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Girls Who Save the World: The Female Hero in Young Adult Fantasy

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Girls Who Save the World:

The Female Hero in Young Adult Fantasy

The Senior Honors Thesis of Erin F. Danehy

Professor Peggy A. Knapp, Advisor

Department of English

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Carnegie Mellon University

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Note on Abbreviations

The following titles are abbreviated in references in the text:

The Blue Sword = *Sword*
The Hero and the Crown = *Hero*
Alanna: The First Adventure = *Alanna*
In the Hand of the Goddess = *Goddess*
The Woman Who Rides Like a Man = *Woman*
The Golden Compass = *Compass*
The Subtle Knife = *Knife*
The Amber Spyglass = *Spyglass*

All other titles are referenced in full.

PROLOGUE

THE FEMALE HERO

> "It would be a great thing for us, and for our daughters—a damalur-sol."
> Damalur-sol. Lady Hero.[1]

Harry, the protagonist of *The Blue Sword* by Robin McKinley, hears her teacher Mathin's words but the idea behind them—that *she*, the awkward, too-tall girl with the stiff neck, could be called a *hero*—it is almost too much for her to believe. Until, however, she saves her world, proving herself a hero beyond all doubt, and her friends and companions cheer her name.

Heroism is a concept our world has never seemed to be without. As far back as stories stretch, we find tales of heroes performing great deeds and saving their people. Very often, however, women have been left out of that venerable heroic tradition. Often when women are included, they serve functions more often than they embody individual character. They also often face an inevitable fate of marriage in the comic or romantic tale, or death in the tragedy. The few examples of women performing heroic (not *heroinic*) deeds—the myth of Psyche, the true martyrdom of Joan of Arc, for example—are dwarfed by both the number and scale of male hero stories, both mythic and those based in history. There are many other stories, plays, fairy tales, and novels with female main characters, but those women are often termed as "heroines"—female protagonists who, while demonstrating strength and complexity of character, fall into the more commonly defined roles for women. Literary critic Nadya Aisenberg points out that, "Though there is no dearth, and never has been, of courageous women, active women, spiritual women, women of leadership, the Hero has nonetheless been our culture's central symbol" (11).

[1] *The Blue Sword*, 112.

The heroic stories that form the traditional fabric of our culture are intensely male-dominated; in today's culture of both strong men *and* women, as Aisenberg states,

> "We need a new heroine with new strengths, new virtues, and new energies to play new roles because classical heroes and the heroic code they embrace have failed us badly. The paradigm of virtue that heroes like Aeneas, like Roland, and the heroic code — maiden-rescuing, dragon-slaying — represent has been destructive both to the individual and to Western culture…. Examining the hero, we discover his essential narrowness which neglects concerns with community, negotiation, nature, human relations, and the enablement of individual destinies to flourish in their differences" (11-12).

Our culture needs new heroic archetypes, new figures to inspire us with their heroic mettle and steadfast determination. We need female heroes.

Why not new *heroines*? In the twenty-first century, women are functioning in roles that would have been socially unthinkable outside the male gender less than a century ago. More than ever our changing culture needs a changing heroic tradition, one that features heroic women along with heroic men—side by side. Young girls and women are growing up to face new roles and look to fiction as one of the sources for worthy, strong, capable role models on which to pattern their dreams. Strong female archetypes are necessary "For our daughters," Mathin tells Harry; new female archetypes are not only important in society as a whole but for examples whom young girls and women can admire. As our society becomes more and more gender-egalitarian, gender-neutral language is more often being used for the sake of being politically correct. I therefore propose that heroic women—women whose quests and adventures, in reality or depicted in fiction, fit the criteria of being "heroic"—deserve the title of "hero," without the diminutive. If women can prove themselves equal to the professions, tasks, and intellectual capacities of men, the heroic title should reflect that equality.

In this thesis I will examine twelve fantasy novels all published in the last twenty-five years that demonstrate this archetype of the female hero.[2] All of the protagonists—the heroes—are equal to the tasks and tests of the archetypical hero. The criteria for "heroism" I will draw from Joseph Campbell's 1949 critical text *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. In that book, Campbell defines the quest, the journey, of the hero by analyzing heroic myths and legends from around the world. He draws an archetypical "monomyth," a universal heroic pattern to which all hero stories can be loosely linked.[3] The six heroes of the twelve novels each challenge the role of the "traditional" hero. Their quests are challenging, the odds against them intimidating, and the characters are active, engaging, and realistically fascinating. By patterning the quests of the heroes in question onto Campbell's monomyth, I will demonstrate that these female protagonists qualify as female heroes. A point to note is that though the heroes in the books I discuss are female does not mean any male love interest characters are diametrically relegated to the passive positions of female love interests in classic hero stories. Often, it is the opposite: the supporting male characters offer opposition, assistance, or support but remain active (and sometimes heroic) themselves. This egalitarian interpretation of the hero story better reflects a modern world in which women and men often work side by side in many different professions.

I chose to draw the novels from the genre of fantasy for several reasons. The heroic quest broadly defined may be applied to nearly any story in any genre, whether metaphorical or literal, but it is most tightly linked with that of the epic and the romance, especially the epics of the Greeks and Romans and those epics and romances of the medieval period. The most easily recognizable heroic figures—Aeneas and Roland as mentioned, but also Beowulf, Odysseus,

[2] For details regarding the novels, their worlds, and their characters, see Appendix I.
[3] For a diagram explaining Campbell's heroic cycle in detail, see Appendix II.

King Arthur and his knights, and many others—derive from those periods. The genre of modern fantasy has evolved from those same epic and romantic traditions, and remain tightly linked.

I will begin by defining and discussing the genre of fantasy and its connection with the tradition of the romance, epic, and hero story in general. Then, using Campbell's theory, demonstrate how the novels and their heroes fall into the heroic pattern he described. Finally, I will discuss the particularities of the female hero story versus the male hero story and then the novels themselves in greater detail.

PART I

THE ADVENTURE OF THE HERO

Chapter I

In Defense of Fantasy: Imagination and Tradition

Fantastic literature has long been capable of captivating the imagination and creating worlds, characters, and situations that seem both real and radically different. This makes fantasy a perfect genre for the female hero. I have chosen to concentrate on specifically young adult fantasy for a variety of reasons. Firstly, modern fantasy is in many ways the descendant of the romantic and epic traditions, in which we find the most famous and memorable examples of heroes in Western culture. As critic Boris Tomashevsky explains, "The usual device for grouping and stringing together motifs is the creation of a character who is the living embodiment of a given collection of motifs" (87-88); in other words, the classic hero stories that form the basis of the heroic tradition are filled with characterizations and plot points that have become culturally familiar elements we naturally attribute with heroes and hero stories. Sir Philip Sidney recognized the power of the heroic story, looking to the Greeks and Romans for his examples. He praises the power of literary heroes:

> …who doth not only teach and move to a truth, but teacheth and moveth to the most high and excellent truth; who maketh magnanimity and justice shine throughout all misty fearfulness and foggy desires. (99)

Heroes exhibit the greatnesses of their societies, showing by example an admirable way to behave and honorably act. Heroic poetry represents to Sidney "the best and most accomplished kind of Poetry" because not only does "the image of each action stirreth and instructeth the mind

with desire to be worthy," but it also "informs with counsel *how* to be worthy" (99, emphasis mine). Hero stories and the motifs that have evolved from them are more than simply entertaining adventures, and many modern fantasy authors are not only aware of the rich tradition into which they are entering, but often reference it directly.

Along with inheriting the tradition of the hero as a character in a narrative, modern fantasy has also inherited the world attached to that tradition. Much of the quest-oriented fantastic literature for young adults (and adults) is set in a world or worlds that resemble a European medieval or early modern setting, additionally leading to its association with the romance and epic traditions prevalent in those periods. As Northrop Frye explains, "Romance is marked by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space" ("Mythos of Summer" 109); the easily idealized world of kings and princesses, dragons and sorcerers is that "golden age" for fantasists, worlds in which one person's actions (like a hero's) can have far-reaching and easily recognizable effects. There is a theme prevalent in almost all fantasy, of protagonists making consequential decisions and tangibly taking action themselves which may be attributed to the chivalrous—honest, loyal, brave—knights of legend and their fictional legacy. Not all fantasy—or all quest-fantasy—however, is set in such a world, but almost all fantasy worlds are those in which the hero can make a substantial difference in their world, however big or small, through his or her successful quest.

As to why I chose *young adult* fantasy literature, young adult themed stories are inherently coming-of-age stories, and the coming-of-age story is analogous to the quest-myth as defined by Frye and the heroic cycle by Campbell. As Frye discusses generally, "The complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main

stages: the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero" ("Mythos of Summer" 109). There is a distinct tie between the coming-of-age story and ritual, and ritual and myth; these ties make pairing the two adventures of coming-of-age and completing a heroic quest a logical combination.

The coming-of-age story has become a universal trope in literature, especially in literature for children and young adults. Children and young adults must inevitably "come of age" and join the wider world and literature for that age range confronts that thematic issue more often than it is used in adult literature. The natural event of growing up is reflected in rituals and significant events and milestones in the lives of young people of all religions, ethnicities, and nationalities. Arnold van Gennep, a French anthropologist, first analyzed and discussed the cultural importance of rituals in his 1909 book, *Les rites de passage*.[4] In it, Van Gennep explains, "Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings…. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well-defined" (3). Often these major life events mark a change or turning point; the individual undergoes a "rite of passage" and becomes acknowledged by his or her society as more mature or more individual than before. Van Gennep defines "rites of passage" as "The ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another" (Van Gennep, 10). The Christian Confirmation or the Jewish Bar and Bat Mitzvah, among others, recognize adult abilities in young teenagers, while milestones like high school, college, and the first experience outside of parental jurisdiction

[4] *The Rites of Passage*. I am using the 1960 English translation.

represent other rites of passage. These modern-day rites of passage are often depicted in fiction for children and young adults, but they are not unlike the same sort of coming of age rites children and young adults underwent in other cultures in other times.

All of these rites of passage take the same form, from start to finish, regardless of culture or time: separation, transition, and incorporation; each rite of passage, in a way, forms a natural linear narrative. Northrop Frye explains that narratives originate from rituals, that "rituals cover the entire range of potentially significant actions in human life" ("Archetypes of Literature" 509). In many ways the coming-of-age story associated with these rituals is inherently an adventure; it may take place over a series of weeks, months, years or through a series of landmark life experiences. In all of the stories I discuss, the hero is on the brink of a social or physiological change, one that will mark her maturity and acceptance into her society as a full member. Sabriel is about to graduate from school with high marks; Lirael has reached the age all other Clayr receive the Sight, their birthright; Harry faces the vague notion of marriage as a near-future expectation; Aerin is old enough to be recognized as her father's daughter but cannot find a place for herself within his court; Alanna is growing into a woman but has the spirit of a knight; while Lyra runs the streets as a half-wild child, poised on the brink of consequential adolescence. Rituals of maturity are an integral part of every society, as discussed by Van Gennep, and the coming-of-age testing of the hero's quest falls at a crucially important point for each of these female heroes, whether it be like the young Alanna and Lyra, whose adventures cover the range from childhood to adolescence, or like Harry and Sabriel, already recognized adults by the standards of age, but not yet ready to move beyond the dependency of adolescence into independent adulthood. Before the female hero can fully grow into her own, she must be challenged away from the comforts of childhood and naïve youth and be forced to grapple with

dangers that challenge everything she has learned over the course of her life, and even that which she will learn as her journey progresses. Through the testing and proof of their quest, these heroes may re-enter their home society with a newly-gained maturity with which they can become actively independent. The World Navel is representative of the hero's childhood innocence and immaturity; she must return to it with the power and grace of a fully mature and capable hero in order for her to reach her full potential within her society as an adult.

Additionally, children's and young adult fantasy literature is to some degree mimetic, reflexive of its tradition, and sometimes either overtly or covertly didactic. The ethical tradition of fantasy literature—using fantasy literature to specifically relate morals or themes beyond simple enjoyment—dates back to the traditions of the romance and the epic, which were also, to some extent, mimetic or didactic to their noble and common audiences.[5] Before discussing these themes in further detail I must state, however, that simply because the books I will discuss are classified as "children's" or "young adult" literature does not meant their themes and content are not applicable to or enjoyable by adult readers. "If fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all," fantasy writer and literary critic J. R. R. Tolkien writes, "it is worthy to be written for and read by adults" (137).

But if a "fairy-story" is "worth reading at all" by all audiences, by what criteria do we define fantasy? Saying it is "imaginative" or "made up" is easy—but so, inherently, is all of fiction: created and imagined literature. Fantasy is—and has been for more than a century—one of the most difficult to define genres in literature. Broadly considered, as said, it is *all* imaginative literature, but in its modern sense, as Colin Manlove wrote in 1975, it is "A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects with which the reader or the characters within the story

[5] From John Leyerle, "Conclusion: the major themes of *Chivalric Literature*." *Chivalric Literature*, 131-135.

become on at least partly familiar terms" (157). Fantasy has the unique position of being able to create worlds entirely alien with the sense of being completely familiar. Yet simply creating a world is not enough. Fantasy must not only "[manage] to sustain our interest in impossible worlds simply by making these worlds emotionally meaningful to us" (Wolfe, 229) but also be powered by the strength of what J. R. R. Tolkien calls "Secondary Belief" (132)—the author's ability to convey through style, artistry, character, and tone an arousal of "genuine emotions…from impossible circumstances" (Wolfe, 231).[6] The creation of a convincing, realistic reality is one of the most important elements in successful fantasy; if the story and its world do not seem real, Secondary Belief cannot be evoked and the story falls flat. Yet Fantasy is also more than an author simply creating whatever he or she desires to create that imagined world. It is, like any other form of fiction, restricted by rules of creation and principles of aesthetics. When fantasy is masterfully created, as Tolkien described, it is "not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent" (139).

But how is it achieved? The modern fantasy author can create a world and draw in its readers with the promise of limitless imaginative possibility, yet, though the possibilities are limitless, the story itself and the "Secondary World" (Tolkien, 132)—or worlds—it weaves still must be governed by rules similar to those that govern *our* world. Though "anything" can potentially happen, *everything* must be tightly governed by rules the author creates. In 1890, fairy tale author, adapter, and critic George MacDonald wrote that an author's fantasy world,

> once invented, the highest law that comes next into play is, that there shall be harmony between the laws by which the new world has begun to exist; and in the process of his creation, the inventor must hold by those laws. The moment he

[6] Tomashevsky makes a similar point in discussing themes: "The emotion attached to the theme plays a major role in maintaining interest…. The emotions a work of art excites are its chief means of holding attention. It is not enough, for example, to state the phases of the revolutionary movement in the cold tones of a lecture; the listener must sympathize, must be indignant, joyful, disturbed. Only then does the work become really "real"; only then are the listener's emotions unprotestingly led in the desired direction" (65).

> forgets one of them, he makes the story, by its own postulates, incredible. To be able to live in a moment in an imagined world, we must see the laws of its existence obeyed. Those broken, we fall out of it. (65)

Consistency in fantasy is as important as it is in any other genre. Tolkien believes that "inner consistency of reality" is even more necessary in fantasy than in other genres.[7] Ursula K. Le Guin further discussed this principle by saying that "In fantasy, there is nothing but the writer's vision of the world…. There is no comfortable matrix of the commonplace to substitute for the imagination, to provide ready-made emotional response, and to disguise flaws and failures of creation. There is only a construct built in a void, with every joint and seam and nail exposed…. The only voice that speaks there is the creator's voice" ("Elfland to Poughkeepsie" [1973] 154). This is no easy task for a fantasy author, but if achieved, such literature has the power to show by vivid example and allusive image that which historical fiction struggles to find examples to demonstrate and the approach of realism might be too narrow to define through image. Fantasy, while freer in the limits of its scope, must "work harder" in some senses than realism because not only is the author attempting to craft a compelling story with empathetic characters, but he or she is also crafting an entire world.

Modern fantasy integrates both psychological realism with its tremendous imaginative potential. Young readers (not to mention adults) are much more skeptical, intelligent, and demanding when it comes to fiction in the twenty-first century than they were a century ago. To tell a simple fairy tale or fable to older children is to give them a formula from which they have been trained to educe a moral or discover the simple allegory underneath the tale. Many classic fairy tales (like those of Grimm and Perrault) are, as Frederic Jameson describes, "preindividualistic narratives" (197), or stories in which the protagonists are little more than

[7] "On Fairy-Stories," 138. The phrase is part of Tolkien's definition of Imagination which he redefines as the ability to "Sub-create" a "Secondary World" (139).

archetypal stand-ins that were developed before the widespread influence of psychoanalysis and the emergence of the concept of the motivated individual. The main characters of those fairy tales have little actual character; their desires and interests are never revealed to us. In addition to needing compelling protagonists, modern readers need a firm connection to reality in whatever they read, regardless of its genre. Teenage readers are in many ways experienced in the nature of narrative and, as Tomashevsky describes, "Although firmly aware of the fictitious nature of the work, the experienced reader nevertheless demands some kind of conformity to reality, and finds the value of the work in this conformity" (81). Fantasy literature must, like any other literature, remain grounded in the world in which its readers reside, on some level, or they will reject it. A truly created world has no roots in our own; the fantasy author must create a world that is both mimetic and marvelous for us to begin to feel connected to it emotionally. Grounding the characters through psychological realism and rooting the world with some connection, metaphorical or realistic, to our own allows the author freedom to create a fantastic world while keeping a firm, realistic connection to the real world.

The flexibility of such a genre allows for polarization of issues facing readers in the real world by placing such issues against a fantastical backdrop. In what is termed "ethical fantasy," writes Molson, the author "takes for granted that good and evil exist and that there are substantive, discernible differences between them. At the same time it concedes that the differences are not easily discernible" (86). These authors avoid condescending or insulting older children and adolescents by presuming to tell its readers it has answers to real life's complicated problems. By presenting fantastical obstacles and issues with heroes who overcome them with human characteristics and a little supernatural assistance, the genre refrains from condescending to an intelligent readership aware that our world is "increasingly complex and its difficulties

relatively immune to the mere application of intelligence" (Molson, 85). The fantastical nature of the genre allows it to allegorically provide solutions to problems we all face without espousing those solutions as refutable "truths." The genre of fantasy allows authors to show good and evil—and the shades of gray in between—in different, inventive, and engaging ways, rather than attempting to solve the often unsolvable problems presented in reality. The decisions of these stories' young heroes can have world-changing consequences; by demonstrating "that choosing between right and wrong and accepting the consequences of that choice are marks of maturity," (Molson, 86), these books imply that their readers' decisions are also important. In a world where young people are being faced with adult decisions earlier and earlier, a genre that broaches serious themes and allegorical elements in a straightforward way—while remaining engaging and potentially escapist in nature—is important.

The hero faces problems with a realistic, psychologically accurate attitude, often suffering on her path, but the device of the "other world" setting of many of these fantasies allows for creative optimism in the story's conclusion, an often necessary assurance for an adolescent reader. This element of setting is crucial to the lasting value of the genre. Besides often being inherently adventurous and interesting because of its simple foreignness, the "other world" setting serves three important functions: it serves to reduce the banality and over-familiarity a more traditional, modern setting might evoke; it polarizes and highlights the important elements of the story because they can often be more easily recognizable in a foreign world than in our own; and it allows for creative alteration that enables the author to contrive an ending that is possibly more satisfying because of its scope, depth, or simple levity. Evil, for example, is often more easily characterized in fantasy because of the surrealistic freedom the genre may create; demonstrating evil in a more clearly vivified form through the medium of

fantasy does not reduce its substance, only changes its form to be more recognizable or possibly more overtly frightening than its counterpart in reality. Through fantasy, however, even a more frightening evil can still be contained within the world and still be conquered, bringing about that which Tolkien termed the "eucatastrophe," (153), the happy ending necessary to a good fantasy that, while not denying the possibility for failure, reinforces an optimistic outlook by letting us glimpse the possibility for "Joy beyond the walls of the world" (Tolkien, 153).

