourage peace between the two conflicting races. This is shown by the internal struggle in Memer's psyche where most of her battle is fought before its reconciliation is externally manifested. Memer often doubts her abilities, listening to the oppressive voice of the Alds telling her that she is not good enough because she is a woman, and because she is mixed-race.

> I'm sorry now, for that girl of fifteen who wasn't as brave as the child of six, although she longed as much as ever for courage, strength, power against what she feared. Fear breeds silence, and then silence breeds fear, and I let it rule me. Even there, in that room, the only place in the world where I knew who I was, I wouldn't let myself guess who I might become. (Le Guin, 2007: 31)

Memer recognises the power of the Oracle from the first time she enters the secret library of Galvamand and is terrified of it, and her ability to be a channel for its powers. Although she has always gravitated towards the books in the library, she is frightened of some of them due to her sense that there is something supernatural about them.

> I knew the book had groaned when I touched it. I was only about six years old then, but I remembered. I wanted to make myself brave. I dared myself to go all the way to the shadow end...I clenched my right hand and reached out my left hand and took the book from the shelf, telling myself it was safe because the cover was pretty. I let the book fall open. There were drops of blood oozing from the page. They were wet. I knew what blood was. (Le Guin, 2006: 31)

Memer's sense of the power of the books at the shadowy end of the library is an indication that she will eventually become a channel for the voice of the Oracle. This fear of the books, the Oracle, and herself is one of the biggest challenges she faces throughout the novel and her Ald heritage holds her back from fully acknowledging the power the books have and the power they can wield through her. Her wariness of the books leads to her fearing that the Ald's superstitions regarding literacy and texts are true, and she expresses this to the Waylord later on in the novel when finding out she is to be the voice of The Oracle.

> What I finally said took me by surprise. I said '*Are* there demons?' When he did not answer, I went on, the words bursting out of me hoarse and unclear, 'You say I'm a Galva, but I'm not - not only - I'm both - neither. How can I inherit this? I never even knew about it. How can I do something like this? How can I take this power, when I'm afraid - afraid of demons - the Alds' demons - because I'm an Ald too! (Le Guin, 2006: 182)

Upon her discovery of the Oracle, the Waylord explains to her the burden of duty she was born to bear as a member of the house of Galva. Memer must guard the books and the Oracle of the house, and read the words of the Oracle. He explains that Memer "learned to write the words that let [her] enter, before [she] knew what writing was. And so [she]'ll know how to read the words that are written" (Le Guin, 2006: 148).

According to Noble, the second dragon, depression “can erupt in a myriad of self-destructive or self-enclosing behaviours” (1994:67). This dragon is more present in female heroes than male heroes, due to the nature of the tasks the female hero must face - the struggle to live a life that goes against the norms of the patriarchal culture she finds herself in and the isolation that comes with that. It can be argued that the female heroic narrative needs to have someone to be more than a symbol of the quest, to be exalted and adored. The female heroine, fighting the cultural conditioning that has taught her that in order to slay dragons she needs to find a man to do it for her, needs to be exposed to her own female rescue figure (Attebery,1992:100). This female mentor is someone who tells and shows the hero that she can save herself.

Gry is able to provide Memer with this knowledge, especially when Memer finds herself depressed and disparaged at the lowest point on her journey to transformation. Although some critics such as Attebery and Fergusen state that the female hero must seek knowledge outside of the maternal sphere, and that “the female protagonist’s development is circular; remaining at home in order to learn the ways of her mother” (Fergusen, 1983: 4). I argue that Le Guin is able to challenge these notions through the presence of Gry. Although the source was written some time ago, the validity of the following statement by Pearson and Pope is clear, as it reflects Le Guin’s philosophy on the positive presence of a nurturing mother to perpetuate traditionally feminine strength through the act of caring.

> The traditional method of patriarchal sex-role identification is that women nurture others and men achieve heroic selfhood. Therefore, if a woman is to achieve in the world, she cannot be nurturing. Should a woman move into the male mode, should she be achievement and self-oriented, it is expected that she will relinquish her female nurturing, unselfish qualities. The positive mother, in contrast, teaches the hero that ego, self-assertiveness, strength, and reason are actually

> compatible with nurturance and intuition. (Pearson and Pope, 1981:186)

When Memer meets Gry she immediately is taken by her confidence and control of any situation. Having spent her life stuck in the same routine and the same system of oppression, the sight of Gry and her half-lion, Shetar, sparks the belief in Memer that she can rise above her circumstances and be autonomous and strong. Memer immediately states that she likes Gry “from the moment I saw her standing beside her lion. I liked the way she talked and what she said and everything about her” (Le Guin, 2006:47). As Memer lost her mother at a young age, and Gry and Orrec lost a daughter who would have been the same age as Memer, it is clear that both Memer and Gry act as surrogate mother and daughter for one another. Pearson and Pope state that “the female’s reconciliation with her mother is crucial to a successful journey … it may also put the daughter in touch with her own true perceptions about the world, which social myths about womanhood would obscure” (1981: 178-180). Gry acts as a role model for Memer of female heroism, just as Memer acts as a role model for the reader. Each character displays to the reader that they can be caring and expressive of their femininity, and still be considered heroic, and find heroism through their gender expression.

When Memer is unsure of what to do, and lets the dragon of Depression take over, she turns to Gry for guidance and advice, and through Gry learns that she is capable of saving herself. When the revolution starts and it becomes clear that the Alds are on their way to Galvamand, Memer chooses to stay with Gry and Orrec and stand up to the Alds, instead of accompanying the Waylord to the safety of the secret room. At this lowpoint in her adventure, when she feels she has abandoned her dearest friend and mentor, Memer seeks comfort in Gry.

