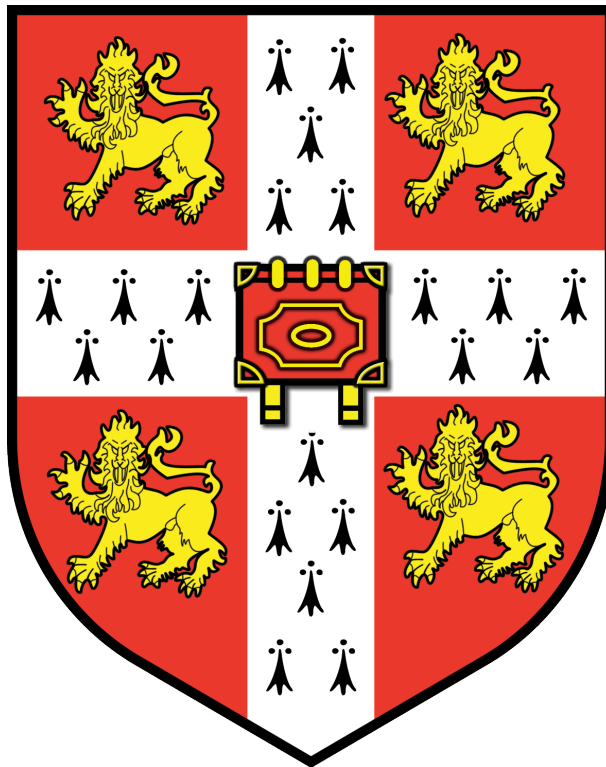


“Girls Who Kick Butt”: A Cognitive Interpretation of Tamora Pierce’s Adolescent Feminist Fantasy



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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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Prose fiction is something you build up from 26 letters and a handful of punctuation marks, and you, and you alone, using your imagination, create a world and people it and look out through other eyes. You get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone else out there is a me, as well. You're being someone else, and when you return to your own world, you're going to be slightly changed.

*Neil Gaiman*

~~~~~

When you read a book, the neurons in your brain fire overtime, deciding what the characters are wearing, how they're standing, and what it feels like the first time they kiss. No one shows you. The words make suggestions. Your brain paints the pictures.

Meg Rosoff

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I got into this to write about girls who kick butt.

*Tamora Pierce*

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Introduction

At the 2012 Edinburgh International Book Festival, Neil Gaiman celebrated the tenth anniversary of his book *Coraline* (2002). He discussed the grown-up women who had informed him that by thinking of Coraline during times of duress, they could better face their fears. Understanding that Coraline knew she was afraid, but persevered despite that, gave these readers the knowledge that they could do so too. She gave them a context for their real-world troubles, and thus helped them cope (Gaiman and Riddell, 2012).

After this talk, I realized I had experienced this phenomenon myself. When I was eleven, I became a bolder individual after reading *Alanna: The First Adventure* (Pierce, 1983). I had wanted to play on a basketball team, but the one I had access to was boys-only. Facing this challenge, I did what I thought Alanna would do: I joined anyway. She did not let anything stop her from pursuing her goals, even if they were prohibited to girls. It did not matter that Alanna lived in a magical world and disguised herself as a boy to become a knight; I saw her determination to achieve, despite gender stereotypes—so they would not stop me, either. This novel showed me how to think and act courageously by providing a hero on the page.

It occurred to me that there must be reasons why books like *Coraline* and *Alanna* seem to have a powerful affective and cognitive impact on readers. While my behavior, and the reported behavior of the girls who spoke to Gaiman, may not seem that out of the ordinary, it is interesting due to broader societal structures that can encourage girls to feel inferior. Research by Lin Bian, Sarah Jane Leslie, and Andrei Cimpian (2017) shows some girls as young as six see themselves as innately less talented than boys. Beliefs such as these prevent girls from participating in activities where natural aptitude seems necessary—perhaps, for example, in playing basketball. Thinking that many girls might be positioning themselves as inferior due to societal pressures, I began to wonder how novels can counteract those demands in ways that result in women reporting lasting impressions and tangible changes in their behavior. In an interview with the BBC, professor Gemma Moss said “girl power” needs to start when people are young—with books—to challenge the assumption that boys are smarter (Bushby, 2017, n.p.). I became more and more intrigued by the idea that stories can affect people so profoundly. I asked myself:

—What about *Coraline* and *Alanna* made readers remember what the characters did and why, and then modify their behavior in light of that?

—Did something connect these books, besides that they are both fantasy texts that focus

on an adolescent female protagonist?

These questions were what initially helped me frame my research ideas. Reading fiction has a profound impact on many people—something book lovers have always known. Stories form an integral part of how humans see the world and make sense of it. We think of the world, of other people, and of ourselves through stories, and “we do things because of the characters we become in our tales of self” (Denzin, 2001, p.60). In the past two decades, scientific research has forwarded the idea of fiction as life-changing (Oatley, 1999, 2009, 2016; Mar, 2011; Djikic, Oatley and Moldoveanu, 2013; Fong, Mullin, and Mar, 2013; Kidd and Castano, 2013, 2016; Decety and Cowell, 2015; Koopman, 2016; Maslej, Oatley, and Mar, 2017; Mumper and Gerrig, 2017; Rain, Cilento, MacDonald, and Mar, 2017). This research has inspired literary scholars to examine this issue as well (Stockwell, 2002; Zunshine, 2006, 2013; Keen, 2006; Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2012; Nikolajeva, 2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Oziewicz, 2015; Trites, 2014, 2017, 2018). The brain affects how we read fiction, and the fiction we read changes our brains. Cognitive narratology, which explores this phenomenon, merges the fields of psychology, neuroscience, and literature to create “a cross-disciplinary approach to reading” (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.4). It “focuses on how brains receive and respond to various aspects of narrative; this field thus encompasses the study of both the textual features that trigger brain responses and the brain’s perceptual processes that allow for the completion of meaning-making” (Trites, 2017, p.102). Our minds seem to be hardwired for narrative understanding, and when examined cognitively, “fiction emerges as an evolutionary adaptation that recalibrates the mind, sharpens social cognition, and offers multiple benefits” (Oziewicz, 2015, p.54). Fiction provides vicarious experiences of imagined spaces and situations that can help shape our perceptions of the real world, our social others, and the self (Fong, Mullin, and Mar, 2015, p.10).

I like what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says in regards to power and representation—she points out how impressionable people can be in the face of stories, particularly when they are children. She explains that because all she read as a child were books in which characters were foreigners (not African, like her), she thought books by their nature had to have foreigners in them (2009, n.p.). She warns people about the dangers of a single story becoming the only narrative people understand. An idea I address in this thesis is that stories having believable female characters have the potential to show readers there is more than one type of girl, and these books “can help make it the norm for girls to see themselves as daring, inventive and, of course, clever” (Bushby, 2017, n.p.). While in theory I agree with what Helen Bushby says, upon further interrogation she is falling into the trap Adichie warns of—that there is only one type of

“best” girl, and that girl is daring, inventive, and clever. To defeat the single story, no one type of girl can be prioritized as better than others, because not all girls are going to be daring or clever. Instead, girls should be whatever type of person they want to be—what is important is they should not be prevented from being themselves because of their gender. Naturally, what kind of person they want to be is complicated by what society they live in, because they might have only been presented with one type of life. They may not know there are other ways for them to think and behave, which is something else these books seem to offer.

This thesis delves into the idea that adolescent readers can engage with a novel’s characters’ thoughts and behaviors by using their improving cognitive abilities to transmute what is on the page into real-life coping strategies. This idea is especially compelling when considering the potential impact empowered female characters in fantasy novels—specifically, in this case, my primary texts—could have on adolescent girl readers, since their malleable brain around puberty (Blakemore and Choudhury, 2006, p.307) makes them more receptive to accepting ideas—such as a person’s gender not being a limitation. In this thesis, I examine what the primary texts themselves offer, and analyze certain aspects of the texts that could be linked to potential readers’ cognitive and affective engagement. Adolescence is a time of growing awareness, and “an empathic sense of injustice can...lead to personal, social, and ideological responses based on understandings of unfairness or evocation of righteous indignation on behalf of victims” (Keen, 2007, p.19). Reading texts that bring an awareness of injustice, combined with empathy-enhancing fiction, could completely change the way people think.

The primary texts I have chosen are two quartets by Tamora Pierce: *The Song of the Lioness* (1983-1988) and *Protector of the Small* (1999-2002). They each focus on two adolescent girls—Alanna and Keladry—who live in the fictional land of Tortall. Each of these characters shuck off gendered stereotypes by training to become knights, and I have selected them because I think they will exemplify the kind of stories I am interested in: adolescent feminist fantasy. I will examine if they fall into that category, and in turn, if what I learn from them can be extrapolated to other texts in the genre. It cannot be stated conclusively of every reader, but the guiding ethos for this thesis is the following idea explained by Suzanne Keen: “Readers might obtain socialization experience through characters’ reactions to fictive situations, translating recognitions about characters back to their own lives” (2007, p.18). Reading has the potential to change people’s lives.

Brief Caveats and Theoretical Framework

Before continuing, there are three caveats I would like to make. The first is that my research is

theoretical, and while I am making educated hypotheses, I also subscribe to J.B.S. Haldane's "duty of doubt," (1928, p.224), and strive to remind both myself and my reader that one cannot be entirely certain of anything. Therefore I use words like 'potentially' and 'likely' because what I am describing is *a singular* outcome—but not the only one, and not necessarily the one all people will experience. And whenever words like 'potentially' are not there, they are implied. The second caveat is that when I describe a character's actions, I am aware that characters are textual functions and have no will of their own. Therefore, I may say "the character decided to do this," but the underlying meaning is that the character was represented as making a decision. I find that repeated use of the phrase "represented as" becomes awkward and tedious, but I want to make it clear that at no point do I believe the characters are real people. The third caveat is that whenever I refer to the reader, unless specifically stated otherwise, I am referring to the potential reader.

My theoretical framework for this thesis is a three-pronged approach: fantasy genre theory, feminist literary theory, and cognitive narratology. I combine genre theory to discuss fantasy fiction, and feminist literary theory to analyze gender; both of these approaches help me dissect my primary texts to see if they can be categorized as adolescent feminist fantasy fiction. I define adolescent feminist fantasy fiction thusly: fiction that is intended for adolescent readers where one of the protagonists is a female adolescent character who is fighting for her agency. While this may seem simple, I tease out the complexities of this definition throughout the thesis. Brief definitions¹ of the important components are:

- adolescent: a person between childhood and adulthood
- agency: a development of representation of characters from lack of power/limited power over themselves to a range of increased or full ability to make their own choices
- feminism: equality of the sexes

I utilize cognitive narratology throughout the thesis to examine the cognitive impact these texts could have on potential readers. It is a suitable theoretical framework for my work, as I am interested in the way texts can affect potential readers' thoughts and behaviors.

First it is important to have a firm grasp of fantasy fiction, both as a genre and its potential usefulness as a milieu for empowered females. Delving into some of the basics of fantasy will

¹ These are *very* brief definitions, all of which I expand upon further throughout this thesis. However, this is a basic place from which to start.

lead into the discussion of what primary texts I have selected and for what reasons—and what implied readers I think the texts presuppose, and what exactly the potential reader is. It is here that I further define adolescence, and ask why fiction for adolescents can be so impactful. I then examine some of the core tenets of feminism, and how its history affected the fiction that was being produced at those specific times—especially fantasy fiction. At the end of the Introduction, I discuss the facets of cognitive narratology I use throughout this thesis, explaining why it is necessary for my work.

I now turn to a discussion of fantasy fiction.

Fantasy as Genre and Potentially Useful Cognitive Tool

I intend to explore adolescent fantasy fiction's potential as a cognitively vital genre, and specifically focus on Pierce's quartets within that field. Adolescence is a time of upheaval and learning (Blakemore and Choudhury, 2006; Hilton and Nikolajeva, 2012); therefore, reading the types of texts I have mentioned could help readers to process different experiences in their lives. Before I define fantasy as I use it in this thesis, I need to discuss genre, which will lead into some of the characteristics of fantasy that make it particularly useful for my research.

If asked to list genres, publishers and bookstores may quickly list science fiction, fantasy, romance, mystery, historical fiction, and so on, but would perhaps be hard pressed to define what genre is itself. Brian Attebery posits that genres are categories “defined not by any clear boundary or definition characteristics but by resemblances to a single core example or [narrative] strategies” (2013, p.38). Tzvetan Todorov starts his discussion of genre by stating that genres are “classes of texts” (1990, p.16), but he quickly dissects that simplification and expands upon it. According to Todorov, there are the basic ideas of what text is—words and sentences—but the interpretation of that text differs depending on the order it is in, and the subsequent meaning each individual makes of it (1990, p.16). Genres are fluid concepts, and as soon as one begins to define them, someone will discover an exception. For my purposes, it is useful to differentiate between mimetic and nonmimetic fiction. Mimesis is a way of looking at fiction, in which fiction is a representation of the realistic world (Hume, 1984; Nikolajeva, 2002, p.8). Kathryn Hume notes that realistic fiction is presented in “ways that we recognize as signifying or resembling what we consider reality” (1984, p.xi), whereas fantasy (or the nonmimetic) is the “deliberate departure from the limits of what is usually accepted as real and normal” (p.xii). I adhere to Marek Oziewicz's view, wherein he posits that nonmimetic fiction is speculative fiction—“in its capacity to describe the alternative past, the alternative present, and the inherently alternative—i.e. not-yet-realized- future, speculative fiction is conceptually larger than mimetic fiction, whose

domain is only the actual past and the actual present” (2015, p.4). Nonmimetic fiction is one of these possibilities—it is constantly metaphorically asking, “What if?”. What if the past were different, what if the future were different, what if there were witches, what if Hitler won the war? Such departures from the consensus of reality require thinking about the world in a different way, which means it needs more imagination and effort on the part of the reader. Mental attention must be paid to a fictional world a reader does not understand because it does not resemble our own.

Fantasy, at its core, is metaphor. While elements of magic and wonder are added to the narrative, conventional challenges like a girl dealing with her first menstruation, or being thwarted in her ultimate desire, still exist. Lubomír Doležal discusses possible worlds in fiction, which encompasses the idea that within the universe of discourse, there are uncountable, nonactualized worlds that differ from our actual world, offering up endless possibilities for fiction (1998, p.786). Maria Nikolajeva points out that while upon first glance realistic fiction offers the closest approximation to the actual world (2014a, p.36), some readers may not have the real-life knowledge described in the action of the text, making it an unfamiliar story. Therefore, a text that is anchored in a specific time and space will only approximate the actual world for a limited number of readers who have the knowledge of that time and space. For the readers who do not have that knowledge, the possible world is pushed away from the actual world (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.36). So while narratives such as the domestic, family, or school story may seem realistic, “they inevitably reflect both the society within which they were written and the society they depict” (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.37). Mimetic fiction may not be as straightforward as it seems, but perhaps only for readers who do not have that specific life-to-text experience. For those that do understand the specific time-place of a story, it may seem mundane and uninteresting. I am not saying all fiction that recreates a world familiar to readers is necessarily boring; it may offer a particular familiar kind of enjoyment. What I am saying is that a fantasy world will be unfamiliar at first to all readers, and therefore a new text will always initially defamiliarize readers. Even when readers consume a lot of fantasy fiction, they can never be sure about the guidelines for each particular possible world.

Fantasy is the fiction of impossibility, which makes it the fiction of possibility. While to some extent all fiction is open to different readings, fantasy fiction especially “opens spaces for interpretation” (Sandner, 2004, p.1), and that interpretation is up to readers’ imaginations. In 1712, Joseph Addison wrote, “Our imagination loves to be filled with an object or to grasp at anything that is too big for its capacity” (2004, p.142). What Addison is hinting at here, hundreds of years before it was scientifically demonstrable, is what has since been studied in cognitive and

neuropsychology—that the functions in the brain appear to enjoy a challenge. Nikolajeva posits that xenotopia, or strangeworldliness, “offers many cognitive challenges to the reader,” and fantasy does that to a great extent (2014a, p.40). And again, while all fiction does this to a certain degree, fantasy fiction provides boundless possibilities. It is also a useful genre to utilize when discussing adolescent literature, since adolescents have been known to read it vociferously (Blackford, 2004). One of the possible reasons for that is it allows its young characters to have more agency than their counterparts in realistic fiction.

Fantasy fiction allows characters to have more empowerment because fantasy worlds do not have to follow the rules of the realistic world—which, for example, has girls aged six believing that women are innately less talented than men (Bian, Leslie, and Cimpian, 2017, p.389). The worlds in fantasy fiction do not need to adhere to the suppositions of our world, and therefore can create worlds where girls are afforded more power (Attebery, 2013). When using the term empowerment, I mean a development of representation of a character from a lack of agency/limited agency to a range of increased or full agency. I have linked this concept to Roberta Seelinger Trites’ idea of agency, wherein she states a text works as a feminist children’s novel if the protagonist is more aware at the end of the book of their ability to make their own choices and to assert their personality (1997, p.6). She does not say this about any one genre within children’s literature, and I take it as a jumping-off point for how to look for agency within this thesis.

There is tangible evidence that readers *do* engage with fiction, and that their empathy is improved by it, which makes what kind of stories people read that much more interesting (Mar et. al., 2006; Mar and Oatley, 2008; Heath and Wolf, 2012; Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Kidd and Castano, 2013; Fong, Mullin, and Mar, 2015²). Knowing this engagement happens, it is important to examine what fantasy fiction can accomplish when it comes to ideas such as gender norms and empowerment, and what that could potentially mean for readers. Karen Coats says it is good for readers to engage in fantasy fictions that lets them consider a future beyond their current social environments because it allows them to realize that they do not have to accept the status quo—if they do not like something about their lives, they can change it (2017, loc.8044-8045). Fantasy is better equipped to imagine possible scenarios where thinking about differences between people (whether it be socioeconomic status, gender, race, sexual identity, or anything) is a positive thing, whereas realistic fiction more often portrays these differences as problems that must be solved (Coats, 2017, loc.8061-8063).

Reading Pierce’s quartets alone will not empower readers; much more is involved than

² I go into each of these studies in detail later in this thesis.

that. To further elucidate upon what I mean when I say empowerment, I look to Albert Bandura, a sociocognitive psychologist who studies self-efficacy (1997). He thinks the term empowerment is misused by political groups, which make people think it is a quantifiable thing that is bestowed upon people like a gift. Instead, he defines it as that which is gained through developing a personal efficacy that *enables* people to make use of opportunities and break through social constraints. He says that the idea of enablement is most important, and *that* is what enhances agency. Vital for this process is “equipping people with a firm belief that they can produce valued effects...and providing them with the means to do so” (1997, p.477). The books I have selected are part of an enabling process. This enabling can be achieved through the cognitive and affective challenges posed to readers, as books that are challenging are part of the equation that affords readers the opportunity to engage with texts. Fantasy books can provide that challenge.

There are several types of fantasy, and Farah Mendlesohn puts them into four broad categories—though she cautions against taking this taxonomy as unchangeable. These categories are portal-quest fantasy, where a fantastic world is entered through a portal; intrusion fantasy, where the fantastical breaks into the real world; liminal fantasy, when the fantastic is there but it is blasé; and finally, immersive fantasy (2008, p.xix- xxiii). I look for evidence within my primary texts to prove they belong to the category of immersive fantasy, as I think it has the potential to be the most cognitively demanding.

Immersive Fantasy

I use Mendlesohn’s term immersive fantasy, as I see the reader as being fully immersed in a strange new world—much like the characters are completely enmeshed in this world, because it is, figuratively, the only one they are aware of. I will refer to the immersive fantasy setting as the fantasy or fictional world, and to the world we live in as the real world. These fantasy worlds have no relation to ours in a geographical sense—characters cannot be transported from our world to the worlds in immersive fantasy, such as in portal fantasy, and nothing from the immersive fantasy world can break into ours, as in intrusion fantasy (James and Mendlesohn, 2012, p.2). The worlds of immersive fantasy are logical and coherent unto themselves—they make sense on their own terms (Mendlesohn, 2008, p.63). Coats says that one of the most interesting things about fantasy novels is the need for consistency and verisimilitude in its worldbuilding, meaning that “the world of the book must have its own rules, and an author cannot change them willy-nilly” (2017, loc.8123-8127). Fantasy is a nonmimetic genre, but it relies on mimesis to create its reality: “a possible world of fiction thus includes physical as well as social features that may or may not reflect the actual world, but that are true within the possible

world” (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.36). Once it sets up its governing rules, the fantasy world cannot break them, otherwise it loses its credibility. However, the further from reality a fictional world is, the more the reader’s brain has to work to understand it. More attention must be paid, and more imagination is required to comprehend the bizarre things that may be encountered: “the more difficult and demanding it is for the readers to orientate themselves in a possible world, the better for cognitive development. Within reason—encountering a completely incomprehensible world, novice readers are likely to give up” (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.44). A balance between the recognizable and unrecognizable must be achieved for a fantasy story to work.