Many modern readers (especially very young readers), while willing to experience classics and enjoy them on their own terms, still seek books that speak to the present culture with familiar language or themes. Additionally, not all "classics" of fantasy, many even written in the twentieth century, can be taken directly as written. Jane Yolen points out that many beloved fantasy authors of the past century have written books that involve racist, misogynist, or other offensive themes that must be taken with a grain of salt in today's culture.[8] "Fantasy tales are as much *of* their time as *beyond* it" (328) Yolen writes, though this sentiment may apply in both the positive and negative senses. Tomashevsky points out that even if works have themes that speak to humanity in general, those "human interests must be developed through some kind of specific material, and if that material is not relevant to reality, the formulation of the problem may prove 'uninteresting'," though he specifies, saying, "Reality in literature need not be thought of as the representation of *contemporary* conditions" (64, emphasis mine). Tamora Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* quartet was written in the early 1980s and though it is set in a fictitious medieval world, it is full of modern dialogue and character motivations more suited to girls in the 1980s questioning gender roles in America. However, her tone and characters remain consistent and clear; Pierce follows the rules she set out in her world: there have been female heroes before, and

[8] Yolen's vivid examples include Roald Dahl (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*: racism with the Oompa Loompas), Richard Adams (*Watership Down*: narrowly defined gender roles), E. Nesbit (anti-Semitism and racism).

there can be again. A fantasy may, "At best … lead us to a further recognition that these surface impossibilities constitute a necessary strategy for approaching some profound and intense reality. For such worlds, 'the impossible' may be little more than a surface structure; the works themselves concern things that could not be more real" (Wolfe, 234). Fantasy stories and their authors must be able to speak to its readers' current concerns—either as openly as in Pierce's or Philip Pullman's books, or as subtly as in Robin McKinley's—as well as be able to tell a compelling tale. The staying power "universal" thematic elements grant a story are still dependent on the audience's ability to tangibly grasp them.

Crucial to this end are the story's language, style, tone, and, possibly more than any other element, its characters. Dimensional, realistic, and motivated characters are necessary in today's fantasy, as much as in any other fiction. Literature is born of a time and culture and twentieth and twenty-first century fantasy is inevitably a product of those cultures, not of the twelfth century in which it may be set fictitiously. Le Guin reminds us of this in her essay, "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," where she distinguishes between good fantasy and that which merely claims to be a part of the genre. Modern writers cannot write ancient epics any more than Homer could write a modern novel. This is not to say that a modern author *cannot* write in the style of a given work or tradition, but to that author falls the responsibility of being consistent with that tone and style, as well as mindful of his or her present-day audience. "Consider: Did Henry the Fifth of England really talk like Shakespeare's Henry? Did the real Achilles use hexameters? Would the real Beowulf please stand up and alliterate? We are not discussing history, but heroic fantasy. We are discussing a modern *descendant* of the epic" ("Elfland to Poughkeepsie" 152, emphasis mine); a descendant, not a facsimile. Consistent, creative, and artistic style and language, to Le Guin, are essential to world-creation and character development in the genre: "Many readers,

many critics, and most editors speak of style as if it were an ingredient of a book, like the sugar in a cake, or something added onto the book, like the frosting on the cake. The style, of course, *is* the book. If you remove the cake, all you have left is a recipe. If you remove the style, all you have left is a synopsis of the plot" ("Elfland to Poughkeepsie" 154). The style of the books I will discuss has played a tremendous role in their reception and remains a part of their staying power. Young adult fantasy must both be mimetic and marvelous, holding a mirror to present-day society while it imagines the impossible. It must be consistent, realistic—either clearly or allegorically—and linguistically believable. While these same guidelines may apply to any other genre for it to be successful with readers, they are indispensable to fantasy. Ultimately, fantasy deals "with simple or fundamental things, untouched by Fantasy, but these simplicities are made all the more luminous by their setting" (Tolkien, 147).

Fantasy is defined by what is included in the genre in the modern sense and also in the tradition of fantastic and imaginative literature throughout the ages. Critic Brian Attebery defines fantasy, the mode—as opposed to the genre or formula—as

> a sophisticated mode of storytelling characterized by stylistic playfulness, self-reflexiveness, and a subversive treatment of established orders of society and thought. Arguably the major fictional mode of the late twentieth century, it draws upon contemporary ideas about sign systems and the interdeterminacy of meaning and at the same time recaptures the vitality and freedom of nonmimetic traditional forms such as the epic, folktale, romance, and myth. (293-4)

He defines the "fantastic mode" as "a vast subject, taking in all literary manifestations of the imagination's ability to soar above the merely possible" (294), citing Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* as falling under the same mode.[9] Looking beyond the simple "formula" or "genre" of what is considered modern fantasy by examining this wider mode links modern fantasy with a wide, respected, and ancient tradition of

[9] Attebery is adapting and expanding upon Frye's definition of "mode" in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) (295).

literature that informs and influences new works in the genre, as well as authors entering the tradition themselves.

There is a very tangible sense of the tradition in fantasy, partly because in the attempt to simply define the genre it may be necessary to give examples, and many times those examples are themselves rooted in other examples, tracing a path back through the tradition likely reaching to Homer. Robin McKinley cites an influence by J. R. R. Tolkien, who was in turn influenced by George MacDonald and English and Norse epics; George MacDonald drew influence from Romantic German fairy tales, the roots of which lay in common myths and tales… and so on.[10] Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy draws directly from many sources in the British fantasy tradition, from Milton's *Paradise Lost* to *The Dark is Rising* sequence by Susan Cooper. It becomes harder to conclusively trace the paths of influence in fantasy—as difficult as it may be for many other genres. And like other genres, it is impossible for new works of fantasy to be completely liberated from the great works of the past in that tradition. New works of fantasy (by which I mean works of the latter half of the twentieth century and those of this century) can never be *completely* original if they wish to convey any perceivable meaning to our culture at all, but neither can they be a facsimile of a past work. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot points this out, saying, "To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art" (75). There is a tenuous line, then, between a new work being hackneyed and being original in a familiar way in a genre so obliquely defined by recognizable motifs, archetypes, settings, and structures.

The author, according to Eliot, "must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same" (75). In this way many recent authors of fantasy recognize, in their works, their entrance into a specified tradition which they

[10] See Bergmann for more on these influences.

cannot ignore. This self-reflexivity is what Attebery mentions above; it is the author's awareness of the tradition and his or her intentional reference to it within the work, especially prevalent in works set in worlds where that tradition is (like in our own) tangibly present in the forms of epics, ballads, books, or tales told to or about the protagonist. This self-reflexivity manifests in two distinct forms that directly implicate the reader: the first, the characters' familiarity with their culture's famous heroic stories may lead to comparisons between the lives of those fictional heroes and their own (whether similar or laughably incongruous), and the second, in which the protagonist reads (or begs to hear) those same stories with the intention of mentally escaping into them to avoid the dullness or unhappiness prevalent in their own worlds (before they begin their own adventures). The direct implication may not be readily obvious to a young reader, but may lead to identification and sympathy for the protagonist who seems to wonder or imagine in the same way they do.

The theme of the incongruousness between reality and story appears in two distinct ways: the hero, once on their adventure, may wonder if those great heroes of legend felt as they do, or the hero, having completed their quest or a part of it may hear a story about themselves and marvel at its embellishment and incongruence from the "reality" we see in the novel itself. The fiction claims to give us the reality of what is happening—complete with apprehension, discomfort, and even gore—while the stories the folk in the world will tell after the event will differ, in the bardic or romantic tradition, from what we as readers have "witnessed." To this effect, Alanna, of the *Song of the Lioness* quartet, and Aerin, of *The Hero and the Crown*, wonder if history will recall the negatives as well as the positives of their adventures. When Alanna is knighted and revealed as a woman, she is met with criticism and ridicule from many,

but in the years to come, her story seems to take on an unrealistic angle of embellishment.[11] By Harry's time, in *The Blue Sword*, the stories of Lady Aerin, Dragon-Killer, abound; Harry wonders, feeling unsure of herself, if the great Lady Aerin felt similar insecurity. Yet in *The Hero and the Crown*, we see those insecurities for ourselves, knowing they will be lost to history. Aerin herself wonders, half-heartedly, if her deeds will be remembered, and is ridiculed when she hears a song has actually been composed about her.[12] This not only implies that readers should take tales told to them with a grain of salt—reminding them that the novels they are reading are, in fact, fictions—but also reminds them that these heroes are still ultimately human, with all of the insecurities, imperfections, and self-doubt we all possess. The further reassuring implication is that all ordinary human beings have the potential to become heroes, regardless of any superficial imperfections.

The second way in which the theme of self-reflexivity is used is that the protagonist herself may, like the readers of the story, be reading as a method of escape from less than enjoyable present circumstances. As a result, they may be surprised when they are called to adventure and when their actual adventures deviate from those they have read about. Especially in the case of the reluctant hero, the reactions she has during her adventure may stem largely from doing what she has read about; she may also not be surprised at what she has encountered because she has become familiar with the possibility through reading. These books often include a subtle comment about the importance of first-hand experience versus a dependence on life lived second-hand through books, an inherent danger to a reader of fantasy more willing to escape into a different world than face their own. Each of the heroes whose adventures include

[11] In the later series by Tamora Pierce set in Tortall, many characters regard the famous Lioness, Alanna, as a legend rather than as a real person, even though she is still alive.
[12] Aerin's bitter, elder cousin Galanna remarks, "How charming…to think—we are living with a legend. Do you suppose that anyone will make up songs about any of the rest of us, at least while we are alive to enjoy them?" (97)

this theme are, by the end of their heroic quest, more readily capable of facing their old lives—or have even gained newer and better ones—simply because of their challenging exposure to a world outside of the realm of their own childhood experiences.

This is the case for Harry and Lirael, both of whom grow up relatively alone. In *The Blue Sword*, Harry's days are "empty of purpose" (*Sword*, 2) at the garrison, and to the outside observer, she has all she could want—servants, little luxuries, doting guardians—and yet still she is restless. Harry blames that feeling of vague restlessness on her love of reading adventure novels as a young girl—she assumes they gave her grandiose ideas (*Sword*, 8). Her mother had been the one to introduce Harry to books, and Harry recalls learning "to love books, particularly adventure novels where the hero rode a beautiful horse and ran all the villains through with his silver sword," and yet, "her embroidery was never passable" (*Sword*, 5). This not only implicates the reader herself—who, in reading *The Blue Sword* is reading an adventure novel—but also makes a historically appropriate comment about the tension between female readership versus action, about the power of fiction to give women ideas that may inspire them to deviate from the expected role of women in their society. Books have shown Harry of the possibilities that exist beyond her ken in the same way *The Blue Sword* itself shows its readers the imagined possibilities of a different world and the inherent heroism in any young woman with determination and compassion. Lirael, in *Lirael*, also retreats to the safety of books as companions rather than other people, but it is through that reading—and the curiosity of exploration it provokes—that leads her to find the very family she desperately desires.

This self-reflexivity also manifests in these books as allusions or parodies to the history and roots of the hero story as a genre and tradition. This serves the purpose of teaching the reader, in a sense, about the tradition of the hero story, if the reader is unaware of the tradition; if

the reader is aware, it enhances the text and provides contextual and historical depth to the world of the story. Alanna is obsessed with earning her place among the stories of brave heroes and knights, to be heralded as a hero in story and song by bards and minstrels around her kingdom. The title of the books—"Song of the Lioness"—is an allusion to the history of the epic and hero story as recited or sung in the days before the ready availability of books, a fact of which young readers in the present day may not be aware. In the sense of parody, many of the works feature tension-relieving jokes made by characters, wondering aloud if their deeds—as awkward, botched, imperfect, or painful as they may be—will be remembered in eternity. To teenage readers who may be encountering *Beowulf* or *The Iliad* in their school courses for the first time, that comic reassurance in books with protagonists that remind them of themselves puts the heroic tradition into a more digestible perspective.

Another way in which the tradition may be prevalent in modern fantasy is by a more direct allusion. Garth Nix's Abhorsen trilogy (*Sabriel*, *Lirael*, and *Abhorsen*) thematically confront the divide between magic and logic, between the supernatural and technology. He alludes subtly to Shakespeare several times: Abhorsen, the title of Sabriel's office (the banisher of the Dead), is an allusion to the character "Abhorson," in *Measure for Measure*, who is an executioner. Touchstone, Sabriel's love interest, cannot remember his name and is dubbed "Touchstone" which he himself acknowledges, embarrassedly, is a fool's name; the character Touchstone in *As You Like It* is a court jester. In *Lirael*, Sameth, Sabriel's solitary and brooding teenage son, is unhappily forced to play the "Bird of Dawning" at the midwinter festival—a reference to *Hamlet*.[13] The character of Sameth is also very like that of Hamlet himself. The allusions, both directly and thematically, might not be lost on readers Sameth or Lirael's age

[13] "Some say that ever, 'gainst that season comes / Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated, / The bird of dawning singeth all night long" (*Hamlet*, I.i.181-3).

(sixteen and eighteen respectively) who might be experiencing Shakespeare in the course of their own real life educations. Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (*The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*) directly addresses John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (and also indirectly alludes to many other more modern works of British fantasy). Pullman does not adapt, update, or attempt to copy *Paradise Lost*, however; he only loosely ties his books to Milton's epic, creating his own completely vivid and separate set of worlds, characters, and problems with historical influences of the Enlightenment, Scientific Revolution, and the rise of modernism. It is not necessary for a young reader to be aware of the allusions to enjoy the books on their own merit but they enable a richer depth to those aware of Pullman's link to the English literary tradition.

Chapter II

Hero Theory and the Female Hero Story: An Overview

As previously stated, Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, discusses the heroic monomyth—the universally applicable mythic formula described as a cycle—by examining mythology and heroic stories from every culture (including *The Odyssey*, the *Poetic Edda*, the *Upanishads*, European fairy tales, and others). Also as discussed earlier, the hero story has a similar structure to the coming-of-age story, a rite of passage. Campbell likens the heroic cycle to the formula Van Gennep describes in *The Rites of Passage*, saying, "The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation—initiation—return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (Campbell, 30). Campbell's theory is the framework that makes up every hero story, ultimately, whether as vaguely as the "separation—initiation—return" formula or with many more complexities. Kathleen Noble expands upon Campbell's theory in her book, *The Sound of the Silver Horn*, but specifically applies the theory to real twentieth century women, further demonstrating the theory's potential for universal application.

The monomyth is comprised of roughly nine parts, though naturally there are variations among the many different heroic myths and stories. Sometimes the stories begin at the beginning, with the hero's period of stasis, of waiting for the call to adventure to begin the heroic quest. Some also start *in medias res*, in the middle of the quest, and the narrative circles back to explain how the hero came to be in his or her present situation before continuing. Regardless of where the story opens, the cycle of the hero is still the same. It begins with a period of stasis, where the hero is in his or her home world, or World Navel—a place not necessarily where the

hero was born or where the hero is from, but a place familiar to the hero, where he or she is comfortable. From there the hero is called to adventure in any number of ways, leaving the home world and embarking on their quest. The hero must cross the threshold of adventure, literally passing from the world of familiarity to the world of the unknown, the Underworld, the world of adventure, in which the hero will be tested, undergoing his or her period of initiation. During this period of initiation the hero is often helped through these tests until he or she reaches their transformation. Having achieved the transformation, the hero leaves the Underworld, returning once again to the home world, where he or she brings their Elixir—the object, abilities, or inner qualities gained because of their transformation—for the ultimate goal of rescuing or aiding the home world, once again returning it to stasis.

Noble's theory adds an additional layer of complexity to Campbell's cycle. The period of initiation, of being tested, is, as Van Gennep notes, universal. The tests the hero undergoes, however, can be more than the archetypal physical tests we imagine—such as the knight slaying the dragon—but also confrontations that test the hero's wit, courage, and resolve. They also test the hero psychologically, challenging her self-concept as part of her path to transformation. Noble refers specifically to six tests, six metaphorical "dragons of initiation" the hero must face on her path to transformation: the self, depression, passivity, prejudice, overextension of self or resources, and coping with loss and accepting mortality. These tests are intrinsic to all heroes, but often are used in modern, psychologically-driven hero stories the stead of the prototypical dragon-slaying tests of heroic legend. Not all women—or, certainly, men—can slay a dragon, but all heroes and readers must come to terms with our inner dragons as part of the rites of passage evident in our own lives.

Call to Adventure

The call to adventure, or the "call to awaken," as Noble refers to it, can occur in three different ways—or a combination of one or more of these ways—though all serve the same purpose. The first way is through the hero's conscious choice to embark upon an adventure. In this scenario, the hero is typically restless. She may be able to perceive the period of stasis—the calm before the beginning of an adventure—or she may be growing bored of her World Navel, eager to begin a quest to prove to herself, and to others, that she is capable of her abilities, whatever they may be. Alanna is almost afraid of what is to come in the ritualized life laid out for her—marriage and noblewomen's activities—and is eager to prove to others she is capable of becoming a knight. Alanna actively shapes her situation to fit her ends, taking control of her adventure from the very beginning. But such an adventure is a sharp change for Alanna, and even she has reservations about her decision, not unlike her counterparts for whom the call is involuntary or accidental in nature. As Noble says, "No one undertakes the challenge of awakening with ease, even those to whom change comes without great resistance. No matter what form her call takes and no matter ho much she needs to leave her old life behind, the fledgling hero is always reluctant to respond" (40). In choosing to embark on a quest of her own choosing, Alanna accepts the risks—both known and unknown—and plunges into adventure.

As opposed to this voluntary call to adventure, the forced call to adventure does not allow the hero the choice of whether or not to embark, only allowing her to accept or reject her adventure *after* she has begun it. Typically the hero may have dreamed or imagined the possibility for adventure, but due to her society's limitations or her own lack of confidence, would never undertake beginning her own adventure. The forced call involves the hero being called to adventure by a third party, either without the hero's permission, or her knowledge,

forcibly starting her along her adventure. In *The Blue Sword*, Harry's call to adventure is forced, by way of a kidnapping. Corlath steals her away from the Residency in the night and by the time she is cognizant of her circumstances, she is far enough away from the Residency that going back would be impossible alone. She is already on her adventure, and cannot turn aside and must accept her call to adventure and brave the circumstances. Because her call was forced, Harry's acceptance of her call is more important than Alanna's; where Alanna perceived her adventure beginning from the moment she set upon it, Harry must accept her adventure as she has been thrust into it by making the best of her difficult circumstance, or fail her quest prematurely. But the hero, Noble says, "must choose to perceive herself as someone who is invited to set forth upon a remarkable journey of growth and transformation, and not as a victim of circumstances beyond her control" (59). Even if destiny and fate seem to be forcing the hero along a path against her wishes, she must choose to accept what comes and face it with every fiber of her being, showing her heroic potential for the quest to come in the simple act of accepting her call.