> I went to Gry and put my arm around her, because I had to have somebody to hold. I had to let my dear lord go, I had not held him, I had to let him walk away alone to be safe, to live, not to be hurt again. But I had to have somebody to hold. (Le Guin, 2006: 209)

The support Memer receives from Gry (and Orrec) is vital to the completion of her quest, and her fulfilment of her duties as the voice of the Oracle. It is interesting that at this crucial point in the quest, Memer turns from her male mentor to her female one. This shows a level of acceptance for her future as a formidable female heroine. The maternal presence of Gry is important in helping Memer to realise there is power within her. Gry's bravery and tolerance help expand Memer's world view from beyond Galvamand and a hatred of the Alds. Through Gry's care work, and acceptance for the Alds, Memer and the reader are able to see strength in the traditionally feminine traits of tolerance and compassion. This, according to Newcomb "affirms 'women's work' as important without decontextualizing it and losing its potential to exploit and oppress" (2014:109). When Gry stands up to the Ald's son, Iddor, the cruellest and most conservative of the Alds, it gives Memer the courage to assert herself as a courageous and powerful female figure.

> What I saw, what the soldiers and the nearby crowd and Iddor saw, was Gry, who came out of the door with Shetar, unleashed beside her. Woman and lion paced forward and descended the wide steps slowly, walking straight at Iddor, and he drew back. (Le Guin, 2006:211)

The importance of the Dragon of Depression is that it teaches all heroes that even the most difficult and tumultuous situations are not necessarily the end, and with each low point in the adventure, comes further understanding of the hero's self. By the end of the novel Memer has overcome her fear of the Oracle and her fear of herself. She has fully actualised into the person she is meant to be. This is shown

when she speaks of the duties passed down to her. When previously speaking to the Waylord of this burden previously, Memer says “I’m ashamed, I’m afraid! I don’t ever want to go into that darkness again” (Le Guin, 2006: 293). Once Memer sees the strength and the hope the Oracle gives her people, and the merit of bravery and courage in struggling against the oppressive regime, she is able to cherish and accept her gift. By the end of the novel she speaks of the Oracle not with fear, but with respect and acceptance by saying:

> There is a voice here, and it must speak through one who can - who can ask, who can read. He taught me. He gave me that. He kept it for me and passed it to me. It’s not his to carry; but mine. I have to come back to it. To stay here. (Le Guin, 2006:284)

The third dragon, passivity, comes in the form of Memer having to overcome the pressure from those around her to hide at home and be good, and in some ways the pressure to be heroic in a way she does not fully understand. Throughout the novel, Memer is underestimated by those who do not see her for who she is, but only see her in terms of her gender. Although Orrec and Gry see Memer’s potential and encourage her to seek it, even the Waylord underestimates her at times. In trying to protect Memer from the burden of the Oracle, he avoids telling her the truth behind her gift and the responsibility she must take on as a reader and as a protector of the House of Galvamand. He tells Memer “you were my comfort…my dear comfort. And I looked only for comfort…I taught you to read, but I never let you know that there was more to read than tales and poetry…I gave you what was easy to give. I told myself, she’s only a child, why should I burden her?” (Le Guin, 2006: 146). Memer’s full potential is only realised once her destiny and duty to read the predictions of the Oracle is revealed; the passivity the Waylord inadvertently enforces on her in trying to protect her is something she must overcome towards the end of the novel.

External people such as the Alds and a revolutionary called Desac often dismiss her as well. Desac regularly visits the Waylord to discuss the upcoming revolution against the Alds, yet expresses his displeasure at Memer being there whenever she is present. This frustrates her immensely as she ponders “Why hadn’t I been allowed to listen to talk of rebellion, of rising against the Alds, fighting them, driving them out? Did Desac think I’d be afraid? Or go blabbing about it like a child? Did he think, because I had sheep hair[14] that I’d betray my people?” (Le Guin, 2006: 126). Memer of course goes on to help in the fight against the Alds in her own gentle way, something Desac does not live to see as he dies in the fire that sparks the uprising.

Adrienne Rich, an acclaimed essayist and feminist who has written many pieces on the effects of the patriarchy on society, speaks about the passive role of women in the household and within patriarchal culture. Rich discusses women through the eyes of the patriarchal household as being passive and powerless, servants to their husbands and “instruments through which daughters are taught to conform to their ‘degrading and dispiriting role’” (Mirkin, 1984: 140). Rich argues further that women in traditional roles of nurturing and motherhood are considered powerless according to the systems and values that hold them. The position of women in the household has traditionally been a position created and controlled by men in order to cater to their needs. It can be argued that this view of the patriarchy is perpetuated by the Alds, who only see women as useful because of their domestic roles, and overlook their powerful qualities. Le Guin takes the figure of Memer, as well as Tirio Actamo, the wife of the Gand Iorrath, the leader of the Alds, and proves that there is more power in the household than merely being a passive servant to the patriarchs.