An immersive fantasy world without any discernible connection to an identifiable fiction world demands a lot from a reader cognitively, especially in regards to attention (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.43). While Nikolajeva is not specifically discussing immersive fantasy, it is still relevant because it is potentially the most extreme type of fantasy—one where there is absolutely no reference to the real world, and therefore nothing realistic for the reader to start from. That is part of what makes immersive fantasy such a valuable cognitive tool—the rules of this new world are unknown to a reader, who must unearth the intricacies and nuances of how this place works. Can animals talk? Are there witches? Does communication occur through touch, or telepathy? These are only a few examples of questions that must be navigated when a reader picks up an immersive fantasy text. Readers’ brains must “make the effort to imagine how it would feel to live in a world like that” (Nikolajeva, 2015). And the more ambiguous a text is, the more the brain needs to work—when a person is presented with something they do not know, but is intriguing, they can engage with it. When readers do not recognize phenomena from their life experience, they must adjust their expectations accordingly and use their imagination to recreate a world (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.49). While, as stated, this occurrence can happen in mimetic fiction for readers who do not have the particular lived experience of a realistic world, an immersive fantasy world creates a defamiliarization for all readers at some level. Upon first reading an immersive fantasy text, a reader cannot have all the prior knowledge of that new world, meaning they will have to pay more attention to understand the story.

Fantasy fiction becomes accessible because while realistic fiction is mostly specific and “enmeshed in...local-cultural circumstances and national histories,” fantasy is global and “relies on imagined settings, races, characters, and cultures” (Oziewicz, 2015, p.13). It has the power to be the wildest of imaginings, while simultaneously helping readers comprehend the everyday. That is because fantasy has the ability to both create and undermine the illusion of familiarity: “the point of fantasy is to portray the real world in disguise, as a metaphor” (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.44). Immersive fantasy especially is “amenable to political readings” (Bould and Vynt, 2012,

p.107), setting up societies that can easily lend themselves to metaphors about specific issues. Attebery states that fantasy's reliance on traditional motifs means it does not usually change its entire fictional society, but instead focuses on the development of the exceptional individual (Attebery, 1992, p.103). But this concept does not mean it only impacts the individual character within that fantasy world—"even without remaking every cultural institution, fantasy can call certain assumptions into question" (Attebery, 1992, p.103), whether that be within the narrative or without. This idea becomes important in texts that illustrate inequalities that are perhaps too subtle, or too well-established in that world, for the character to consciously notice, but are there for the reader to see (Oziewicz, 2015, p.260). It refutes the idea of fantasy as only escapism, as we compare fantasy worlds to our world, and use the text-to-life strategy to project the fictional into the actual.

Not only can reading fantasy help readers comprehend the real world, it can help change their ideas about it. I argue that readers should be able to understand agency as a concept that they may obtain, learning from characters that have more power to affect change, and that this behavior is more accomplishable in fantasy. This phenomenon is because "fantasy characters have significantly stronger agency than characters in realistic fiction" (Nikolajeva, 2016). The rules that apply to characters in mimetic fiction do not always exist in nonmimetic ones, allowing the characters to change, both their own lives and their societies in general. Attebery says that in mimesis, "characters are limited; like everything else in the story they must conform to our sensory experience of the real world" (1992, p.3). In the real world, we are often inculcated with the idea that following the rules is laudable. But that often results in outdated and sexist ideas permeating throughout society.

Fantasy has the potential to prove that the status quo need not remain so. It allows for social and gender transgression because protagonists are able to exhibit more agency and change their lives—which is possible, yet not as likely, in a realistic text. The more agency a character has within a given setting, the more enabled they are to make choices that may go against the norm—for example, within my primary texts, the immersive fantasy setting is what makes it possible for Alanna to crossdress convincingly as a boy and to train as a knight, with no one recognizing that she is a girl. In doing so, she has broken the law of Tortall; this action can be seen as morally dubious. Readers need to decide if what the character did has merit, and if doing something similar in the real world would be condonable—even favorable. If what the character has done helps enable her agency, this becomes pertinent for my research, as texts encourage readers to take that into consideration when contemplating whether to accept what the character has done. Fantasy is a useful genre for cognitive studies, because it has the potential to teach

readers about the real world without seeming to do so, since the settings are bizarre and not of our world.

I do not dismiss other types of fiction thoughtlessly. Lisa Zunshine has shown that even a common story about teenagers in love produces complex metacognitive reasoning (2013, n.p.). Other genres require a similar sort of mental attention that fantasy does. The mystery novel requires the reader to attempt to discover the killer, and in realistic fiction the description of the everyday can be bizarre enough to necessitate special attention. But while these types of stories may stimulate higher levels of cognition, it makes sense that narratives that require attention to the minutest of strange details could potentially do this to a greater extent. Would it not make sense that in a world where everything is new, like in fantasy novels, the everyday concepts that readers are accustomed to are shaken apart, and readers must expand their minds to encompass everything new? In the literary world, fantasy has often needed defending as a worthwhile genre (as, so often, does children's literature). This defense "stems from the division between high and low in our literary culture, in which belief in mimesis, the idea that a writer or artist can accurately describe reality, took centre stage" (Levy and Mendlesohn, 2016, p.1). Within children's literature itself, "fantasy has high status...while in general literature it is most often treated as pulp" (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.43). It seems logical that fiction that breaks away from the mimetic, the everyday reality of the regular world, would disrupt readers' expectations more than that which is traditionally termed 'literary.' Fantasy fiction, or any kind of fiction, when written well should stimulate reflection and discussion, making it as worthy as the latest Man Booker winner. At its best, fantasy can be original and innovative, and the primary texts I have chosen are examples of that. I move now to discuss the primary texts I have selected for this thesis.

Corpus Justification

There is a range of books I could choose for my research, from ones published decades ago to ones published this year. The following are a handful of books I consider to be adolescent feminist fantasy: *A Wrinkle in Time* (L'Engle, 1962) *The Last Unicorn* (Beagle, 1968), *The Darkangel* (Meredith Ann Pierce, 1982), *Sabriel* (Nix, 1995), *His Dark Materials* (Pullman, 1995-2000), *Ella Enchanted* (Levine, 1997), *The Wee Free Men* (Pratchett, 2003), *Vampire Academy* (Mead, 2007), *The Mortal Instruments* (Clare, 2007- 2014), *Graceling* (Cashore, 2008), *Daughter of Smoke and Bone* (Taylor, 2011), *The Lunar Chronicles* (Meyer, 2012-2015), and *The Rebel of the Sands* trilogy (Hamilton, 2015-2018). I do not dismiss these and the countless other books like them summarily; I have chosen Pierce's books because I feel they best suit my purpose. I am aware of these other books, and books like them, and that awareness helps inform my ideas of the genre,

and the impact it has had on readers. But it would be nearly impossible to include all books of this type in my research, so I have selected a few texts outside the two quartets to contextualize and compare with my primary selections.

Not much academic research has been conducted on Pierce's works, and almost none of it has examined it from a cognitive narratological standpoint. Deborah O'Keefe (2003) briefly mentions the Alanna stories, to dismiss them as formulaic (something I argue against). John Stephens and Robyn McCallum (2013) discuss *Lioness* from a mythopoetic view, and are more favorably inclined towards the texts than O'Keefe. Susan Fichtelberg wrote an entry for Tamora Pierce in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Young Adult Literature*, wherein she describes how popular Pierce's books are, the background of Pierce's writing, and the numerous awards that Pierce has won (2005, p.573-574). The two most useful studies I have found on Pierce's works are by Victoria Flanagan (2008) and Anastasia Salter (2013). Flanagan predominantly analyzes the gendered implications of Alanna disguising herself as a boy, and I draw from this text at various points throughout this work. Salter briefly discusses aspects of cognitive narratology and *Lioness*—again, I address this text further later. Apart from my own chapter, "Disruption—Not Always a Bad Thing: A Look at Scripts in Tamora Pierce's *First Test*" (Day, 2017), I have not found anything written about *Protector*. This lack of research on Pierce's books seemed like an oversight on the part of children's literature scholarship, and part of the reason why I chose to use her books in my thesis—as I will show in the following paragraphs, Pierce's books have had an impact on a number of people, and I felt that my thesis could help address this academic gap.

Flanagan and Salter both treated Pierce's books as feminist fantasy, which supports my choice; but they have not focused on what I want to focus on, which is part of what makes my research new and different. I selected my primary texts because I thought they might be representative of adolescent feminist fantasy fiction. I decided to primarily focus on two quartets: *The Song of the Lioness*, which is focalized through the character Alanna, and *Protector of the Small*, which is focalized through the character Keladry; these texts correspond to each other because they each focus on adolescent girls who want to be knights. They are separated by a fictional gap of twenty years, which means that they have similar goals but vastly disparate environments. I also include Pierce's other works that take place in or near the realm of Tortall, as this will provide a larger context to see how Pierce has portrayed her fictional world as developing. The books depict over thirty years of fictional history, wherein it can be seen how Alanna's portrayed actions affect the entire society, providing a fictional case study where I examine the differences and interconnectedness of the ideas of second- and third-wave feminism. Choosing to narrow in on two of Pierce's quartets has given more focus to my

research, as well as allowing me to explore these particular stories in depth more than if I had selected several texts. Keladry from *Protector* can train openly as a girl and a knight directly because of what Alanna has been depicted as doing in *Lioness*, and the parallels between their stories point out different types of gender inequality, gender performativity, and personality traits, some of which may engage certain readers more than others. It will be enlightening to look at similar experiences that these two characters have, and those that are vastly different, and to see if those experiences are due to their different types of personality or because of their gender. I analyze this within the context of script and schema disruption, and try to bring to light the complexities of these two characters.

While I enjoy these books, and they were important for me as I grew up, they were important to other people too. *Alanna* is currently (as of February 2018) #4 on Goodreads' list "Best Kick-Ass Female Characters From YA and Children's Fantasy and Science Fiction"—the first one on the list from a book published in the 1980s. Sixteen of Pierce's books appear in the top 100 in that category. The following is a selection of some of the views of people who were deeply influenced by these books. These reader comments demonstrate the impact that these books had on them, and it is likely that many other readers may find similar value in them³. Some Goodreads reviews that stand out are:

"In retrospect, this is not a perfect novel, or series of novels, but when I think of who I wanted to be when I was ten years old, my answer was always Alanna"
(Natalie, 2008).

"This is one of those books that will stick with me, literally and metaphorically. I have it with me at college...The whole series and all the ones I have of the spin off series are dear to me. They are wonderful for girls who are growing up. It is one story after another of strong young girls turning into strong young women"
(Erin, 2008).

"I remember being handed the first one by a librarian, and begging my parents to buy it for me when I had to turn it back in. I remember then begging the librarian to tell me the date the next one was expected to release (that was the

³ Of course, they do not include the comments of those who were not deeply influenced by these books, because those people are less likely to leave reviews.

only way to find out, in those days). I remember the look and location of each new book, in the bookstore, when I went to pick it up. I still have all my first editions...This series actually did change my life” (Gail Carriger, 2009).

“Alanna got me through being 13, and years later I think about her on a regular basis...It is impossible to overstate how hard I fell for this series and that imagining my life without them is not only distasteful but unfathomable” (Angie, 2012).

These reviews are a sampling of hundreds I could have picked to elucidate the impact Pierce’s books have had, and I selected them because they have been ranked on Goodreads as some of the most useful reviews (and because they were all five out of five stars). But beyond that, I believe that these books have features that are a good example of the genre. They are immersive fantasy texts, and, as stated, while that itself does not make a book more empowering, it does afford more potential for empowerment within a text. It also potentially leads to cognitive dissonance, or having puzzling thoughts, in readers, which is important when regarding readers’ attention to the details of a text. Each quartet closely focalizes one character, a girl with determination and challenges of several kinds to overcome. These characters are depicted as living in a society that is vastly different from our own⁴, yet has similarities to it when considering scripted roles for girls and what is expected of them.

The final reason I have selected these texts is for the simple fact that, while they each predominantly focalize through one adolescent girl as she trains to become a knight, the stories and characters are still different. When it comes to whether or not a reader engages fully in a story depends greatly on that specific story. The action of the plot, the types of characters, the larger implications—all of these aspects can affect how a person feels about a story, as well as innumerable other facets. As Keen says, “No one text evokes the same responses in all of its readers, and not all texts succeed in stimulating readers to feel and act as their authors apparently wish” (2007, p.4). Choosing two quartets constructs two different—though similar—implied readers, and therefore more chances to engage with a text. This avoids the problem Adichie identifies as the single story: it “creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (2009, n.p.). There is not only one story for readers—there is not only one reader. Using these

⁴ That is, in an English-speaking Western world in the 2010s.

two characters' stories allows me to compare and contrast their depicted lives, and shows that even when it seems like things are the same, they can be very different indeed.

As stated, I think these books might be examples of adolescent feminist fantasy fiction. This thesis will discover if Pierce's writing is representative of this type of fantasy; if it is so, then any findings from this thesis will be applicable to other books that are adolescent feminist fantasy fiction.

While thus far I have begun discussing fantasy, it is important to talk about each element of that term. One of the trickiest words to analyze is "adolescent"—both in what it means for adolescents themselves, and how to know what a book's intended readership is. I now turn to the concept of adolescents and readers to explain the implied and potential reader of these texts.

Constructing My Implied Reader, Analyzing the Potential Reader, and Defining Adolescence

While it is only recently that technological advancement has provided the tools to see what happens to the brain during reading, I turn now to Wolfgang Iser (1978), who forty years ago described the un-self-conscious experience of reading. He said that a reader's being—that is, their mind, personality, and experiences—will tend to form the background of understanding what a particular book means. A person cannot disappear completely while they read a story. They remain themselves, while simultaneously taking on the different mind(s) involved in a narrative. Iser states that if readers were to vanish while they read, they would forget all the life-experiences they bring into play while they read—"experiences which are responsible for the many different ways in which people fulfill the reader's role set out by the text" (1978, p.37)⁵. Through that reading, readers may lose conscious awareness of their experiences, but those experiences still affect who that reader is, and how they interpret what they read. Iser says that by the end of reading, readers are liable to consciously want to incorporate the new experiences gained during reading into the reader's store of knowledge (1978, p.37). Thus, every text is different to every reader, and every reader can find a new meaning in a story. But there are not infinite meanings to be found. I can conclusively state that there are several interpretations of *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, 1937), but that the story is not about a group of silly puppies playing fetch. Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer elucidate, saying that texts are not open to any and all ways of making them meaningful—a specific reader is implied (2003, p.18). But like Iser says, all readers are different, meaning that texts do not have only one meaning. It is finding the balance between text and reader that creates the perfect synchronicity: "In becoming the reader a text

⁵ Which is the definition of life-to-text strategies.

implies, then, readers are not in the process of losing themselves in the text. And equally, they are not in the process of losing the text in themselves” (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003, p.18). That is how the implied reader is created.

The idea of implied readers has been examined by several scholars, and many of them have specifically addressed it in children’s literature (e.g. Iser, 1971, 1978; Chambers, 1985; Nikolajeva, 2002). While I am dealing with feminist ideas and focusing on female protagonists, my implied reader is not female. Nor is it male. My implied reader cannot be assigned “to one of the categories of race, gender, class, or age conventionally used to describe human subjects...but by describing a set of knowledges and decoding skills” (Reimer, 2010, p.5). The implied reader is an abstract idea and not a real person at all, yet it is imbued with perceived experience and knowledge. There are implied readers for every text, or group of texts, genre, or historical period, and it is the text itself that dictates what kind of person that is: texts “suggest in their subject and their style the characteristics of the reader best equipped to understand and respond to them” (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003, p.16). I think of my implied reader as beyond a single person and instead as a set of knowledges and experiences.

However, that set of knowledges and experiences comes from an implied audience that has a set of more basic characteristics: they are located in a Western, English-speaking country (likely the USA or the UK); they are educated, and likely to be middle-class. They are probably aged 10-14 when they start the series (though possibly younger, as younger readers often read texts where the protagonist is older), though the books are now often found in the “young adult” or “teen” section of bookstores, which possibly is a result of both starting with ten-year-old protagonists and ending with one who is 18 (Kel) and another in her early 20s (Alanna). More than likely the reader is female, though, as I argued above, it is not necessarily so. While the implied reader will more than likely have limited life experience, these are probably not the first fantasy texts that they are reading, as by this age, they will have been exposed to many other fantasy stories—they will probably have seen films such as *Mulan* (Cook and Bancroft, 1998), *Brave* (2012), *Frozen* (2013), or *Moana* (2016), all of which contain magic and female characters searching for agency. Reading about Alanna and Kel will likely not be the first time they have encountered female characters with difficult goals to accomplish—specifically difficult because of their gender. But it is important to note that this is the *contemporary* implied reader; the people who first read *Lioness* in the 1980s would not have had this exposure to empowered female characters, meaning that for them, Alanna would have been one of the first well-rounded female heroes they had ever encountered. It is necessary to remember that these books could have had an unbelievable impact on those who had never seen anything like Alanna, but that these texts

can build in influence for readers who have seen other female heroes.

The implied reader is an important concept for this thesis. However, there is another term that is more significant: potential reader. The implied reader is something that exists within the text, and is constructed by that text. The term potential reader means real flesh and blood readers that can be affected by reading these books. It is an abstract concept, but it is a concept that is imperative for this thesis. I am extrapolating what possible outcomes exist for actual people. While this approach may not seem entirely scientific, as I have no empirical evidence of my own, these are my reflections, and in my reflections I follow the most eminent cognitive narratological scholars, such as Zunshine (2006, 2013), Patrick Colm Hogan (2003, 2009, 2011), Peter Stockwell (2002) and Nikolajeva (2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2017) in how they approach these concepts. It is not just possible, but legitimate, to speculate that fiction does affect readers and readers do take something out of fiction that affects their understanding and behavior. That is a concept that has been guessed at for centuries, but now has neuroscientific backing. It does not mean that it was not a legitimate idea beforehand—it now means that it is an idea that can be taken further. That is why the term potential reader is indispensable for this thesis. I am, in an educated and informed manner, speculating how all of these different aspects may work for a potential reader, because that is what cognitive criticism does. Cognitive narratology is doing something new, by answering questions literary scholars have had but also by bringing up new questions. We need someone with a literary background to ask the right questions, which is what I am attempting to do in this thesis. I am analyzing what may be the outcome from a real reader picking up a book and reading it. I am examining the possible interactions that may occur, and that is necessary in children's literature at this time because no one has done it by combining the particular theoretical strands I use: namely, fantasy texts, feminist literary theory, and cognitive narratology. The work I create in this thesis explains concepts that have never been explained in this manner before, along with terms that have never before been used.

One of those terms is adolescent feminist fantasy fiction. I have chosen to call Pierce's texts adolescent novels, and the primary difference between an adolescent novel and a children's one is that the protagonists of the first are predominantly adolescents, while in the latter they are primarily children. This demarcation implies that adolescent novels are for adolescents, and children's novels for children—although in reality that is not always the case, as readers are frequently younger than protagonists⁶. This definition may seem basic, but it is untangling the differences between children and adolescents where the complications ensue. In a general sense,

⁶ And, in the case of myself and my colleagues, the readers are usually older.

adolescence is defined as the period between childhood and adulthood, although in the past fifty years, “the length of time and degree of importance associated with adolescence have both grown significantly” (Day, 2013, p.8). While the clear beginning of adolescence appears to be going through puberty, with physical changes marking children as growing (which I will look for in my primary texts through external descriptions, such as growing breasts and the onset of menses), it is harder to tell when adolescence ends. While before, it was said that adolescence was formed of the ages between 12 and 20 (Rudd, 2010, p.140), the cultural markers that used to exist to denote the start of adulthood, such as choosing a career or getting married, are being pushed back or ignored altogether (Day, 2013, p.8). Adolescence can now stretch onwards past the teenage years, with the most recent research saying it goes to the age of twenty-four (Sawyer et. al, 2018), which is one reason why I do not refer to my primary texts as teenage fiction, or young adult literature. The first is too specific (and often inaccurate) in time, and the latter marks this time period as dependent on adulthood. Adolescence should be seen as its own distinct time-period. It is a vital time for development as a person, where one discovers more about oneself and the surrounding world. Adolescents should not only be regarded as almost-adults, but as people within their own right; people who may be confused and conflicted about changes (physical and mental) in their lives, but never to be seen as almost-people (Hilton and Nikolajeva, 2012, p.4). I therefore look for protagonists who are in adolescence through mental representations of characters whose worldviews are changing, whose thoughts are in turmoil, and who are confused about the many new things they are experiencing.