A last type of call is the accidental call to adventure, which can take many different forms, and often combines with one of the other call types to give the hero an ultimatum. In this call, the hero's destiny, or seeming coincidence, conspires to begin the quest for the hero; unlike the forced call to adventure, the hero still must make the decision to embark, but she can refuse to leave the comfort of her World Navel, regardless of how pulling and dire the circumstance. Usually this involves an inciting incident of sorts that disrupts the hero's world of stasis, forcing the hero to choose to embark on her quest, or to remain in her comfortable world with the consequences. Sabriel is given a choice, albeit an obvious one, in her summons to adventure. She can choose to accept the message her father sends her and leave to rescue him, or she may go back to bed and ignore what happened. While this does seem like a small and hardly likable

choice, Sabriel has it, as opposed to Harry, who is already miles of desert away from the comfort of her bed by the time she may accept her quest.

The hero's call to adventure performs a vital function in the journey of the hero's quest, proving her capacity to take an active role in her own heroic journey from the start. The female hero, "Unlike those classical heroines who lay suspended in sleep until a prince aroused them from their spell…must wake herself up. To do this, she must draw upon her innermost reserves of strength, courage, hope, and resolve" (Noble, 60). For the female hero to be heroic, she must take an *active* role in her own adventure, by setting her own course or adjusting her outlook to make the course set for her undeniably her own. The call to adventure sets her on the path that will begin her adventure; regardless of how the call comes, she must face it and accept it for what even she might not yet recognize it to be—the first step toward transformation.

Threshold Crossing

A necessary step along the heroic path is the crossing of the threshold, between the normal world, or World Navel, and the Underworld. This crossing can be a physical crossing of geographical boundaries, a movement between worlds or parts of worlds, or simply a shift from the comfort of one's home to a foreign place. The characteristics of all of the World Navels of the heroes are often consistent; they are the place where the hero was either raised (though not necessarily born), or at least where the hero is surrounded by comfort and familiarity. Harry, a Homelander, is still at home among the familiar comforts and social stressors of her old life at the garrison on the edge of the Damarian desert. It is a world of dinner parties and dances, fine silverware, and expectations of a certain social order, one with which Harry is reluctantly familiar. Alanna's home, Fief Trebond, is filled with similar social expectations, exactly what she wishes to escape by leaving—and by disguising herself as a boy. Sabriel's Ancelstierre is not

her home by birth, but she has grown to love her life and friends in Ancelstierre. She is fluent in its customs and intricacies, making her travel into the foreign Old Kingdom all the more unknown and perilous. Aerin's palace, in Damar, is the only world she has ever known, even though it has presented her with its own dangers over the years. Lyra, too, knows the ins-and-outs of Jordan College better than most of the adults, seeing with a child's careless eye all of the comforting detail that allows her to settle into a carefree routine. Each of these hero's home worlds have thus far provided her with knowledge and training suitable enough for her to pass into her Underworld with enough preparation to face the unknown.

In order to cross into the Underworld, the new world of her adventure, filled with the unknown of experiences yet to be had, the hero must cross an emotional, and sometimes physical, threshold. It can be as simple as moving from a familiar place to a strange place, as in Lyra's move to live with Mrs. Coulter, which opens her eyes to a different side of the world she has already known, or in Alanna's move from quiet Fief Trebond to the bustling capital city of Corus. The move changes location and moves the hero from a relatively simple world she has already mastered to a world of complexities she must unravel to overcome. Conversely, moving from the home world to the Underworld can literally be a crossing between worlds, as in Sabriel's case. Sabriel must pass from Ancelstierre into the Old Kingdom through a magical Wall, constructed hundreds of years before to protect Ancelstierre from the mysterious magic of the Old Kingdom. The rules of space and magic are very different on the other side of the Wall, shifting the seasons, time of day, and weather for Sabriel in a single, shocking step. As Sabriel sees it: "It was clear and cool on the Ancelstierre side, and the sun was shining—but Sabriel could see snow falling steadily behind the Wall, and snow-heavy clouds clustered right up to the Wall, where they suddenly stopped, as if some mighty weather-knife had simply sheared through

the sky" (*Sabriel*, 32). This dramatic shift in worlds underlines both the change in worlds and the rules that govern those worlds that each of these characters must face, sometimes more visually obvious than for others. Harry is kidnapped and taken across the vast and seemingly insurmountable Damarian desert, beyond which her own, imperialistic Homelander people have never ventured. Lyra faces this sort of threshold as she leaves one part of her adventure to embark upon another—crossing from the world of her birth into that of Cittàgazze, stepping across a bridge between the worlds in the sky, the first of many world-crossings for the intrepid Lyra. In each case, the physical movement from one place to another is mirrored by an emotional movement, from a place of comfort to a place of unknown adventure.

It is also not enough for the reader to recognize the shift in setting or the change in challenge; the hero must notice and accept this new challenge as well. If Alanna believed, truly believed, that the capital city and the king's palace were the same as Fief Trebond, she would never have been mentally prepared for her rude welcome into the life of the palace pages. Sabriel accepts and prepares herself for the stark differences between Ancelstierre and the Old Kingdom, rather than stumbling blindly into the snow, she has anticipated the dangers that await her, both with the gear she carries and with her heightened sense of anticipated danger. Harry does not try to argue, coerce, or fight her way back to the garrison, in the way one of her Homelander peers might have, but rather toughens herself to the challenge of speaking an entirely new language and adjusting to the desert culture of the Hillfolk with perseverance and grace. The Underworld, the realm of mystery, is also a realm of similarity and parallelism, enough to enable the hero to employ the knowledge she gained before embarking on her adventure, and allowing her to then be able to employ her new knowledge upon her return. If the Underworld were a place where the very laws of existence were different from the hero's World Navel, her Elixir and Return would

have little impact. Her Underworld must be foreign and different enough from her comforting home world to test her with new challenges, but similar enough for the skills she already has, and those she will gain, to be employable in both worlds.

Crossing the threshold can be a harrowing experience when it is so vivid, but for some heroes, smaller guided crossings have helped the heroes become acclimated to the idea of traveling into the unknown before they actually make the crossing themselves. Harry faced change and movement for weeks before Corlath's kidnapping of her; after her father's funeral back in her Homeland, she was put on a ship for the long journey to Daria to meet her brother Richard. She had to grow accustomed to the differences between the green and forested Homeland and the desert culture of Daria before being exposed to the even more foreign culture of the Hillfolk. Similarly, Sabriel had been taught how to brave the perils of Death by her father for years before her father's disappearance made it necessary for her to strike out alone. Her confidence in her successes at her father's side give Sabriel heart when her plans go awry not far into her journey into the Old Kingdom. The experiences both heroes had before even embarking help both recall that once, before this test, they had been tested by new and different experiences, and they survived those tests. Lyra recalls her many adventures among the street children of Oxford and uses them to give her heart as she faces the henchmen of the Oblation Board, Specters, and worse. Putting their new tests in terms of what they have experienced even before they left their world of comfort helps give each hero more confidence and courage to continue facing the challenges ahead.

Another aspect of the crossing of the threshold is the hero's view of the world of adventure she is about to enter. There are two very clear ways these heroes seem to approach their impending adventures: they either see themselves confidently capable of using their skills

to overcome any obstacle, or they are timid and unsure of themselves, or may not even realize what skills they possess to begin with and as a result hope somehow they will be able to think of a way to survive it. Usually there is a combination of both confidence and trepidation. Sabriel confidently enters the Old Kingdom, recalling her reading of *The Book of the Dead* and her father's years of tutelage on dealings with the denizens of Death, knowing she possesses the skills to deal with whatever she may encounter. Alanna, at each beginning stage of her adventures, knows she has the skills to deal with the unknown; as a child her confidence stems from her fighting ability compared to her timid brother's, and as a teenager, her confidence comes from her lessons and the friendships she has garnered. Aerin, however, is incredibly reluctant to think of herself as what she is—the First Sol, the highest-born lady—let alone as hero material, and embarking upon her quest is much more difficult, even though she chooses to embark on her own terms. Aerin approaches her adventure with a scientific practicality, having methodically prepared and tested her dragon-killing techniques behind the closed doors of the palace, giving her confidence—if only academic confidence. Harry is also reluctant to realize her own potential, hardly able to imagine herself a damalur-sol.[14] As each hero beings her period of initiation, her preconceived notions of her adventures and their preparedness for them will be tested along with her mental, physical, and emotional capacities.

Initiation

Once the hero has crossed the threshold of adventure and has arrived in the Underworld, she enters the period of initiation, where she will be faced with tests, which will ultimately trigger her transformation. "The purpose of initiation is to release those capacities and hidden strengths by presenting a series of formidable obstacles," according to Noble. "These obstacles

[14] "Lady Hero" in the Hill-tongue. *The Blue Sword*, 112.

or ‘dragons’ invariably seem insurmountable, but they must be overcome if the quester is to realize her authentic potential” (Noble, 63-64). For Campbell, while these tests are often psychological or symbolic in nature, they are often rooted in the physical: a physical test often has a psychological or symbolic significance. Yet for the coming-of-age hero story, especially for female heroes, the psychological and emotional aspects of physical and non-physical tests are often the most important. Some of the hero’s tests may also be psychological in and of themselves, testing the hero’s resolve and determination without any actual physical violence or threat. Noble divides the initiation of the hero into tests of an emotional, psychological nature, referring to these tests as the Dragons of Initiation. She discusses six crucial emotional tests during the hero’s initiation: the self, depression, passivity, prejudice, over-extension of oneself, and the reality of loss and mortality. By conquering these tests, the female hero matures emotionally, an especially crucial part of the coming-of-age hero story, and may transform and grow, facing her final climactic test with a new, more mature perspective.

First Dragon: The Self

The first of these “dragons,” the self, is a dragon every hero—and every reader—faces at one point or another. The hero must face herself, examine her characteristics, abilities, and innermost weaknesses, and confront them with maturity if she hopes to move past them. This often means confronting character traits that are undesirable or facing fears, anxieties, or misgivings about her ability to go through with her adventure. As Noble explains, “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 be indeed ferocious, but the quester must move forward even when she wants only to cling to the past” (Noble, 63-64).

Facing external foes and fears are not quite the same as facing internal ones, as Alanna learns repeatedly through her adventure. For most of her adolescence, Alanna is terrified of her magic, of something that is as intrinsically a part of her as her hair color or stubbornness. Learning to accept that her magic is an extension of her, as useable and as dangerous as a sword—but as controllable—is a mental battle she struggles with for years. Overcoming that fear by fighting a witch woman in *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man* is the only way she is able to realize how far she has come in learning how to control both herself and her magic. She recognizes this and remarks to Coram, her man-at-arms:

> Have you ever noticed that 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….I 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. (*Woman*, 226)

Learning this lesson is crucial, because it marks the acceptance of one facet of Alanna's self. It brings her a step closer to accepting the *whole* of herself, as both a lady and a knight. The hero must be willing to face her self and her adventure with an open mind—or a steadily opening mind—otherwise she will not be able to make the necessary change required for her transformation.

Second Dragon: Depression

Each hero faces a low point on her adventure, a point of despair brought on by failure, embarrassment, or by reaching a barrier to completing her quest. These points of despair are especially difficult for the hero to combat because it is an intrinsically internal dragon she must face. A consistent stimulus for this depression for each of the heroes is loneliness. In order to overcome this dragon, the hero must face her troubles and sadness; she must recognize that loneliness or depression and master it in order to overcome it and help her on her path to

transformation. For the hero to conquer this dragon, “she must affirm the meaning and purposefulness of her life even when she is experiencing only emptiness and pain” (Noble, 67). This either requires the hero to call on reserves of self-confidence and reaffirm her goals and ambitions or to be bolstered by her allies.

Alanna attempts to give up her quest multiple times, initially as a page when she discovers that her chosen career is much harder than she first expected, and much later, when she fears gossip and others’ opinions of her actions. Each time she complains, and sits retrospectively to think over her options, and each time she finds reassurance and confidence from her own determination and the friendship of her allies. Often, allies can be crucial in giving the hero that much-needed boost of confidence to allow her to conquer this dragon. Lyra bravely steps forward to lie to the Harpies in the world of the Dead—and fails. Will helps her escape and Lyra, wracked with sobs, moans, “Will—I can’t do it anymore—I can’t do it! I can’t tell lies! I thought it was so easy—but it didn’t work—it’s all I can do and it doesn’t work!” Will firmly reassures her, “It’s *not* all you can do” (*Compass*, 263) and reminds her of their quest. Will’s intervention—like Coram’s with Alanna—reminds Lyra to focus on the positives and the importance of their quest rather than letting her dwell on the negatives. The hero must also understand that true heroes cannot succeed alone. Alanna desperately seeks to be alone, adventuring, careless of others’ needs or opinions, but cannot shake her loyal companions. Harry too finds when she most wants to be alone, she instead finds herself surrounded by her friends: Narknon, Terim, and Senay.

Lirael, of all of the heroes, is the most completely alone. While the other heroes are surrounded by friends—and enemies—from the start, Lirael has only herself and her distant relatives, none of whom pay her much attention. She feels so alienated and lonely, she decides,

on her fourteenth birthday, that she will commit suicide. She is the only hero of those I have discussed whose *only* motivation for death is her own depression and feelings of worthlessness. When Aerin wishes for death, it is because she considers death a blissful release from her physical pain; Alanna would gladly die chivalrously to protect her Prince. Fate intervenes with Lirael, putting her forcibly into a path that, while it does not completely satisfy her, keeps her intrigued and distracted enough not to think about suicide again.

Aerin deals dearly with this dragon—literally. Aerin faces Maur, the enormous Black Dragon of myth with little more than her spears, horse Talat, flame-resistant salve kenet, and her determination. The shape of her quest mirrors the shape discussed by Frye in "The Mythos of Summer: Romance," when he says:

> If the leviathan is death, and the hero has to enter the body of death, the hero has to die, and if his quest is completed the final stage of it is, cyclically, rebirth, and, dialectically, resurrection. …. There are thus not three but four distinguishable aspects to the quest-myth. First the *agon* or conflict itself. Second, the *pathos* or death, often the mutual death of hero and monster. Third, the disappearance of the hero, a theme which often takes the form of *sparagmos* or tearing to pieces…. Fourth, the reappearance and recognition of the hero. (113-14)

Aerin kills Maur but in the process burns much of her body, head, and face, breaks several bones, and suffers severely weakened lungs from inhaled fire. Disheartened at the prospect of being permanently disfigured, she realizes, "It took strength to deal with people, strength to acknowledge herself as first sol, strength to be the public figure she could not help being; and she has no strength to give. She tried to tell herself that her hurts were honorably won; even that she should be proud of them, that she had successfully done something heroic; but it did no good. Her instinct was to hide" (116). In returning to Damar she faces the hero's return she has honorably won but she knows she is dying: her lung ailment weakens her and the taunting mad words of Maur's skull, prominently displayed on the wall of the palace's banquet chamber, remind her of all of her old insecurities, forcing her to consider if it was her own alien nature that

enabled her to slay him. The only way for Aerin to recover from the bitterness of this low point in her adventure is to seek healing—both physically and mentally—from Luthe. It is through his help, answers, reassurance, and wry humor that she comes to bring herself away from the despair and loneliness she has felt her whole life and face the rest of her adventure, and life, with determination and resolve.

Third Dragon: Passivity

The dragon of passivity is one that affects every hero who must choose to accept the call to adventure and face his or her tests squarely. Yet it especially affects the female hero often specifically because of her gender. "The third dragon speaks through the voice of every culture that tells women to stay home, be quiet, and be good" (Noble, 72). Conquering this dragon requires the female hero to overcome the risk of falling into the feminine status quo, of passivity and domesticity. Most of these female heroes' societies are ones in which female warriors are unusual; overcoming the pressure of society to exert power through more "conventional" channels is something many of the heroes face. She must not wait for a solution to be presented or to present itself, but seek that solution without fear of appearing to break stereotypes or please others. It is a dragon readers may experience clearly in their own lives and the strength with which these heroes face this dragon offer real inspiration.

However, the act of voluntarily embarking on a heroic quest in many of these societies itself is difficult. "If a woman learns…that her achievement is avocational or secondary to men's, it should come as no surprise if she feels confused, ambivalent, or insecure about developing or utilizing her potential" (Noble, 73). Alanna faces this dragon repeatedly; she often compares herself to other court ladies and is jealous of their grace, beauty, and poise, despite the fact that she has always wanted to be a warrior. That jealousy is compounded by other characters'

criticism and pressure for Alanna to conform to an expected role. Even Jonathan, when he proposes marriage to Alanna, pressures her into accepting that "the duty of any noble wife is to give her husband an heir" (*Woman*, 145). The strength and resolve she gains as a result of being tested by this dragon help her gain the confidence and conviction she needs to keep control over that voice for the rest of her life, for, realistically, it does not vanish even after she earns a unique position in the court, as King's Champion and Lady Knight. She still faces gossip and judgment but is now equipped with the self-confidence to remain true to herself despite what others may think.

Fourth Dragon: Prejudice

"A fourth dragon…tells women they cannot have great desires or great possibilities because they are female" (Noble, 79). It is the voice of prejudice, the scornful voice of many societies that do not give credence to the hero for the deeds she wishes to accomplish—or perhaps even those she has already accomplished—because she is a woman. The dragon of prejudice takes other similar forms as well; "Exclusion from the challenge of the heroic quest goes beyond the mere fact of gender," Noble adds. "It is augmented by an array of cultural demons that dismiss women if they do not conform to stereotypical criteria" (79). Aerin, the daughter of the "witchwoman," (*Hero*, 15) is confronted with mistrust and scorn because many believe her mother bewitched her father into her conception, but died because she had borne a daughter instead of a son. Because of the mistrust the Damarian people harbor for Aerin, she is passed over in the succession, and instead her cousin Tor becomes her father's heir—simply because of the prejudice and mistrust of the people.

Alanna, once revealed to be a woman, faces mistrust and disbelief as often as she faces praise. "You are a terrifying creature," Ali Mukhtab tells Alanna when she is among the Bazhir.

"You do not take your 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" (*Woman*, 43). Among the Bazhir, women have very defined social roles very different from those in Alanna's homeland, but the basics—that women must marry and bring honor to their husband's house, that women cannot be warriors or otherwise act as men—remain the same. "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" (Noble, 81). When Alanna decides to train two Bazhir girls in the use of their magic, to become shamans, the tribe's women even turn their backs on the two girls, but they continue learning and soon the women adjust their opinions. "It takes enormous courage to confront this [prejudice] 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" (Noble, 86). Alanna's strength of resolve fortifies the girls' and together they slowly bring around the tribe to understanding that female shamans can be just as powerful and respectable as male shamans.

The hero must realize that society's expectations or preconceived notions about her are something to face both throughout the journey and afterward. Simply because she conquers this dragon once does not 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 judgment that even still test the lessons she has learned on her adventure. "An essential component…is the ability to externalize prejudice and cultural oppression in whatever form they appear, to see these forces as emanating from the larger society rather than as indictments of her own shortcomings" (Noble, 88). Alanna recognizes that she is as good as any male warrior and

seeks to enact change herself. Aerin too realizes that the prejudice she faced as the "Witchwoman's daughter" will always surround her in one form or another, but her actions and the confidence she has gained as a result of them give her the ability to face others without constantly worrying about what the whispers say behind her back.