[14] “Sheep hair” refers to Memer’s Ald-like features, the Alds were described as having “pale, bony face[s] and sheep hair” (Le Guin, 2006:23)

> Her name is Tirio Actamo. She's the daughter of a great family. I knew her before the invasion. She was a beautiful, clever, spirited girl. All I know of her now is servants' gossip brought to me by others, but the gossip is that Iorrath honors her as his wife, and that she has a great influence on him. (Le Guin, 2006: 198)

Tirio is a well-known citizen of Ansul and an old friend of the Waylord. When she is taken as the Gand's concubine she is able to win his love and is a great influence over the Gand, as the leader of the Alds, and encourages reform of the oppressive regime. Because of Tirio's influence, the Gand is more openminded than his more traditional subjects, as well as his son. Tirio is able to use her position to end the conflict between Ansul and the Alds. Once again, Le Guin is showing that a woman's position in the household is not necessarily one of enslavement. This underestimation of Memer's abilities, and of the abilities of the women around her by the Alds, reflects the underestimation of the traditionally "feminine" female hero in YA Fantasy. It is clear from my analysis of Alanna that traditionally, the female hero must perform some sort of masculinity in order to be taken seriously. Tenar, Memer, and Gry subvert this belief for the reader. Le Guin "subverts the male-oriented hero tale through…care work, which redefines power through the lens of care and revises the kinds of power available to both women and men" (Newcomb, 2014: 106). Memer's power is held in her traditionally feminine traits of "feeling and nurturing, empathetic caring, sharing, and a talent for and enjoyment of communication" (Goodwill, 2012: 142).

This is where Le Guin's "language of the household" is shown, as Memer often comments on the heroism behind hospitality.

> I always wondered why the makers leave housekeeping and cooking out of their tales. Isn't it what all great wars and battles are fought for - so at the day's end a family may eat together in a peaceful house? The tale tells how the Lords of Manva hunted and gathered roots and

> cooked their suppers while they were camped in exile in the foothills of Sul, but it doesn't say what their wives and children were llving on in their city left ruined and desolate by the enemy. They were finding food too, somehow, cleaning house and honouring the gods, the way they did in the seige and under the tyranny of the Alds. When the heroes came back from the mountain, they were welcomed with a feast. I'd like to know what the food was and how the women managed it. (Le Guin, 2006:62)

It is evident from this quote that Memer suffers from the same lack of representation as the reader, and wishes to see her own story reflected in the stories she reads. It can be argued that Memer's Third Dragon is not passivity, but the belief that "passivity" has no place in heroism. According to Margaery Hourihan in *Deconstructing the Hero* (1997), which explores the structure and meanings behind the heroic quest, hero stories started out as discussing and exploring what it means to be a man (68). Ursula Le Guin explores, through Memer, what it means to be a woman and the quiet strength present behind the seemingly "passive" act of caring for people, and for the household. Memer finds her honour and her strength through looking after her beloved Galvamand and the people in it. She states that "This is part of what I meant about housework. If it isn't important, what is? If it isn't done honourably, where is honour?" (2006: 62). Throughout the novel Memer finds strength in caring for others and in providing those she cares about with a safe and comfortable place to stay. When introducing himself to Orrec and Gry, the Waylord refers to Memer as "not the daughter of [his] body, but of [his] house and [his] heart" (Le Guin, 2006: 59). It is clear that Memer's strengths lie, not in combat or jousting, like Alanna, but in protecting the house of Galvamand, its people, and its gods. Both forms of heroism and gender expression have a place in the realm of the female hero.

When the fight is over and the Waylord and the Ald Leader start negotiations to free the people of Galvamand, Memer struggles to come to terms with the different kind of heroism that has occurred and laments that:

> Maybe I had trouble seeing it because nobody died bravely for it. No heroes fighting on Mount Sul. No more fiery speeches in the square. Only two middle-aged men, both crippled, sending messages across a city, cautious and wary, working out an agreement. (Le Guin, 2006: 271)

However, the restorative justice that is achieved through quiet negotiation proves to be more effective than its more violent opposing counterpart, retributive justice (Oziewicz, 2010: 37). Desac is present in the text to demonstrate the consequences of active violence, as his death causes chaos among the now leaderless revolutionaries, who, although they succeed in barricading the Ald soldiers into the council house, would not have been able to overpower them. The Waylord points out that the king of Asudar, the land where the Alds come from, could easily “send more soldiers against us” (Le Guin, 2006: 189). Although it does not have the glamour Memer desires, Orrec and Gry’s strategy of passively negotiating with the Alds, “lays stronger foundations for a lasting solution” (Oziewicz, 2010: 37). This once again reinforces the idea that, although the more active and violent solution sparks more emotions and is thought to be more effective, it is the passive and peaceful solution that ultimately restores order to her world.

> The hero who is an outsider because she is female, black, or poor is almost always a revolutionary. Simply by being heroic, a woman defies the conditioning that insists she be a damsel in distress, and thus she implicitly challenges the status quo. If she and the author of her story are aware that sexism is not ordained by God or nature but that it is a social phenomenon that can be changed, the work will be explicitly feminist. (Pearson and Pope, 1981: 10)

Memer constantly challenges the status quo, and the fourth dragon, prejudice, throughout her journey as a heroine. Especially as a mixed-race woman, Memer has to deal with prejudice throughout her life. Neither Ansul, nor Ald, Memer's hybrid identity causes a lot of internal conflict that she learns to deal with as she moves through her period of initiation and comes of age. Memer's hatred of the Alds, and therefore of the Ald side of herselfherself, is apparent from the beginning of the novel when she confesses that she will "always hate the Alds, and [she] will drive them out of Ansul, and kill them all if [she] can" (Le Guin, 2006: 12). It is clear from the way Memer behaves towards the Alds, that she sees herself as a victim of her race. As she is the product of a rape, and is therefore tied to the Alds genetically, she will never be truly free of this oppression (Covarr, 2015: 132). Not only does Memer feel prejudice towards half of herself, but her appearance is often commented on by the Ansulian members of her household. When Ista, the cook at Galvamand sends Memer to the market, she does so with the confidence that Memer will not get sexually assaulted for the way she looks.