A reason why a potential adolescent reader is important for my thesis, as well as adolescent protagonists, is because the adolescent brain is going through changes, but that does not happen at a prescribed age for anyone. Oziewicz discusses age restrictions and the definition of childhood: “the concern with narrow age classifications, important for the publishers and marketing executives, is not something with which engaged readers tend to bother” (2015, p.2). When it comes to the primary texts I analyze, an acceptance of fluidity of age is required, for both characters and potential readers. Since adolescence itself is fluid, it does not make sense to say it begins and ends at arbitrary ages. Many of the characters start their books when they are young and end them when it could be said they have reached adulthood, but that does not preclude them from being adolescent fiction. Trites points out that while adolescent fiction may seem to be about empowerment, it actually shows that real power comes from leaving adolescence behind (2000, p.3). I examine my primary texts to see whether or not maturation into adulthood is forced on the protagonists when they search for freedom and empowerment. In some ways, the characters do not want to grow older, since that brings bodily changes—

more developed breasts, along with menses—which for the warrior characters can be seen as an inconvenience. But if the protagonists are all searching for some empowerment, or the ability to do something to which they have been barred, they may see adulthood as the only logical answer. However, perhaps Pierce’s protagonists are more welcoming of adolescence because they are written in a fantasy world, which, as previously stated, permits greater agency in its characters. Coats tells us that adolescent fiction focuses on the same kinds of tensions that adolescents are dealing with in their physical and mental lives: “between growth and stasis, between an ideal world we can imagine and the one we really inhabit...and, perhaps most importantly, between an impulsive individualism and a generative ethics of interconnectedness” (2010, p.316). That interconnectedness, along with the idea of the ideal world, brings to mind social interactions, and what kind of society adolescents desire and perceive. Part of adolescence is becoming more aware of the social world, and the idea that there are *others* who are *people*—and that people have wants, thoughts, and behaviors just like them.

The social brain, or the parts of the brain involved in understanding others, undergoes “structural development, including synaptic reorganization, during adolescence” (Blakemore, 2008, p.267). At birth, humans have millions of synaptic connections; in what is believed to be an effort to make the brain more efficient, these synapses are pared down in the first years of life—the brain discovers which connections are not used and cuts them off (Blakemore and Choudhury, 2006, p.207). A similar phase has been recorded during adolescence. The brain rearranges inefficient synapses, making puberty a malleable time. Sarah-Jayne Blakemore and Suparna Choudhury have discovered that around puberty, the brain could be more responsive to change in executive function and social cognition (2006, p.307). They say that “certain social cognitive skills might be much more difficult to incorporate into brain networks once they are established after puberty” (2006, p.307). It is not radical that new concepts are more easily accepted before people have become set in their ways; now there is neurological evidence that the brain is physically more flexible during puberty than it is later.

This concept is partially why reading fiction that challenges preconceived notions about the world could be especially poignant for adolescents—their brains have not closed off potential new connections. I relate this idea to adolescent readers being educated about feminism: specifically, in what is expected of girls, both in their thoughts and behaviors. If fantasy fiction with empowered female characters is introduced to adolescent readers, it seems possible that these books could have a powerful impact on how those adolescents think and behave. I now discuss another part of my term adolescent feminist fantasy fiction—feminism.

Feminist [Literary] History and Gender Performativity

Gender bias has existed for millennia in the entire world, though here I am discussing it primarily in the Western world, and it is so ingrained it often seems like an impossible battle to fight. This sexism can be found in the building blocks of everyday life, such as in word choices in the English language. People of both genders are commonly referred to as “he” or “him,” whereas only females are called “she” or “her.” These language choices inform the power structure that exists at a non-self-conscious level of society. It also informs certain word choices I have made in this thesis. When referring to my potential reader, I use the term “they” to signify both singular and plural cases, as to negate the preference of one gender over the other. I also use the word “hero” instead of “heroine,” because it harkens back to the idea of separate but equal⁷. I find no reason why there should be a word that means a person is a hero, no matter their gender, but also a word that means a person is a hero but only if they are a girl. Being a hero is, in essence, a genderless act, and therefore I use the word that reflects that truth.

That I am focusing my critical study on primary texts written by a woman author is a feminist literary act. The published writings of women were usually ignored by critics before the 1970s, and therefore often went out of print. In 1979, Elaine Showalter defined the word gynocritic to refer to someone who helped “to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature...rather than to adapt male models and theories” (p.32). She argued that a theoretical approach such as this was needed to “stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition” (p.32). Since the majority of literary criticism had heretofore only looked at male writers, literary criticism was a de facto male criticism. Showalter proposed that gynocritics “focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture” (p.32). This lack of attention placed on texts produced by women was only brought to the forefront less than forty years ago exemplifies the gap left in the world of literature. The lives of women writers and the opportunities open to them have changed exponentially in the past forty-plus years, and this is reflected in the number of books published by them, and in the types of characters they have written. Part of the reason why I have selected two quartets written by the same author, placed in the same fictional world, is to see how both real world history has affected these texts, and how the fictional history has changed the story world in the imagined time that has passed. To do so, I provide a brief history of feminism, both literary and otherwise, from which to begin.

⁷ A phrase used in the Jim Crow era of US history, where it was stated that black Americans were provided with the same level of facilities (schools, buses, water fountains, et cetera) as white Americans, but they were separated to maintain racial harmony. As history and the civil rights movement of the 1960s made evident, that which is separate can never truly be equal.

The word feminist was first used in 1895 to describe someone who advocated for the equality of the sexes, although it was used disparagingly to refer to a woman with intelligence (OED). Since then, historians agree that feminism has experienced four ‘waves’—the first being focused on women earning the right to vote in the early twentieth century; the second occurred in the 1960s and 70s and centered around the idea of the political sphere affecting women’s personal lives; the third started in the 1990s and was about the concept of multiple feminisms, and the effort to make groups within the label of ‘women’ feel included in the general feminist movement; and the fourth wave is happening now, made possible by the immediacy provided by the internet and the ability to ‘call out’ sexism experienced in everyday life (Munro, 2013). More important than the historical timeframes of the waves are the ideas that they represent, though calling them waves can call to mind those ideas without having to specifically refer to them each time. I am most interested in the second and third waves (as well as the fourth, but in a peripheral way), as they tie into the time periods when my primary texts were published, and reflect the social context in which they were written. I therefore briefly describe these two waves, and the implications the real world events had on fiction published during these times.

The second wave of feminism came about because of the status of women in the US in 1960. Legally-binding statutes meant that a husband could control his wife’s income and property, but she could not touch his. To get a divorce, a woman had to prove that her husband had wronged her in some way—for example, by his marrying someone else or having children in another state. Betty Friedan, a graduate-trained psychologist who, like most women then, gave up her job to take care of her husband and children, captured the ethos of these women in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), the publication of which publicized the dissatisfaction millions of housewives felt across America. Margalit Fox writes that a typical woman of the 1950s, even if she were college-educated, had a life that focused exclusively on chores and children: “She did the mopping and the marketing and took her husband’s gray flannel suit to the cleaners. She was happy to keep his dinner warm till he came wearily home from downtown” (2006). But she *was not* happy—and that was the feminine mystique that Friedan wrote about. Women wanted the basic rights of equality and freedom, and they wanted this to be the law.

The second wave was a movement that led to things the West now considers normal—as if they have always been here. Before this movement, rape crisis centers, women’s shelters, and health clinics were not common; neither was equal access to education, increased participation in politics and the workplace, and regular access to birth control and abortion. The latter two in particular had a huge impact on the way women could live their lives. Margaret Sanger, the birth control activist who urged scientists to develop it, “wanted to liberate women sexually and

socially, to put them on a more equal footing with men” (Harford, 2017). There had been types of birth control in the past, but they were not as reliable as the pill became in preventing pregnancy. Besides which, swallowing a pill once a day is an act that is completely within a woman’s personal sphere of choice. There is no negotiating with a partner, like there is with a condom, and no mess, such as with the diaphragm and sponge (Harford, 2017). The pill was first approved in 1960 in the US, though primarily for married women. It was not until 1970 that states started making birth control available to single women, which is what really started the economic revolution: “Women in America started studying particular kinds of degrees - law, medicine, dentistry and MBAs - which had previously been very masculine” (Harford, 2017). For the first time, women no longer had to take unwanted pregnancies disrupting their studies—or their careers. Beforehand, investing five years or more into qualifying as a doctor or lawyer was not a logical investment of money and time, as to achieve that, a woman would need to delay giving birth until at least age 30—“Having a baby at the wrong time risked derailing her studies or delaying her professional progress” (Harford, 2017). It is unsurprising that the rise of birth control coincided with the second wave of feminism—a large part of its ethos was women taking control of their own bodies. In hindsight, we see now that women controlling their bodies led to an increase in women in professions that had previously been seen as masculine. Women did not have to abstain from sex for fear of an unwanted pregnancy, whether they were married or single⁸. It made sex for women become what sex had always been for men: something fun and relatively responsibility-free.

In 2014, Pierce wrote a new afterword to *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man* (the third Alanna book) that confirms what she was trying to accomplish by writing *Lioness*. While author’s intent is not something I find a need to deliberate on, it is clear that the meaning I understand and promote is one that Pierce would have hoped for. What is particularly useful is Pierce’s description of what inspired her to write the character of Alanna. It coincides with what I have said about the state of feminism in the US during the second wave. Pierce writes that the Bazhir (a nomadic, warrior tribespeople):

accept Alanna when she proves herself as a warrior. This is so different to the world that women lived in during the 1960s and 1970s...I was told repeatedly when growing up that girls couldn’t be soldiers. When I wrote to the FBI (I was in middle school) to ask about their requirements for someone who wished to be an agent, the person who

⁸ It can also be seen as benefitting men as opposed to women, as it could lead to women feeling pressured to have casual sex, because there was less of a chance of conceiving. The pill was primarily a benefit for women, but, as with almost everything, it was not perfect in that regard.

replied to me explained that women were not allowed to be agents. If I was still interested when I was older, there were many secretarial positions in the Bureau... Unlike the Bazhir, they would not give me the chance to persuade them differently. In the end, large numbers of women changed the times in which these people lived by changing the law (p.265-266).

Pierce lived through the second-wave of feminism in the US, which was focused on what was necessary at that time—changing the laws and the economies that women lived under, so they could pursue their goals. Making significant choices that direct her life is something Alanna has been depicted as doing from the first page of the first book. This coincides with Pierce’s desires in life—she writes, “I was part of a new wave of women, one that didn’t marry after high school or college...It was time to believe we could be something more than society told us we were supposed to be” (p.267). Pierce clearly knew how it felt to be rejected and rebuffed because of her gender, and she channeled that into her writing.

As can be seen from Pierce’s afterword, fantasy fiction during the second wave of feminism was greatly impacted by what was happening in the real world. Authors such as Sheri Tepper and C.J. Cherryh burst onto the scene, and Marion Zimmer Bradley wrote *The Mists of Avalon* (1983), which rewrote the King Arthur myth from Guinevere’s perspective. Suddenly there were *real*, believable female characters in prominent positions in fantasy books (James, 2012, p.75). No longer were female characters relegated to being “the damsel in distress” or “the prize at the end of the story”—they were the focus of their own stories. Except that these new female heroes did not represent everyone. Somewhat ironically, because there is such a paucity of LGBT protagonists in the majority of children’s literature, most of these female heroes were gay—or celibate (a small list of examples include *Virgin Planet* (Anderson, 1959); the *Darkover* series (Bradley, 1962-1996); *The Female Man* (Russ, 1975); *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* (Tiptree Jr., 1976); and *The Chronicles of Tornor* series (Lynn, 1979-1980)). Pierce herself pointed out that one of her inspirations for writing a character like Alanna was that she wanted to see someone like herself represented in stories, and she was neither gay nor celibate. So she “wrote fantasy with female warrior heroes who like guys” (2002, n.p.). Other authors started publishing adolescent fantasy fiction with female heroes at the same time Pierce was, showing that she was not an anachronistic anomaly. Two examples of this phenomenon are Diana Wynne Jones, who published *Howl’s Moving Castle* (1986), and Robin McKinley, who wrote *The Blue Sword* (1982), both of which contain girls as the main character. But I contend that Pierce was doing

something different from her contemporaries: she was one of the only authors who wrote a character who had real agency. As I discuss further when I look at the script of destiny in Chapter One, both Sophie from *Howl's Moving Castle* and Harry from *The Blue Sword* have everything handed to them—they do not have to work hard for their skills. Sophie is passive in her story, simply letting things happen to her—she lets her stepmother tell her what to do, permits the Witch of the Waste curse her into looking old, allows Calcifer and Howl to boss her around, and, importantly, she does not know how her own magic works. It is something she does not control, but rather something that happens to her. Similarly, Harry seems to already know the Damarian language, even though she has never spoken it, and though she does train at swordplay, she becomes the best fencer among all the country's fighters after a few weeks' work. And these skills in language and swordplay are not things that Harry has chosen to pursue and succeed in—there are men around her who suggest that she do so, so she does. Alanna's story is one of the few from the early 1980s that has a fully-realized female hero—that is, someone who knows what she wants to achieve and is shown as working hard in her pursuit of it. Pierce has explicitly stated that her fiction had “to feel real,” and that her “heroes have to work at what they want” (2002, n.p.). Alanna is not given anything, and is portrayed at first as being bad at swordplay. Almost forty years after the publication of the first Alanna book, there is now a plethora of choice in the adolescent feminist fantasy fiction genre, many of which I discuss in this thesis

The third wave of feminism came to prominence in the 1990s. It fought to recognize differences *between* women, and that ‘women’ do not all desire the same things. This is when gender theory came into the forefront, as well as ideas of race and queer theory (Munro, 2013, n.p.). Suddenly, individual empowerment was seen as important, because there were newly recognized ways of *being* an individual. In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality as a way to critically describe the multidimensionality of black women, as opposed to groups identified just as ‘women’ and as ‘blacks’ (p.139). This idea was revolutionary, since beforehand people could bring suits for discrimination based on gender or based on race, but not on both (p.143). At this time, feminism in the Western world was largely focused on white women. Since Crenshaw, the term intersectionality has expanded to mean the combination of many different perspectives along with feminism—socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, and almost anything else imaginable. And that is what the third wave of feminism wanted to emphasize: you can be anything else you can think of, *and* be a woman. It was a movement that focused more on *you*, not the *we* of the second wave.

In 1990, Judith Butler wrote *Gender Trouble*, in which she stated that both gender and

identity are solidified as ideas in a person's head through repetitive acts—literally through performing. She says that gender is “real only to the extent that it is performed” (1990, p.278). That is, it is not an internal or fixed definition of a person, while at the same time it is not a voluntary nor superficial identity to be put on like a new set of clothes. It is a “doing”—an active set of behaviors, and not an identity at all. A person's biological sex and their gender do not have to align, a fact which has recently received a large amount of publicity due to the further awareness of trans people, and the ‘coming out’ of famous people as trans (for example, Caitlyn Jenner and Laverne Cox). Jonathan Culler writes that Butler's *Gender Trouble* took issue “with the notion, common in American feminist writing, that a feminist politics requires a notion of feminine identity” (1997, p.102). While this idea now seems almost commonplace to academics, it is one that is only slowly starting to percolate into the world at large. That is why discussing gender performativity and gender expectations with non-academics is important—incredibly so when it comes to adolescents.

Vital to my research is the concept of children and adolescents crossdressing. It is an overt way of showing that gender is perceived truly in the way a person presents themselves—and it is not fixed. It is different from transgender, which is when a person's biological sex does not match their assigned gender, and in which they sometimes transition to present as a different gender. It is also different from gender-fluidity, wherein people do not identify as one fixed gender, and therefore can present at times as one or another gender, or a combination of both. Crossdressing, specifically female-to-male, in children and adolescents is temporary: it “ceases when the cross-dresser is discovered, or chooses to reveal herself at an opportune moment” (Flanagan, 2013, p.21). These characters literally put on a gender by putting on a different outfit, and a corresponding set of behaviors. In this way, they play with what gender actually means—it almost becomes obsolete as an idea.

The idea that a person does not have to identify herself according to others' expectations or what society dictates is a core concept of third-wave feminism, and one that Butler's ideas of performativity support. And it is that concept of choice in a person's life, and how a person navigates her innate desires and goals amongst society's perceptions that seems to have engaged feminist fantasy writers after and during the third wave. The actions and goals of second-wave feminism in the US in the 1960s and '70s may have led to an increase in female heroes in adolescent fantasy books in the 1980s and early '90s, all the way up to now.

As it relates to adolescent literature, I find what Flanagan says useful: children's narratives effectively demonstrate that people need to be judged for who they are, not for what gendered role they are supposed to fulfill (2008, p.48). Femininity and masculinity do not have to be

“inherently oppositional, binary concepts” (Flanagan, 2012, p.26), but can instead exist on a gradation. Labeling people due to what they *should* be is limiting. Yet it still happens. Back in 2002, Pierce said in an interview that she was at a book fair where a mother and son saw her books—and the son immediately blanched at the sight of girls on the covers. When the mother asked what books Pierce would recommend, she responded, “Well, in this one she and her friends end up fighting four-foot-tall furry spiders with human heads,” and the boy said, “Coooll!” Pierce went on to say it is all about how you talk to potential readers:

The boys respond to the action element, but I think they also respond to the strange, really radical and subversive idea that girls are people too. And the girls read it and see the boys, and they go, ‘You know, they’re people’
(2002, n.p.).

Despite the second wave and the third wave, despite countless girls and women showing in real life that there is no difference between them and males when it comes to achieving their goals, boys still shy away from a book with a girl as the main character. I say still, because though Pierce was talking in 2002, it is a problem that persists to this day. The children’s laureate in the UK, author and illustrator Lauren Child, said in her debut ceremony that boys do not like reading books that have girls as the main characters, which “makes it harder for girls to be equal,” while girls do not have a problem reading a book with a male protagonist (BBC, 2017). Sales numbers back up her statement, with boy-led books selling more than those with girls as main characters. She says that parents ask her if she writes books for boys—and that that is part of the problem. There *should not be* “books for girls” and “books for boys.” Books do not have genders, and people do not need to project their preconceived notions of gender onto stories.

It is in part because of this divide that works such as this thesis are important. Feminism and feminist literary theory have progressed immensely. Forty years after she published *Feminine Mystique*, Friedan released her memoir. She said, “What used to be the feminist agenda is now an everyday reality. The way women look at themselves, the way other people look at women, is completely different” (2000, p.375). Without people like Friedan and Sanger, women in the West would not have achieved the socioeconomic leaps and bounds that they have. They were pioneers and revolutionaries and they changed the face of the world. But the work is not done. Friedan wrote, “Our daughters grow up with the same possibilities as our sons” (2000, p.375), but I disagree. Yes, boys and girls theoretically start off with the same infinite possibilities in front of them, but soon socioeconomic realities and systemic oppression set in and boys are still

given preferential treatment. It may be an implicit bias, it may be unintentional, but it still happens. In my own small way, I hope this thesis will be another step in leveling the gender playing field.

The way this thesis could possibly do that is by cementing the idea that reading Pierce's works, which I postulate are representative of adolescent feminist fantasy novels, could help change the thoughts and behaviors of adolescent readers by helping them develop their empathy—specifically something called moral empathy, or empathic concern. There is a plethora of recent scientific evidence that illustrates how reading fiction can affect people's brains, and I turn now to discuss the relevance of that to my thesis.

Cognitive Narratology

Stories have long been valued for the vicarious experiences they give readers, as they enable readers “to know how it feels to be in particular situations and thus to acquire dispositions to act and feel in certain ways” (Culler, 2011, p.113). Keen has pointed out how “fictional worlds provide safe zones for readers' feeling empathy” (2007, p.4). Reading fiction with an engaged mind can result in readers experiencing things they could never physically encounter in the real world. Dorrit Cohn said that narrative fiction is the only kind of narrative in which the unspoken thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of a person other than the speaker can be portrayed (1978, p.7), which can give the reader access to people in a way not possible in the real world.

A recent direction of research explores readers' engagement with fiction, called cognitive narratology, which David Herman defines as “the study of mind relevant aspects of storytelling practices” (2013, p.2), by blending aspects of cognitive science, reader-response theory, and narrative theory. A study by Raymond Mar and his team discovered that lifetime exposure to fiction positively predicted measures of social ability, whereas that same exposure to non-fiction was a negative predictor (2006, p.694). That is, people who read a lot of fiction over the course of their lives were shown to better understand people they came into contact with, because they could comprehend that these other people had thoughts, opinions, feelings—namely, that people they met were fully-formed, just like characters they had read about. Trites expands upon that idea when it comes to children's and adolescent literature, saying “it helps scholars examine the interactions among childhood cognitive development, cognitive activity, and the cognitive cues embedded in textuality” (Trites, 2017, p.102). Adolescents, whose brains are actively changing and developing, do not necessarily have the life experience expert readers will, and they can potentially learn more about possible worlds from reading fiction. Readers can try on different identities, genders, races, sexual orientations, ages, socioeconomic statuses—the list of

possibilities is endless. Fiction can provide a proxy experience in a way that nothing else can; more than that, it does it in a safe environment, where readers are not put in the physical or social danger that the characters may be (Nikolajeva, 2017, p.83). An added benefit is that practicing social skills with characters eliminates the moral dilemma of doing so with actual people—fictional characters cannot suffer at the hands of readers (Kokkola, 2017, p.110). So fiction provides the ideal classroom for social skills; it lets readers learn about others they may never come into contact with, while simultaneously not hurting any real people in the process.