Fifth Dragon: Overextension of Self or Resources

The fifth dragon is a tendency to take on too much or want to save the entire world, despite the negative consequences that may have for the hero. This is a dragon especially pertinent to a female hero, who is often typed, because of her gender, as one who is supposed to nurture and care for others—to be a maternal presence. Often, it is a saving grace; her compassion and sincere desire to help is what makes her most heroic and memorable. But if she does not take care to protect herself and to be sure of her physical and emotional limitations, she could sacrifice herself—and doom her home world—as a result. Noble says, "A woman must insist upon her right to choose when and how she will respond to the people, institutions, and situations in her life" (93), emphasizing the importance of the hero's agency in determining her own priorities. Rather than be tugged in opposing directions by the many claims on her time and resources, the hero must choose when and how to respond to the crises that arise during her initiation.

Surmounting this dragon requires both an acceptance of limitations and an acknowledgment of priorities. The female hero can potentially save everyone, if she has the time, resources, and allies necessary; she may also have to acknowledge she cannot save everyone and first rescue those in greatest need before rescuing anyone else—or even risk sacrificing others for the greater good. In some cases, she is prevented by one of her allies from sacrificing herself or her energy to save others who are tangential to her ultimate goal. When Sabriel sees children

being used as "bait" to attract dead spirits in the city of Belisaere, she is disgusted and desperately wishes to save them, but Touchstone stops her. "What will it profit these children, and all the others who may come, if you are slain?" he asks (*Sabriel*, 326). She experiences the pain of conflict before acknowledging the necessity of reassessing her priorities. If she can conquer the largest evil, she will win herself the time to later correct these lesser—though no less emotionally painful—evils.

Often the hero learns this lesson through experience. When Harry returns from battling the Northerners, she realizes her old teacher Mathin has taken a serious wound and desperately seeks to heal him, and once she heals him, with Corlath's help, she seeks to heal everyone who was so much as scratched in the battle. But when her artificial strength for healing leaves her, "it took with it the marrow of her bones and the elastic of her muscles," leaving her "feeling as if she had been sick for a year and was now approaching convalescence" (*Sword*, 240). Alanna too overtaxes her resources through healing, realizing too late that "In the excitement of fighting, of keeping control over the crystal sword, of her worry over the tribe's young ones, she had overextended, using more of her Gift than she could afford to give away" (*Woman*, 105). Only because she overtaxes herself several times does Alanna learn how much more valuable it is for her to control her desire to save all she can for the sake of the greater good.

The hero's compassion often extends to a selfless desire to save others from the fate she may see as solely her own, even if the desire is short-lived and impractical. Harry knows of the battles to come by the end of her adventure, and desperately tries to convince first Terim and Senay, then even her faithful pet Narknon and her ally Colonel Dedham of leaving her alone to fight the battle herself. "Harimad-sol, you cannot ask us to give up so easily, after we have come so far," Terim tells Harry (*Sword*, 219). Harry realizes she is not the only one who is honor-

bound to complete the quest she had begun, in her mind, alone. Sabriel too faces doubts over the involvement of her former classmates and peers, her friends, in the defeat of Kerrigor. She questions her right to involve them in something that could potentially take their lives. Touchstone reassures her that their involvement is necessary for the safety of the greater good, for all of Ancelstierre. Yet still, Sabriel regrets: "They're only schoolchildren…for all we always thought we were grown women" (*Sabriel*, 448). She makes the decision for the girls, taking the responsibility for their lives onto herself.

The hero's compassion, one of her most powerful traits, is tested during her initiation as completely as any of her other characteristics. Facing this dragon often requires the help of allies to steady the hero, reassure her that she must remain steady and focused, and continue to offer their support as she approaches her transformation.

Sixth Dragon: Coping with Loss and Accepting Mortality

Accepting loss and death as a part of the natural order, and accepting a certain level of spirituality can be necessary in helping to cope with such loss, is an important step along the path to transformation. For the female heroes in these novels, their youthful skepticism about a reliance on spirituality or the fatal consequences of bad decisions must be overcome by an acceptance of both death's existence and their own eventual human mortality. Accepting that loss and grief never go away entirely and learning to cope with loss by drawing upon inner strength are important lessons to learn on the path of the hero.

Alanna is used to being a knight and hero, but as her cat Faithful warns her, "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" (*Woman*, 91). She also believes all death is a worthless loss until her friend Liam changes her opinion, showing her that dying for a cause can matter. All of these heroes

lose friends and allies during their adventure. Aerin returns to Damar to find the city in a losing battle against the Northerners. Her boon turns the tide, but even so, she finds her father, Arlbeth, wounded and weary. She weeps and he says, "Don't waste it on me; I'm too old and too tired. Save Damar for yourself and for Tor. Save Damar" (*Hero*, 206). And when she tells him, desperately, that she has returned his family's treasure, the Hero's Crown, to Damar, he smiles but does not waken. Still Aerin stands and continues to fight and help all she can, because now Tor is the new king and life must continue. "The hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror" (356) according to Campbell; Aerin mourns but does not neglect her greater duty to Damar, never wavering in her strength of resolve.

Accepting mortality is another aspect of this dragon the hero must face. Knowing all life must naturally come to an end is akin to being able to cope with loss, and this is especially true for the hero herself. But accepting her own fate is linked with the hero's adventure itself, so I will discuss it at length as part of the hero's return in her heroic cycle.

Transformation and the Elixir

The transformation of the hero is the turning point along the hero's cycle; it is the test at the bottom-most section of the hero's round, the nadir, the point of transition between the ordeal of tests and the return to her home world. As Campbell explains, the point of transformation is the point "when he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward…. intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being" (Campbell, 246). The transformation can take many forms, some of which are symbolic, though all lead to the same end for the hero, bringing her to around the mid-point of the cycle, leading her toward the flight and finally, the Return.

Along with the transformation is the elixir, the item or metaphysical trophy the hero earns as a result of the quest which must be returned by the hero to free the home world from danger. The elixir may also have world-redeeming consequences for the Underworld as well. The return of this boon is "the full round, the norm of the monomyth" that must be brought "back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds" (Campbell, 193). The return of the elixir is often necessary to fulfilling the quest objective of the hero, but is also necessary to completing the hero's emotional and psychological quest and transformation.

Aerin had determinately set out to bring back the Hero's Crown; returning with it would do what nothing else—killing Maur included—has done: free Damar from the Northerners. And, perhaps, bringing this treasured boon home would allow her to return and be praised and loved as First Sol, not simply reviled as the witch's daughter. However, when she realizes with horror that though Agsded is gone, she does not have the Hero's Crown at last, she believes she has failed:

> It had nothing to do with her own blood and birthright as her mother's daughter, nothing of personal vengeance; it was the idea of bringing the Crown back to the City, of presenting it to Arlbeth and Tor…. The Crown mattered, and the story of it she might have told: that she had wrested it from him who held it, to bring it back to her City, to lay it before her king. As it was, for all that she had done, she had done nothing. (*Hero*, 81)

But Luthe's aid brings her back to her own familiar territory and with it, the Hero's Crown, the elixir she has earned to bring back to Damar. Alanna, like Aerin, has a need to prove herself to her people by returning home with a boon from legend, the Dominion Jewel. "If I win it and return home bringing the Dominion Jewel for the glory of Tortall," Alanna says to herself, "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 honored vassal who brought a prize to honor his reign" (*Lioness*

Rampant, 29). The actual objects both of these heroes bring with them upon their Return serve as the physical proof of their successfully passed trials. This proof complements the psychological growth the tests have wrought upon the hero to better enable her to finally re-enter her society in the heroic role she has earned by her adventure's conclusion.

The elixir itself, however, is not necessarily a tangible object. The hero can also gain a personal change in the form of an emotional realization that, acting like an elixir, can enable her to help her society through its employment after the hero's Return. This "ultimate boon" is the intimate understanding of the innate qualities the hero possessed all along that her tests have revealed to her; it is the realization of her heroic capacity. It may also be an acceptance of new qualities she has gained from her guides, allies, or experiences themselves on her adventure. Sabriel learned how to function as an Abhorsen by reading *The Book of the Dead* under her father's tutelage as she grew up. She departs on her adventure technically having all of the skills required to face whatever dangers lay ahead. Her adventures prove to her, again and again, that she is innately capable of defeating what must be defeated, so when she returns to Ancelstierre, she brings with her the same basic knowledge with which she left, but with the boon of experience, insight, and confidence.

The price of transforming and winning the elixir can often have negative and painful consequences for the hero; often a sacrifice must be made—by the hero or for the hero—in order for the hero to be able to earn the elixir or to be able to bring it back to her Homeworld successfully. The sacrifice for the female hero can often be the loss of love, or a loved one, forcing her emotions to the limit even as she still faces the prospect of the Return and the final completion of her quest. Lyra faces a terrible realization of sacrifice after freeing the dead: to finally solve the "problem" of Dust, she and Will must close every window between every

world, save one, in order to keep the terrible Specters in check and cease the flow of Dust out of the worlds. Her quest has gained her the insight and experience necessary to know that making a decision that would benefit only her and Will would go against everything she now understands about the world. This is her final test, in a way; only through the agony of having to part from her soulmate can she fully realize her growth and be able to return with her elixir, the knowledge and experience she has gained.

For Aerin, returning with the Hero's Crown means leaving Luthe—the love she has only lately discovered—and returning to the life and the king she left behind. But Aerin has learned patience and a commitment to duty through her adventures, and tells herself that "this [sobbing] would not do. She had the Crown, and she carried an enchanted sword; she was coming home a warrior victorious—a first sol worthy of respect" (*Hero*, 195). Sabriel also loses one she loves in order to be able to bring her own elixir of knowledge back to Ancelstierre: her father. In order to complete the task set before her she must learn her hardest lesson yet, that "Everyone and everything has a time to die" (*Sabriel*, 382).

Flight

Once the hero has decided to bring her Elixir back to her home world, she is often assisted back through the help of others; she must typically race to her home world (or race to save her home world) to confront and defeat a final evil, and may be pursued by malevolent forces. Often along the way to facing that final evil is an obstacle: no easy way to return to the home world, a lesser villain to defeat, or an ally to convince to aid the final cause. This flight can take the form of help from allies or assistance from a supernatural force; while it may also appear as a rescue, for the female hero's particular story, it is critical she take an active part in her own

Return, however minor, to prove herself apart from Noble's "classical heroines" (60). She must want to return, on some level, in the same way she must want to embark on a heroic adventure.

After Sabriel returns to the reservoir from Death with her father, she must race to Ancelstierre to destroy Kerrigor's corporeal form. Her flight to the final confrontation is assisted through the supernatural—through two of her clairvoyant relations, the Clayr. They appear in exactly the right place at the right time to give Sabriel the last piece of information she needs to discover Kerrigor's location, and an enchanted glider to get her there. Aerin's, like Sabriel's, is a race to save her kingdom, bolstered by the quiet companionship of the mysterious yerig and folstza. The City is besieged and her people have fallen under an exhausted despair; Aerin's Elixir—the Hero's Crown—can provide the necessary vivacity to turn the tide of battle.

But Harry's flight is one of determination and shame. She stands up to Corlath, stubbornly insisting that she knows where the Northerners will attack better than he, and then runs away when he disagrees with her. After sneaking from the Hillfolk camp, however, she realizes she is not alone. Her pet Narknon follows, then the young warriors Terim and Senay, her friends and allies. They bolster her confidence in her decision and help her convince others to join them in their fight to save the Homelander Garrison. But an obstacle remains: she must convince the Homelanders to aid her, formerly one of their own, in her final objective.

Lirael's flight is not as direct a path as the other heroes'. At the end of *Abhorsen*, rather than travel back to her home world, she travels to Ancelstierre to stop the rise of Orannis, the Destroyer, who threatens both her own world and Ancelstierre. To do so, she must travel into Death to discover how to defeat the Destroyer and must travel to the very precipice of the Ninth Gate—the deepest, most dangerous part of Death—to look back in time to the Beginning. The Dog helps her along the way by reminding her of dangers and acting as a look out for other Dead

creatures. But before she can return with her knowledge, she must finally confront and defeat Hedge in the Ninth Gate itself. Lirael proves herself against this obstacle and can return, bringing her knowledge and the full experience of her quest to bear to save her world.

Return

The hero must make an active decision to Return to her home world after her initiation and the receipt of her boon. This decision may be as much of a test as any trial she faces during her initiation. If she desired escape from her home world, she might not want to leave her Underworld behind. The hero may therefore choose to reject the Return and dwell in the land of adventure (the Underworld), or in the realm of the gods, without returning her Elixir to her Home world; this is a failure of the hero story but is not necessarily negative for the hero herself. After having all revealed to her in her moment of transformation, it is that achievement of enlightenment that can often make returning to the "normal world" unappealing. To prove her true heroic mettle, however, she must return, accepting the costs to herself in light of the greater good her Elixir will bring.

The inconsistency between the land of adventure and that of the home world might be too much for the hero to accept. She might reject staying in her home world afterward, preferring to return to enlightenment, if she can, or to attempt to find satisfaction elsewhere. She might also accept the difference and reconcile the two worlds, which can often cause suffering but gradually an acceptance that can benefit one or both worlds ultimately because of the bridging nature of the hero's character.

The crossing of the return threshold is often as important an event as the crossing of the threshold into the Underworld in the first place. It is the ultimate vivid proof of the hero's successful quest, apart from her final presentation or proof of her Elixir. It is the hero's first

opportunity to see for herself how much has changed since she departed, and to note the changes in herself. However, this can also present problems for the hero. She must face the inconsistencies between the two worlds with her new experiences acting as a filter, showing her new things she may never have seen before, and often she finds her home world disappointing or undesirable. The undesirable quality of her old world might drive her to return to either the Underworld, or to pass beyond the realm of mortals all together. Or, she may choose to accept the differences between the two worlds and reconcile them, which might cause temporary discomfort, but gradually an acceptance that can benefit one or both of her worlds ultimately. 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.

No hero can fully exist in two worlds at once, and the bridging nature of the hero's character is never completely one that sits comfortably in both worlds forever; her adventure enables her to cross between worlds but ultimately she must choose, as Lyra is forced to choose. For the span of her adventure she crosses freely between many different worlds, but she can only permanently reside in one. The human hero, the most identifiable and familiar kind of hero, must choose which world is truly her new home at the end.

The only type of hero able to freely pass between worlds is the deified hero, who alone has the ability to completely master both worlds at the cost of mortality. The human hero, however, can never truly be a full part of both worlds, and must choose one—though that is not to say traveling between is impossible, but after the transformation might be irreconcilably different, cowardly, or undesirable. Aerin, who becomes "no longer quite mortal" (*Hero*, 146) as

a result of her experiences, gains the ability to seemingly get all of what she wants—a life as Queen in Damar, and another, with the immortal sage Luthe. She achieves the best of both worlds—at the price of her mortality. The burden does not weigh easily on any of the immortal characters in *The Hero and the Crown*, however; Aerin is only capable of ultimately defeating Agsded because of who she is, and what she has become, but will outlive her husband one day. It is not an easy burden for her to live with, but she learns to take pleasure in the present, the details of her life rather than dwell on the future.

Aerin additionally gains wisdom from her inadvertent immortality. At the end of her adventure, she chooses to keep Maur's bloodstone hidden away from the mortals of Damar. If she were to place it in the Hero's Crown, the crown would grant its user invincibility. Luthe cannot believe her choice, seeing her decision as sacrificing all of the good the bloodstone could do if used properly. "You're letting your own experience color our answer," he tells her. "Yes," Aerin replies, "I am letting my own experience color my answer, which is what experience is for" (189). She reflects that even if the object itself is not inherently evil, there is no guarantee its wielder would not put it toward a sinister purpose. Her choice proves the wisdom she has gained through her newfound immortality (*Hero*, 188-90). Bestowing inhuman power upon a human always comes at a cost, as Aerin now understands; she is wise enough to choose to keep that power away from other Damarians rather than risk the negative consequences that may come because of it.

Another aspect of the return is the return to stasis, the resumption of "normal" life after the completion of the hero's quest. The hero's quest forever changes the hero, but it may also change her life path, giving her a different one to lead than the one she might have expected before her adventure. Harry, Alanna, and Aerin complete their adventures with completely new

lives to lead afterward. Harry has found a home at last among the Hillfolk. She is welcomed and loved by the king and his people; even her brother and friend Jack Dedham find peace among them. Alanna has earned the shield of a knight and the entire kingdom's respect. She is King's Champion and has actively made the dream she has always wanted come true, and has even found love, a thing she had never anticipated.

Aerin at last gains the love of the people who had always called her "witchwoman's daughter." When Tor comes to Aerin after the battle, he tells her that he will be crowned king and she admits, "Of course you're king. It's what my—what Arlbeth wanted… it's what the people want as well." But Tor disagrees. "You should be queen. We both know it. You brought the Crown back; you've won the right to wear it so. They can't doubt you now. Arlbeth would agree. You won the war for them" (217). Tor asks her to marry him, "as queen, none of this Honored Wife nonsense" (217) wanting the people to see them as rightful equals, not as the king and his wife. Aerin finally earns what should have been hers by birth, by right, but was not—by proving herself through her hero's quest.

Sometimes, for Sabriel and Lyra, the hero's quest does not alter the path set for the hero, but better prepares her for the road she has been destined to tread all along. Sabriel was born to be the next Abhorsen; she was trained and prepared for it all of her life. In saving the Old Kingdom from Kerrigor, however, she now is prepared to face anything in her life-long career. She has earned the respect of others and has even restored the Old Kingdom's monarchy, saving the kingdom from its fall into anarchy. Her adventure is unusual, for an Abhorsen, but does not change the path she has always been set. Colonel Horyse tells Sabriel, before she crosses the Wall, "You have chosen a difficult path" (56). She replies, quoting, "Does the walker choose the path, or the path the walker?" as *The Book of the Dead* asks on its last page (57). Sabriel is not

sure if she controls her destiny or if her destiny controls her; she knows only her duty, and she will continue to do her duty for the rest of her life. Similarly Lyra's adventure ends with her taking a path not too different from one any girl of her birth might take; she is a young woman now, set to go to school and learn. She had always been reluctant to do so before she ever left Jordan College, but after returning, having seen the world—and worlds—available to her, she is excited to learn. She does not, like Harry, change her fate, but merely accepts, with mature enthusiasm, the future that had been hers from the start.

Freedom to Live

The hero's final test, in a sense, is to decide to continue living, rather than succumbing to the forces at work—to embrace her future and her life and continue to live it. This test can occur at almost any point along the hero's journey, either as part of the hero's initiation, transformation, or even a result of the final conflict involving the hero's Elixir. It is also to some degree an on-going test she must face, similar to the dragons of initiation. The hero must recognize the inevitability of life and death and the impermanence of nature. She must realize that the world will always need saving, because change in inevitable and time inexorably moves forward, and too that she cannot always be the one to save it. These are not only necessary lessons for the hero, but for any youth maturing into adulthood.

This acceptance does most importantly occur after the hero's adventure. At the end of the hero story, once all temporary evils have been completed, the hero must still choose to continue living in their world—or worlds—in order for her hero cycle to complete its round. Her acceptance of this "test," in a way, demonstrates her maturity more than any other test. Her Elixir is proof to her that she can overcome obstacles and the tests she will face for the rest of her life, and to embrace her future is to fully complete her heroic quest. For the hero to choose death over

life—the afterlife over the present difficulties of day to day life—is not unknown; however, for the coming-of-age hero story to truly be successful, the hero must accept life, and the inevitability of maturity. When Sabriel defeats Kerrigor, she slips easily into the current of Death that is naturally on her periphery as Abhorsen, telling herself, "Everyone and everything has a time to die…" (*Sabriel*, 488), but "half a hundred" (489) voices stop her and push her back to life, reminding her that she has the strength to continue living and that she must return, it is her duty. She does have the strength and wades back into life and the destruction all around her, but it is with determination and hope for the future that she returns, embracing life and her future.