> The Alds wouldn't look at me, she said. She meant they wouldn't like my pale bony face and sheep hair like theirs, because they wanted Ansul girls with round brown cheeks and black sleek hair like Sosta's. 'You're quite lucky you look the way you do', she always told me. (Le Guin, 2006: 22)

Although Memer agrees with Ista for practical reasons, as her appearance keeps her safe from any unwanted attention from the Ald soldiers, she still gets upset whenever someone calls her "sheep hair".

This type of prejudice is typical in the classic hero story, in which women and racially-othered characters are doubly affected by the classic Western centralised narrative of the masculine hero (Hourihan,1997:44). The Western narrative states

that “men are the natural masters of the world … they overcome the dangers of nature … other ‘inferior’ races have been subdued by them … [and] women are designed to serve them and [those] women who refuse to do so are threats to the natural order and must be controlled” (Hourihan,1997:1). This point of view is mirrored in the way the Alds view women and “non-believers” or people who are other. The fact that Memer is a product of a rape that occurred when the Alds took over the city is a clear indication that the attitude towards women in Ansul under the Alds is one of objectification and prejudice. As Memer explains, “a woman who went alone in the street was a whore, a demon of temptation, and any soldier was free to rape, enslave, or kill her” (Le Guin, 2006:24).

As Gry states when Memer is worried that she will be recognised as a woman when she dresses up as a boy to visit the Ald’s court, “All unbelievers look alike. And Alds don’t see women anyhow” (Le Guin, 2006: 83). The Alds seem to fear and want to control women the way they fear and want to control the people of Ansul. A strong woman who is not subservient is clearly something that is not welcome or understood, just like the books they have demonised. It takes Gry to open Memer’s eyes to the weakness of the Alds’ prejudice as there is “never a moment they’re not anxious about a rival male, or a female getting loose. They’re never free. They fill their world with enemies…” (Le Guin, 2006: 100). Throughout the book, Memer only leaves the house dressed as a boy for fear that this prejudice against her gender will affect her. However, when she visits the leader of the Alds once the revolution has occurred and she has achieved her transformation, she goes as “Memer the girl instead of Mem the groom or Nobody the boy” (183). Her statement that she “wanted to wear [her] own clothes because [she] needed to be [her]self” (100) indicates to the reader that she has stopped letting the prejudice against her gender affect her. This

is proven even further when she chastises the head of the Alds for belittling her because of her sex.

> “Come back with some men to talk to. Why do they send me children, girls, by God!”
>
> “Because women and girls are citizens here, not dogs and slaves,” I said. “And if you knew how to write, you could send your so-called orders to the Waylord yourself and read his answers yourself!” I was shaking with fury. (Le Guin, 2006: 270)

Aside from race and gender, another, more prominent prejudice affects Memer throughout the novel - that against her religion. The Alds follow a monotheistic faith, and worship the burning God Atth; they are led by a high king who is also a priest. The Alds believe “there is nothing sacred outside the Fire of Atth” (Le Guin, 2006: 64). The religion of the Alds is contrasted with the polytheistic faith of Ansul, which venerates the ancestors and has many shrines set up for regular worship and devotion. Whereas the Alds believe the Earth is a place of exile, and that their God is looking down on them from the Sun, the people of Ansul believe that their Gods are omniscient and present in their day-to-day lives. When Memer meets Orrec and Gry she attributes it to the workings of Lero - the God of Luck. Memer states that "the sea, the earth, the stones of Ansul are sacred, are alive with divinity" (Le Guin, 2006: 92). The prejudice of the Alds against Memer’s religion is explained to Gry and Orrec by the Waylord:

> And on earth Obatth, enemy of Atth, is manifest - in the evil fortunes of men, and the evil men do, and the evil spirits they worship. And most of all, in one certain place...In that place, all the foulness of earth gathers together, darkness drawing inward into earth, the reverse of light shining out from the sun. It is an anti-sun that eats light ... A void, a great hole in the earth, deep beyond depth. It is called the Night Mouth. (Le Guin, 2006: 65)

The Waylord explains that the Alds are convinced the Night Mouth is in the City of Ansul, because it is surrounded by water, the symbol of Obatth, and is opposite the Mountain of Sul - a fiery volcano, which is therefore sacred to Atth. The reason for the Ald's invasion of Ansul is to find the Night Mouth and destroy it. Memer's remark that "the Ansul of my childhood was a broken city of ruins, hunger, and fear" (Le Guin, 2006: 10) reveals to the reader the effect such religious differences can have on a society, and the effect they have on Memer.

Throughout the novel, it is this prejudice against the Ansulian faith that Memer fights hard to resist and overcome. Despite the Alds' belief that books and writing are the product of the "Other Lord" Obatth, Memer and the Waylord keep their faith against all adversity. Memer addresses this prejudice by saying that "'Heathen' is merely a word for somebody who knows a different sacredness than you know. The Alds have been here for 17 years and still hadn't learned that the sea, the earth, the stones of Ansul are sacred, are alive with divinity. If anybody was a heathen it was them, not us" (Le Guin, 2006: 103).

However, the Alds' beliefs are clearly more complicated than Memer perceives. Despite the fact that they despise the written word, they still value the poetry and spoken words presented to them by Orrec. Le Guin also shows the uprising of the Ansulians against the Alds to be as violent as the Alds' initial invasion of Ansul.