Narratives are how we teach ourselves and each other about the world—written fiction does it in a way that can be put down, picked up, and returned to when a reader is ready, and teach them lessons without feeling didactic. Specifically connecting this idea with my research is the idea of empathy:

Linking novel reading to a widely shared moral principle—caring—without demanding that fiction be about caring allows broad claims about the medium to exist without evaluating content...Novels, by this logic, do not need to articulate the principle that people ought to care for one another. Didacticism is not required. Instead, the very action of reading fiction—any fiction—supposedly trains people to care for one another (Keen, 2007, p.20).

Seen in this light, Keen is saying that reading fiction can appear to be a kind of magic that works miracles upon the emotional intelligence of the reader. And, in a way, it is. But while the power of stories is something that readers and scholars have known about for centuries, it is only in the past fifteen years that technology has developed to help us start to understand exactly what is happening to us as we read.

There is now neuropsychological evidence (which I have cited above) to demonstrate that reading fiction affects the brain so potently, it acts differently than it would otherwise. While there are many facets that fall within the scope of cognitive narratology, there are two components that are specifically cogent for my argument. These are empathy (of which there are three types: mind-modelling, or cognitive empathy; affective empathy; and moral empathy/empathic concern), and script disruption, all defined below. I start first with the different types of empathy, as it is a type of empathy (empathic concern) that is most necessary for readers to change their behaviors.

Empathy

Empathy is important for my work because it is what lets people imagine what it could be like to be another person, which is why Lisa Zunshine says people read fiction (2006). As just stated, reading fiction gives people the opportunity to encounter characters that they would not meet in their everyday lives—people who are markedly different from themselves. This difference can be represented in any number of ways, from gender, to socioeconomic status, to outlook on life, to personal history. That concept is vital for this thesis, since the driving focus of it is that reading Pierce's works have the power to enact positive change in potential readers by changing their attitude and behavior when it comes to gendered stereotypes. This change can be wrought specifically by people who develop moral empathy/empathic concern, one of three types of empathy I introduce below. While I define and discuss them now, the more in-depth analysis of them and their importance to my project can be found in Chapter Three.

Jean Decety and Jason Cowell discuss three levels of empathy: perspective taking, affective sharing, and empathic concern (2015, p.3). Empathy Lab, a non-profit group in London with the goal of improving people's empathy through reading fiction, has drawn from those ideas and called them affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and moral empathy (www.empathylab.uk/empathy-and-stories). I find all of these terms useful, and, as they mean the same thing, will use the corresponding pairs interchangeably. They are defined as follows:

- cognitive empathy/perspective taking**: mind-modelling; when we apply reason to working out how someone else feels and can effectively put ourselves into the mind of other people; the ability to ascertain what someone else is thinking
- affective empathy/affective sharing**: when we resonate with what someone else is feeling; the capacity for us to become affectively aroused by others' emotions; feeling alongside another person and viewing the situation from their perspective
- moral empathy/empathic concern**: a powerful motivator for helping others, a force for social justice; corresponds to the motivation of caring for another's welfare; altruism (Decety and Cowell, 2015, p.3; Empathy Lab; Kokkola, 2017, p.99)

All three types of empathy overlap, yet are distinct—the most active of which is moral empathy, as it involves feeling motivated to help others. It seems pertinent for adolescent readers to develop this ability, since, as their brains are developing, it could be a vital time to emphasize social justice as a desirable and achievable outcome. Social justice on a large scale refers to righting injustices facing societies; this thesis is particularly interested in the idea of gender

equality as a type of social justice. Social justice could be a concept that adolescent readers are not aware of in a concrete way, which could be remedied by exposing them to fiction that engages their moral empathy.

While all three types are important, in this Introduction I focus primarily on cognitive and affective empathy, which correspond to mind-modelling and empathy as it is defined in general. I move on to a detailed analysis of these two types, as well as moral empathy, which I see as the most important type, in Chapter Three. Moral empathy can only be developed once a person can use both cognitive and affective empathy, so therefore it is logical to discuss these types first. Since moral empathy is the most important one for my project, as it is what can cause people to enact change in response to feeling and thinking for others, I provide the thorough discussion of it later, to more closely show how it relates to my texts through primary analysis. To start, though, it is necessary to have a solid understanding of cognitive and affective empathy.

Cognitive Empathy

The terminology for the concept of cognitive empathy has changed significantly in the years I have been conducting my research. When I began this thesis, I referred to it simply as theory of mind, while others, such as Peter Stockwell and Keith Oatley, referred to it as mind-reading. Now, however, I primarily use mind-modelling and cognitive empathy throughout this thesis (though I will occasionally use theory of mind when quoting those who have used that term). In psychology and neuroscience, theory of mind was first used to understand how a person can have a sense that other people have similar forms of consciousness, perspective, memory and emotion (Premack and Woodruff, 1978). There has been much ensuing debate as to whether theory of mind can be ascribed to theory-theory, or to simulation-theory (for a comprehensive examination of these theories, see Apperly, 2008). Neither of these theories are important for this thesis—I mention them here to show that I have considered them. I am interested in the literary experience, which is what cognitive narratology is. Mind-modelling is a more precise term than theory of mind, because it denotes a more text-driven approach (Stockwell and Mahlberg, 2015, p.133-134). It is important to understand the beginnings of cognitive empathy as theory of mind, for which I provide the following paragraph.

Theory of mind is the ability for a person to attribute mental processes to another person. It is a natural ability that appears at around three or four years of age, but must be trained for it to fully mature (see Blakemore and Frith, 2006). In their 2013 article, “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind,” the neuroscientists David Kidd and Emanuele Castano describe literary fiction as a fictional genre which represents experiences that often disrupt our

expectations, causing the reader to stop and ponder (p.378). They pit this against ‘popular’ fiction, which they describe as unchallenging, letting readers breeze through a book without cognitively engaging with it. In a 2016 study, Kidd and Castano again made the point that it is *literary fiction* that improves theory of mind⁹, and to further make this case they study three groups and their knowledge of what they term “literary” authors and “genre” authors. They posited that genre authors follow formulas in their fiction, which is what makes them un-literary. However, they go on to discuss how JRR Tolkien was originally put on both the literary and genre lists, because some people associated him with literature. Kidd and Castano state that this is because Tolkien challenged the formulaic tendencies of fantasy, meaning that he transcended his mere genre (2016, p.6). I take issue with their terminology—I see no point in delineating fiction as “literary” and not, when what they mean is that there is some fiction that tends to make people think more than others. Since reading fiction that makes you think arguably improves theory of mind (Kidd and Castano, 2013, 2016), it makes sense that reading fantasy, a genre potentially more cognitively disruptive, would do the same—if not more so. Thus the fantasy fiction that I research could prove to be a powerful cognitive tool, because it has the potential to affect readers’ minds. What that potential effect is, however, is determined by the specific books that are read. Nikolajeva states that nonmimetic modes have more potential to engage readers cognitively and emotionally than realistic texts, and I agree with her, especially when it comes to readers whose brains are still actively developing (2016, n.p.), for the reasons I discussed above.

Mind-modelling is useful in literary theory because it deals with representations of people—much like fiction deals with representations of people. Stockwell and Michaela Mahlberg explain mind-modelling by saying that the same sort of assumptions we make about other people are the same kind readers make about characters. They say that we start with a template that presumes another person is a person, and:

since the most viable and vivid model of a person is yourself, all interaction begins by modelling the other person as having your own experiential qualities: that person has consciousness, has beliefs and intuitions, has imagination, creativity, aspirations, goals and an outlook that is familiarly human in a very basic sense
(2015, p.133).

⁹ Briefly, theory of mind is the ability to understand other people’s thoughts and feelings—I fully analyse this concept below.

Theirs is a scholarly way of saying what the epigraph to this thesis states, when Neil Gaiman refers to the process of reading as discovering that “everyone else out there is a me, as well.” Readers model the minds of characters on themselves, and in turn can model real people’s minds on the ‘others’ that they have found in characters in fiction. Mind-modelling is a skill that humans must develop and nurture through interaction with other people—whether that be with actual human beings, or with characters in books. It is a similar cognitive process, wherein readers discover more about human behavior, which in turn gives readers the opportunity to better understand others and themselves.

Nikolajeva argues that “the most important knowledge readers acquire from fiction is the knowledge and understanding of themselves,” which is vital during adolescence since identity is still being processed (2014a, p.141). While mind-modelling is a social tool, it would not be possible without some understanding of the self. The self affects the social, just as the social can affect the self. If a person does not understand that they have a mental state, it would be impossible for them to realize that someone else has one. Comprehending that someone else has thoughts, ideas, and beliefs comes from first seeing it in one’s self; it is that which makes reading fiction so enjoyable. Zunshine writes that the “cognitive rewards of reading fiction might thus be aligned with the cognitive rewards of pretend play” (2006, p.17). She is building on Peter Carruthers’ idea that “awareness of one’s mental state makes possible the enjoyment derived from the manipulation of this state” (1996, 265). These ideas are relevant for my research since I am linking the reading of fiction to the ability of readers to take what they learn in fiction, from the mental states of characters, and to affect real change in their thoughts, behaviors, and sense of self.

Reading fiction, something considered a solitary act, can actually help people learn how to construe social situations by assisting them in their mind-modelling skills. In real life, we mind-model by seeing how people act and react, by analyzing their facial expressions and other body language—and we do it without consciously noticing it. It is what makes us able to interact with people, to predict their behavior, and to thusly adjust our own (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.78). In my primary texts I analyze mind-modelling by looking at how characters are focalized, and how much access readers are given to their thoughts. Is it direct thought, or is it given through narrator’s discourse? Is it free indirect discourse? What narrative ways do readers have of interpreting characters’ thoughts, and what benefits come from internal focalization? But to be able to accurately predict how others behave, it is not merely a supposition of what they are thinking; it also has to do with how they are feeling. To analyze that concept, I now turn to affective empathy, the second type of empathy a person needs to develop before they can

achieve moral empathy.

Affective Empathy

Neuropsychologists such as Blakemore, Uta Frith, and Simon Baron-Cohen often do not differentiate between empathy and theory of mind (mind-modelling), sometimes using the terms interchangeably (Baron-Cohen et al., 2000; Blakemore and Frith, 2006). There is, however, an important distinction—mind-modelling has to do with thoughts, whereas empathy has to do with emotions (Oatley, 1992, p.18).

Understanding thoughts and emotions are both necessary social skills that make interpersonal communication possible (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.18), and empathy is needed to engage with characters, which eventually leads to using mind-modelling and empathy in readers' actual lives. They go together well because emotions *are* cognitive (Oatley, 1992, p.18). Oziiewicz extrapolates on this idea when he says, "Learning occurs, and is retained in memory, not merely when facts are remembered, but when a certain degree of empathetic identification and engagement with the story is achieved" (2015, p.10-11). Emotions provide a visceral and memorable connection, which the process of mind-modelling assists in making cognitive sense of it. Empathy has been shown to be provoked by physically witnessing that state, hearing about it—or even by reading about it (Keen, 2007).

While a detailed neuroanalysis of emotions is not necessary for this project, I find it useful to have a brief discussion of what emotions are, as affective empathy relies on understanding them. Several neuroscientists, psychologists, and doctors have differing opinions as to how exactly how to categorize emotions. In 1972, Paul Ekman said there were six basic emotions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, surprise, and sadness. In 1980, Robert Plutchik said emotions had 4 pairs of opposites that existed on a wheel: joy-sadness, anger-fear; trust-disgust; and surprise-anticipation. According to Keith Oatley and PN Johnson-Laird, there are five basic emotions, which include happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust (1987, p.33). More recently, there has been debate over whether or not there are discrete, basic emotions at all (Gendron and Barrett, 2009). For this thesis, it is sufficient to state that there are emotions that individuals feel themselves, and there are social, or higher-cognitive, emotions, such as love and guilt—what we feel when we interact with others (Oatley and Johnson-Laird, 1987, p.41). Emotions are non-verbal experiences, making describing them verbally seem fruitless. In our real lives, it is the norm to see other people's facial expressions and body posture and assign them an emotion. It happens internally to us as well—if we are happy, the automatic reaction is to smile. Our physiological reaction is quicker than our conscious processing of what we are feeling. A

common example of this sometimes happens when we experience fear—our bodies may tense up before we fully realize what is happening. When we try to interpret what we see in other's faces and bodies, to understand what they are thinking, this is part of mind-modelling—when we understand the other person's emotions, that is affective empathy. Hugh Crago states that “only after a story has stirred up our emotions will we start reflecting on them in a conscious way” (2014, p.12), or that we only start to think consciously about characters or events in a novel after we have reacted strongly to them. While I argue that there are several other things that can make us think about characters—for example, needing to discuss that character for a class—I agree that emotions are one way in which to inspire readers to reflect on characters. It is then that we consider why we felt so powerfully about someone who does not exist, or something that did not occur, which is ultimately something that could bring about a cognitive and behavioral change in a reader. Having that as the outcome, however, is dependent upon what level of empathy readers reach. Emotional engagement needs to occur for readers to train their affective empathy, so in turn they can develop empathic concern. Affective empathy must be developed in people before they can achieve empathic concern, which is what actually leads to change, and what this thesis focuses on.

Readers engage with characters' emotions because of the mirror neurons in the brain that simulate the goals of other people in the same way it presents our own goals (Mar and Oatley, 2008, p.179). Mirror neurons are cells in the brain that fire in sympathy when we observe something emotional happening to someone else, even though it is not happening to us (Blakeslee, 2006). The brain simulates the same action it observes, without the body completing the action. But the brain goes beyond that to simulate emotions we observe in others. For example, if you saw someone in emotional distress from failing to achieve a goal, the mirror neurons in your brain would simulate their distress. You know how they feel because you literally feel what they are feeling (Blakeslee, 2006). The same thing happens when people read fiction; the brain is affected the same way if the reader were doing what the characters were doing (Mar and Oatley, 2008). Even if the story takes place in the fantastical realm, mirror neurons make it real, both through action and emotion. But this process is selective. While empathy may be a semi-automatic response, our mirror neurons only activate for certain people—or characters. This is where the idea of identification enters, because somehow our brains know who to resonate with (Crago, 2014, p.44). While that is usually the protagonist, it can be whichever character is seen as most 'like me.' However, as children mature, so too do their frontal lobes, which enables them to inhibit automatic responses and to select what impulses to take seriously (Crago, 2014, p.45). While their mirror neurons are still firing, the maturing frontal lobes separate

real emotions from emotions related to the character. This development allows the response to evolve from the unexamined 'like me' to the reflective "this is like me, but it isn't me" (Crago, 2014, p.45). With mirror neurons, behavior and intention in fiction can be accessed by the brain as if it were veridical. This is vital for my research since I am interested in how readers engage with characters through their improving cognitive abilities, and how understanding these characters impacts their lives, and thus seems vital to developing their moral empathy.

In my primary texts, I assess affective empathy through narration of emotion, and how the characters discuss or think of how they feel. One of the most potent ways to describe emotions is in a metaphorical, embodied way, which I discuss now in full.

Embodied Emotions

Trites points out that cognition resides within the body, since "brains are obviously part of the body" (2017, p.102). The same is true of emotions, whether ascribing to the idea that an emotion is only understood once it is described in language, which happens in the brain, or to the idea that emotions are physically felt in the body (and also the brain). A way for humans to understand others emotions (ones that, perhaps, they have never experienced before) is for them to be described metaphorically through the body. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson write that "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life" (1980, p.3). They explain that there are several concepts in our lives that are abstract, such as emotions, and the only way to grasp them is to describe them as tangible concepts (1980, p.115). Everyday realities are dependent on metaphors—they play a part in how humans relate to everything. But it is not something people are usually conscious of. Since metaphor is such an integral and automatic part of how people think and experience, it makes sense for emotion to be conveyed that way—if the emotion, or situation surrounding that emotion, is bizarre, a metaphor gives the reader something recognizable with which to connect. Embodied metaphors can accomplish this because when humans apply an embodied concept to an unrelated one, people do not have to consciously think about how they are linked, because they can learn to instantly understand it. These metaphors start to work as "fixed form expressions that function in many ways like single words" (1980, p.51)—like icy fear, or burning anger. They provide immediate connotations and degrees of feeling, which works especially well when the metaphor is anchored in the body. At this point, it becomes useful to link back to the concept of fantasy fiction—since so much of an immersive fantasy text is new to readers, having recognizable metaphors that connect strange emotions to the body could potentially help in understanding that world.

Stockwell expounds on this idea, saying that all of a person's experiences are related

through the body, and thus humanity's language patterns developed naturally to using bodily metaphors (2002, p.5). Bizarre feelings can be effectively communicated by positioning them in the body, which is important for engaging with a novel. A reader can comprehend the emotions a character is feeling—which leads to more fully understanding their thoughts—by the embodied way in which it is expressed. For example, if a character is described as feeling 'icy,' it conveys the degree of fright she is feeling, and a reader can think back to a time when they, too, were so scared that they felt icy. Or if they have not felt icy from being scared before, it calls up the idea of freezing cold, a much more basic feeling that can be imagined by the reader—which is what empathy demands. Simply stating that a character was 'incredibly scared' or 'very scared' is not necessarily enough for a reader to fully understand what the character feels. Anchoring it in the body gives the reader a concrete and relatable concept.

In my primary texts, I analyze the way in which the emotions that characters are portrayed as feeling are conveyed, and if the text has done this effectively enough to potentially elicit an empathic emotional reaction from the reader. Empathy has a two-fold role to play in fiction, since empathy may be enhanced by reading fiction and understanding represented emotions (see Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2012, p.131), and represented emotions can be felt more strongly by readers who have a more trained ability to empathize. Adolescent female readers have been theorized to connect emotionally to characters within books, to the point where they feel like the characters are friends in their real lives (Zunshine, 2006; Keen, 2006; Day, 2013, p.3). While these critics point out that this response is immature, it can be the stepping stone to something more complex. This connection creates an affinity to the character where emotions can be felt—"these literarily imagined emotions are created to activate stimuli that should elicit the reader's notional empathy with the figures presented in the text" (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2012, p.132). Reader's empathy for a character leads to emotional entanglement and potential cognitive engagement with the text. Oatley points out that while we simulate the character's behaviour, the emotions elicited are real, and completely the reader's own (1999, p.114). In my primary texts, I look for emotions conveyed in a metaphorical, embodied manner, whether they be structured in an obvious way through a simile (for example, Alanna's anger was like a furnace burning within her); a less obvious way, with metonymy or synecdoche, where verbs are used to describe the emotion (for example, her anger burned within her); or as an adjective (for example, her burning anger).

Empathy is a necessary social skill that can arguably be improved in people by reading fiction. What sort of empathy that develops depends upon what the texts offer the readers, and what is noticed. While moral empathy is the goal for readers, I find it more useful to fully discuss

the ramifications of that in Chapter Three, which is when I conduct a detailed primary analysis to exhibit exactly how it works. For now, I turn to the next of the important cognitive concepts for this thesis: scripts and script disruption. These concepts begin to answer the questions about why and what readers might notice in fiction—I posit that in the primary texts I have selected, readers might be more prone to detect gender-specific scripts, which they could then apply to their real lives. To break a gendered stereotype, you must first know it is there.

Script and Schema Disruption: Gender Stereotypes and Performativity

Jean Piaget first introduced the concept of schemata when discussing his theory of cognitive development, in which he explained how a child constructs a mental model of the world (1936). He defined a schema as the building block of knowledge; it is “a cohesive, repeatable action sequence possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning” (1952, p.). While this definition may have been the first to come forward, it is no longer exactly accurate. Schema as a term has evolved in the past several decades, and Piaget’s definition of a schema is more similar to what today we would call a script. In 1977, Roger Schank and Robert Abelson discussed the cognitive concept of scripts as it applies to human beings. Since then, scholars have used various cognitive terms to refer to the different aspects of script theory. Oziewicz has condensed these terms “in favor of three hierarchically nested types of Schankian knowledge structures” (2015, p.58): schemata, scripts, and stories. Oziewicz uses a scientific metaphor to explain how scripts, schemata, and stories are interconnected, relating schemata to genes, scripts to cells, and stories to organs (2015, p.58-59). They each build upon each other to create the final product. In contemporary terms, schemata are “knowledge structures, or patterns, which provide the framework for understanding” (Stephens, 2011, p.13). A script is similar to a schema, except a script is dynamic where a schema is static. They are both common in our everyday lives, and scripts encompass schemata within their function. A schema is not a script, but a script can be made up of schemata. Scripts are the stored memories of ordinary events that we do not need to consciously think about. In a story, readers do not question what they see as regular. Once they recognize a script, they form expectations of what will follow, based on what has happened previously in the same situation (Stephens, 2011, p.15). An example of a script is when we see an old crone hand a young girl an apple, we expect that the girl will take a bite of it and fall ill because the apple is poisoned. We then expect the old crone to be revealed as the evil stepmother and for a handsome prince to save the girl. This script includes the schemata of the evil stepmother, and the poisoned apple, two constructs which our brains connote with fairytales. Oziewicz points out that schemata and scripts can both

be generalized, and that is part of what makes them useful. Stories, though, can never be generalized. They consist of unique aspects that make them particular unto themselves. This concept relates to Mar and Oatley's idea of narratives functioning as simulations of social situations (2008; see also Oatley, 2016). Stories provide information that readers cannot access directly by offering a model of social behavior, and to therefore help readers understand and potentially predict what will happen in social situations (2008, p.174-175). Stories are not direct copies of reality, but are simulations of it made from what Mar and Oatley call abstractions—schemata and scripts. So, while the story itself cannot be generalized, the building blocks (schemata and scripts) that create it can be, which are then applied to readers' real lives.