The hero's coming-of-age adventure also prepares the hero to experience the further tests adulthood will bring. If the hero were to reject life without having lived beyond youth or adolescence, the hero's coming-of-age story would not be completed. In a way this choice is similar to the hero's choice of whether or not to return after the transformation, a difficult but surmountable choice, not as final as choosing death over life. Although, as Peter Pan's famously said, "To die will be a great adventure," the coming-of-age hero must finish her (or his) adventure completely by choosing to live before she can embark on that final adventure.

PART II

A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF THE FEMALE HERO

I turn now to looking at the texts more closely, not only reading them within the framework of Campbell and Noble's theories, but to examine elements that are both unique to the individual books and those that are characteristic of the genre. The stories themselves vary in scope, character, and breadth of themes, and the way they are told stylistically varies even more strongly depending on the author and the specific texture of the world of the story. Before discussing the texts themselves, however, there are several slight deviations and particular thematic emphases apparent in the female hero story that differentiates it from the male hero story in general terms. In many ways, many of these points also apply for male *or* female hero protagonists in coming-of-age or children's hero stories; they are points that are likely overlooked by young readers because they appear very often in more mainstream children's and young adult fiction. Simply put, the hero herself 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.

Firstly, the female hero herself, as a character, must be well-substantiated. She must be someone we can believe capable of the change she is about to undergo, as richly developed as any of her fictional peers across other, more ostensibly realistic genres. This seems an obvious point, but it is especially easy in a genre filled with stereotypes and archetypes for an author to

be tempted to fall back on classic character molds instead of developing a richly complex protagonist. If the hero is too much of a leader, too brave, too intelligent, she, like any other male hero, becomes less human and less comparable to the reader. Like any other fiction for children and young adults, the protagonist is the reader's link to the world, and she, above all, must seem *real* in all of her contradictions, complications, and faults in order for the reader to begin to gain a sense of "secondary belief." Lyra is tremendously brave and wryly intelligent, but she is also dangerously curious and impetuous; Alanna is insightful and a quick-thinker, but she is so stubborn she misleads herself into believing things that are not true, which emotionally tear at her. Any good character is a mix of contradictions, possessing both virtues and faults, and this is no less important in fantasy than it is in any other genre. Additionally, the hero's society must also have the capacity to accept her as a heroic figure and her change as true, otherwise her Elixir would not be able to have any impact—and ultimately, the story itself would fall flat. She also must be somewhat open to an adventure in the first place. The "reluctant hero" archetype cannot be *too* reluctant, otherwise we will not believe she is capable of change or of bettering her world in some way. We cannot stand behind a hero who *completely* rejects the idea of being a hero.

Secondly, there must be the precedent of a heroic female or a supernatural female—a goddess, heroic woman of legend—in the hero's culture, to help the hero gain confidence and to help others recognize the hero's heroic qualities by comparison. Otherwise, the female hero's adventure will test her more harshly and she might risk losing her mortality (or life) in the process of attempting to succeed in her adventure. Without precedents like Athena or Artemis in Greek legend, Eve or Mary in Christian belief, historical figures like Eleanor of Aquitaine or Joan of Arc, or relatively modern pioneers of change like Helen Keller or Eleanor Roosevelt, girls and young women in our world would have no basis upon which to imagine themselves as

heroic or capable of a world-changing impact. The same must be true of the fictional worlds in which women attempt to be heroes, otherwise we would have little reason to believe in the realistic parallel of that hero's story to our own world. Aerin references the goddess Aerinha, for whom she is named, complaining that no woman "has ridden at the king's side since Aerinha, goddess of honor and flame, first taught *men* to forge their blades…. You'd think Aerinha would have had better sense. If we were still using slingshots and magic songs, I suppose we'd still all be riding with them. They needed women's voices for the songs to work" (*Hero*, 17-18). Even though Teka reminds Aerin that story is "only a pretty legend" (18) it still holds powerful sway over Aerin's beliefs. In Aerin's world goddesses have—or had, at least—the power to do that which Aerin will ultimately do by the end of the novel: earn her place beside her king as both a woman and fighter. This precedent is critical for both world building and the building and reassurance of Aerin's own confidence. In *The Blue Sword*, the near-mythic figure of Aerin herself serves as the epitome of the Damalur-sol, the lady hero, and since Aerin's time such strong women are not unusual. Precedents are more casual in the *Abhorsen* trilogy: there have been countless female Abhorsens in Sabriel's world, who over the ages have proved that the title and bell bandolier can be worn by either sex and still be as effectively wielded.

In Alanna's world, the precedent and exemplum of the strong woman figure is drawn in the character of the Great Mother goddess. She echoes an Athena-Artemis-Hera combination from Greek mythology, but also reflects aspects of the Virgin Mary in Christian belief, representing a protector, advocate, and mother to Alanna, whom she chooses to protect long before she confronts Alanna. In the second book, *In the Hand of the Goddess*, Alanna meets the Goddess personally, conversing with her in a manner that would not have been unusual in a Greek myth. The close relationship Alanna develops with the venerable goddess enables her to

trust more in herself and the apparent connection between Alanna and the immortal goddess helps give Alanna more credibility in the wider world where the Mother Goddess is revered and those she favored are duly respected. Legendary precedents both inspire the heroes to dream and find acceptance in their society as heroic figures, just as fictional heroes allow readers to imagine themselves being heroic in a similar reflexive manner.

Next, the nature of female physiology must be addressed in some way, as a part of the hero's coming-of-age as both a hero and a woman, if that is part of the hero's rite of passage or heroic cycle. 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. Sabriel blushes when rescuing a completely nude Touchstone and Alanna is terrified when she experiences her first menstrual period. In both of these worlds, the social divide between men and women is such that Sabriel went to an all-girls school and never learned how to behave around real young men and Alanna never learned about her own reproductive cycle: issues that young women in a modern context face in our world. These heroes also face barriers of self-confidence regarding their physical appearance: Aerin has "silly orange hair" (*Hero*, 17), is "gangly and awkward" and her "pale skin [comes] out in splotches when she [is] angry" (*Hero*, 23); she is also "automatically conspicuous as the only pale-skinned redhead in a country of cinnamon-skinned brunettes" (*Hero*, 116). Similarly, Harry is "simply too big: taller than all the women, taller than most of the men" (*Sword*, 6), and Alanna is the "shortest and skinniest…weakling" (*Alanna*, 171) among the pages, or so she believes. These problems and insecurities are issues real young women face, and for these teenage female heroes to seem real, they too must face them.

Similarly to precedence and character substantiation, the fact of gender equality in society must be faced in some manner. 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 part of the tests she must overcome or the society she must change with her Elixir. Sabriel is Abhorsen by blood and right and is never questioned or looked down upon by others because she is female. Her gender is not an issue because in her world it has been established that men and women inherit thrones and titles based on blood and age, not gender. However, Alanna faces the inequality and prejudice of those around her simply because she is a woman in a man's vocation, and must continue to stand firm against that prejudice always. The path she cleared does allow women after her to become knights freely, but people's beliefs change slowly, and Alanna's story reflects that human truth.

Finally, there is a certain necessity for the hero to be helped by allies, supernatural forces, or spirituality. Human beings are inherently a social and interdependent species, and for a hero to plunge forth entirely alone and still succeed puts that hero above the level of humanity of her readers and makes her example less applicable in our daily lives. More realistically, the hero is aided by friends and supporters, her faith in a higher power, or by supernatural forces of magic or a god's intervention, as already mentioned. Especially in adventures in which the hero's physiology (as compared to the average man's) puts her at a disadvantage, the intervention or aid of the supernatural, spiritual, or simply other allies is crucial for her success. Typically women are at a physical disadvantage against male opponents; many heroes may overcome that with assistance. Alanna practices for hours each day as a young page with her friends George and Coram to learn how to compensate for her stature, but she is also protected by the benevolent

force of the Mother Goddess, and she possesses the magical Gift, which puts her on even footing with many opponents, both physically and magically. Harry's extraordinary height gives her an advantage when she learns swordplay and horseback riding, but she learns those skills from the patient King's Rider Mathin and finds herself bolstered by her other friends throughout the rest of her adventure. The allies also serve the purpose of pointing out the hero's flaws and contradictions, psychologically enabling her to confront the unpleasant parts of her personality as she continues on her coming-of-age journey. All of the heroes find that the presence and support of allies are critical to the ultimate success of their quest.

A special kind of ally that deserves attention is the figure of the animal companion. Ever since the Cheshire Cat grinned and spoke enigmatically to Alice in Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the figure of a talking animal guide—or silent, steadfast animal companion, as in Jean Craighead George's *Julie of the Wolves*—have become standard in literature for children and young adults. In some novels the talking animals are the heroes themselves—as in Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*—but in the novels I have discussed they function, in the Campbell definition, as allies or the bearers of supernatural aid to the hero. Mogget and the Disreputable Dog in the *Abhorsen* trilogy, Talat in *The Hero and the Crown*, Sungold and Narknon in *The Blue Sword*, Faithful in the *Song of the Lioness* quartet, and Pantalaimon in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy all provide support, friendship, advice, and even sarcasm to their respective mistresses and ultimately help them both complete their quests and grow up. Because of their non-human natures, the heroes regard their respective animal companions differently than they do their other human allies—often being more honest with a non-judgmental animal than with a possibly suspect fellow human. Jennifer Marchant proposes that animal companions may serve a deeper psychological function for the protagonist, standing

in as the "imaginary father" under Julia Kristeva's definition.[15] While some companions, like Aerin's Talat, may be considered an "imaginary father" figure, more generally they provide the hero with self-confidence and act as helpers or stepping stones to allow the hero to fully integrate into an adult society.

Talat, Sungold, Narknon, and Moonlight are silent companions, offering quiet encouragement and acting as sounding boards for the female hero's insecurities and doubts. Talat, Aerin's father's old war stallion, is half-lame and depressed when Aerin, lonely and bored, totters out to visit him while still recovering from her bout with the poisonous surka leaves. Both she and Talat are lonely and in need of recuperation. They regain their strength together and he becomes her first non-judgmental friend at court, one who does not remind her that she is the reviled witchwoman's daughter. Aerin is able to talk to Talat and confess her fears—an effective device for revealing Aerin's voice in the third-person novel—and even learns, from Talat, how to be a better warrior because of his instinctive war-horse training. Talat's unswerving loyalty gives Aerin the courage to face dragon after dragon and eventually Maur, and it is his patience and quiet acceptance that helps her in the aftermath of Maur's defeat: "She hung an arm over [Talat's] neck and hid her face in his mane, ignoring the feel of it wisping against her left cheek…. [Her] fingers tightened in Talat's mane, dear cheerful Talat who felt that so long as she was riding him there was nothing too serious wrong" (*Hero*, 122). Aerin's relationship with Talat seems instantly familiar because of the silent and loyal nature of their friendship.

Harry too finds silent solace with her companions Narknon and Sungold.[16] Narknon, a forthright hunting cat, becomes Harry's tent companion among the alien-seeming Hillfolk, helping to ease her into life among them. The familiar presence of a cat helps Harry adjust to her

[15] Pg. 4; Marchant specifies the nature of the imaginary father: "'He' does this by offering the child a deeply satisfying love, while yet recognizing her as an individual" (4).
[16] Also referred to as Tsornin, which in the Hillfolk language translates to "Sungold."

new life by being a solid, silent anchor to something she can recognize. Narknon's affection and her loyalty to Harry help bring the Hillfolk to recognize Harry's heroic qualities almost as much as Harry's actions do. Sungold, a beautiful mare, is Corlath's gift to Harry and becomes her loyal friend. Both Narknon and Sungold stay with Harry when she leaves the Hillfolk to go back to the Homelander garrison on what seems to her like a fool's errand, but their steadfast belief in her helps remind her that she is not alone.

Animal companions, more than human companions, run the risk of falling into cliché or didacticism because we often assume animals possess less character dimensionality than humans; as such, they more easily fall into categories because we are not often privy to their own interests and desires. This fact makes talking animal companions by nature very different characters from their silent counterparts. While Narknon and Talat certainly have their own identifiable personalities despite their lack of dialogue, the talking companions Mogget, the Disreputable Dog, Faithful, and Pantalaimon each express character, opinions, advice, desires, and rebukes with voices as well as with actions, making them distinct rather than archetypical. Lirael's suspicious, introspective nature causes her to fear to converse with the other Clayr, believing them to be judging and scorning her for her differences. Confiding in the Disreputable Dog, however, is natural for Lirael; she realizes the Dog shares none of the same concerns or loyalties the other Clayr possess, though the Dog still has her own individual personality, secrets, and desires. More importantly, the Dog talks back to Lirael, a crucial step in changing the too-silent, shy Lirael into a young woman capable of leadership and bravery.

Mogget, however, is a completely different companion for Sabriel. He is immediately sardonic and condescending, stemming from a centuries-old bargain that forces him to serve the Abhorsens when he would rather eliminate them. Mogget is less an ally for Sabriel than a guide,

offering her directions instead of inspiring comfort. Mogget—like Faithful in the *Song of the Lioness* quartet—often offers tension relief through his sarcasm and occasional humor, cutting the serious or portentous moments of the novel with lighter moments of comedy and reflection. When Sabriel and Touchstone form a plan to combat Kerrigor, Mogget chimes in: " 'As it happens, I can't think of anything else. I've grown stupid over the millennia—even stupider than the Abhorsens I serve' " (*Sabriel*, 322). Faithful, like Mogget, is as quick to give his mistress a sardonic reply as he is to offer wisdom. He reminds her of how obvious—and potentially dangerous—her obvious love for Jonathan is while she is disguised as a boy by asking, "Do you enjoy snuggling up to Jonathan like a lovesick girl?" knowing well how that specific choice of words would grate upon the proud Alanna (*Goddess*, 84). These animal companions serve similar teaching functions but rather than descending into boring didacticism to serve that function are instead striking and distinct characters with drastically different relationships with their heroes, adding to the overall appeal and uniqueness of their stories.

Pantalaimon is an altogether different model of animal companion. Dæmons, in Lyra's world of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, are animal manifestations of a person's conscience, at least superficially. When facing a dubious choice at the start of *The Golden Compass*, Lyra asks Pan, "You're supposed to know about conscience, aren't you?" (8). Pan also reminds Lyra of herself—of who she is and what her morals are. As Lyra "Silvertongue" manages to convince the gullible armored bear-king Iofur Rakinson to believe her lies, she marvels:

> The great bear was helpless. Lyra found her power over him almost intoxicating, and if Pantalaimon hadn't nipped her hand sharply to remind her of the danger they were all in, she might have lost all her sense of proportion. (*Compass*, 300)

Iofur Rakinson is easily tricked because he so desperately wants what Lyra and all other humans in her world have—that external voice, a dæmon, though he does not and cannot have one. The

good-hearted armored bear Iorek Byrnison is not like Pan at all, however; though he is a remarkable talking animal he functions in Lyra's heroic story as an ally, as many of the human characters (like Lee Scoresby and Serafina Pekkala) function. Pullman's consistency is important here: rather than having Iorek or another character acting as Lyra's conscience (as Faithful often does for Alanna) he designates that function specifically to Pan, in keeping with the rules he has set forth for Lyra's world.

While Pan, acting as conscience, supports Lyra and offers her constant vocal encouragement or wariness, Will—until he befriends Lyra—functions hesitantly with only his own wits and indecision, clearly without a dæmon of his own. However, when Lyra is later separated from Pantalaimon as she and Will enter Death, their division forces her to cry out, "My *heart*, Will…" (*Spyglass*, 254) implying that the separation from Pantalaimon is like the separation of her soul itself. At the same moment, Will feels a similar sensation in his own chest, as if he is leaving a crucial part of himself behind as well—his own metaphorical dæmon. Mary Malone's thought later seems to confirm this, when she reflects that the "three-part nature of human beings" is what "St. Paul talks about [as] spirit *and* soul *and* body" (*Spyglass*, 392). Serafina elaborates to the dæmons later, "You must help your humans, not hinder them. You must help them and guide them and encourage them toward wisdom. That's what dæmons are for" (*Spyglass*, 424). Dæmons do seem to represent conscience, that internal wellspring of wisdom everyone possesses, and to manifest outwardly in animal form in Lyra's world seems an appropriate analogy for many of the relationships between animal companions and their heroes. Dæmons are an outward manifestation—and thereby visual and vocal—of an inward part of all of us. Pullman seems to suggest that listening to that inner wisdom (though admittedly easier when vocalized externally) is essential to our being complete human beings. Ultimately this

relationship seems little different from that which evolves between Lirael and the Dog, or Aerin and Talat: each companion allows the hero to recognize wisdom inside of herself and enables her to use it independently—a crucial part of growing up.

Like other allies, these animal companions enable the hero to be heroic; they offer the essential support, wisdom, or humor the hero needs to successfully complete her quest. They can also act as bridges, in some cases, between the hero and the larger society; by befriending and trusting in Talat to help her slay dragons, Aerin gains "a place of her own—both taken and granted" (*Hero*, 94). The Dog encourages Lirael to widen her experiences of the world until she moves beyond her home entirely and into the wider world of her future. They also function much as any other human ally or guide may function: offering humor, companionship, or advice, but in the straightforward form of a cat, dog, horse, or other non-human (and therefore potentially less threatening) creature. Narknon offers Harry friendship in return for porridge and the simplicity of such a companionable relationship loosens Harry's tightly held guard and lets her start to trust the Hillfolk. The variety, character, and nature of animal companions seems as wide-reaching as the natures of the heroes themselves, increasing the fantasy and complexity of these adventures in a potentially unexpected way.

When all of the above caveats are taken into consideration, it is clear that the female hero story is not very different from the male hero story in terms of basic structure and necessary motifs. As we have seen, however, there are specific thematic and character elements that may need to be added to increase the believability of the character, world, or situation in which the hero finds herself, more so than in a male hero story.

Now I turn to the novels and series themselves for a closer examination of what distinguishes them from both the other hero stories I discuss and books of other genres entirely.

The Blue Sword* and *The Hero and the Crown

Robin McKinley's two companion books, *The Blue Sword*, and its prequel, *The Hero and the Crown*, stylistically echo both fairy tales and classic heroic legends. Certain elements of the novels are reminiscent of the Arthur legends and the brothers Grimm at times; McKinley's narration often is that of the classic storyteller: third person omniscient, with a penchant for shifting viewpoints whenever ironically convenient. The point of view in both novels roots itself most firmly with the hero giving us her self-doubt and first-person observations intermixed with the third person narration. Because of these shifts, we get to see Corlath's decision to and hesitation at stealing the sleeping Harry from her windowsill at the Residency and Tor's nervous awkwardness at realizing how dearly loves his young cousin, creating a tension and complexity that brings these stories superficially from fantastical fairy tale to psychological novel. The novels are also complex in terms of structure. *The Hero and the Crown* begins *in medias res*, starting with Aerin at eighteen, a few days from her battle with Maur; this divides the novel clearly into the two parts of Aerin's adventure, a challenging structure for a novel for a young audience. Harry's story in *The Blue Sword* begins with her boredom at the Residency, allowing her to reflect on how she came to be there, and leading immediately to the anticipated visit of the Hill-king, rather than moving in chronological order.

Additionally, McKinley's diction is complex for a young audience, remaining consistently truer to the worlds' and characters' diction rather than writing with her twentieth century audience's. In particular, *The Blue Sword* shows many strong romantic and fairy tale influences, most especially in the occasionally formal dialogue between characters. When Harry and Corlath declare their love for one another at the end of the novel, their dialogue is clearly reminiscent of early modern and classic fairy tale language than that of modern novel dialogue.