Despite the prejudice shown towards her, Memer needs to overcome her own prejudices against her oppressors in order to grow. When asked to attend a poetry reading at the Gand's tent, Memer immediately thinks that she wants to "protest, to say I refused to go anywhere near the Alds, I didn't want to learn anything from them or about them...The idea was more frightening the more I thought about it" (Le Guin,

2006: 98). According to Fiona Covarr, by refusing to engage with the Alds, Memer is rejecting their culture, and that ironically, by doing this, Memer is "perpetuating the same 'racialised violence' by which she feels victimised" (2015: 134). This prejudice is highlighted when Memer, disguised as a boy called "Mem", meets an Ald boy named Simme while at the Gand's tent. Memer's first impression of him is that he is "graceless, detestable, and pitiful...yet for all [her] fear and contempt of him, he made [her] want to laugh...he was so shameless" (Le Guin, 2006: 98). Despite their differences in background and belief, Simme tries to befriend "Mem" - a sentiment she rejects by stating, "There isn't any way we can be friends. Not till you can read what the fountain says. Not till you can touch that stone and ask blessing on my house" (Le Guin, 2006: 149). Although Simme refuses to practise and learn about Memer's faith, Memer does the same to Simme by refusing his friendship because he is an Ald. It is only at the end of the novel when Memer has learnt the powerful effect of tolerance that she feels shame for the way she treats Simme (Le Guin, 2006: 155).

The dragon of prejudice is one that Memer struggles to overcome throughout her life, and she only really defeats it once the Alds are driven out of the city, and the Ansulian beliefs and way of life are restored. However, because of the nature of this dragon, one can assume it is one the female hero will have to constantly work to keep at bay, as it has been "forged through centuries of misogyny, discrimination, and victimisation, this dragon is particularly insidious because it is ubiquitous, often unconsciously internalised and highly resistant to change" (Noble, 1994: 80).

The fifth and sixth dragons, overextension of oneself, and the reality of loss and mortality do not feature much in Memer's journey to transformation. It is clear from

the very start of the novel that Memer has felt the effect of the sixth dragon from an early age, as she grows up feeling the loss of her mother. The reality of death is something every female hero must face, as it is a constant and repetitive part of life, and something Noble states “can never be vanquished in its entirety” (1994: 105). The only loss Memer experiences in the novel is that of the revolutionary Desac, who gets trapped in the fire he sets in the Ald leader’s tent. Despite the fact that Memer struggles with the idea that Desac never took her seriously, she still feels the loss once the revolution against the Alds is over, remarking, “I saw him alive, straight-backed and soldierly, arrogant, passionate, talking with the Waylord - “We’ll meet again, free men in a free city!” he had said. His shadow was all around us” (Le Guin, 2006: 246). The impact of Memer’s more gentle and “feminine” brand of heroism is solidified by the fact that, despite Desac conforming to models of male heroism, he is unable to achieve his goal of freeing Ansul.

Due to the fact that this dragon can never be fully slain, and must be tackled over and over, Noble points out that those heroes with strong spiritual resources are often able to overcome this dragon better than those who practise no faith or have not gone through a spiritual experience. These spiritual experiences of the hero “often act as powerful catalysts for change, giving rise to a renewed sense of hope…and permanent transformation” (Noble, 1994: 105). Memer has always had a connection to her gods, shown in the way she leaves offerings and prays at their shrines daily, however, she experiences yet another spiritual connection when she undertakes the task of reading the predictions of the Oracle. When the son of the Gand, Iddor arrives at Galvamand with a fleet of mounted soldiers and the intention to destroy it, the fountain of the Oracle, which has long been broken, starts to flow again. The

Waylord calls upon the protection of the Oracle when he tells Iddor “This is the House of the Fountain, and the Lord of the Springs protects it, sending it the blessing of his waters. This is the House of the Oracle, and in the books of this house your fate and ours is written!” (Le Guin, 2006: 180) It is Memer who reads the words of the Oracle then, yelling into the crowd “Let them set free!”. Memer describes the experience as follows, “there was a ringing in my ears. I cannot truly say what it was I heard, nor can anyone who was there that morning ... a voice cried out, a loud, strange voice that rang out all around us ... I don’t know whose voice it was that cried out. I don’t know that it was not mine” (Le Guin, 2006: 180). This encounter with the Oracle enables Memer to believe that life has a greater meaning, and instils a sense of purpose in her. No matter what hardship she goes through in life, or how many lives she will have to say goodbye to, Memer’s spiritual belief in her gods, and herself, ensures she is able to live more in the present and with purpose. As Noble states,

> by drawing on our profound inner resources we can live more fully in the presence of this dragon and move beyond passivity, bitterness, grief and despair to acceptance, transformation, and wholeness. (Noble, 1994:105)

Memer is able to navigate and slay these dragons of initiation due to the encouragement and reinforcement of her allies - people Noble refers to as “Harbingers of hope”. In the throes of her initiation, Memer has the support of the Waylord, Gry and Orrec to help and encourage her to move from where she is, a state of stasis, to where she wants and is destined to –e - full transformation. According to Pearson and Pope, the hero’s allies

> Always [urge] the hero to take risks, to be fully alive...to avoid those who tell her to stifle her energy, passion, and individuality, [and to]

> recognise the heroic opportunity obscured by the apparent catastrophe. (Pearson and Pope, 1981: 84)

Memer as the elixir

By going through the period of transformation and slaying the psychological and physical "dragons" she faces, the hero is able to tap into and realise her latent potential and transform the world around her for the better. The transformation is the start of the hero's return to the, now transformed, place of stasis which she left and, according to Danehy (2007) she often returns with some sort of elixir or "boon" which renews the community of the hero and sets it on the path of transformation the hero aimed for when starting her quest.