Readers take notice when something out of the ordinary occurs. If the young girl takes the poisoned apple and tricks the old crone into eating it, the script is turned on its head. This deviance from the norm is called script disruption. In narratives, when scripts are disrupted, readers are more likely to realize that something different is happening. Script disruption should be considered a type of what Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer calls readers' enhancement of awareness, which occurs when texts draw readers' attention to important parts of a text (2012, p.131). Adolescent literature is an especially important milieu for script disruption because "so many scripts are based on stereotypical knowledge" (Trites, 2014, p.49)—including gender stereotypes. Everyone internalizes scripts, but adolescents, whose brains are in such a volatile state of development, do not necessarily think about or question them if nothing forces them, or something shows them that they *can* be questioned (arguably, this phenomenon can occur with non-analytical adults as well).

Readers hold pre-existing scripts that are based upon their past experiences. This knowledge is un-self-conscious and therefore not usually remarked upon when a script is recognized. But when a script is disrupted, it is noticed—sometimes consciously, sometimes not. The disruption then adds to the previous knowledge embedded in the script, updating what the script itself entails. Schank (1983) introduced the concept of dynamic memory, which is a type of memory that changes in regards to new data. This lends itself to the idea of updating scripts via disruption. But disruption can only occur if the reader already holds a version of that script in their memory. If the script is not there, it cannot be recognized or changed. It can, however, become inculcated into the reader's understanding and *become* a script.

Scripts apply to virtually every common action in the world; naturally, they also apply to gender, which is one of the main focuses of this thesis. John Stephens has discussed the schematic abstract pattern of femininity, where he states that traditionally in fiction, girls are seen as soft, nonviolent, sensitive, submissive—and not much else (1996, p.19). Nikolajeva has

expanded on this idea, leading to the conclusion that “in our [Western] culture, masculine features are implicitly superior” (2002, p.115), while feminine ones are seen as defect. Girls who see the schema of ‘girl’ as the only way they can behave will not try to change themselves, which is why fiction could play a crucial role in updating their concept of what it means to be female. These concepts all lend themselves to the schema of girl—what a girl is, or how she should be. Traditionally in fiction, there were three ways for a girl’s story to end: in marriage, madness, or death, with all tracts ending the character’s development (Attebery, 1992, p.92). There was no freedom or power for girls, who were meant to grow into demure women who took care of the house for their husbands. Even in the Golden Era of children’s literature, girls who began as rebels would end their stories in a subservient type of role, such as Jo from *Little Women* (Alcott, 1868). Characters like Jo would initially show an empowered streak, refusing to conform to the gender stereotypes of domestic behavior and ‘mature’ silences, but their voices are eventually quashed and they inevitably marry a father-like figure; “one of the strongest sub-currents of children’s literature has been the reformation of these female rebels” (Trites, 1997, p.10). Attebery posits that this is partially because realistic fiction is limited by the restrictiveness of the recognizable world, and when the girls of reality have restricted options, realistic fiction’s female characters follow suit (1992, p.92). All of this fictive history has further emphasized the gender stereotype that being a girl means growing into a subservient role with limited power: “boys ‘grow’ and girls ‘shrink’” (Pratt, 1982, p.30).

Oziewicz identifies the justice scripts in the genre of speculative fiction, which is an umbrella term under which fantasy falls. He argues that scripts “frame our understanding, intelligence, memory, and expectations about the world, especially about causally-linked event sequences” (2015, p.5). Oziewicz states that children’s [fantasy] fiction is an effective vehicle for justice scripts because it is so fluid in the way it allows for thought-experiments (p.12–13). It is a milieu for “what if” questions that I described earlier (for example, what if animals could talk?), which stretches readers’ imaginations. A question that could be asked of my primary texts is, what if a girl went after her goals, no matter what? Asking a question like this could lead into moral empathy, which could lead into considering social justice—and perhaps doing something about it.

In my primary texts, I look for the scripts and schemata that have traditionally applied to girls in the Western-specific real world, and see whether or not these texts confirm or disrupt them. Through both external description and internal representation, I examine the characters and the societies in the texts to see what is expected of a girl—in how she behaves, what she says, how she thinks, and so on. I hypothesize that there are similar scripts in my primary texts’

fictional land and our real world, in that the expectations for what a girl is and can be will be much lower than what they are for a boy.

Part of what it means to be a girl is discussed by Butler, who championed gender performativity (1990). Disparately, Lissa Paul defines the term ‘hero in drag’ as what happens when a story “exchanges a female protagonist for a male one” (1990, p.162) without changing anything else in a typical hero-quest (Hourihan, 1997). In a similar vein, Nikolajeva states that the tomboy archetype is an example of abjection, with “heroines” refusing to accept their own femininity and feeling forced to “suppress it by manifesting nonfeminine behaviour” (2002, p.45). But these ideas further exacerbate the idea of female scripts, conforming to the concept of feminine and non-feminine. If gender is performative, then it should not matter if a girl is behaving ‘like a boy,’ because it is only the readers’ understanding of what it means to perform as a boy. Ideas of gender performativity are especially apparent in stories where characters crossdress, or special attention is paid to the proper way they dress for their gender. It also calls into question what is ‘appropriate’ for a female character to do—the scripts that dictate girls are feminine, or they are not truly girls at all (see Österlund, 2002; Flanagan, 2008).

I analyze how the characters perform—both when trying to be female and when trying to be male—and how they think about gender. This analysis will be especially interesting when looking at girls depicted as consciously deciding how to perform. I look for characters who, like Butler, oppose the ideas that certain kinds of gendered expressions are false while others are true (1990, viii), and I will identify them by their rejection of gender schemata and scripts. And if they disrupt gender performative scripts, will they do so enough to make a large enough difference? Will they evolve into empowered characters? What are the potential ramifications for readers?

To answer these questions, it is vital to have an understanding about how fiction has been proven to affect readers previously. I now look at empirical studies conducted upon real readers, to elucidate some of the intricate ways reading fiction can affect people, and to investigate further how readers can pull so much extra information from a text, as this research informs the rest of my thesis.

Previous Evidence of What Readers Responded to in Texts

While I am interested in the reader in a hypothetical sense, I am looking at what the text offers the reader. My approach to examining my texts involves looking exclusively at the texts themselves. Cognitive narratology is “less interested in readers as such, but in what texts of fiction offer to readers through various narrative devices.” (Nikolajeva, 2014a, p.19). Nikolajeva explains that “cognitive critics are interested in how fiction makes use of narrative structures to

engage readers,” which includes “the issues of why it is possible for readers to access textual codes and how literary competence is connected to cognitive and affective skills” (2014a, p.17).

My thesis is not based on reader responses, because it focuses not on what readers get out of a text but instead what a text does to get potential readers engaged. Patrick Colm Hogan analyzes what elements of texts can trigger brain activity like attention, memory, imagination—what is there in the text itself, as opposed to looking at readers (2011, p.4). My methods correspond to the majority of other literary cognitive studies, which have taken the theoretical rather than empirical approach; this is partially because attempting to explain “what happens *during* the reading experience can only be measured by methods that examine an *after-reading* reaction, and in part because the cognitive/affective processes our minds perform during engagement with the story occur with lightning speeds and without our conscious attention” (Oziewicz, 2015, p.10, emphasis original). However, to further explain the idea of readers’ engagement with texts, in this section I discuss previous research from empirical studies to see how readers cognitively and affectively responded to reading fiction, which will then guide what I look for in my primary texts. I discuss actual readers to give examples of instances where reading has evoked real change, though unfortunately no research that I can find has been conducted on the effect that reading feminist fantasy fiction has on adolescents, although there has been some conducted on fantasy fiction and adolescent girls in general. Instead I base my conclusions on the implications of other previously conducted studies on the impact reading has on adolescents.

Studies of Adolescent Readers’ Engagement

Holly Blackford (2004) reports that in her study, fantasy was overwhelmingly the fiction of choice for American pre-teen and teenage girls in the early 2000s. They enjoyed reading it because it was different—it transported them out of their everyday lives and opened up worlds of opportunity for them. Even when the protagonists were male, the girls recognized the freedom that fantasy provided. Blackford’s main focus was not cognitive narratology, and therefore she did not scientifically explain why the girls’ reading habits affected them so much. She also noted that the majority of the girls were not avid readers, and did not seem to be aware of fantasy novels with female protagonists.

Many girls in Blackford’s study wanted stories that could take them on adventures, narratives that would let them both participate in the action but also observe it in an invisible role. They did not select novels to read based on the protagonists’ gender, nor did they always connect with the protagonist more than they did with the genre and form of narrative.

Specifically, they tended to read more for fantasy than for any other reason. They stepped away from pure identification but reiterated the idea that they liked books where “the words make you feel like you’re in the story” (2004, p.48). This feeling of transportation is important when it comes to readers’ engagement with a story. While these particular readers did not connect personally with the protagonists, they recognized the individual freedom represented by the stories. Fantasy is what cannot have happened, which is what makes it expansive—if a story is taking place in a setting that cannot exist, then it stands to reason that the possibilities within said place are limitless.

Shirley Heath and Jennifer Wolf also studied adolescent readers (of both genders), and they state that adolescents made it clear in their reports that they are aware of what is happening in a novel and that they bring the ideas gleaned from their reading to bear in their real lives (2012, p.147). The researchers explain that this is possible because the information that they read and remember is “situated in bodily patterns and senses remembered and projected” (2012, p.146). These projections are something the researchers call future memories, which means that when readers find themselves in a situation similar to one they have been in before—or similar to one about which they have read—their bodies instinctively remember how they should act. Once they have projected themselves into a story, they can remember how that felt and repeat it in real life. Heath and Wolf’s ideas are supported by neuroscientists, who, when studying the brains of people reading, came to the conclusion that “readers construct simulations of situations as they read a text, and that this process is similar to recalling previous situations or imagining potential ones” (Speer et. al., 2009, p.997). Their results imply that by simulating the events of a story using their imaginations, readers better understand what is happening and why—and are able to update their ideas of what the story means as new information is presented (Speer et. al., 2009, p.989). They are consciously changing the preconceived notions, of either characters or stories, by gaining new data. By simulating the action in their heads and updating it as they go along, they create a model for how they might behave in real-life situations.

Gay Ivey and Peter Johnston (2013) conducted a year-long study with four classes of eighth-grade students (aged thirteen to fourteen), and discovered that by letting the students select their own books to read, their whole lives were affected. Introducing the concept of agency in terms of control over what they read enabled the students to have more opportunities to enjoy reading, which made them engage with the texts more. Both this ability to choose combined with active reading led to them having “a substantially stronger sense that they could have an effect on things: their own reading, social relationships, emotions, and life narratives” (Ivey and Johnston, 2013, p.263). The researchers reported that not only did the students choose

to read more than they had before, but they changed their behavior—they extricated themselves from abusive friendships and romances, they felt the need to discuss points of shared books with their classmates, and they began to perform better on standardized tests. Ivey and Johnston observed these results through self-reporting from the participants, but also through their own inspection, along with those of teachers and parents.

As it relates to my ideas, this marked change in readers' actions is important proof that engaged reading can change people. Even when not including feminist fantasy fiction, these students began to move towards a more positive way of thinking. They understood that their identities were not fixed points, but that they could change. Ivey and Johnston reported that there were “shifts from a fixed view of ‘who I am’ to an understanding of the possibility of change (‘I’m becoming someone different’)” (2013, p.262). It went beyond their identities as readers and expanded into the conscious shaping of their own futures. This linked to Speer et al.’s (2009) ideas about updating information—these readers could update their conceptions about themselves the more they read. This concept of updating relates to scripts, and if these readers had been given books to read with empowered female heroes, they could maybe have broadened their understanding of feminism, and perhaps gone on to realize that while they were changing as people, adolescents around them were doing the same. As they changed their minds about themselves, they could change their minds about the world, which is what I posit is possible for the potential readers of my primary texts.

Transportation, Identification, and Projection into Narrative Fiction

There are several terms that have been used to describe the feeling a reader has when they become fully engaged with a text: being wrapped up, immersed, absorbed, lost in, entranced, and transported into the story, to use a few. Psychologists Melanie Green and Timothy Brock coined the phrase “transportation theory” to describe this event, postulating it occurs when all of a reader’s mental systems and capacities focus on the events of the narrative (2000, p.701). They stated that the more transported a reader felt, the more the story might affect their real world beliefs. Being metaphorically transported into a story “reflects the idea of an imaginary shift in the effective reference point of perception and experience from the immediate environment of a person to a point in the fictive world...as if the person was spatially present in that world” (Cheetham, Hänggi, and Jancke, 2014, p.1840). It is as if the reader is actually *there*, inasmuch as the story can create a physical world. There are three important mental functions that need to occur simultaneously to achieve an even higher level of transportation: attention, imagery, and feelings. Eleven years before Green and Brock’s research, reading researchers Shirley Long, Peter

Winograd, and Connie Bridge concluded that when readers produce mental imagery while reading, they were more likely to comprehend and recall stories (1989). Creating vivid mental imagery is similar to what Green and Brock described as transportation into a story, though Long, Winograd, and Bridge specified that certain textual elements were linked to the evocation of imagery. These are emotional descriptions, use of figurative language, and the inclusion of dramatic climaxes. Green and Brock theorized that this is because transportation makes a narrative experience feel more like a real experience (2000, p.702). They also postulated that attachment to a protagonist may affect the persuasiveness of a story, and that they may serve as an ‘internal’ source of information for the reader—the more a reader was transported, the more involved with a protagonist they may become.

It is important to note here that transportation does not mean uncritical identification with a protagonist. When researchers have studied reader identification with characters (see Oatley, 1994; Mar and Oatley, 2008; Kaufman and Libby, 2012; Cheetham, Hänggi, and Jancke, 2014), they found that while readers empathized with a protagonist, they were not unthinking about the character’s choices. Keen points out that “middlebrow readers tend to value novels offering opportunities for strong character identification,” (2007, p.ix), who then report feelings of empathy and sympathy with fictional characters. Even though these readers are “middlebrow,” they report believing that reading novels opens their minds to “experiences, dilemmas, time periods, places, and situations that would otherwise be closed to them” (Keen, 2007, p.ix). But as Mar and Oatley state, this process is more complex than merely “projecting oneself mentally into the personhood of a protagonist” (2008, p.181). The reader must be more active and therefore more critical. There is a level of absorption that is important, but it does not always go to the extent of complete experience-taking, which Geoff Kaufman and Lisa Libby define as the imaginative process of assuming the identity of a character to the point where the reader simulates the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of that character as if they were her own (2012, p.1). For their purposes, the reader *becomes* the character. Nikolajeva points out the potential dangers of entirely losing oneself; she defines the phenomenon of a reader becoming too involved with a character as immersive identification (2014a, p.86). She suggests readers should strive for empathic identification, where readers can understand characters’ emotions without necessarily sharing their opinions (2014a, p.86). Green and Brock warn of this as well, saying that transportation into a story causes readers to become less able to disagree with any particular conclusion in the story (2000, p.703). That is to say, if a reader is too absorbed and does not critically analyze certain propositions, they will likely not question what is true. If such a level of absorption can lead to a positive belief-change, such as when readers felt more accepting of

protagonists of different sexualities or races after reading stories about them (Kaufman and Libby, 2012), it is plausible that the same level of belief-change could take place in a socially-negative story as well. That is where critical engagement comes in—the reader should be responsible for assessing what they have read and deciding whether or not it is worthy of incorporating into their world-view.

One way of doing that is suggested by Mar and Oatley: “We have to project ourselves into a story world in order to understand what the characters are thinking and feeling” (2008, p.178). Projection shares qualities with empathic identification, though it allows for a higher level of absorption/transportation into a story. Readers do not necessarily become the protagonist, but instead become part of the story. They may understand the emotions and thoughts of a character, and even initially experience them as if they were their own, but there is a distance from the character that does not exist in immersive identification. In doing so, individuals can “flexibly shift their mental perspective away from the immediate present and project (or transport) themselves into imaginary simulations of real and fictive scenarios” (Cheetham, Hänggi, and Jancke, 2014, p.1841). Like in transportation theory, projection relies on descriptions of emotions, metaphors, and metonyms (Mar and Oatley, 2008, p.179); since these three concepts may help readers engage more effectively with a text, it makes sense to use them to inform my primary textual analysis.

As it relates to my work, it is valuable to note that Mar and Oatley predict that fiction may be helpful in reducing bias against outgroup members, because if the reader did not assume similar emotions, desires, and beliefs as the protagonist, the “phenomena of transportation, enjoyment, and ultimately understanding would remain elusive” (2008, p.181). Fiction provides a conduit into other people’s minds—people who are different from the reader—but it also allows the reader to pull back both cognitively and emotionally from a story, to consider what they have just engaged with (Mar and Oatley, 2008, p.182). Researchers discovered that “greater exposure to fiction...was related to increased gender role egalitarianism and reduced gender role stereotyping” (Fong, Mullin, and Mar, 2015, p.1). This idea connects to Wolf’s and Heath’s (2012) assertion that the effects of reading fiction continued once the act of reading was complete, with the link between fiction and social outcomes suggesting that “the experiences elicited by a story may remain with us even after the story has ended” (Fong, Mullin, and Mar, 2015, p.2). When it comes to understanding all genders to be equal, and everyone being capable of asserting their own agency, researchers have shown that “temporarily adopting diverse gender roles could provide a more flexible perspective on gender issues” (Fong, Mullin, and Mar, 2015, p.2). But it must be an active projection into that character’s mind—“including reasoning about

their mental states and intentions” (Fong, Mullin, and Mar, 2015, p.2). People need to understand that other people have complex mental states and motivations—essentially that one’s mind is not the only unique one, and that other minds matter in this world.

Readers have the possibility to recognize social injustice, especially as it relates to gender inequality, and perhaps be inspired to do something to fix it—the stirrings of moral empathy. Throughout this thesis, I base my views on the preceding research, to prove it is possible for reading fiction to change how people behave and think. I extrapolate from what these empirical researchers have done to explore the idea that if readers engage with my primary texts, they have the chance to believe in themselves, regardless of their gender, and to develop empathic concern to recognize the same in others around them. I now discuss the chapter outlines for the rest of this thesis, as to give my readers a plan they can follow.

Chapter Outlines

I utilize each of my theoretical frameworks in a chapter apiece. The first chapter deals with fantasy fiction—defining it, questioning it, and analyzing its potential cognitive and gendered benefits. Chapter Two delves further into gender, and looks specifically at three type of gendered scripts that I identify and define. Chapter Three examines moral empathy as it may be potentially elicited from readers. This last chapter bring everything together to really examine my primary texts for their cognitive potential. As I refer to all of the books in both quartets throughout this work, I have included brief synopses of each book and a list of important characters in the Appendices, which is meant to orient readers of this thesis if they are unfamiliar with Pierce’s work. I have also included a list of important terms for this thesis, and how I define them, in the appendix, to serve as a reference point for readers.

I now turn to fantasy fiction to examine the ramifications of fantasy as a genre on gender and cognition. Before doing so, a quick reminder of Adichie: “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize” (2009, n.p.). That is the potential I think my primary texts exhibit—to be used to empower and to humanize.

emphasize that my project is original, and I am confident that it is so, because of how I combine the three theoretical tools

Chapter 1: Fantasy Fiction

This chapter looks at what genre-specific traits of fantasy make it a suitable space for authors to explore gender and feminism, and for potential readers to engage with female characters. Fantasy as a genre conceivably provides a useful environment for improving cognitive skills in adolescent brains (Nikolajeva, 2016), and one within which feminism can be realized more profoundly through empowered female characters (Attebery, 1992). Empathy helps readers engage more actively with texts, and therefore take more away from them, which can then relate to real-life coping strategies that help them overcome gender-related barriers. Fantasy fiction presents readers' learning brains a chance to actively engage with stories and characters, due to its defiance of expectations. Cognitive criticism puts forth the idea that remote associations necessitate greater cognitive activity from readers, which seems likely to occur in fantasy fiction.