While much modern dialogue (especially in novels for younger readers) tends to try to capture the *true* nature of speech—with all of its stops, hesitations, interruptions, and uncertainties—Harry and Corlath deviate at the end of their story, giving explanatory speeches to one another that are reminiscent more of the long speeches and avowals of love in a medieval romance than in a modern novel. Not all of the dialogue is written in that style; Harry's speech otherwise closely follows that of any politely raised young woman, and seems as real as that which a reader may speak. McKinley's style blends traditional language and storytelling methods in a contemporary and engaging new way.

The novels tell the stories of two very different heroes in two different times with the constant being the land of Damar, the ancient kingdom that is the "Underworld" setting for both adventures. Both books deal with the theme of the hero's two worlds, which for Harry, in *The Blue Sword*, are the world in which she was raised, the Homeland, and the world into which she is thrust on her adventure, that of the disparate Hillfolk, Damar. *The Hero and the Crown* is set centuries earlier, when Damar was more of a medieval-seeming kingdom. In that novel, Aerin's two worlds are that of her mother and that of her father, two very different heritages and different destinies, both of which she must accept—but not necessarily assimilate—to find peace.

The difference between the two worlds in Harry's story—between the Homelander garrison and the Hillfolk and Damar—is a constant theme. Harry was raised in the Homeland, across the sea, a world similar to that of late nineteenth century England. After her father dies, she moves to an army garrison on the edge of the Damarian desert because her older brother Richard is stationed there. She is tall and ungainly, but she has a quick mind, deep strength of character, and a pride that even her hosts notice. "Young Harry here is going to be a fine ambassador's wife someday," Sir Charles tells his assembled guests shortly after Harry's arrival.

He then corrects his statement, after observing her: "A general's wife, on second thought" (*Sword*, 11). Within the frame of this world, those recognizably heroic qualities in Harry—pride, ingenuity, adaptability—can only be contextualized by others in terms of Harry's suitability for marriage. Those qualities, coupled with her height, however, make it "not likely she would marry" (*Sword*, 3) at all, because she will never be meek and proper as a soldier's wife should be, making her future unpredictable in the carefully plotted world of the Homelanders. She recognizes this stagnation and has desperate thoughts which, to her sensible Home-raised mind, seem renegade: "A small voice whispered to her that she didn't even want to go Home again. She wanted to cross the desert and climb into the mountains in the east, the mountains no Homelander had ever climbed" (*Sword*, 20). She settles instead to pose her rebellion within the context of her world, "merely [arriving] first to the breakfast table" rather than running "off toward the mountains" (*Sword*, 2).

It is hard for her to dislike her position, then, when she is unceremoniously kidnapped by the Hill-king and taken across those same mountains. Harry is adopted with an almost unnatural ease into the new world of the Hillfolk. She wonders at the Hillfolk's polite, earnest treatment of her and feels "a fool, let loose, however involuntarily, in a highly organized community which now wished to organize her too: like the grain of sand that gets into an oyster's shell. What if the grain doesn't want to become a pearl? Is it ever asked to climb out quietly and take up its old position as a bit of ocean floor?" (*Sword*, 76). She feels awkward standing between these two worlds, feeling like an outcast among the Homelanders and an intruder among the Hillfolk. The wizard Luthe calls her a bridge (164) and Harry admits, "I can see the two worlds I am between… although why the second one chose to rise up and snatch me I still don't understand" (164). Returning to seek Colonel Dedham's aid at the Homelander garrison, and finding him

unsurprised at the changes she has undergone, she realizes a truth about herself, that she as "The bridge could stretch to cross this chasm, perhaps, after all…. And perhaps it did not matter in what world she belonged if both worlds were marching in step" (189). Everything falls into place for her, however, when Dedham tells her what Richard had told him, that her great-grandmother was a Hillwoman. She considers that:

> Perhaps she was a better-constructed bridge than she had realized; and she thought of beams and girders, and almost laughed; how Outlanderish an image that was, to be sure. And as she labeled that bit of herself Outlander she then was free to label some other bit Damarian; and she felt a little more like herself all over, as though she were fitting into her skin a little more securely…. Her last shred of doubt about whether she had chosen wisely when she chose the Hills over the country that had raised her dissolved; but she had loved her family and her home, and she was without bitterness. (191-192)

The disparity between Harry's two worlds still remains, but she no longer finds her loyalties shifting between them. Even Colonel Dedham and her brother Richard are moved by her love for the people who had once kidnapped her and throw themselves behind her cause. When she decides to remain among the Hillfolk at the end, it is not that she has chosen to return to her Underworld after the completion of her adventure, but rather that she recognizes she belongs among those who love her—in a sense, returning home.

Aerin's struggle is not the division between her home world and Underworld, as Harry's is; Aerin seeks to simply *fit in*, to be confident and useful among her relations at the palace in the City. At the start of her adventure she uncomfortable in her own skin—literally. She has pale skin and red hair, a stark contrast between the darker skin and hair of the other Damarians. This physical differences mark her clearly as her mother's daughter, not her father's daughter, a black mark that rides with her for years. It is this conflict that begins Aerin initially on her heroic path: Aerin's cousin Galanna dares her to touch the surka plant, "saying that Aerin would be afraid to touch the royal plant, because she was not really of royal blood: she was a throwback to her

mother's witch breed and Arlbeth was her father in name only. If she touched the surka, she would die" (*Hero*, 22). Aerin not only touches it, but pulls "half a branch off the surka, and [stuffs] most of it into her mouth" (23). The resulting sickness and her convalescence take months, and it is during that time that she begins taking the steps that will lead her to become Aerin Dragon-Killer, by training and gaining strength with Talat and discovering kenet, a salve that makes her impervious to fire. Her brave—but woefully unmatched—confrontation with the dragon Maur leaves her heavily scarred and burned, especially across her face and scalp. The hair that begins to replace her burnt off hair grows in smooth and a darker red, more like her mother's, "and there were lines on her face that had not been there before, and her eyes looked as old as Arlbeth's" (*Hero*, 125). Before leaving her home to seek out the mysterious wizard Luthe, Aerin is no longer the naïve king's daughter, but a proven warrior—a true Dragon-Killer—but one who needs supernatural aid to be healed before she can continue on her path to save Damar.

When she seeks out Luthe to be healed of Maur's wounds he tells her that it is her mother's heritage that saved her from being killed by the surka outright, as it later helped her against Maur—that no one else in her family would have been able to survive her trials. It is the same heritage that will bring her inevitably to Agsded. "It is true your mother wanted a son," Luthe tells Aerin, "she believed that as only one of his blood might defeat him, so only one of his sex might, for to such she ascribed her own failure. She felt that it was because she was a woman that she could not kill her own brother" (*Hero*, 152). Agsded is "to Maur what Maur had been to her first dragon; and the first dragon might have killed her—and Maur *had* killed her, for the time she lived now was not her own" (*Hero*, 153). But it is Aerin's familial fate to face her uncle, for no other Damarian can—not even Luthe.

Aerin's transforming ordeal is a combination of what Campbell describes the atonement with the father and the "confrontation that epitomizes the whole sense of the difficult road of trials," where the hero "discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed" (Campbell, 108). Agsded, her mother's brother, represents an intrinsic part of Aerin herself. When Aerin confronts Agsded, "he [smiles] Aerin's own smile" and is unnerved because she knows it is he who has been the cause of her land's strife. He mocks her Damarian heritage and throws her life's fears at her. "You have always kept to the shadows," he says, "and [King Arlbeth] has let you stay there, and has done nothing to deny his people's voices when they whisper, witchwoman's daughter" (*Hero*, 172). And he reminds her, viciously, that she is alone, that she crossed all of the years and distance to face him "without even the lowliest Damarian foot soldier, without even a ragged village brat to shine [her] boots" (*Hero*, 172). Campbell writes that "If it is impossible to trust the terrifying father-face, then one's faith must be centered elsewhere" (*Hero*, 131) and Aerin centers herself with firm faith in those who have helped her, and confidence in herself. She recognizes her own confidence in a moment, by looking at Agsded: "Aerin thought, His hair is the color mine used to be before Maur burned most of it off. My hair isn't that color any more" (*Hero*, 174). She raises her sword and fights him, reminding herself, "My hair is not that color any more…and my eyes are not those eyes, and I am not the man before me" (*Hero*, 175). Aerin ultimately conquers Agsded by demonstrating her mastery of the trials of the outside world: the surka and Maur. This is related to Campbell's discussion of initiation: "This is the process of dissolving, transcending, or transmuting the infantile images of our personal past. In our dreams the ageless perils, gargoyles, trials, secret helpers, and instructive figures are nightly still encountered; and in their forms we may see reflected not only the whole picture of our present case, but also the clue to

what we must do to be saved" (Campbell, 101). Aerin throws at Agsded a wreath of surka leaves—the same leaves that made her deathly ill years before—wrapped around Maur's bloodstone, the hard-won proof of her defeat of the deadly dragon. By using this combination of symbols of the tests she has successfully passed, she demonstrates her worthiness to truly face and finally conquer Agsded.

After defeating Agsded, leaving Luthe, returning the Hero's Crown to Damar, and saving her people from the Northerners' invasion, Aerin realizes:

> She had misunderstood what her fate truly was a few days ago, as she rode to the City to deliver up the Crown into the king's hands; it was not that she left what she loved to go where she must, but that her destiny, like her love, like her heritage, was double. And so the choice at last was an easy one, for Tor could not wait, and the other part of her—the not quite mortal part, the part that owed no loyalty to her father's land—might sleep peacefully for many long years. She smiled. (*Hero*, 218)

Returning home for Aerin is finally a recognition of her place among her people. The people "seemed to have more or less forgotten that they had ever held the last king's daughter in so lively an antipathy" (*Hero*, 223) and they cheer proudly when Aerin is declared queen. When Aerin realizes that her people have come to love her, she muses, "So Maur did me a good turn after all… That's the finest victory of all" (*Hero*, 223). Aerin's humorous, mature acceptance of the trial that almost drove her to give up living demonstrates her growth as a result of her heroic adventure. Aerin is tested beyond even the limits of human mortality and still is able to smile afterward—a demonstration of her true heroic courage and resolve. Aerin's two worlds are different from Harry's, but unlike Harry, who brings both worlds together, acting as a bridge, and assisting with relations between the Homeland and Damar in the future, Aerin settles in Damar with Tor, putting aside her second world of immortality and Luthe, "that she might love her country and her husband" (*Hero*, 227). Her mature decision—like the one Harry makes—

shows both responsibility and compassion, easily demonstrating her worthiness to be called a *hero*.

The *Song of the Lioness* Quartet

Alanna's story spans four separate novels by Tamora Pierce—*Alanna: The First Adventure*, *In the Hand of the Goddess*, *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*, and *Lioness Rampant*—encompassing the heroic journey she undertakes as a whole from age ten to twenty. Pierce writes with an acute attention to the concerns of young women in the 1980s as well as with realistic attention to life in the high middle ages. She blends twentieth century dialogue (complete with slang and dialect demarcation) and plot points (confrontations with bullies, mathematics lessons, and love affairs) with the language and culture of chivalry and the medieval romance. This combination gives us an entirely new parallel fantasy world in which Alanna's challenging of the feminine status quo is not necessarily as strange as it might have been if Pierce set out to write a linguistically and factually realistic story of a nobly born lady who decides to become a knight instead of studying at a convent. She blends historical facts of the figures of the knight-errant and the thief with the accounts of the education of nobles and warfare with situations atypical to a medieval world but familiar to ours to give a fantastical twist on the female coming-of-age story.

Pierce also sets the quartet over a stretch of nearly ten years, relating Alanna's growth and change through episodes over the many years she studies to become a knight and then her adventures after she has earned her shield, leading to the final peace-restoring battle at the end of *Lioness Rampant*. The entire quartet follows the Campbell path if taken as one large adventure, though each book has its own episodic arc in addition to contributing to the overall adventure cycle. As opposed to telling a straightforward hero story that happens over a period of days,

weeks, or months, Pierce relates Alanna's story as that of her *entire* coming-of-age, from naïve little girl who play-acts with wooden swords to confident King's Champion—a character transition that would not have been believable over the course of a few weeks or even a few years. Also, the training Alanna undergoes to become a knight is structured in many ways like a school: Alanna attends classes with others her age and earns her rank through tests set at intervals, then goes out into the world to apply the classroom knowledge and realizes she has only learned a fraction of what it takes to survive real life. These themes and the structure are easily identifiable among readers familiar with school fiction and the school experience, who experience middle and high school levels of education as Alanna experiences education as a page and squire, then go out into the world—to college or to occupations—and face new challenges. The books deliberately combine modern elements with aspects of a medieval setting to forge a world that is both familiar and interestingly different to school-age readers.

Alanna, as a character, is the most ambitious and goal-oriented of the heroes I discuss; her adventure is the fulfillment of her childhood dream and the subsequent challenge of coming to terms with the realities of fulfilling that dream. Dreaming of being a female knight—the first in a century—seemed easy for Alanna when she was a child, but the reality of that ambition draws on all of her courage, confidence, and trust in her allies—and in turn, offers a clear path of inspiration to a clever young reader. Alanna wants desperately "to travel and do great deeds" (*Alanna*, 211) as she tells Prince Jonathan; by choosing to disguise herself as a boy to become a knight, she is not merely embarking on a hero's quest, but on a *career* of heroism. To be a knight in her country of Tortall is to protect the innocent and serve the interests of the king in war and peace, not to simply enjoy the glory of a single battle. Alanna's adventure, like Sabriel's, prepares her for a lifelong series of similar adventures and potential hardship. Alanna's

adventure is clearly allegorically applicable to any female reader who—in the 1980s or today—wishes to embark upon a career path in which she would be in the gender minority. Alanna's unflinching awareness of the struggle she must face is inspiring to a young reader intent on a career path full of hardship but rewarding to those who prove themselves capable of the challenge. As George tells Alanna, "Not all the monsters you meet are dragon shaped" (*Alanna*, 168), and that is as true for girls in our world as it is for Alanna herself. Alanna's ability to successfully surmount obstacles is inspiring not only because of the adventurous, imaginative nature of the story itself but also because of its clear, allegorical message to the clever reader.

The successful completion of the entire hero's arc serves to prove to Alanna—and to those around her—that she is worthy of the future she has chosen for herself, but Alanna does more than simply pass the tests necessary of all knights. She is challenged in many different ways, learning not only the value of being competent with a weapon, but learning that others' ways of life are not inferior to hers, that not all "women's skills" are useless for a knight to learn, that maturity comes from seeing the world with an open heart instead of a disdainful one. For instance, Alanna believes women cannot enact change through traditional roles. The strength of character of her two young—female—shaman apprentices and the perseverance, grace, and humility of Thayet show Alanna women can be strong without dressing or acting like "men" and can enact change with nothing more than the heartfelt desire to do so. Faced with a wailing child in *Lioness Rampant*, Alanna balks at the idea of changing a diaper but determinedly realizes that, "Surely a proven knight was equal to anything!" (*Lioness*, 80). Her man-at-arms Coram teaches her how to change the diaper without flinching—demonstrating that knowing such a thing will not make her less of a warrior. She also has a misconception shattered by meeting the fabled warrior Liam Ironarm, who has no fear of any physical opponents but is afraid of magic simply

because he does not wish to understand it. Alanna cannot believe so strong a warrior would be susceptible to a fear she herself has conquered and learns that perhaps she has truly earned a place among the living heroes of legend like Liam.

Love for Alanna is as complex as it is for many real young women in our present time, rather than the more demure, fairy tale style of love that Harry finds with Corlath or Sabriel finds with Touchstone. Alanna falls for Jonathan as his squire with little concrete idea of what "love" means, beginning a physical relationship with him without talking of the future or of practical concerns. After she is knighted, Jon proposes marriage, telling Alanna, "I want what *I* want, not just what's good for Tortall" (*Woman*, 115) but Alanna is too dutiful, too chivalrous, to allow him to choose her—the "scandal" (*Woman*, 114)—and too determined to let herself give up her dreams of being a knight errant to settle down as Jonathan's modest queen. When Liam meets her, he is instantly attracted to her *because* of her power, independence, and self-confidence, and does not wish to change her as Jonathan wanted. But Alanna finds herself desiring a future with someone she could *potentially* settle down with—and the wandering warrior Liam would never give her that. George, however, has loved Alanna brazenly for years, but Alanna is hesitant to accept his offer of unconditional love, anxious about their differences in class and wondering if truly loving him would require her to lose a part of herself. "I don't want to fall in love," she tells the Goddess who comes to offer her advice. "I want to keep me for myself. I don't want to give *me* away" (*Goddess*, 11-12). Her adventures and all she has seen as she grows up force her to reconsider her opinion and to see George's love in a new light. Nothing is easy for Alanna on her quest to prove herself a hero in Tortall, and love is no different than any other obstacle the Lioness must conquer. Like everything else, Alanna finds it on her own terms, not seeing her decision to finally marry George as a sacrifice but a compromise. "I've finally tamed me a

Lioness," George tells her, but she corrects him: "I wouldn't call it *tamed*, laddy-me-love. [Your lady] shouldn't be *tame*" (*Lioness*, 308).

More than any other lesson Alanna must learn is that of coping with who she is, physically. Alanna's struggle with her femininity is the most pointed of any of the female heroes I discuss. In a way, her struggle with her own identity—as a *female* knight—is simply not a dragon she must surmount but rather a point on her heroic path to which she must Return. Her consistent World Navel is not a location, but rather a mindset—her gender; she must Return and bring with her the Elixir of her learned experiences and confidence to be able to live life as both a woman and a knight. When she leaves Fief Trebond, she is escaping her world and future—of going to a convent to learn how to be a noble lady—and beginning an exciting adventure, disguised as a boy. She does not return to Fief Trebond in the way Campbell's theory indicates she should; if any location can serve as her World Navel, it is Corus, the capital, but even that changes. The real stasis to which she must return is the persona of Alanna the woman, rather than Alan the boy. Accepting herself as a woman completely is not so much a test on her path of adventure, as a state to which she must eventually return. She does not, at any point, consider remaining disguised as a male permanently; she remarks to her friends all along that she will reveal the ruse once she has earned her knight's shield at eighteen. She even admits, "I see all the Queen's ladies wearing pretty things, and I've been thinking lately I like pretty things. I'm going to have to be a girl someday" (*Goddess*, 123). At the conclusion of *Lioness Rampant*, she has returned to being herself, being completely happy in her own skin. The Elixir she brings to aid her in her return to being a woman is not necessarily a tangible thing—it is confidence in her abilities and her friends, the knowledge she is loved, respected, and admired throughout the land, and that if she can do all that she has done and more as a Lady Knight, there is little left in the

world that she cannot conquer, even finally admitting she would be proud to one day have children.[17] Alanna's character arc demonstrates in a believable way that it is possible to both fall into a gender-defined role while also challenging another; Alanna's realization that it is possible to be both *woman* and *knight* without sacrificing either reality entirely is a realization that is clearly reflected in real life, and is a lesson the books' readers can starkly see when dramatized against the imaginative backdrop of Alanna's fantasy world.