Unlike Alanna, who returns to Tortall with the Dominion Jewel as a symbol of her emotional and psychological transformation, Memer does not possess or obtain an object at the end of her hero's journey. However, Memer is still in possession of a society-changing "boon" at the end of her journey. According to Danehy (2007) "the hero can also gain a personal change in the form of an emotional realisation that, acting like an elixir, can enable her to help her society through its employment after the hero's Return" (2007:47). It is only when Memer fully embraces her duty and ability as the reader of the Oracle, and is able to read out the Oracle's words of "Broken Mend Broken" that her world is transformed. At first when Memer reads these words sent to her by the Oracle, she is puzzled by their meaning; this is largely because she has not undergone the necessary initiation and change that inevitably brings her clarity. She wonders why "the oracle couldn't speak plainly, why it couldn't just say *Don't resist,* or *Strike now,* instead of cryptic messages and obscure words" (Le Guin, 2006: 136).

Memer interprets the message she does receive to mean that in order to be free of the Alds, the citizens of Ansul must revolt against them in a violent way; she wonders if the oracle is asking for the Alds' bodies, minds and power to be broken by the instruments of rage and force. Once Desac's revolution fails and the attempt to fight back with brute force proves to be fruitless, Memer, with the help of Gry and Orrec realises her true potential as a harbinger of change. By entering into peaceful negotiations with the leader of the Alds, and bringing restorative justice and hope to her beloved Ansul, once broken by violence, Memer experiences an epiphany with regard to the true meaning of the oracle's words.

> I had misjudged it, and him. I had wanted to refuse patronisation, manipulation, compromise - politics. I had wanted to fling off every bond, to defy the tyrant. I had wanted to hate the Alds, drive them away, destroy them ... my vow, my promise, made when I was eight years old, that I had sworn by all the god's and by my mother's soul.
>
> I had broken that promise. I had to break it. *Broken mend broken*(Le Guin, 2006: 273).

By breaking the cycle of violence caused and perpetuated by the Alds, and healing the prejudice and hate harboured in her own heart, Memer is able to help bring restoration to her world. As Joseph Campbell states "for the mythological hero is the champion not of things become, but of things becoming; the dragon to be slain by him is precisely the monster of the status quo" (Campbell, [1949] 2004:311). By going against the status quo of oppression and violence, and realising her own capacity for healing and peace, Memer brings lasting change to her society, and in turn encourages others to join her on her journey to transformation.

> The hero's reward for violating the sex-role taboos of her society is the miracle of combining inner wholeness with outward community. Such a shift in consciousness cannot be taught; it can only be achieved.

> Therefore, the kingdom can be transformed only when others join the hero in her quest. (Pearson and Pope, 1981:15)

Once she sets the example with Orrec and Gry, the transformation of Ansul is continued by the people of her beloved city who band together and work towards achieving peace. While the Waylord holds conferences to discuss the way forward, Memer waits on his needs and provides her opinions whenever she is asked. Her transformation and newly found belief in herself and her capabilities is clear when she remarks on the attention she receives as a hero “I was a new thing among them. He was Galva. I was the daughter of Galva, and through me the gods had spoken” (Le Guin, 2006: 240).

Through Memer, Le Guin is able to teach the young female reader that she does not have to forgo her femininity in order to make a change in her world. Memer and Tenar are able to give voice to more feminine gender expression, and introduce the world to a new brand of heroism - one that focuses on connection and restoration.

Conclusion

This paper has explored different representations of female gender expression in Tamora Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* series (1983-1988) and Ursula Le Guin's *Voices* from the *Annals of the Western Shore* series (2004-2007). Although the development of the female hero over time and across different authorships has been explored, it is also crucial to consider the effect these female representations may potentially have on the young reader.

The effect of fiction on Young Adults is difficult to determine, as the concept of 'teen fiction' is a relatively recent concept, although the recognition given to the YA genre in the world of children's literature has improved over the years. The adolescent state is situated somewhere between childhood and adulthood - a period in which the formation of identity is important. Therefore, presence of characters in novels with whom the reader can identify may be crucial for the development of the adolescent. By being exposed to characters that are like them, characters that are also struggling with the woes and confusion of adolescence, young adults may have their developing sense of identity reinforced.

Allison Waller, a lecturer in Children's Literature at Roehampton University, and an expert in Young Adult fantastic realism, has discussed the difficulties of young adult identity formation and the effect literature has on it in her book *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism* (2009). In it, Waller states that "

> whereas teenage realism purports to portray teenagers and their lives *as they really are*, fantastic realism has the potential to disrupt these representations, subvert the dominant discourses of adolescence and offer an alternative set of ideological positions. (2009:26).

With this in mind, it can be argued that the presence of Fantasy as a genre that subverts reality and portrays a world that potentially dismantles real-life power structures may be crucial in the development of young girls. Waller refers to a study done on teenage reading, which found that upon reaching adolescence, boys begin to read less, but this is not the case with girls. (Waller, 2009: 10). It is important, therefore, especially during this crucial stage of liminality between childhood and adulthood, that girl readers be exposed to texts that represent them positively. The disempowered position females hold in society and in literature can be disheartening for girl readers, which is why YA Fantasy novels need to subvert these power structures and introduce stronger, more focalised female protagonists. In *Earthsea Revisioned* (1993), Le Guin points out that:

> the heroic man's relation to women is limited to the artificial code of chivalry, which involves the adoration of a woman-shaped object. Women in that world are non-people, dehumanised by a beautiful, worshipful spell ... A world in which men are seen as independently real and women are seen only as non-men is not a Fantasy kingdom ... It's our politics. (1993:987)

Through Fantasy, an alternate reality can be portrayed, one that no longer portrays images of submissive and helpless women, but of brave strong girls who wholeheartedly embrace their identities as women, whatever that might mean to them. Le Guin discusses the impact of representation in YA literature in one of her essays entitled "Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" (1979):

> I believe that the best faculties of a mature human being exist in the child and that if these faculties are encouraged in youth they will act well and wisely in the adult, but that if they are repressed and denied in the child they will stunt and cripple the adult personality. And finally, I believe that one of the most deeply human, and humane, of these faculties is the power of imagination. (Le Guin, 1979: 44)

It is clear from this statement that the more girl readers are exposed to female heroines who embrace their power, dismantle the repressive structures of their societies, and achieve their goals, as well as reach an *apotheosis* - an understanding of self - the more they will be encouraged to reach for this in their daily lives.