In a 2015 interview, Kazuo Ishiguro and Neil Gaiman discussed Ishiguro's latest book, *The Buried Giant* (2015). They stated that while it has fantastical elements in it, it was not categorized as a fantasy novel. This fact upset the so-called fantasy people. Although she later retracted it, Ursula K. Le Guin said, "This is fantasy, and your refusal to put on the mantle of fantasy is evidence of an author slumming it" (Gaiman and Ishiguro, 2015). Le Guin's statement harkens back to an idea prominent for many literature scholars; namely, that fantasy fiction is not literature, or if it is, it is a low form of it. This concept sparks a lively conversation between Ishiguro and Gaiman, in which they discuss the importance (or non-importance) of genre, and, though they do not label it such, they touch on the topic of literary scripts. Without using the jargon, they agree that novels can have certain schematic elements to it, but that does not necessarily include it in that schema's prescribed genre: for example, Gaiman says that there is a huge difference between "a novel with spies in it and a spy novel; or a novel with cowboys in it and a cowboy novel" (Gaiman and Ishiguro, 2015). He elucidates by stating that for a novel to qualify as a certain type (or genre), it requires specific actions to occur: "If it was a cowboy novel, we'd need the fight in the saloon; we'd need the bad guy to come riding into town and the good guy to be waiting for him. A novel that happens to be set in the Old West doesn't actually need to deliver any of those things – though it would leave readers of genre cowboy fiction feeling peculiarly disappointed, because they have not got the moments of specific satisfaction" (Gaiman and Ishiguro, 2015). Gaiman is describing literary scripts, and I particularly want to highlight his use of the phrase 'specific satisfaction.' This relates to the idea of script theory as well, since readers derive enjoyment from recognizing certain scripts which accompany different

genres. It also ties into schemata theory, as each and every fictive text is unique, but, based on previous reading, there are facets of a text that cause readers to place it in a certain category, exactly like several other texts. These definitions are based on individual reader's schemata, and therefore not every person agrees what belongs in which literary genre, making genre—and scripts—complicated ideas.

Fantasy as Freedom

Fantasy children's literature works well as both fantasy fiction and children's literature have the ability to subvert traditional power structures. Children's literature gives the opportunity for the powerless (children) to become empowered through story (Nikolajeva, 2010, p.10). When it comes to gender, fantasy especially has the chance to subvert the normal hierarchy (patriarchy): it "contains both imaginative, possibly subversive elements, but is also based on traditional genres including...gendered conventions" (Lehtonen, 2013, p.192).

Examples of greater extended freedom in adolescent fantasy fiction abound—Harry Potter goes from essentially being a malnourished slave with all his movements dictated by the Dursleys to boundless unsupervised time at Hogwarts (Rowling, 1997); Lyra Belacqua lives at a college in Oxford that is full of adults, but none who have any time to properly parent her, and her adventures take her further and further away from any kind of adult control (Pullman, 1995); Clary's mother in *The Mortal Instruments* is almost immediately kidnapped, forcing Clary to consort with other adolescents who are given an almost obscene amount of leeway when it comes to battling demons and other magical enemies (Clare, 2007). This freedom experienced by these characters does not feel forced, arbitrary, or even particularly temporary. This could be one of the reasons why fantasy authors often choose out-of-time settings for their stories; that is, placing their plots within timeframes in which children and adolescents were treated more as small adults than anything else. As Levy and Mendlesohn point out, "medievalist settings became, for a very long time, one of the defaults of children's fantasy" (2016, p.153), although often these were more sanitized versions of medieval history than would be entirely accurate. As several children's literature scholars have discussed, the rise of children's literature was only possible when the concept of 'the child' came into being, which was not until around the seventeenth century (Reynolds, 2011, p.7). Therefore, medieval ages, which historians agree ended sometime in the fifteenth century, did not subscribe hugely to the idea that children were much different from adults. This idea probably had more to do with adults not living long, and that education levels, heavily tied to the ability to read, were not extremely high in the general population. Kimberly Reynolds states that once basic reading skills were established, adults and

children read the same things up until about the nineteenth century (2011, p.7). While obviously literacy levels are not the only difference between adults and children, it does perhaps lend itself to the idea that children were simply thought of as small, inexperienced adults. Thus, while having children's fiction based in medieval ages may not be historically accurate (since there are decidedly children and younger people in these stories), it does tend to have young characters that have more control over their lives. Compounded with the fantasy genre, it makes perfect sense for authors of adolescent fiction to set their stories in these worlds—adult control is a presence, but often more negligible than it is in mimetic fiction.

This greater allowance of agency is important for the characters in my primary texts, and especially for Alanna and Kel. Because of their gender, there is a proscribed life set up for them to follow—to become proper aristocratic ladies. Alanna is able to break with that because she disguises herself as a boy—a believable disguise that could almost only work in a non-realistic text (because there is not a realistic text I have come across where a girl can convincingly hide her sex for eight years). Later in Tortall's fictional history, Kel can break with that gendered role because of what Alanna did before her—Jonathan (who becomes King at the end of Alanna's quartet) makes it legal for females to train as knights. Again, this act is not something that would generally happen in a realistic text. It comes back to what Brian Attebery says about girls' freedom in fiction—there is more of it available in fantasy texts, because it is unrealistic. That is, realistic texts mimic reality, and in reality, girls have less power afforded to them (1992, p.3). And that is one of the inequalities I want this thesis to address. By reading fantasy stories like Alanna and Kel's, readers have the possibility to see environments where girls seize opportunities usually blocked to them. Seeing characters successfully break through gender barriers could enlighten readers that they can do so as well. I turn now to discuss how certain fantasy fiction can do that through the manipulation of fantasy scripts and schemata.

Fantasy as Gendered Schema and Script

In this section I touch on important schemata and scripts of fantasy fiction, and begin to link them to gender. Joseph Addison describes the 'fairy way of writing' as being more difficult than any other genre when it comes to the author, as there is no pattern to follow, and therefore the writer must work "altogether out of his own invention" (2004, p.22). Writing this in 1712, Addison was possibly correct, but in the three-hundred years since then, there has been a fair amount of fantasy fiction published, which led to fantasy author Diana Wynne Jones' writing an entire parody book of fantasy tropes (1996). As I mentioned earlier, Attebery says that one of fantasy's main strengths *and* weaknesses is its tendency to rely on tropes (1992, p.87). But there is

still some truth in Addison's words, though now in relation to the reader. For while there are innumerable recognizable plots and characters and settings in fantasy fiction, the reader does not know the exact parameters of what they will encounter with a new fantasy novel. David Sandner wrote that one of the fundamental characteristics of fantasy is displacement: "the fantastic signifier does not point, even superficially, to any clear signified and so causes the reader to experience a lack, a disruption, inviting (if not provoking) an interpretation" (2004, p.9). Disruption of scripts, which I discuss in depth in Chapter Two, is an important cognitive tool for understanding fantasy. Fantasy fiction is the ideal milieu for disruption, which makes it a rich playground for cognitive engagement. Nikolajeva points out that there are many things readers take for granted in a story, unless told otherwise (2016, n.p.). For example, because our real world has no magic, readers (not knowing what rules this new fictional world yet has) will follow the realistic script and assume the fictional world has no magic either—it is only when the text informs them that there are witches, or other types of magical beings, that the script is disrupted. While this description may seem basic for fantasy fiction, it can be broadened to encompass anything we take for granted in the realistic world—the presence of only one sun, the understanding that animals do not speak English or conduct magic, or even the basic idea that there are no longer knights. Nikolajeva posits then when readers encounter this new information, their brains get puzzled, because they cannot correlate the magic-having world with the previously stored information of the realistic world. Puzzlement stimulates cognitive activity, because the brain cannot passively receive information—it needs to restructure neural connections to adapt to new information, new schemata and scripts, that accommodate a magic-having world (Nikolajeva, 2016, n.p.). That which the brain does not understand, it cannot take for granted. These new concepts must be paid attention to, a phenomenon that seems abundantly likely in a setting where the reader cannot definitively know anything.

While I discussed schemata and scripts in the Introduction, I touch upon them again here, and will again in the next chapter, since they are important concepts for understanding fantasy fiction's cognitive usefulness. As a reminder, a schema describes a pattern of thought that organizes categories of information and the relationships among them. A script is a series of schemata linked by the passage of time (Stephens, 2011, p.14). Scripts are one of the most efficient forms of memory, because they help people remember how to do everyday, minute things without having to consciously think about each and every step of those processes. Trites puts it in literary terms by saying, "all narratives rely on our stored memories about the way certain events typically unfold" (2017, p.106), meaning that the narrator does not need to explain every movement Alanna goes through when picking up a sword (bending her elbow, grasping

the hilt) or Kel goes through when riding a horse (putting one foot into the stirrup, holding the pommel, swinging her other leg up). Such descriptions would quickly become tedious. When schemata and scripts are put in literary terms, they begin to sound similar to motifs and tropes, and that is for good reason—they are similar. But motifs and tropes are literary terms, and are bounded by only referring to the literary; scripts and schemata, however, can go back and forth between both the literary and the real world. They are psychological terms that have come to be useful in literary analysis because they can describe real life patterns and behaviors while simultaneously being able to accurately describe literary patterns and behaviors. Motifs and tropes refer to large-scale repetitions and trends in stories. Scripts and schemata can do that as well, but they can also be ascribed to the minutiae of letting the author skip over the tedious and specific actions of Alanna picking up a sword. They are necessary to help move the story along. If narrators had to describe every insignificant detail, there would be no gaps for readers to fill, and the writing would become boring immediately. Ideally, there should be a balance between action that is scripted and that which is not.

Scripts and schemata can stretch across genre; fantasy fiction has a multitude of them. If there are too many scripts, then readers may lose interest; simultaneously, if there is not enough to recognize, readers may lose interest. There are certain scripts and schemata that immediately scream “fantasy” to readers¹⁰, while there are others that are recognizable as belonging to fantasy within a certain context. By that, I mean that there are some scripts and schemata that exist in other types of fiction besides fantasy, but that within fantasy follow a prescribed function. An example of these types are: the hero, the mother (also the evil stepmother), the wise old man, or the trickster. Examples of ones that exist only in fantasy fiction are: the enchanted prince, a changeling child, magical beings (which can range from witches to dragons to ogres to trolls to just about anything imaginable)—and the list goes on (Clute and Grant, 1997, n.p.).

But readers find stories boring if they find them too predictable—that is, if they have encountered fantasy texts, and the prevalent schemata and scripts are too often repeated, they do not have to pay a significant amount of attention to what is happening in the story. If a reader can predict too well what is going to happen next (something that happens through a recognition of a script), then the story loses its active engagement possibility. The potential reader for Pierce’s texts will, as I discussed in the Introduction, likely have read or seen fantasy texts before reading these books. If they have been exposed to the likes of Disney’s *Mulan* and the Harry Potter series, then there is a good chance they will be aware of some of the most common

¹⁰ “I remember Terry [Pratchett] saying to me at some point, ‘You know, you can do all you want, but you put in one fucking dragon and they call you a fantasy writer.’” —Neil Gaiman (Gaiman and Ishiguro, 2015)

fantasy scripts.

Jones' semi-fictional, ironic text, *The Tough Guide to Fantasy Land*, still manages to be insightful when it comes to fantasy scripts. Of course, it is not titled or marketed in such a way, but that is precisely what it does. It is called, and describes itself as the "authoritative A-Z...for all those who dare to venture into the imaginative hinterlands" (1996, cover flap). While written in a comic satiric manner as a sort of travel guide to the imagined 'you' who is beginning 'your' tour of Fantasyland, the book is a veritable list of fantasy schemata and scripts. These consist of that which is readily seen as belonging to fantasy fiction, and which practiced fantasy readers will greet with a sigh of recognition and comfort. That is, what Gaiman refers to as 'fantasy people' will find solid footing and familiar ground in Jones's text.

In the following passages, I identify relevant fantasy scripts and schemata for this project, and examine whether or not they are disrupted in my primary texts.

Perhaps the most recognized fantasy fiction script is that of **good versus evil** (Clute and Grant, 1997, n.p.). Again, this script can appear in other types of fiction, but in fantasy fiction it is usually portrayed as straightforward, almost to the point of simplicity. There is a good guy (the hero) and a bad guy (usually the dark lord, but sometimes an evil sorceress); the hero wants to save the world, and the villain wants to destroy it. The villain is set up at the beginning of the story as being evil incarnate, and the hero is the only person in the world who can beat them. Examples of this script can be seen in fantasy fiction stories from many different ages; in *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954-1955), Frodo is the hero trying to save the world by destroying the Ring, while Lord Sauron is evil and wants to find the Ring to bring the world under his rule; in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950), the Pevensie children want to save Narnia by defeating the White Witch, whereas the White Witch wants to bring eternal winter to Narnia and bring everyone under her control; in *A Wrinkle in Time* (L'Engle, 1962), Meg wants to rescue her father and gets caught up in his fight against the Black Thing that wants to take over and dominate the entire universe; in the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 1997), Harry wants to live a normal (wizard's) life but has to protect himself from Lord Voldemort, who wants to reign over muggles and wizards alike, by destroying him. All of these books (and many others like them) may have complex plots and intricately detailed characters, but they lay one thing out in black and white—the hero and the villain. There is often not anything redeeming about the villain whatsoever, and they are presented as needing to be vanquished because the world will only be safe once that happens. Lydia Kokkola presents this straightforwardness as a reason for fantasy's popularity amongst developing minds, as these kinds of stories quickly answer the question of

which character the reader is meant to care about (and not care about) (2017, p.111). That is especially true for fantasy stories that utilize the good versus evil script.

Both Kel and Alanna's stories use this script to a certain extent—there are good and evil characters in the texts. But in neither story is there an ultimate evil set up from the beginning that the hero must vanquish to save the world. Both of the main challenges the characters face is overcoming the disbelief they have in themselves. The closest Alanna comes to having a villain is in the character of Duke Roger, Prince Jonathan's older cousin who tries to magically kill his older brother (the King) and his family, so he can take the throne. Throughout the last part of the first book and all of the second book, Roger is set up as being well-loved by everyone—except Alanna. She dislikes him for reasons she cannot name. When his treason is revealed, she duels him and kills him; her story then continues for two more books, and Roger disappears until the end, when he is brought back from the dead and she must defeat him again. He clearly represents evil, while Alanna represents good. But her story deviates from the good versus evil script in that Roger has not been set up as her definitive enemy in the same way that Voldemort is for Harry, or even how the White Witch is for the Pevensie children. In the good versus evil script, the hero's main goal is defeating the villain. Alanna's main goal is proving herself.

The same is true for Kel's story. Only in the final book of *Protector* is a villain named that Kel must slay—Blayce, the Nothing Man, who is killing children and putting their souls into mechanical devices used to fight the Tortallan army. The Chamber of the Ordeal tells Kel that she must kill Blayce at the end of *Squire*, and that order carries into the next book, *Lady Knight*. Blayce is obviously evil—anyone who kills children is guaranteed that title. But even once Kel has been told to kill Blayce by a magical being (The Chamber of the Ordeal), it is still only in the back of her mind—her main goal is to follow orders given to her by her commander in the war against Scanra, which is to build and maintain a refugee camp. After many months at the warfront, she eventually kills Blayce, which is a great victory for the Tortallans, and for Kel—but it does not end the war, and the main relief Kel feels in his death is from rescuing the refugee children Blayce had kidnapped. It is an event exciting enough to work as the climax of the novel, but it is not the same as the good versus evil script that many fantasy texts follow. Both Kel and Alanna's stories have characters that are good and those that are evil, but in changing the significance of those evil characters, the texts are more complex than many other fantasy stories.

The **fantasy hero** is one of the most discussed schemata (and the related **fantasy hero quest** as a script) in fantasy fiction. In some ways, the fantasy hero's characteristics overlap with other types of literary hero, but a fantasy hero has magic in his¹¹ world—sometimes magic to help him overcome challenges, and sometimes magic that must be defeated. It often pairs up with the good versus evil script, wherein the hero is solely *good*, often to the point of simplemindedness. An example is Taran from *The Book of Three* (Alexander, 1964), who is guileless and completely focused on rescuing Hen Wen (an oracular sow—perhaps a comic stand-in for the damsel in distress) and, in the back of his mind, defeating the evil Lord Arawn. He is different from heroes in a spy story, because a spy hero would have to be cunning and devious to be successful, and it is different from a wild west hero, because then he would be a guns-blazing, shoot-first-and-ask-questions-later kind of character. The traditional literary hero is a white man, but the fantasy hero will above all else want to defeat *the evil*, whereas other types of heroes will have more personal goals. The hero myth “inscribes male dominance and the primacy of male enterprises” (Hourihan, 1997, p.68). The gender of the hero is something I discuss often in this thesis, as I take great issue with those who comment on female heroes of the past being “little more than honorary men who undertake male enterprises in a male context and display ‘male’ qualities” (Hourihan, 1997, p.68). The reason I take umbrage at these sentiments is because scholars such as Margery Hourihan, Joanna Russ (1995), and Lissa Paul (1999) claim that any female who behaves as a hero is simply being male, and displaying male qualities: “courage, single-minded devotion to a goal, stoicism, self-confidence, certitude, extroversion, aggression” (Hourihan, 1997, p.68). To imply that females who have such attributes are merely heroes in drag—that being self-confident or extroverted negates a person's female-ness and renders her male—is offensive in the extreme. Hourihan states that heroism is gendered, and that that is made apparent in C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle* when Jill thinks, “Even if I can't stop blubbing, I *won't* get my string wet” (1964, p.115)—Hourihan posits that in behaving thusly, Jill “does not forget how a true warrior behaves,” and this behavior somehow makes her male (1997, p.68). I argue two things: first, that Jill being portrayed as crying but carrying on despite that shows emotional strength and practicality; second, that we must define characteristics as being either manly or womanly is an outdated mode of viewing the world.

Nonetheless, the history of the schema of the hero is important to know, if for nothing else that we may move forward with it. Other qualities typically associated with a fantasy hero are avoiding any significant sexual involvement (for it would get in the way of his mission), and a

¹¹ I use male pronouns to discuss the traditional fantasy hero, because this particular type of character is always male.

contempt for such involvement (Hourihan, 1997, p.68). The hero exerts control over himself, his environment, and his world—which Hourihan sees as the essence of his masculinity (1997, p.69). The hero’s final success only comes with the end of the story itself, which, historically, has often simply been “happily ever after” (Hourihan, 1997, p.69) by defeating the main villain. The hero often is an unanalytical kind of person—there is good, there is evil, and the hero must vanquish the evil. Hourihan states that he is attractive to readers because of his certainty, and how he reinforces established views of the way the world is (1997, p.58). Essentially, the hero is the white male living in a shining patriarchal world—at least, that is how traditionally the hero has been seen. By the end of this thesis, I hope that this view of the hero is seen as historically accurate, but no longer relevant in a contemporary context. This entire thesis is an examination of whether or not Alanna and Kel qualify as heroes, especially as I would define it in a modern feminist text—characters who go from having little agency at the beginning to having confidence their abilities and choices at the end. I analyze this facet of Alanna and Kel’s characters fully in Chapter Two, where I discuss scripts that are specifically gendered, though I think their relationship to the traditional fantasy hero can be summed up succinctly—neither of them are white men, so simply by their stories existing, they are breaking the traditional fantasy hero script.

The traditional hero has arisen from the oft-told story—or **quest**—of how white European men are the “natural masters of the world because they are strong, brave, skillful, rational and dedicated...how women are designed to serve them, and how those women who refuse to do so are threats to the natural order and must be controlled” (Hourihan, 1997, p.1). Like the fantasy hero, the fantasy quest differs from other types of literary quests because they are undertaken for noble reasons (usually, though not always, to save the world), and because there is some kind of magic involved. In *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, 1937), Bilbo and the dwarves set out on a quest to retrieve the dwarf homeland, The Lonely Mountain, from Smaug the dragon. It is a noble act because it is saving the dwarves’ ancestral home that was violently taken from them, which resulted in the scattering of their people and the loss of many dwarf traditions. Reclaiming the Lonely Mountain will help right that wrong. If it were simply a quest to steal treasure from Smaug, it would not be a fantasy quest—it would just be a heist. The fantasy quest has promulgated in many different forms, and has been questioned significantly, but there is much in it that clings on. Traditionally, the quest is always the same—the fantasy hero has a goal to vanquish evil, faces many challenges along the way, gets the quest object (and the girl) and eventually succeeds at everything he set out to do (Hourihan, 1997, p.1). Jones, in her book of

humor and parodies—and truths—says that, “Many, possibly most, Tours are organized as a Quest. This is like a large-scale treasure hunt” (Jones, 1996, p.164). The aim of a quest is to find the **quest object**, which is an example of a schema—a static part that helps make up a script. It can be anything from a jewel to a person to a hidden kingdom. But the finding of the quest object does not mean the end of the story. As such, these quests fall into the pattern of not being the ultimate goal, either internally or externally: “Tourists, far from being rewarded for achieving their Quest Object, must then go on to conquer the Dark Lord or set about SAVING THE WORLD, or both” (Jones, 1996, p.164). Alanna and Kel each go on quests: Alanna for a magical jewel, and Kel to kill an evil sorcerer. These quests each take place in the last book of the quartets, and work as an outward manifestation of each hero proving herself—if she can successfully complete her quest, she truly deserves to be accepted as being worthy as a female knight (both by the world at large and by her own self). Alanna quests to find the Dominion Jewel; she must present it to King Jonathan, and in doing so must defeat Duke Roger (again). Kel quests to find the Nothing Man and kill him, but then must return to help win the war Tortall is waging. Unlike the traditional fantasy quest, the quest is only a small part of the larger story—it only appears in one out of four books for each protagonist. And as with everything else that happens to Alanna and Kel, they have to work hard to achieve these particular goals—nothing is handed to them, or magically bestowed upon them. Nothing is easy.