The *Abhorsen* Trilogy

Garth Nix's *Sabriel*, *Lirael*, and *Abhorsen* introduce us to two fascinating worlds reminiscent of our own, both connected and divided by the Wall, a structure of magic. The Old Kingdom, to the north, is a medieval world of magic and Dead things, where Charter Magic—magic bound, regulated, and described by symbols and words—and Free Magic—wild, dangerous magic from the beginning of the world—make it a dangerous place of Dead and Free Magic creatures and potentially sinister forces. Ancelstierre, to the south, is a country not of magic but of superstition governed by science, reminiscent of early twentieth century England. Nicholas Sayre, an Ancelstierrian, calls the magical occurrences in the Old Kingdom "curious anomalies" (*Lirael*, 383); "I'm sure you think of it as magic," he tells Sam in a letter, "but I expect it can all be explained by the proper application of the scientific method" (*Lirael*, 257). The theme of the conflict between magic and science, between fact and belief, is prevalent throughout the trilogy and is often seen in many fantasies. Nix's worlds of the Old Kingdom and Ancelstierre contrast the differences between medieval and post-Enlightenment thought and in the middle of that juxtaposition Nix places his heroes Sabriel and Lirael, whose adventures

[17] *Lioness Rampant*, 308; Initially Alanna says, "I don't plan on children" (*Alanna*, 138), then repeats, to herself, "I don't want to have children just yet!" and "I'm not ready to have children!" (*Woman*, 138; 145), desiring desperately "To never worry about anything or anybody, to go where I want without thinking about other people at all" (*Woman*, 148).

require them to find a balance between the mysterious and the practical. It is complex theme that is nonetheless reflexive for a modern reader who may be faced with negotiating the line between fiction and fact.

From the moment we are introduced to Sabriel, we know she is going to do great things. Her heroic journey is one of discovery and change, as we expect it to be. The notable facet of her arc is that of all the heroes I examine, Sabriel is the only one whose story would not change drastically if she were not female. She goes to an all-girls school, true, and she rescues a man with whom she falls in love—but her discoveries would not be altered if those genders were reversed. The pattern of male hero rescuing female and saving the kingdom is an old, familiar, and beloved pattern; Nix's decision to make Sabriel female, while not specifically altering the nature of her story, gives us a different take on that classic pattern. Sabriel is a brave and heroic woman who succeeds under similar circumstances as her classic male counterparts. Touchstone's one gallant attempt to prove to her that he can be her sworn defender is not made because she is a woman and needs defending, but because she is the Abhorsen and he is honor-bound to help any Abhorsen in his or her quest. Even Mogget tells Touchstone that "in this present era [Touchstone will] find common sense more important than honor" (*Sabriel*, 224). In the danger-filled world Nix has shaped, gender is not important if a person is of a certain lineage or blood, out of practicality. The royal line has all but died out and the Dead are rising and terrorizing the living; only those with the birthright to rule and to banish the Dead can set the Old Kingdom back to rights—regardless of their gender. Sabriel truthfully explains her merit to the skeptical Colonel Horyse:

> I am only eighteen years old on the outside…. But I first walked in Death when I was twelve. I encountered a Fifth Gate Rester when I was fourteen, and banished it beyond the Ninth Gate. When I was sixteen I stalked and banished a Mordicant

> that came near the school. A weakened Mordicant, but still… A year ago, I turned the final page of *The Book of the Dead*. I don't feel young anymore. (*Sabriel*, 56)

Sabriel's qualifications simply depend on a combination of blood-right, experience, and schooling. It makes logical sense in the world Nix presents, yet to a reader in our world, the simplicity of the situation and the matter-of-fact way in which it is presented polarizes our perceptions of heroism without confronting the theme within the narrative itself.

Sabriel's adventure is harrowing and exciting, though it is still part of her duty as Abhorsen, and nothing she has not been prepared to face for her entire life. Lirael, however, in both *Lirael* and *Abhorsen*, has grown up in the entirely female, magic-filled realm of the Clayr, and has a much more complicated path to discovering her destiny. Like Aerin, she is an outsider among her relations; she lives in the Clayr's glacier among her distant cousins, all of whom awaken to the Sight, the Clayr's birthright—the ability to see the future—as young teenagers. This rite signifies a Clayr's coming of age and acceptance as an adult. Fourteen year old Lirael still must wear the uniform of a child and sleep in the Hall of Youth. Worse, she is only daughter of the Clayr—among the hundreds of Clayr—with black hair, dark eyes, and pale skin—a stark contrast to the Clayr's homogenous blonde hair, pale eyes, and honey-colored skin. Lirael wants nothing more than to have the Sight and not to stick out "like a thistle in a bed of well-tended flowers" (*Lirael*, 19). Lirael's desperation to fit in and be unremarkable is the opposite of Alanna's fierce desire to stay true to her unorthodox dream and different again from Aerin's situation of alienation within her household. Lirael is restricted within the democratic social boundaries of the Clayr's society in a way Aerin is not restricted because of her society and rank. Aerin can pursue her own interests, has the companionship of Tor, and the distant love of her respectful father. Lirael is alone; even her own mother's sister does not recognize Lirael's private agony.

Lirael's persistent dragon is clearly her depression, a lonely bridge she can only find the confidence to cross through the help of an ally, the Disreputable Dog. Her anxiety over not having the Sight and imagining herself an outcast leads Lirael to desire her own company, away from the adult Clayr, and even when she is at last offered a job among the working Clayr, she chooses "the logical place where she could avoid people the most"—the Library (*Lirael*, 73). Even in taking the position, she considers that in the Library "she might find a spell to painlessly end her life… if she grew older and older without the Sight and the black despair welled up again inside her" (*Lirael*, 76). Among the other librarians she can perceive little common ground, instead remaining "silent, hiding behind her hair" (*Lirael*, 90). She even lets days go by without even hearing her own voice (*Lirael*, 137). Like Aerin's, Lirael's heroic path begins through an "intellectual exercise" (*Lirael*, 88) spurred by loneliness that leads her into rediscovering knowledge unknown to others; also, like Aerin, it is that curiosity which gives her an unlikely ally and companion—in Lirael's case, the Disreputable Dog. She awakens the Dog through an experiment of sorts and the Dog becomes an energetic, talking, and confident presence in Lirael's life. Lirael, who "[hates talking to people]" (*Lirael*, 73) begins to confide in the Dog, who in return helps Lirael see beyond her despair by offering the simplicity and compassion of an ally. Lirael's lack of self-confidence and propensity to remain silent disappear as she and the Dog traverse the dark, unexplored corridors of the Library together, giving Lirael enough courage to accept the call to her real adventure and face her destiny.

Lirael is also timid and passive compared to many of the other heroes, preferring to hide in the uncertainty of her past rather than attempt to solve its mystery—until she is called to adventure. The question of her identity can only be answered through her experience in the outside world on her adventure. Her identity is intertwined with that of Sameth, the ostensible

Abhorsen-in-Waiting, who has always been terrified of Death and has never read *The Book of the Dead*, the basic text of the Abhorsen. Lirael has already accepted that the Clayr have Seen her as a Remembrancer—one who travels in Death to See the past—and the moment she sees Sam's bells is entranced: she runs "her fingers over the smooth mahogany handles and the rich, beeswax-treated leather. She had a sudden urge to put on the bandolier and walk into Death to try the bells. Her little panpipes were a toy in comparison" (*Lirael*, 592). Parts of Lirael's life begin fitting together more smoothly as she discovers who she is, culminating with her arrival at Abhorsen's house, where she recognizes at last who she must be. Even realizing who her father was, Lirael clings to what she has known her entire life: "I am a Daughter of the Clayr," she insists (*Lirael*, 686), and realizes that she will never have the Sight: "She was half Clayr, but it was the Abhorsen's blood that ran strongest in her veins. The gift she had longed for her entire life was finally and absolutely denied to her" (*Lirael*, 687). Sam is relieved at the change in his fate but Lirael feels only loss, "the shock of losing a childhood dream" (*Lirael*, 689). Mogget and the Dog remind her of what she neglects to see: "It is a family you have found, and all will welcome you" (*Lirael*, 690).

However, Lirael's entire adventure, like Aerin's, requires her to traverse two heroic cycles, Lirael's spanning both *Lirael* and *Abhorsen*. Without the adventure and the subsequent change wrought in Lirael, she could not have been called for her larger adventure—saving not only the entire Old Kingdom, but Ancelstierre as well—and neither would she have had the courage or confidence to accept the call at all. Once Lirael dons the surcoat of the Remembrancer—the symbol of the Clayr, a star, quartered by the symbol of the Abhorsen, a key—she is prepared to face the greater evil of Orannis, the Destroyer, who is unearthed from his primordial prison by a twisted necromancer, Hedge.

The *His Dark Materials* Trilogy

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy is a different kind of fantasy. The trilogy—comprised of *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*—tells the story of Lyra Belacqua, a young girl thrust into an adventure that initially only affects the small world of Jordan College in Oxford but grows to shake the foundation of *many* inter-connected worlds on an epic scale. Rather than taking place in a "swords and sorcery" world similar to Aerin's in *The Hero and the Crown*, Pullman's fantasy uses the premise of the many worlds theory of quantum mechanics, which has appeared in many forms in both science fiction and fantasy throughout the twentieth century. [18] The basic idea, of crossing between worlds, is a classic motif in fantasy: Alice falls down a rabbit-hole in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and Peter Pan escorts the Darling children past the "second [star] to the right, and straight on till morning" (Barrie, 56) in *Peter Pan*. Not only is Pullman's conceit of "many worlds" allusive to the tradition of fantasy, but he seems to pull from another Briton's vision of inter-world travel in *The Golden Compass*. Margaret Cavendish's 1666 fiction *The Blazing World* features her main character traveling to an "other world" via a very convincing and seemingly scientific means: by traveling through the air at the "pole" of our world, where that of the "other world" slightly connects—a very similar manner in which Lord Asriel connects Lyra's world with that of Cittàgazze at the end of *The Golden Compass*.[19] Pullman is well aware of the lengthy and rich

[18] A simplified explanation of the theory is given by the tutor of Christopher, the protagonist, in Diana Wynne-Jones' 1988 novel *The Lives of Christopher Chant*: "All the worlds were probably one world to begin with—and then something happened back in prehistory which could have ended in two contradictory ways. Let's say a continent blew up. Or it didn't blow up. The two things couldn't both be true at once in the same world, so that world became two worlds, side by side but quite separate, one with that continent and one without…. It's history that makes the differences. The easiest example is our own Series, Twelve, where our world, which we call World A, is oriented on magic—which is normal for most worlds. But the next world, World B, split off in the Fourteenth Century and turned to science and machinery. The world beyond that, World C, split off in Roman times and became divided into large empires" (422-23).

[19] "At the moment [Roger] fell still, the vault of heaven, star-studded, profound, was pierced as if by a spear" (346); "Lyra looked up at the blazing sky" (350).

tradition of fantasy—especially British fantasy—and often alludes purposefully to other texts throughout the trilogy while still telling a starkly original and compelling story of his own.

More obvious perhaps to adult readers are Pullman's allusions to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. *Paradise Lost* may be considered a fantasy—an epic fantasy—under the definitions I have provided for the genre. All of his amazing feats and miraculous worlds considered, Milton keeps his poem grounded in religious fact and realistic, epic similes—in descriptions that make everything seem at once fantastic and remarkably *human*. His Adam and Eve are not saved by a made-up fictitious device, but through their own efforts and Christ's sacrifice on their behalf. It is in this way too that the *His Dark Materials* trilogy is fantasy; it employs the same religious and realistic authority to gain its foothold in reality while also putting forward fantastic ideas and relying on the mythical and supernatural to connect the parts of its complicated plot together. It is also children's literature, young adult "coming of age" literature, *and* adult literature. It is epic fantasy, able to be all of these things at once. *His Dark Materials* poses many intriguing and complex questions, demonstrating that "it is from the confrontation with mystery," Michael Chabon writes, "that the truest stories have always drawn their power" (1). By remaining vaguely positioned between mysterious and serious, realistic and fantastic, children's and adults', Pullman, like Milton before him, gains a narrative authority that allows him to retell one of the most powerful stories of human existence with a "stark realism" (Moloney, 173) and a powerful philosophical message that is yet unmatched in any modern fantasy.

Lyra's world, where we begin the trilogy, is "a universe like ours, but different in many ways" (*Compass*, ix). In her world the Miltonic and the religious seem very closely at hand; the heart of the Church lies in Geneva, as if a radical Calvinism has replaced the Catholic Church of old. The division between church and state, between heresy and law, are as foggy in Lyra's

world as in Milton's, and Pullman continues the allusions by telling us that naphtha provides light and witches from Lapland are regular sights, referencing *Paradise Lost* and a Miltonic universe in images and descriptions almost as often as he creates new ones himself.[20] *The Amber Spyglass* has similar such images; the "Clouded Mountain" where the Authority rules is as Satan sees it in *Paradise Lost*, with "opal towers and battlements adorned/ Of living sapphire" (II, 1049-50).[21] Amidst all of this, people in Lyra's world have dæmons—soul-like companions that take animal shapes—and it is this fact—that people in Lyra's world can talk to their innermost selves as companions and confidantes—that makes her world most unusual. Yet Pullman swerves in and out of these fantastical elements as if they are simply fact and should be accepted as such; like Milton, he has a flair for making the surreal seem natural and factual. Additionally, Pullman's twist on the conventional children's story of adventure and excitement away from parents and authority turns the familiar pattern in on itself—for that is exactly what this story is: a story about an adventure away from authority taken upon by innocents who inadvertently gain experience as their journey progresses.

Also unusual for many fantasies, but not very unusual for an epic story, Pullman's characters move between *multiple* worlds and universes through windows cut between them by a knife—the Subtle Knife—that can cut through even the tiniest of microscopic particles. This gives us a chance to see not only Lyra's world, but Will's—our own—and still others, increasing the scale at which the story is told. It allows for remarkable and almost surreal characters like Lord Asriel to exist while also directly relating the subject matter to principles available in our own world. Also, as we are introduced to more worlds, we are also introduced to more and more

[20] "Naphtha" (I, 729) is Lyra's world's gas; the "witches of Lapland" (II, 665) are long-lived and have unusual dæmons; they (including the major character Serafina Pekkala) befriend Lyra and ultimately join Lord Asriel's war.
[21] *Paradise Lost*; these lines are quoted at the start of the chapter thirty, "The Clouded Mountain," of the Knopf edition of *The Amber Spyglass*.

characters, and more corresponding sub-plot lines. Pullman demonstrates his masterful command of the epic scope by showing us every ball he is metaphorically juggling at once. In showing us every plot line and the way it leads to the ultimate revelation, he helps solidify and emphasize that revelation in the way a simple linear narrative, following Lyra, could never have shown us. The further divided the narrative gets and the more omniscient narrative viewpoints the author takes up, the more epic the scope becomes. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman requires a narrative shift every chapter, swinging us with his epic vision from the Adamant Tower to the Land of the Dead to Mary's mulefa to Geneva for us, as readers, to gain the same epic knowledge Pullman has as author. It is through the insight gained from these other characters that we as readers can come to grasp the entire worlds-wide scope of the trilogy.

The crucial character of Mary Malone, a physicist and former nun in Will's world, plays the "serpent" and is also an important guide through these epic worlds as our link to Will's—our—world's science and technology. She is able to interpret what Lyra tells her in words that a reader in our world (more specifically, an adult or well-informed reader) can interpret. Mary uses the language of science to break down the complex theological and philosophical problems that Lyra brings to her and those she later finds herself. Mary interprets Lyra's Dust as "dark matter" or "shadow particles" in our world, linking the fictional concept with a firmly grounded and true scientific concept.[22] Yet, in the same chapter, Pullman uses Keats' explanation of imagination to describe the state of mind necessary to communicate with Shadows, or Dust: a person must be "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (*Knife*, 78). This seeming contradiction—that to search for truth, one must suspend reason—consistently appears throughout the books, especially through the scientific vehicle of

[22] *The Subtle Knife*, Chapter 4. Pullman also links trepanning, the I Ching, and human evolution to Dust, "shadow particles" and "dark matter." (63-89)

Mary Malone. Among the mulefa, Mary describes the probable cause-and-effect history of the world in terms of Darwinian evolution, lining up the truths she gleans to understand the mulefa. She realizes that to fully understand Dust, to solve the problem of the mulefa and the dissolving *sraf*, she cannot search scientifically, but rather "[fool] around for long enough, without fretting, or nagging herself, [to] find out" (*Compass*, 201). Pullman's use of our world's real science in his fantasy challenges his readers on yet another level of complexity.

Pullman creates not only one "Secondary World," as Tolkien put it, but many—each of which are self-consistent and believable. The only way for the reader to accept them, however, is by believing in the truth of those worlds—and by following Keats' directions. In a way Pullman's books teach their readers how to read fantasy: he anchors us through Will's world and lets his imagination loose, pulling us through windows between worlds and enticing us, as Milton does, to trust his power as a storyteller to keep his fantasy continuously rooted in reality. The strongest way in which we are kept rooted throughout the trilogy, however, is through the character of Lyra. She is our heroic protagonist but she, like the worlds in which she travels, is anything but conventional. Lyra is a storyteller, an experienced liar, and a savvy, charismatic leader among the other children of Oxford. Lyra is on the brink of adolescence and has many aspects of both a child and an adult, having both the ignorance and innocence of a child but the cunning and insight of someone much older. As Pullman writes,

> Just as [Lyra] was unaware of the hidden currents of politics running below the surface of College affairs, so the Scholars, for their part, would have been unable to see the rich seething stew of alliances and enmities and feuds and treaties which was a child's life in Oxford. Children playing together: how pleasant to see! What could be more innocent and charming?
>
> In fact, of course, Lyra and her peers were engaged in deadly warfare. (*Compass*, 17-18)

Lyra is a complex character but very different from the other heroes I discuss. Most different is the fact that she does not fight physically—apart from a tussle here and there—as compared to

Aerin, who slays the Black Dragon Maur, or Sabriel, who tackles the Dead with bells and Charter-spelled sword. Lyra has only her wits and her ability to read the aleitheometer, a "truth-meter" powered by Dust that allows her to find the answers to any question she can ask. Powered with truth, Lyra saves Iorek Byrnison, a dangerous armored bear whom she wins to her cause with her straightforwardness and bravery. The *panserbjørne*, the armored bears of Lyra's world, are the first sentient animals we meet; the straightforward way in which Pullman introduces their intelligence and practical way of life foreshadows the ways in which non-human creatures (like the mulefa, angels, witches, and others) will come into Lord Asriel's plan. Asriel's actions—and Lyra's adventure—will affect creatures and beings of all shapes and sizes across the many worlds and Lyra's first actions among the armored bears demonstrate both her worthiness and her preparedness for such an epic task. Lyra is not a child, conventionally speaking, nor does she lack experience or knowledge of worldly affairs. She plunges bravely into worlds we could scarcely believe possible and we follow along behind her for the ride.

Yet Lyra changes in more than one way as the trilogy progresses. Lyra's moment of understanding, the "fall," is the moment of her acute knowledge of what it means to be in love. It is a small, almost insignificant moment in and of itself, but when examined in light of all the epic foreknowledge we as readers have been given, we finally see that instant Mrs. Coulter and the entire Church have been dreading—and it is so simple, so natural, we might have missed it otherwise. It is a moment in which Lyra can *relate her experiences* to Mary's—and understand her: "Lyra knew exactly what [Mary] meant, and half an hour earlier she would have had no idea at all" (*Spyglass*, 396). From the start of Mary's tale, *we* see what Lyra sees but we bring all our additional knowledge to bear and only because of that knowledge can we know that *this* is the moment of temptation. Pullman's narration does nothing to clue us in with key words here. We

needed that epic understanding of everything, of Dust, of God's death, of the fate of humanity, to fully understand Lyra's moment of "temptation" as just that. As Lyra comes of age into her adolescent conscious understanding of the "bigger picture" of the world and her place in it—with Will, and without him—she grows up, exactly as we knew she inevitably would.