It is clear from the evolution of YA Fantasy fiction, that the works of Pierce and Le Guin have pioneered ways forward for female representation. More realistic and varied female protagonists have appeared in the works of Holly Black and Naomi Novik, as the female hero is becoming an increasingly popular figure in YA Fantasy series aimed at girl readers

It is clear from the story of Pierce's Alanna, that female representation has come a long way since the books were written. Nevertheless, Alanna paved the way for female heroes, not only in the Tortall universe but in the world of adolescent Fantasy. It is clear from the evolutions of both Pierce and Le Guin's novels and protagonists that even the writers themselves experienced ideological growth while writing these heroes.

Pierce's Alanna is a revolutionary hero for YA fiction. It can be argued that she is one of the first of her kind, an unapologetic woman shaping the world around her for the better and forming a path for the heroines behind her to follow.Her status as a lady knight is empowering and her performance of feminine masculinity was ground-breaking in the YA Fantasy genre. . Alanna walks so that subsequent heroines in the Tortall series can run, as these later heroines manage to further escape the patriarchal expectations enforced on Alanna. Kel, for example, is able to start off on her journey to become a knight without hiding her true gender; she does not have to perform as a man to achieve her goals. In the later series, Alanna's daughter Aly is

able to achieve her dreams of becoming a spymaster, despite her parents' disapproval of her chosen profession. She uses her combat skills and quick thinking to get herself out of sticky situations, such as being sold into slavery.

Despite these developments, however, most of these characters have classically patriarchal endings to their stories. Waller states that female characters "reach a point of unified self, the natural progression is typically to enter into a conventional heterosexual relationship that will continue to "complete" their identity into adulthood" (Waller, 2009:90). On returning the Dominion Jewel and completing her quest, Alanna settles down with George Cooper and becomes the Lady of Pirates Swoop. It can be argued, however, that in some way Pierce breaks free of the classic patriarchal narrative by not giving Alanna the fairy tale ending that would be implicit had she married Prince Jonathan and become Queen of Tortall. Instead she marries George, the roguish "anti-prince". Alanna's daughter Aly, ends her series by marrying a man called Nawat Crow, and having triplets with him (Pierce, 2004). Kel is the only one of Pierce's female protagonists mentioned in this dissertation who manages to break free of the expectations of marriage. The only love interest she has in her series, Cleon of Kennan, is killed in battle and she ends her series unattached.

Although Pierce's heroines all break free of the patriarchal standards of society in their own way, most of them encourage the performance of masculinity. They all have a knowledge of hand-to-hand combat, and have traditionally more *active* than *passive traits*. They break free of their domestic sphere instead of embracing it, or using it to their advantage, and although they achieve their goals, they often do so in classically "male" professions. By only having central female characters who possess traditionally "male" traits, Pierce instils a belief in the reader to break free of

the gender-binary and pave their own way through their dichotomous. However, second-wave feminist and Science Fiction critic, Sarah Lefanu has criticised the masculine female heroism by saying "'by taking the heroes of sword-and-sorcery tales and giving them breasts', they are unsuccessful because 'they do not necessarily challenge the gender stereotypes they have reversed" (1989: 35). Lefanu is essentially saying that by embracing the stereotypical narrative of the male hero, and all his expected characteristics, the female hero denies who she is. However, I think that gender theory has developed since Lefanu wrote these words. With the increased interest in gender construction of modern times, it can be argued that there is a place for all kinds of female heroism, so long as the female hero continues to be explored and represented.

The heroic tropes featured by Pierce and Le Guin have been explored, represented, and developed by more contemporary authors. My research could be expanded by looking more closely at some of the following authors and texts.

In Holly Black's *The Folk of the Air* trilogy (2018-2019), the main character Jude is very similar to Pierce's Alanna. Jude is an ambitious and fierce human who is taken to live in the realm of the fairies when her parents are killed by a fairy general. Jude desperately wants to be recognised and respected in the fairy court and therefore trains to become a knight. She is eventually employed to be a spy for the heir apparent and uses her cunning to fight, plot against, and murder her enemies. Although not as noble or chivalrous as Alanna, Jude's tenacity and combat skills are reflective of the more "masculine" heroine, as she uses her skill for fighting to earn respect in the court of the fae. Holly Black's *Valiant* (2005) from her *The Modern Faerie Tales* series (2002-2007) also has very clear influences from Pierce. The novel follows the story of Val, a 'tomboyish' ordinary girl who shaves her head and

moves to New York after discovering her mother is sleeping with her boyfriend. Black turns the classic expectations of the Fairy-tale narrative on its head by having Val rescue, and eventually marry, a troll who does not conform to typical warrior stereotypes. Additionally, Val as a protagonist is slightly different from the likes of Alanna and Jude, because she tries hard to be ordinary and unremarkable. This ordinary trait makes her more accessible to the young reader, however, her transformation from someone who perceives herself as "ordinary" into the protagonist of her own story is encouraging for anyone struggling with the formation of their identity. Black has commented that:

> I wanted to tell the story of someone entirely without magic. I was interested in a girl who was kind of a jock and what she would do in an urban Fantasy setting. Also, I wanted to write about someone who has seen herself as a secondary character and learns to be the protagonist of her own story. All of those functions are better served by a mortal character. (Ching, 2011:170).