Magic is a schema that is sometimes a script, and it belongs firmly in the realm of fantasy fiction. Historically, magic has been linked to the female, often being seen as a woman’s art (Flanagan, 2008, p.47). Except when it is not. It is a contradiction. Terry Pratchett’s Discworld books make the distinction between women’s and men’s magic by stating that women are witches and men are wizards—except, of course, that there is a female wizard in *Equal Rites* (1987) and a male witch in *The Shepherd’s Crown* (2015). The main differences between witch’s magic and wizard’s magic for the Discworld books is that witch’s magic is used for practical, everyday things, such as healing the sick and in helping with childbirth, whereas wizard’s magic is for grander things. The OED’s first recorded use of the word “witch” from c890 was used to describe a man who uses magic, although in today’s language, a witch almost always means a woman¹². Around one hundred years later in c1000, the OED records a “witch” as a female magician, and in later use was meant to imply especially that she had dealings with the devil—an idea that corresponds with Heidi Breuer’s text on gendered magic, where she concludes that

¹² Probably helped by, not entirely due to, the success of Harry Potter and the Hogwarts School of *Witchcraft and Wizardry*; the boys are wizards and the girls are witches.

medieval and early modern literature resulted in the gradual “villainization of feminine magic” (2009, p.10). Therefore, it would seem almost impossible to extricate the genre of fantasy from females, and that fantasy would perhaps be the genre with the least amount of gender stereotyping. Obviously, that is not the case, as there are a multitude of examples of male-heavy fantasy texts, as well as a bevy of schemata and scripts that apply to female characters.

There are no witches per se in either Alanna or Kel’s stories. In the Tortall universe, having a magical ability is called the Gift, and people with the Gift are usually referred to as mages, regardless of gender. Both girls and boys of the upper classes, or those with significant magical ability, can be sent to the cloisters to be trained in magic, but most common people train from someone they know. Alanna has the Gift, and her relationship with her magic can be seen as a metaphor as her relationship with her sex—both are aspects of herself she wishes she had control over and could change, but she cannot do so with either of them. Since magic is not gender-specific in Tortall, she is trained in magic at the palace without having to reveal her sex. Kel, on the other hand, has no magical ability herself, but is surrounded by those who do. The biggest impact magic has on her life at the palace is through her interaction with animals who have been exposed to Daine, the Wildmage, who has animal-specific magic. Importantly, that magic is not sex-specific either—Kel has relationships with animals of different sexes¹³. I fully explore both Alanna’s relationship with her magic, and Kel’s relationship with the magic around her, in my primary analysis below.

Related to magic, **magical beings** are creatures that are different from humans in a magical way. This difference can be as small as a witch, wizard, sorcerer/ess, enchanter, mage, or any other word that means human being with the ability to do magic. But it can range to different **races** or **species**, such as orcs, elves, ogres, dragons, unicorns, mermaids, centaurs—the list is endless.

There are two magical beings that appear in Alanna’s books—the Mother Goddess, who briefly appears to say she is watching over Alanna, and Alanna’s cat Faithful, whose meows sound like human speech to Alanna (and to anyone else he chooses to communicate with). Kel’s story also has magical beings, and in a far greater number than Alanna’s books. In the intervening quartet, *The Immortals*, mythological creatures break through a magical barrier to the human world, making them prevalent during Kel’s fictional time period. Throughout her books, Kel faces magical beings that vary from the pleasant to the monstrous: flying horses, centaurs, basilisks, dragons, and, most importantly for Kel, spidrens. Spidrens are giant spiders with

¹³ There is no distinction made between gender and sex for animals in these books, which is logical, since gender is a construct specifically garnered by humans, so theoretically animals have no need to change their behavior to align with a specific gender.

human heads and fanged silver teeth that enjoy kidnapping people in their powerful webs—and then eating them piece by piece. In this sense, Alanna and Kel’s books follow the fantasy script, by including magical beings. As stated previously, there needs to be a balance between the unfamiliar and the recognizable in fantasy texts, so readers realize what they are reading is a fantasy story. The presence of magical beings in both quartets are signifiers that these quartets definitively belong in the genre of fantasy fiction. And these magical beings still serve a cognitive purpose: “our brain is stimulated by these creatures because they puzzle it” (Nikolajeva, 2016, n.p.). While creatures such as unicorns and elves may feel common and understandable through their proliferation in fantasy texts, nonetheless attention must be paid to these magical beings, because there is no guarantee to how they will act. Faithful sometimes meows so Alanna cannot understand him, and spidrens are not common throughout fantasy fiction. The presence of magical beings in these quartets simultaneously defines them as fantasy, while also keeping the brain piqued.

Fate and **destiny** are common fantasy scripts, wherein the protagonist is depicted as behaving as they do because it is meant to be. In tales such as these, the hero has little choice—little agency—about what path their life takes. While destiny does not necessarily mean that the hero has no power (often quite the opposite), it is a power *over* others, as opposed to over oneself. Two examples of scripted hero-fate are from Robin McKinley’s award-winning fantasy novels *The Blue Sword* (1982) and *The Hero and the Crown* (1985). In the first book, as briefly mentioned earlier, Harry is described as a directionless, penniless girl, who is kidnapped by the Damarian king and suddenly finds purpose (and not an unenviable amount of skill) in fighting for this new country. She has something “riding her mind” that gives her a magic-like aptitude for the Damarian language, horse-riding, and swordcraft. She behaves in a way that is prescribed for her, that *seems* right, but it is never her choice. Harry never asks why she has been kidnapped, and never imagines trying to escape back to what she knows. She goes along with everything that is suggested she do; not because she has considered it and decided upon it, but simply because it is suggested. It is implied that Harry is guided by Lady Aerin, a legendary female warrior from Damar’s history. The reader is given the chance to know Lady Aerin better in *The Hero and the Crown*, where she is shown to be almost as drifting as Harry. Her father, the king, forbids her from riding out to war with him, and Aerin is told to stay at home. While she does not remain inactive, and works to discover the secret to fighting dragons, her destiny takes over her life’s path for the last part of the novel. She becomes almost-immortal and, much like Harry, Aerin has an innate skill that comes to life when her destiny is revealed to her; “only she” can defeat

her uncle, an evil sorcerer who is plaguing Damar. Harry and Aerin do not balk from the challenges set for them, but their actions are depicted as though they had no other option—which is a script. They are successful warrior maidens, but they aspire to their conquests because others have told them to aspire to it. Both of their stories end with marriage and children, but neither of them fall squarely into the traditional girl script, with the exception of the idea of obedience—they may marry and have children, but neither completely give up the power they have gained. Harry and Aerin have a destiny, and they obey it—much like a traditional girl who would acquiesce to that which she is commanded to do. They *react*—they do not act.

Though it may seem harsh, the second wave of feminism in the US could also said to be a reactionary movement, though clearly spearheaded by women who were not afraid to act. These women found themselves within a system that oppressed them and denied them rights—it lacked social justice. The **destiny script** can be linked to the **social justice script**; neither of them are exclusively found in fantasy novels, but both are more plausible in the fantasy genre. Oziewicz discusses the **social justice script**, which occurs when novels describe a certain kind of injustice. He describes it as “a thought- and action-protocol for effecting positive change in one’s own society through eliminating aspects of inequality or unfairness embedded in its structures or modes of functioning” (2015, p.203). It is triggered when the protagonist experiences a sort of injustice, which in some respects happens in each of these books. But there is one set of fantasy texts from the 1980s that stands out that creates a character that actively fights the injustice of gender inequality—the *Lioness* quartet. As a ten year-old girl, the text has Alanna decide to disguise herself as a boy and train as a knight, even though it is illegal for girls to do so. She takes what Oziewicz calls the “rights track” of the social justice script, wherein a character fights to change the social system from within, even if expansive social change is not her primary goal (2015, p.198). This individualistic path seems logical in a novel that closely focalizes one person, since it is all about *her*. Alanna disobeys her father and refuses to go to the convent. But the reasoning behind her decision is important, as is that it *is* a decision. Alanna is described as knowing what she wants and pursuing it despite the odds against her. Fate does not drive nor direct Alanna; she chooses to go against the norm because it is what she wants to do. Alanna did not set out to change Tortall or the rest of her world by becoming the first female knight in centuries, but she did. She was fulfilling an individual need regardless of what society dictated (Salter, 2013, p.166). Fictional years later, we read that girls become more equal in Tortall—and that directly leads to Kel being able to train as a knight openly as a girl. This occurs as a result of Alanna successfully becoming a knight, which can be seen as a personal accomplishment. But in doing so, she demonstrated to the world that girls can achieve things

like that. She may have started out by only thinking of herself, but change on a large scale occurred as a result. As with other social justice focused novels, “the aim is to help characters and readers alike develop attitudes necessary for identifying and correcting instances of remediable social injustice” (Oziewicz, 2015, p.204). In fantasy fiction, social justice can be affected more easily than in real life, which can be seen as a disadvantage. I argue, though, it is an opportunity for readers to see that change can be affected, and wrongs can be righted. And while the second wave of feminism in the US accomplished many things for females, like pushing female heroes into existence, it mostly did not think of them as individuals. It seemed to be about girls showing up and kicking ass, and their motivation behind that was inconsequential—that they were kicking ass was good enough. The third wave of feminism in the US seems to have stemmed from the more blatant societal inequalities having been addressed, so it was now time for women to look inside themselves to find equality on a personal level. This individualistic desire can be seen in a sampling of feminist fantasy fiction from the late 1990s and 2000s, as this is when the majority of feminist fantasy texts started featuring female heroes who had an inner drive, a *purpose* to their actions, and made definitive decisions.

A story similar to McKinley’s books came out in 2008—Kristin Cashore’s *Graceling*. In it, a girl named Katsa has unusual powers that seem as if they will dictate her life’s place. She has the grace of killing, and is used as a tool by her uncle, the king. But she does not accept this fate—she forms a secret council to right the wrongs committed across the four kingdoms. She actively decides to combat the evil she sees occurring, and recruits others to her cause. Eventually she gains the courage to break from her uncle and refuses to do his dirty work anymore—a decision which may seem simple and obvious to us, but one that takes tremendous courage and sense of self from Katsa. She has identified injustice in her world, and she works to change it from the inside, taking Oziewicz’s rights track of social justice. But she does not view it as such. All she sees is one girl trying to restore the balance to the world that she has disrupted by using her grace—an idea that seems to stem from the ideas of the third wave.

One of the largest schematic properties of **female characters** in fantasy fiction before the 1960s was that they did not “have any purpose” of their own (Hourihan, 1997, p.157)—though, again, this was not only a problem female characters faced in fantasy fiction. Stories were about the (male) heroes, and did not focus on female characters, whose lives were comparatively dull—because they were given no opportunity to be otherwise. These female characters were almost always marginalized and portrayed as inferior to male characters—they were there not as characters, but as symbols of the hero’s psyche, since the stories were always focalized through

him (Hourihan, 1997, p.156). They are often associated with the domestic sphere or sex in some way, illuminating how female characters in fantasy used to be treated—and often still can be. Hourihan points out that stereotypical female characters such as these are even more prevalent in children's literature—that, or there are no female characters at all. I now introduce those which apply to my primary texts, to allow me to decipher how these scripts apply to them. I apply some of these terms in the analysis of fantasy in this chapter, and use others in Chapter Two, wherein I look more closely at gendered stereotypes that are not specifically connected to fantasy.

The most pertinent for this discussion is Jones' description of **warrior women**, as both Alanna and Kel fall under that delineation. Jones describes warrior women as coming from a country of only women, who are far more soldierly than male soldiers, which they show through swaggering, swearing, screwing, and fighting (much like the Amazons). It is possible to become friendly with them, "provided that no one treats them like women." They are rumored to all be gay (p.233). Jones has clearly taken this trope from the type of fantasy that was being produced around the time when *Alanna* was first published in the 1970s and '80s, as Pierce herself has commented on how writers such as Cherryh and Tepper were writing exactly that kind of character. Closely related to the warrior woman is the **female mercenary**: "She is usually tall, thin and wiry, silent, and neurotic. Sex scares her...She can usually kill two people at once while guarding your back in between" (p.78). This type of character is the other side of the coin of the warrior woman, who is a sexed-up, masculine fighter. They both seem to have been given unnatural skills simply as a fact of existence—they do not have to work for it. This idea harkens to characters such as Cashore and McKinley's female heroes, who are spontaneously super skilled at fighting.

Perhaps luckily for female tourists¹⁴, they will never menstruate—a script that repeats itself in much of children's and adolescent literature. The idea of there being no consequences to the body's needs is prevalent in fantasy. Rarely, if ever, are characters depicted as using the bathroom or bathing, although they occasionally do eat. Developing bodies for females do not seem to be an issue for many fantasy characters. Part of what makes fantasy useful as a genre is it is nonmimetic—but it is in its mimesis that it can truly have an impact. Creating realistic worlds within magical realms requires realities of the human body, which helps to anchor the bizarreness of the fantastic in a concrete, physical way. These physical realities become major issues for both Alanna and Kel—both are depicted as starting their menses, and both of their

¹⁴ Tourists is Jones' word for people venturing into Fantasy Land, which seems to be a combination of main character and reader.

bodies develop as well.

Pierce wanted to create female heroes who were depicted as real people—as real as anyone can be when, like Alanna, they have magical powers (2002, n.p.). She did not want them to be stereotypical brutes, or people who learned how to fight without having to work hard. Her “female warriors are not muscle-bound tanks who go one-for-one”: Alanna is “five-foot-four and stocky. She puts her strength in her stamina, her speed, the ability to go the distance” (Pierce, 2002, n.p.). Kel is larger and more solidly built than Alanna, but she still has to work at improving her arm-strength to match that of her peers. One of the reasons why Pierce’s quartets work so well in regards to gender and fantasy is because she wrote them with that in mind. She read *The Lord of the Rings* as an adolescent, and became an avid reader of fantasy. But she found that there were not many stories where girls got to go on heroic adventures—something that Jones’ tongue-in-cheek analysis confirms. So Pierce wrote her own fantasy stories with female heroes (Cullinan et. al., 2005, p.573). The settings she creates are magical, impossible places, but they are full of characters who are “plagued with many of the same foibles and challenges as their readers” (Cullinan et. al., 20015, p.574). This idea further demonstrates the concept of fantasy fiction as ripe for cognitive engagement, as it balances between the bizarre and the recognizable. Magic creates an otherworldly allure, while the realistic struggles that characters are depicted as undergoing connect the fantastic with reality. Alanna lives in a world of magic, and possesses magical talent herself; nonetheless, she faces gender discrimination and comes up against authorities who would prevent her from achieving her goals. I now analyze the fantastical in *Alanna*, determining what the text provides to create a nonmimetic world that nevertheless exhibits relatable gendered challenges.

Alanna: Having Magic Does Not Make Things Easy

In *Alanna*, the reader meets ten-year-olds Alanna and Thom, twin sister and brother. Thom declares, “I want to be a great sorcerer!” (Pierce, 1983, p.1), alerting the reader that this world is one of magic. If Thom’s declaration were interpreted merely as the dreaming of a young boy, the certainty of it is proved by including Maude, the village healer, who is said to have “taught [the twins] all the magic she possessed” (p.4). Thom does not simply want magic to be real—it truly exists in this world. It is magic that inspires Alanna’s decision for the twins to switch places: “She grinned. ‘You should’ve been Alanna. They always teach the girls magic—’ The thought hit her so suddenly that she gasped” (p.2). She suggests that they switch places—Thom to the convent to learn magic, and her to the palace to learn to be a knight. The only catch is that she must disguise herself as a boy, while Thom is allowed to be a boy *and* a sorcerer.

It is through magic that Alanna and Thom's choices are solidified—they ask their caregiver and magic teacher, Maude, if they should follow through with Alanna's plan. For a choice so life-changing and momentous, Maude decides to try to See the future in the fire, to guide her in what she advises the children to do. She only does so because she already thinks their plan is a valid one; Thom loves magic, while “Alanna was afraid of her magic. Thom had to be ordered to hunt, and Alanna had to be tricked and begged into trying spells” (p.5). This insight into the twins' characters is illuminating later on, when it becomes more and more apparent how frightened Alanna is of magic. This is a script disruption, given that magic is so often linked to females. It also becomes one of the dissonant markers of her personality, because she seems scared of so little.

It is in Maude's attempting to See that the reader encounters the first magical occurrence. Maude thrusts the twins' hands into the flames: “Power shot up their arms. Thom yelled and wriggled with the pain of the magic now filling him up. Alanna bit her lower lip till it bled, fighting the pain her own way” (p.6). Magic is an impossibility in our world, but how it is described in the text anchors it in the body, making it an understandable feeling—it is physically painful. While I examine the concept of embodied emotions in Chapter Three, it is important to mention the power of it here. Through the description in the text, readers are given an opportunity to navigate a way into understanding how magic is meant to feel. It is clear that each twin finds it painful for their hands to be shoved into a flame, but that this is not the only painful aspect. Touching fire does not usually make power shoot up a person's arm—it usually results in searing pain and blistering skin. In this scene, it is the power that is the cause of the anguish. Thus the reader's introduction to magic is associated with physical pain. It also provides further insight into Thom and Alanna's characters. They react in the opposite way it would be expected of their genders—for the male to bear it stoically, and the female to cry out. It is Thom who cries out and Alanna who silently suffers. If the text were not already making it clear to readers that Alanna is the twin more adept at handling physical pain, and therefore is more suited to physical activities than her brother, this is further proof.

Thom quickly disappears from view as he goes to the convent, and the text follows Alanna. She spurns her Gift, attempting to make it secondary to her adventure. This behavior is an example of cognitive narratology's usefulness when examining fantasy, because the reader will not know what to think about magic in the text, making it ambiguous and in need of further contemplation. It is evident that magic has an important presence in this fictional world—it is, after all, through a magical test that Maude decides it is right for the twins to change places. But Alanna, the character readers are meant to align with, rejects magic. Thus, magic is quickly

introduced in the story, and then almost as quickly put aside, making readers aware of its existence but perplexed as to its role, and requiring their cognitive functioning to exert itself to discern its purpose.

Eventually, Alanna's dislike of magic becomes apparent—she fears it because she is scared of not having control over it. Magic can be seen as a metaphor for Alanna's female sex. They are both aspects of herself that she cannot change, but would if she could. She has no control over the existence of both of them, and all she can do is come to terms with them being part of her identity. Importantly, they are each aspects of herself that she does learn to accept, but understanding her magic is portrayed as the much more obvious decision on her part.

The first time Alanna is described using her magic it is put into a physical explication, but a different one than when Maude uses it on her:

Slowly, carefully, she reached inside herself. It was there: a purple, tiny ball of fire that grew as she nudged it with her mind. Her nose started to itch, as it always did when she first called on her magic. She ignored the annoyance. Her eyes watered
(p.115).

She is not literally reaching inside of her body; rather, it is a metaphor for going into her mind to find something within herself. But it is different from how people would do that in the real world, if they were trying to concentrate or think of something specific. She is reaching for something inside herself that she can actually see—this is where the description becomes challenging, because no reader will have the knowledge of what seeing purple fire inside of oneself truly looks or feels like. They must use their imagination. The text gives physical clues, but it is up to the reader to interpret them. An itchy nose and watery eyes are understandable bodily reactions, and they help to anchor the experience in the body. In this way readers are invited to envision what using magic might be like. While the text is drawing readers in, it is simultaneously completely different from anything else imaginable. That it is described as fire further indicates how dangerous it can be, and will serve as a reminder as to one of the reasons Alanna is so afraid of it.

Only after a close friend of her dies from the Sweating Fever does Alanna begin to truly think she should use her power to heal—and then “the fever makes the decision for her” (p.108) when Jonathan falls ill. Alanna frets over using her magic, even though she needs it to save Jonathan's life: “She knew if she used her magic and lost control of it, she would destroy herself

and anyone who was nearby...She was never sure of control over her Gift” (p.105-106). This statement explains that magic in this world has rules, and that Alanna does not like being out of control. It makes it clearer to readers why Alanna has refused to practice magic earlier, though they will need to use their cognitive reasoning to determine what they think of her decision to abstain from magic until a companion had already died. Did she behave appropriately, or should she have tried to save her friend, no matter the potential consequences? Not knowing all the rules of magic present in the book, readers will need to continue applying attention to the text to answer moral questions like this. They must try to understand that Jonathan is the personification of the acceptance she has found at the palace; more than that, he is her friend. She risks losing control over herself to save her friend. It is the unknown that frightens her, but her love for a friend that drives her. Unbeknownst to her, the spell she casts makes her and Jonathan sound like adults—his the voice of a man, and hers that of a woman. In that way, her fear of her magic seems well-founded; someone could hear her and realize that she is a woman. But despite that, she finds some measure of control in it. Alanna can control her feminine magic by “applying a masculine discourse of authority” (Flanagan, 2008, p.36). Through using her magic, Alanna overcomes a perceived weakness and merges the two sides of herself:

She clenched her fists and fought the pain. She ground her teeth together. She would ride this tiger. Her body had never given the orders before—she could not let it start now. *Am I a silly child?* she thought angrily. *Or am I a warrior?* (p.101).