Though Lyra gains more experience and ultimately grows from child to young adult, but we also lose much of the vibrant character who seemed to leap from the pages of *The Golden Compass* by the time we arrive in Death in *The Amber Spyglass*. "By the end of the third volume, Lyra has lost nearly all the tragic, savage grace that makes her so engaging in *The Golden Compass*; she has succumbed to. . . existing only, finally, to fulfill the prophecy about her. . . . She has become, like all prophesied ones and messiahs, at once more and less than human" (Chabon, 24). Because Lyra becomes more of an object, a trope, than a character, she loses part of her humanity—in a tale *about* humanity. Yet, in a way, the loss of the spunky youth of the first book is reflective of the way she is growing up. Adults in Pullman's world are less exciting, less impulsive, more responsible, and more worldly than children—and that is what happens, even to Lyra. She grows up. This is really Pullman's grand allegory—that we must *all* lose a part of ourselves, as we lose Lyra, to gain the wisdom and understanding that comes with becoming adults. As Lyra grows up and recognizes love and her place in the greater context of being, we lose the child with the tempestuous curiosity and gain the young woman who realizes her life mission. Lyra's story of growth and personal transformation isn't everyone's; Adam and Eve are not perfect analogues for every man and woman to ever exist. But it is in their story of loss and gain, of their transition from happy ignorance to pained bliss that we see the reflected nature of the story of humanity.

Another strong theme of the trilogy is Lyra's power of persuasive speaking, of discovering and using the truth effectively. It is ultimately that which she can use to save not only her world but the afterlife—Death—itself. All of the antagonistic forces of the book battle with the same forces—truth and lies, manipulation and compulsion—in an attempt to control others. Mrs. Coulter, the first villain we come to know, manipulates and blatantly lies to children to coerce them into doing what she wills—but she also rarely tells the truth, and when she does, her truths are often as compelling as her lies. Even more than Mrs. Coulter is the Church and beyond that the Authority at whose end the manipulation begins, as John Parry explains to his son Will at the end of *The Subtle Knife*: "We've had nothing but lies and propaganda and cruelty and deceit for all the thousands of years of human history" (*Knife*, 282). One of the largest falsehoods Lyra and Will uncover is Death itself which is yet another parallel world to which Will can cut using the Knife. In Death, a bleak post-apocalyptic-seeming world often reminiscent of Dante's vision of Hell, we find lonely ghosts and wicked harpies. It is here that Lyra learns the cost of lying, first from the Chevalier Tialys, and then viciously from the harpies. "You're a thoughtless, irresponsible, lying child," Tialys accuses Lyra when he realizes Lyra means to cross into Death itself. "Fantasy comes so easily to you that your whole nature is riddled with dishonesty, and you don't even admit the truth when it stares you in the face" (*Spyglass*, 236-37). Tialys scolds Lyra for her ignorance about when and where to employ the power—for it is a power—of lying and telling a compelling story; the reflection to the reader is clear: fantasy must be used responsibly and taken seriously.

Lyra learns this hard lesson later, when the harpies ask the small group for something in return for letting them pass further into Death. Lyra offers the story of their travels, immediately embellishing it with her usual careless flourish of half-truths and outrageous lies—and she is

caught. Here Lyra's name takes on a wealth of meanings: her "silvertongued" lies, like the music of Orpheus' lyre, have typically compelled everyone who has heard them, but the hardened harpies see through them, screaming "Liar! Liar!" at her, "And the word echoed back from the great wall in the fog, muffled and changed, so that [the harpy] seemed to be screaming Lyra's name, so that Lyra and liar were one and the same thing," (*Spyglass*, 261). This experience, coupled with meeting the fading, dreary ghosts, demonstrates to Lyra the power of the truth. When Lyra tells the ghosts—and the harpies—the truth, at last, the harpies listen because, to them, the truth is "nourishing" (*Spyglass*, 284). Thematically it is powerful but in actuality it is ironic: a fiction is telling us, the reader, by proxy of the characters that telling the truth when telling stories is "nourishing" and essential.

The *His Dark Materials* trilogy, the most tradition-reflexive of the books and series I have discussed, ultimately makes a strong argument for the power and necessity of storytelling. Pullman's characters are rich and engaging, ringing true as pre-teenagers while also being able to survive amidst the allusively rich worlds into which they are thrust. The books are also remarkably human, like *Paradise Lost*, telling a story about the importance of seeking the truth through the tricky vehicle of fiction—but telling it compellingly. This duality places the books "firmly within the longest-lived and still intellectually respectable tradition of children's literature, namely, the use of imaginative writing to influence the thoughts and actions of children" (Molson, 88). Pullman forces us to realize that children and young adult fantasy is a more complex vehicle for storytelling than what it was a century ago; his novels take his young readers seriously, exposing dangerous truths of the world—or at least Pullman's vision of it—in the context of a lively, imaginative, adventurous fiction. The books, while in some respects didactic, are also exciting and emotionally cathartic in keeping with the tradition of good fantasy.

EPILOGUE

THE FEMALE HERO AND SOCIETY

Women can be heroes. It is a simple fact, demonstrated through both the actions of the six heroes I have mentioned in their heroic stories and the stories of real women around the world. Fictitious examples, however, allow a reader to feel more personally connected to the hero throughout every segment of her adventure—from her darkest depths of despair to the highest reaches of hope and pride. The reflexivity that fiction enables reminds us that these heroes are ultimately just like us: they are human beings, contradictions full of flaws and psychological complexities. Female hero stories, just like any hero story, remind us of the highest, brightest reaches of which humans are capable. Displayed against a backdrop of fantasy, of extraordinary worlds and unusual characters, those basic heroic qualities shine all the more brightly. Hero stories, like fantasy stories, inspire us with hypothetical possibilities of what the world could be or "should be" (Sidney, 103), depicted through richly drawn characters, images and worlds of fiction that encourage us to both fall into the world of fantasy for the sake of pleasure and to take with us to our own world the truths and inspirations revealed through the fiction.

As Pullman—and Milton before him—reminds us allegorically through their texts, storytelling is a critical and highly enjoyable vehicle for conveying important messages. This is even more true for children and young adult fiction, especially for fantasy: parents often want their children to be reading "meaningful" books, but the children themselves would likely prefer imaginative or exciting books. A fantastic hero story has the potential to offer both enjoyment and depth through the imaginative vehicle of fantasy and the rich tradition and archetypes of the

hero story. Additionally, as many younger readers in particular naturally sympathize with or imagine themselves as the protagonist of the novels they read, having protagonists who better reflect readers enables a closer chance for meaningful thematic connection. Widening the variety of heroes and hero stories available for children and young adults of the twenty-first century to read will increase the odds that a young reader will intensely and personally connect with a hero or hero story, enabling that opportunity for reflexivity. The archetype of the female hero and the particular distinctions of her story allow female readers a chance to see themselves reflected in fiction, to see strong and confident young women performing deeds they themselves thought impossible. This is the crux of the female hero's importance: fiction always reflects reality, and as our culture and our reality change and shift, so must our fictions that reflect that change. Creating multi-dimensional and diverse protagonists—heroes—better reflects the changing culture in which we, and the readers of fantasy books, find ourselves.

The title and the tradition of the hero no longer belong exclusively to male heroes. Girls *can* save the world, too.

APPENDIX I

LIST OF IMPORTANT CHARACTERS AND SETTINGS

The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley

Character	Description	Role
Angharad "Harry" Crewe	Protagonist; late teens	Female hero
Corlath	King of the Hillfolk	Love interest, obstacle
Mathin	Harry's Hill teacher of weaponry, horsemanship	Guide, ally
Sir Charles, Lady Amelia	Harry's hosts at the garrison	Represent "Home" culture
Richard "Dickie" Crewe	Harry's older brother; protective	Ally
Jack Dedham	Colonel of the Homelander garrison	Ally
Terim, Senay, Kentarre	Harry's Hillfolk friends/helpers	Allies
Narknon	Harry's pet hunting-cat; female	Ally
Thurra	Leader of the Northerners	Climactic obstacle
Lady Aerin	Maternal/sisterly figure of legend	Precedent/Supernatural Aid

Home world: An imperialistic army garrison on the edge of the vast desert of what the native people (the Hillfolk) call Damar. It is similar to nineteenth century Britain's campaigns in the middle east and far east, meaning there is a monarchy in the "Homeland" but the actual setting is a mere colony of the Homeland's vast empire. Warfare is dependent on rifles and horses and the few women who are present are not expected to get involved.

Underworld: The kingdom of Damar, a monarchy. They speak a different language from that of the Homelanders. It is largely a desert civilization, though beyond the desert lies arable land, including the capital city and its ancient castle. It is dependent on swords and horses, because the presence of *kelar* or magic prevents most "modern" technology (rifles, clocks, etc.) from working properly. The people give serious, almost supernatural credence to myths and legends.

The Hero and the Crown by Robin McKinley

Character	Description	Role
Aerin	King's daughter, "first sol"; early teens to early twenties	Female hero
Arlbeth	Aerin's father, King of Damar	Minor obstacle
Tor	Arlbeth's heir, Aerin's cousin, "first sola"	Love interest
Galanna	Aerin's beautiful, scornful older female cousin	Minor obstacle
Maur	Immense "Black Dragon" of legend	Test/obstacle
Luthe	Immortal mage who teaches, helps, and heals Aerin	Guide, ally, love interest
Agsded	Aerin's mother's brother; immortal mage and demigod	Transforming test
Talat	Arlbeth's half-lame war stallion Aerin adopts and helps to heal	Ally
Aerinha	Legendary goddess, Aerin's namesake	Precedent

Home world: A monarchy, the immediate setting of which is the royal palace and fine surroundings of the capital city of Damar, including its gardens, fields, and court life. In this world, it is unusual to find women in anything other than a traditionally female role. It is a ruthless social world of prejudices and expectations.

Underworld: The outside world, where villagers are tormented by the monstrous Northerners and dragons are frequent nuisances. It is similar to a medieval landscape, and more ancient than the later world of *The Blue Sword*. Magic is much more prevalent in this Damar, and there is much more of a presence of gods/goddesses.

Sabriel by Garth Nix

Character	Description	Role
Sabriel	Abhorsen-in-training, eighteen	Female hero
Touchstone	Charter Mage, descendant of kings	Love interest, ally
Abhorsen	Sabriel's father ("Abhorsen" is his title)	Guide,
Mogget	Abhorsen family's supernatural talking pet cat; male	Guide, Supernatural Aid
Colonel Horyse	Colonel at Ancelstierrian outpost on border	Ally
Kerrigor	Greater Dead; one-time Charter Mage and Prince	Climactic test

Additionally, In *Lirael* and *Abhorsen* (events occur eighteen years after *Sabriel*):

Lirael	Orphan, "Remembrancer"; age 14 / 18	Female hero
Sameth "Sam"	Sabriel & Touchstone's son, Abhorsen-in-training; 16	
The Disreputable Dog	Lirael summons/creates her: a supernatural talking pet dog; female	Guide, Supernatural Aid, ally
Nicholas Sayre	Sam's school friend, nephew of the Ancelstierrian Prime Minister, scientifically-minded	Inadvertent obstacle, ally
Hedge	Necromancer, minion of Orannis	Obstacle
Chlorr	Necromancer; Greater Dead	Obstacle
Orannis	Being from the time of creation; "The Destroyer"	Climactic test

Home world: In *Sabriel*, Ancelstierre, which is similar to an Edwardian British society with electricity, firearms, and most comforts of modern technology. In *Lirael* and *Abhorsen*, Lirael's home world is the Clayr's glacier, far north of the rest of the Old Kingdom.

Underworld: For all three: The Old Kingdom, a medieval-like world rife with Charter and Free Magic. The presence of the Charter prevents most "modern" equipment from functioning properly, meaning any equipment must be manufactured the "old fashioned" way to work properly (swords and bows take precedence over firearms).

The Lioness Quartet by Tamora Pierce

Characters	**Description**	**Role**
Alanna of Trebond	A lord's daughter who wants to be a knight	Female hero
George Cooper	Tortall's King of Thieves, trusted friend	Love interest, ally
Prince Jonathan	Prince (later King); Alanna's first love	Love interest, ally
Coram Smythesson	Alanna's loyal manservant and friend	Ally; father-figure
Sir Myles	Alanna's adoptive father and mentor	Guide, father-figure
Thom of Trebond	Alanna's twin brother, proud sorcerer	Ally, inadvertent obstacle
Duke Roger	Jonathan's cousin, a dangerous sorcerer	Climactic obstacle
Ali Mukhtab	The Voice of the Bazhir; teaches Alanna	Guide, ally
Gary, Raoul	Alanna's friends and fellow fighters	Allies
Princess Thayet	A beautiful foreign deposed princess	Ally
Liam Ironarm	The Shang Dragon: a lauded heroic warrior	Ally; guide
Moonlight	Alanna's mare for all of her adventures	Ally

Faithful	Alanna's supernatural talking pet cat; male	Supernatural aid
The Mother Goddess	Bestows her favor and protection on Alanna	Supernatural guide, mother-figure

Home world: The nation of Tortall. It is a polytheistic society, with male and female deities, with a sense that gods can potentially meddle in humans' lives. Magic is present in certain individuals, called the Gift.

Underworld: The Underworld is a change from familiar to foreign; the new locations become progressively more drastically different in terms of culture, prejudices, magic, and language.

His Dark Materials by Philip Pullman

Characters	**Description**	**Role**
Lyra Belacqua	Daughter of Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter; about twelve	Female hero
Pantalaimon	Lyra's dæmon; her constant companion; male	Ally
Lord Asriel	A nobleman; wages war on the Authority	Obstacle
Mrs. Coulter	A charismatic, manipulative woman working for the Church through the Oblation Board	Obstacle
Roger	Lyra's friend from Oxford; she seeks him in Death itself	Ally, obstacle
Iorek Byrnison	King of the armored bears in Lyra's world	Ally
Serafina Pekkala	A witch-clan leader in Lyra's world	Ally; mother-figure
Lee Scoresby	Aeronaut from Texas in Lyra's world	Ally
Stanislaw Grumman	An explorer in Lyra's world; John Parry in ours	Ally
Will Parry	A boy from *our* world; wielder of the Subtle Knife	Ally; love interest
Mary Malone	A nun turned physicist from our world experimenting with "dark matter" and Dust; plays the "serpent"	Ally
Metatron	An angel who acts as the Authority's hand	Obstacle
Baruch, Balthalmos	Two low angels who serve Lord Asriel and help Will	Allies
Tialys, Salmakia	Two Gallivespian spies in the employ of Lord Asriel	Allies
Dust	The substance of experience; that which makes sentient creatures sentient and adults different from children	
The Authority	A vague antagonistic force	Climactic obstacle

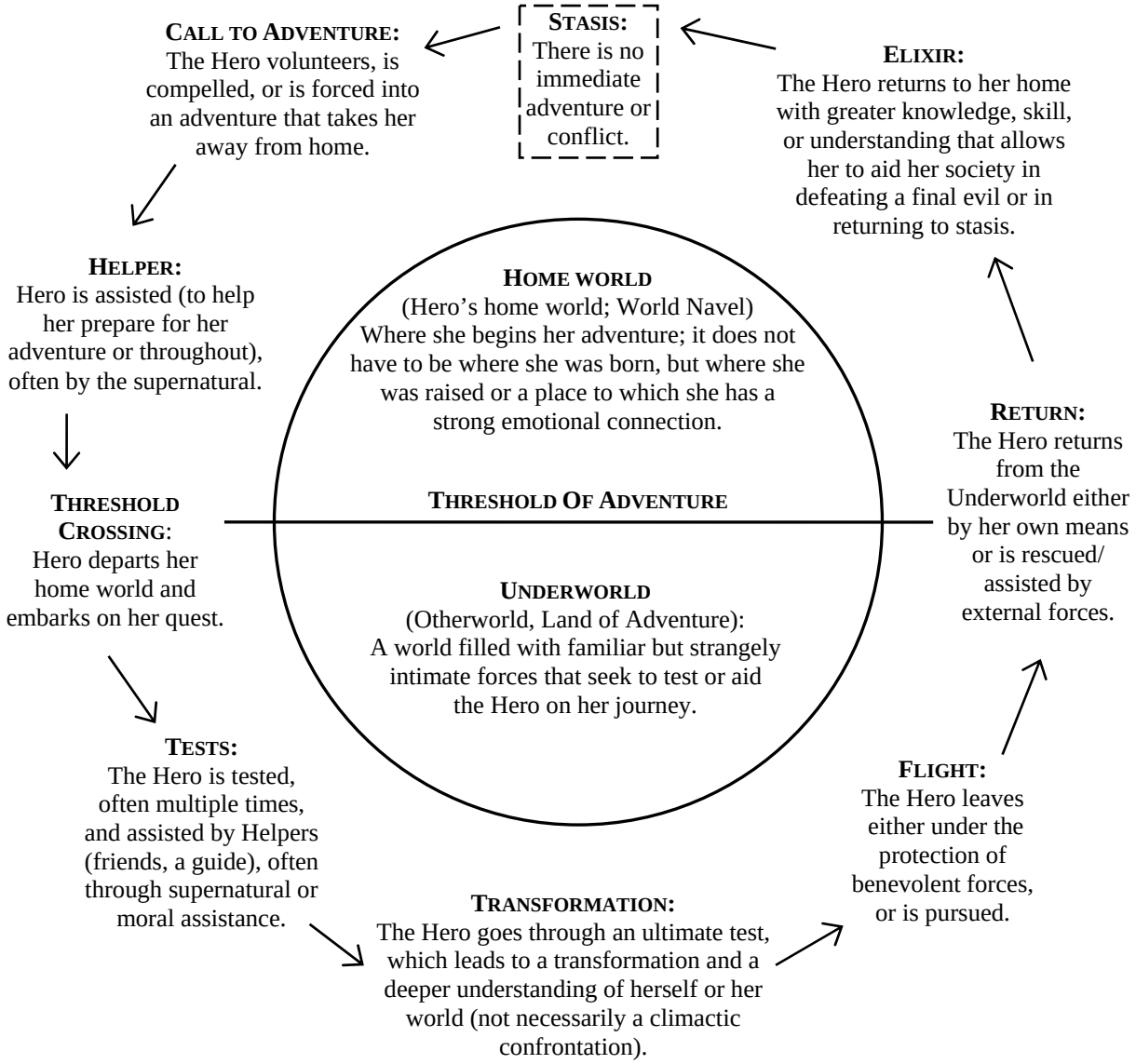
Home world: Lyra's world, a seeming turn of the twentieth century world of odd technologies, where an emphasis on theology and philosophy prevails over scientific inquiry. The people of

Lyra's world also have dæmons (animal-formed external counterparts to humans, usually of the opposite gender).

Underworld: Multiple worlds and locations, all of which vary from one another but are different from the comforting academic world of Jordan College in Oxford. The Underworld for Lyra grows steadily more foreign, from the bustling city life of London, to the far north and the glacial home of the arctic bears, to Cittàgazze and the Specters, to Will's Oxford and its familiar (to the reader) technologies, to the Himalayas of Lyra's world, to Death itself, and several almost completely alien worlds filled with strange species.

APPENDIX II

A DIAGRAM OF JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S HERO STRUCTURE



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Note: These are ordered by author then by year of publication rather than by title to show the order of the series.

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