Black's heroines, who are all full of gumption, show the evolution of Pierce's influence, as both characters in *The Cruel Prince* (2018) and *Valiant* (2005) are able to complete their quests whilst also feeling confident in their identities as females. Ching argues that the presence of these types of female heroes "can help teens learn to perceive both themselves and the world around them more clearly, providing them with the tools they need as they transition into the adult world" (Ching, 2011:168).

Compared to Pierce's warrior women, Le Guin's heroines are able to embrace their feminine nature more successfully. Just as Memer resists the taboos in her society by embracing them, so does she resist the restrictions on her gender by embracing those too. Both Memer and Tenar from *Voices* (2006) and *The Earthsea Quartet* (1968-2001) are shown by Le Guin to embrace their gender roles. This remains true

even though Le Guin admits in *Earthsea Revisioned* (1993), that Tenar had to be revised in the final volumes of the series to become more of an autonomous protagonist since while writing the earlier novels her creator “had not yet thought what a female hero might be” (1993:983).

Le Guin’s feminist journey establishes a new kind of hero in her works, one that is decidedly *unmale.* It can be argued that both Memer and Tenar’s definitions of “action, decision, and power [are] not heroic in the masculine sense. [Their] acts and choices do not involve ascendance, domination, power over others, and seem not to involve great consequences” (Le Guin, 1993: 985). Upon discovering feminism, Le Guin sought to overthrow existing gender structures within society through the use of her female characters.

Memer in *Voices* (2006) has an ending that is unlike that of Pierce’s heroines. Memer, like Tenar “encounters the homeland of herself and is empowered through connection, rather than submitting to the male symbolic order” (Douglas & Byrne, 2014: 6). At the end of the novel, it is implied that she will join Gry and Orrec on their travels, before returning to Galvamand to take care of the books and the Oracle. The fact that Memer does not finish her story romantically attached deviates from the classic expectations of the female hero. Memer even states that “Someday I’d be ready to find out about that kind of love, but it wasn’t time yet. I had to find out who I was, first. I had a promise to keep, and my dear lord to love, and a lot to learn” (Le Guin, 2006: 36). Memer’s decision to focus on herself and to carve her own path alone, unattached, shows her determination to connect with herself. She is not entirely opposed to the idea of romantic love, but also acknowledges that she has not yet come into her power and discovered herself enough to experience it. Le Guin

has given Memer a truly independent ending, free of the pressures of romantic attachment.

Naomi Novik's *Spinning Silver* (2018) is clearly influenced less by Pierce's combative and fierce female heroes, and more by Le Guin's compassionate and resourceful ones. *Spinning Silver* (2018) follows the stories of three different female protagonists in the same Fantasy setting. The first, Miryem, is the daughter of a moneylender whose business is failing due to his own fiscal irresponsibility. When her mother becomes ill and it is clear her family is on the brink of poverty, Miryem uses her skill for negotiation to "turn silver into gold" by collecting items that she can turn into a profit. Novik twists the classic story of Rumpelstiltskin when Miryem is taken to a magical parallel world called Staryk by a king who demands that Miryem increase his fortunes with her skills. Upon entering the magical world, Miryem's ability to turn silver into gold becomes a magical power, not just a practical skill. Miryem takes the anger and frustration she has over her situation and uses it to her advantage to gain control and prevail over whatever hardships she faces. Novik has stated that she wrote the character of Miryem because:

> I liked the flavour of her anger. Young women aren't allowed to be selfishly angry. They're sometimes allowed to be angry in a sort of righteous way for other people, but they are often discouraged from being like, "This is unfair to me. I'm mad for me, and I want these things for me." I think it's really important for women to fight against the idea that they're not allowed to want things for themselves. (Novik, 2018)

The other two voices in the novel, Wanda and Irina connect to Miryem's by the end of the novel. Irina is the daughter of the duke whose lack of beauty is a disappointment to her father. She ends up marrying a cruel tsar in Staryk and with Miryem's help strikes a bargain to help save Staryk from the eternal winter it has

been enduring. Wanda is a peasant girl who is sent to work for Miryem to help pay off her drunken father's debts, both she and Miryem work towards her goal of being free enough to make her own choices in life. By the end of the novel, all three characters are able to achieve the peace and prosperity they desire. This focus on the female voice and the agency and relationships that are formed when helping each other, "reminds us that all we can do when faced with what seems to be inevitable doom, is to hold the ones we love close, and fight against the despair" (Murad, 2018). Novik has taken strong, soft female characters and has explored, very much like Le Guin, how they can use their compassion and determination to their advantage. There is neither swordplay nor great battles in her works, but merely resilient women, struggling against evil forces, and using their desire for connection to overcome whatever hardships come their way.

The presence of the female hero in popular culture clearly generates uncertainty. It is apparent from the actions and characteristics of both Pierce and Le Guin's protagonists that they inherited no clear-cut way for an active heroine to conduct herself. The formula for males is relatively straightforward - be powerful and chivalrous and brave. But surely by attributing these qualities exclusively to men, we are implying that women cannot possess such traits, but should stand meekly in the corner where the patriarchy would like them to be.

What is important to note is that no matter what kind of heroine is written, whether she is feisty and driven like Alanna, or soft, nurturing and yet immensely powerful like Memer, an alternative image of female heroism is created - one that portrays women as anything but weak and defenceless.

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