Alanna could have used the word ‘girl’ instead of child, since she is still at a point in her life when she equates being a girl with being silly. Thinking of femininity in any other way is hard for her to accept, which is why she uses what she perceives as the masculine idea of the warrior to combat it. But for her, this is a big step towards accepting more of herself—before she refused to use her magic at all, just as she has refused to deal with the fact that she is female. Making the choice to use more of herself means that she is closer to using all of herself; that magic and healing are traditionally female elements brings her closer to realizing that there are good aspects to being a girl.

Alanna herself is trying to understand magic. She asks her teacher, Myles, about power, and the ways and the reasons one should use it:

‘It depends on the person, Alan. The Gift is simply an ability. Not all of us have

it, just as not all of us are quick-witted or have good reflexes. Magic isn't good or evil by itself. I believe you should only use it when you are absolutely certain your cause is just'
(p.107-108).

This explanation of magic—which is not an explanation of its rules, or how it works—puts it into a realistic context. As Myles says, it can be viewed simply as an ability. Alanna is training to be a knight—this includes hard work in learning how to use a sword and other combative tools. Not once does she question the usefulness of learning that kind of power. Somehow, when it comes to the prowess of her physical abilities, she does not need others' advice on whether or not it is good or evil. She understands that she is in control of that power, because it *is* her. This discussion with Myles shows that she is not yet at a point where she thinks of her magic as herself. It is beyond her: something she wields, but does not control. Alanna's relationship with her magic evolves throughout the entire quartet, and how she feels about it often corresponds to how she feels about being female, and herself as a whole.

The confrontation at the end of Alanna's first book is important for several reasons. It is a magical and sword-fighting showdown between the Ysandir, an ancient magical race, and Alanna and Jonathan. This event serves to cement Jonathan and Alanna's friendship, and to help prove to Alanna that she is worthy of becoming a knight. Alanna's sex is revealed against her will when one of the Ysandir makes Alanna's clothes magically disappear (p.253). Jonathan now knows Alanna is a girl, and Alanna knows that Jonathan knows. But it does not impair Alanna's abilities, either in her magic-wielding or in her ability to sword-fight. Though the Ysandir stripped her naked to weaken her, it is ironically the cause of Alanna's newfound strength, making her yell, "I may be a girl, but I can defend—or attack!—as well as any boy!" (p.254). It is her words that save her and give her confidence when there is literally nothing else to cover her. And while it comes as a shock to Jonathan, it does not impair his abilities, either. The two of them hold hands and become an unstoppable fighting machine—both magically and physically. They defeat the Ysandir together, ultimately proving to both of them it does not matter that Alanna is a girl.

Throughout her first book, magic is introduced to the reader—and, in some ways, to Alanna, since it is the first time in her life that she starts to accept it. It is an important part of her character, and a metaphor for accepting her female sex. She has not fully done so by the end of the first book, but can be seen developing more throughout the rest of her quartet. It is interesting to look at Alanna's story, because she is a character who has magic in a fantasy text.

Now I talk about Kel, a character who does not have magic, and must learn to navigate a magical world.

Kel: Being Non-Magical in a Magical World

Kel is not Gifted. This fact becomes important when the reader learns that there are those in Tortall who believe Alanna only succeeded at becoming a knight because she had magic. Alanna's magic is also what keeps her from meeting Kel, for the training commander, Lord Wyldon, forbids it; he tells Alanna, "If you help the girl, it will be said that you eased her path in some special way. There are rumors that your successes are due to your magical Gift" (Pierce, 1999, p.6). Readers who have read Alanna's story will know it is a preposterous idea that Alanna cheated, and will see this statement as another example of social injustice in Tortall. *First Test* begins with Alanna as focalizer, which serves both to familiarize readers by starting them with a character they (potentially) already know, and to connect the worlds of Alanna and Kel. The first chapter serves to illustrate that despite what Alanna has accomplished, Tortall is still not a gender-equal environment. This fact aids in setting up the world in which the reader must navigate, further proving that simply because it is magical does not mean it is perfect. But the presence of a non-magical girl in a magical world helps align readers with Kel, for, like her, they are discovering the specific rules of the world, and how to deal with magical creatures when one has no magic herself. While Alanna's character can be seen as an underdog—girl hiding her gender, small in stature and trying to succeed in a physical field—she does have a bevy of magical assistance. While Alanna's character faces challenges that cannot be vanquished by magic alone, it can aid her in certain ways: she heals faster than most, she can call up light when she needs it, et cetera. She can therefore use both her physical and magical abilities to face her foes, whether they are magical or not. Kel, however, has only herself to fall back on, and often faces mythical creatures with no magic to protect her. She can be seen by readers as being more of a 'real' person in an impossible world—much like it can sometimes feel to be a girl in a patriarchal society. Kel must rely solely on her wits, her abilities, and her friends to accomplish her goals.

Living in a magical world without magic does not mean that Kel is unaffected by it, and she does not exist entirely outside it. There are two main ways that magical aspects of the world and Kel interact. The first is with immortal creatures that have been released from the Realm of the Gods. While some of these are peaceful, benign creatures, some are decidedly evil. It is an encounter with a spidren that cements Kel's decision to train as a knight. She is wandering in the woods, thinking about what path she wants her life to take, when she comes across a spidren across the river from her. Even though she is not experiencing magic, or having it acted upon

her, she still exhibits a physical reaction: “Her flesh crawled; hairs stood up on her arms and the back of her neck. Spidren, she thought, recognizing it from descriptions. Spidrens in our woods” (p.14-15). Much as when Alanna is described as feeling her magic as fire, this reaction of disgust from Kel serves to provide readers with an instinctual, physical response, much as they would experience if they saw or felt something terrifying and monstrous.

And the spidren is monstrous. Kel watches as it pulls a kitten from a sack and bites its head off. Kel’s main impetus as a human being is protecting those who cannot protect themselves (thus why her quartet is called *Protector of the Small*); seeing kittens in danger of being eaten alive, something that arguably does not happen often, if ever, in the real world, spurs her to action. It does not matter that a spidren is magical and she is not; it does not matter that she is armed only with rocks while the spidren has magical web and strength and fangs; it does not matter that the spidren is across a river with no bridge. She must save the kittens.

In this first encounter with a spidren, Kel comes up short—she attacks the spidren, but as she follows it up a cliff, she is defeated by her fear of heights, and is almost killed as a result:

Cold sweat trickled through her clothes. She clung to the face of the bluff with both arms and legs, sick with fear. Leaving its sack on the ground, the spidren threw a loop of web around a nearby tree stump. When it was set, the creature began to lower itself over the side of the bluff. Its hate-filled eyes were locked on the girl, whose terror had frozen her in place
(p.16-17).

She is only saved when her brother, an armed knight, comes to her rescue and chops off the spidren’s head. A paralyzing fear of heights in the face of a monster such as a spidren puts into perspective how terrible her psychological fear is. Even as the spidren is making its way down its web to kill her, Kel is oblivious to it. The heights physically affect her more than a magically creature does—the spidren made her flesh crawl (disgust), but the heights make her sweat and physically unable to move (fear). The spidren does not freeze her with some sort of magic spell, and it is decidedly worse than a normal predatory beast—the spidren has eaten the kitten with a gleeful malice, and has hate-filled eyes when it looks at Kel. This type of magical encounter is completely different to the ones Alanna experiences, and gives readers a new avenue to accessing fantasy—especially since the description is rooted in such an embodied way, where Kel’s fear can become a palpable thing for readers.

The other new type of magic that appears in Kel’s books are to do with normal animals. In

between *Lioness* and *Protector* comes *The Immortals*, a quartet which focalizes Daine, a wildmage who can communicate with animals. Through contact with her, animals begin to understand human behavior more than they did before, as well as gaining some understanding of human speech¹⁵. Daine now lives at the palace, where Kel is training, and the animals in the palace have started to change accordingly. As such, Kel, who liked animals to begin with, forms significant bonds with a flock of sparrows that lives outside her room, and with her horse, an ornery gelding named Peachblossom. He is so ornery, in fact, that he is almost useless as a warhorse. He will not follow physical commands such as kicks, and tries to hamper Kel at every turn. Kel's friend, Neal, brings Kel to Daine to see if the wildmage can do anything to help. Kel, witnessing the interaction between the horse and Daine, gives an outsider's perspective to magic. While with Alanna the text explains what she is experiencing, Kel experiences it much more like a reader would. Kel sees Daine silently talking to Peachblossom, but has no idea what they are saying to each other, because it is happening in their minds. Like the reader, Kel is presented with evidence that they are communicating, but only through knowing that magic is at work can either the reader or Kel know that something more is happening beneath the surface.

Despite Peachblossom being so cantankerous as to be dangerous to her, Kel likes the horse. Therefore, when Daine offers to buy Peachblossom to save him and to allow Kel to have another horse, she does not want to do so—and it seems that Peachblossom does not want that either:

Peachblossom put two hooves back, then two more. Another step, and he could turn away from Daine to face Kel. His ears twitched forward. When Kel, unbelieving, held out her open hand—as Neal winced—Peachblossom lowered his head and softly lipped her palm. ‘That’s that,’ remarked Daine. ‘He says you need looking after’
(p.99-100).

Even though Daine interprets for the horse, she almost does not need to. Peachblossom communicates with Kel his desire to stay with her. With Neal depicted as wincing, the text is

¹⁵ Though it is not the focus of this thesis, it should be briefly note that the quartet between *Lioness* and *Protector* is focalized through Daine, and focuses on her wildmagic that connects her to animals. When given access to Daine's mind, the reader sees that she sees animals not as sub-human but as different kinds of thinking, reasoning beings. They have their own mind-language that they communicate with between all species. While the posthuman theoretical ramifications here are rampant, this is not the place for me to discuss them. For now it is sufficient to say that animals have their own language, and learning to understand human-speech is seen as them learning a new language, not as them miraculously learning language for the first time.

noting that he is expecting something bad to happen with the horse's mouth so close to Kel's hand. His reaction does not seem out of place, seeing as Peachblossom is known for being bad-tempered. In the real world, there could maybe be a person skilled with horses who could mollify a horse that had been mistreated as Peachblossom has, but the possibility of someone communicating so clearly with him is out of the question. The magic of Daine not only makes it possible, but makes it commonplace. She even has the ability to change Peachblossom's personality¹⁶, but will not do so; more than that, Kel does not want her to. Instead Daine teaches him spoken commands, so Kel does not need to kick or spur him. But the idea that a person could reach into the mind of a horse and alter his personality is bizarre: not so bizarre as to not be believed in this fantasy world, though, especially if the reader has read the quartet *The Immortals*.

It is not just horses that Daine has an effect on—it is all nearby animals. It seems that once she interacts with an animal, that animal can then affect a similar, humanizing change on other animals. It should be briefly noted that this change is more of animals understanding humans, as opposed to the animals becoming more human themselves, made all the more complex that the change is wrought by coming into contact with Daine, a human¹⁷. This magical occurrence comes in handy to defeat the other magical incursion—namely, in hunting spidrens. The denouement of Kel's first book proves her mettle not only to the other boys and Lord Wyldon, but to the professional soldiers of the King's Own—and their commander, Lord Raoul. As in the beginning of the book, the threat is magical—spidrens. In Jones' *Guide*, the text reads that there is a **forest of doom**, and that there will be an infestation of giant spiders: "It is best to avoid the place if possible. But the Management usually insists on sending you there" (1997, p.81). Hourihan states that the hero's triumph over the wild thing is a demonstration of the patriarchy, but I disagree, especially in some of the ways Pierce represents them (1997, p.107). There are immortals that are evil and must be fought, like the spidrens, but there are also centaurs, ogres, and dragons who are friends to the humans, depicting a complicated relationship between human and non-human. So while Hourihan states that the monster is the "other" that represents the hero's inner fears and passions, I argue that, in this case, the spidren is an incarnation of the fears that Kel would face even if she were tracking bandits. In this occurrence, a pack of spidrens has captured a woman and taken her back to their lair, where they

¹⁶ Again, another feature of Daine's wildmagic, but one which she does not use, as she views it as a violation of animals.

¹⁷ I could write another 80,000-word thesis on the posthuman in these books, especially in *The Immortals*. Unfortunately, in this thesis, I simply do not have the space. For a thorough look at posthumanism in children's fiction, see Zoe Jaques' *Children's Literature and the Posthuman: Animal, Environment, Cyborg* (2015).

will slowly eat her. While bandits may not eat the woman, they would be expected to rape and possibly kill her. The end result is the same—death. These particular texts put forth a more complicated relationship between human and “beast,” with each being shown to be capable of murder.

Unfortunately for Kel’s companions, no one knows exactly where the spidrens’ lair is. The pages go hunting them with the King’s Own, but with little success. Kel’s sparrows follow her, and they fly around her. When the pages have stopped to rest, they stop with them:

Kel offered a finger. When Crown [the head sparrow] hopped on, she raised the bird her face. ‘I wish I were Daine,’ she said very quietly. ‘I’d ask if you could flit about and find these spidrens. You’d be wonderful spies’
(p.207-208).

Upon saying this, the sparrows seem to confer with each other, and then they all fly away. The pages and the King’s Own continue to hunt the spidrens, but still with no success. A while later, the sparrows return and drop a stick into Kel’s hand: “Holding up the stick, Kel noticed a fat, gray-green worm was dangling from the end. Or was it a worm? She looked closer. She had seen this gray-green stuff before” (p.208-209). The worm turns out to be remnants of a spidren’s web. The sparrows have understood what Kel wished they could do. Even after spending time with Daine and Peachblossom, and knowing how Daine’s mere presence affects animals, Kel did not consider actually asking the sparrows to help. Or rather, she did not think that she, as a non-magical person, could communicate her desire to the birds. This disbelief in herself makes the sparrows’ actions that much more surprising and remarkable. Their actions also assist Kel in her status amongst those around her, because it is through her that the hunters have found a solution to their problem. From the moment she realizes the sparrows understood her request, it becomes a case of the birds leading the hunters, flying ahead and waiting for the slow humans to catch up. This scene is reminiscent of the fairytale motif of magical animal helper, except in this case it is more than that—for one thing, there would be no communication issues in a fairytale. It is different here because the sparrows are seen as deigning to help Kel, instead of being put there by some magical force to assist her in a *deus ex machina*. The sparrows’ assistance puts Kel at the front of the hunting party, because she is the one with whom the birds have the bond: “Even if I can’t come back [after my probation year], she thought fiercely, I’ll have done this much. I’ll have led a spidren hunting party” (p. 211). Thus, even though Kel has no innate

magical talent, she can use magic to her advantage. She is cunning and clever and uses the resources around her to her best advantage. She takes the impossible and bends it to her use.

Magic works differently for Alanna and Kel. For Alanna, it is a part of her, but a part of her that she has a difficult time accepting. For Kel, it is something outside of herself, but she learns to adapt it to her needs. From a potential reader's perspective, the text describing two characters who have such similar goals (becoming a knight) and who have to deal with the same world in startlingly different ways portrays how varied fantasy can be within the same world. It means that they must constantly be on their toes and paying attention to the action in each book to ensure that they do not miss something significant. It also means that, even within these two similar set of texts, that potential readers have a choice of avenues into magic. Choice is vital when it comes to being engaged with characters, and Pierce's creating vivid magical experiences for magical and non-magical alike can convey similar messages through varied stories: girls can do anything, with or without magic.

Conclusion

Alanna and Kel are both heroes. Their identity as heroes has not fully formed in the first books of their quartets, but there are clear displays of it, and it is solidified by the end of their fourth books. Hourihan discusses that to rewrite the hero-quest, a subversion of dualisms must occur (1997, p.206), and I agree with her. Where I disagree with her (to a point) is when she states that stories that have a woman play the conventional heroic role do little to modify the meaning of a fantasy hero (much like I disagree with Paul's concept of the hero in drag). She posits that readers are likely to infer that, if they wish their lives to be worthy of notice, women must strive to behave as much like men as possible. My problem is, again, that she attributes specific traits as belonging only to the realm of male; while this terminology may have sufficed twenty years ago, using language such as that today does not. To break past the traditionally prescribed boundaries of gender, people need to forego the idea that behaving in a certain way is womanly or manly. By defining terms as belonging to one gender or another, we are at once forbidding them from the other gender, and simultaneously describing how each gender should behave. Alanna and Kel both subvert the traditional hero because yes, they are girls, but also because they do not *only* display the characteristics typically associated with the hero. Hourihan says that "courage, prowess, arid rationalism and [a] rigid sense of purpose" define the ideal man, and that female characters displaying such qualities are simply "imperfect males" (1997, p.206). Both these characters show courage—in these first books, Alanna against the Ysandir, and Kel against the spidrens—but that does not make them manly. It does not make them womanly. It proves that

they have the necessary temperament to be knights. Both of them also show prowess in the fighting arts, but they are also shown to work hard at it—neither of them are given this prowess as if it were a gift. Neither of them exhibit arid rationalism—Alanna is too outwardly emotional, and Kel tries to hide her emotions underneath the surface. Both characters do have a sense of purpose, but it is not rigid—they have each questioned whether or not they should be knights, and after debate, trial, and error, they eventually come to the conclusion that *yes*, they should. Once that decision is reached, that purpose does assist in guiding them—such as when a person sets a serious goal for themselves to achieve. And that is perhaps what makes Alanna and Kel subvert the traditional hero the most; they are written as believable human beings, who fail and make mistakes, who have emotions and doubts, and who have to work hard at the tasks they set for themselves. In a fantasy world, where traditionally all of their talents could be bequeathed to them from some magical source, Alanna and Kel’s natures and fallibility ground their stories and make them believable.

In this chapter, I discussed fantasy schemata and scripts, and how they can be gender-biased. Fantasy has the power to be a useful cognitive tool, as well as a useful agential tool, but must be utilized with care. I like what Coats says about fantasy fiction:

The simple fact is that fantasy is a necessary activity for human development, both individually and collectively. For individuals, imagining possibilities beyond everyday reality grows the developing brain like doing reps with weights grows muscles; putting stress on existing pathways forces them to adapt, causing new neural connections between different parts of the brain to be activated and thus stimulating brain growth
(2017, loc.8228-8232).

In discussing Alanna and Kel’s first books, I examined these ideas, as well as analyzing how these two characters deal separately with magic. In the next chapter, I delve further into what schemata and scripts are, how they can be useful in a literary context, and how there are wide-reaching gender stereotypes that affect both characters and readers.

Chapter 2: Scripts and Script Disruption

This chapter delves into how my selected texts reflect existing gender-related cognitive schemata and scripts. It discusses gender stereotypes as presented in the real world and in fiction, for only once we are aware of gender norms can we react against them and beyond them. Roberta Seelinger Trites states that “all narratives rely on scripts. Children organize information in scripts, and texts rely on readers to know enough about these scripts that every detail of every action need not be included in the story” (2017, p.106). We need scripts—but only to a certain point.

I briefly want to return to what I said about the metaphor that Marek Oziewicz uses to discuss schemata and scripts, as I find it useful. He explains how scripts, schemata, and stories are interconnected, relating schemata to genes, scripts to cells, and stories to organs (2015, p.58-59). Each builds upon the other to create the final product—the story. He points out that schemata and scripts can both be generalized, and that is part of what makes them useful. Scripts and schemata are both necessary shortcuts for our brains, making our lives more efficient.

Scripts are defined by pre-existing knowledge, which is naturally different and unique to every individual on the planet. Trites says it is impossible to experience textuality without filtering it through memories specific to that individual, and that those memories often trigger emotional responses (2014, p.35). But although it is an individual’s personal knowledge, it is a sociocultural product. David Herman defines scripts as representations of knowledge that “store finite groupings of causally and chronologically ordered actions that are necessary for completing particular tasks” (1997, p.1048). Peter Stockwell explains that the cognitive idea of a script is a mental protocol that is learned by humans to navigate social situations (2002, p.77). He defines it as a conceptual structure drawn from memory to assist in understanding (2002, p.77). Specific cues in particular contexts activate scripts in our minds, and we have certain expectations of what will follow (Oziewicz, 2015, p.5-6). A common example is dining in a restaurant. There is a script that tells us to look for various indicators to assess whether or not we wait for someone or we seat ourselves. If there is someone to seat us, we prepare an answer to the question, “How many?” We know to wait for menus, and that after a certain amount of time, we know to look for a waiter. Scripts are a type of shorthand, and rather than remembering “the details of every set of behaviors we’ve ever experienced...we remember standard procedures conceptually and in generalized terms” (Trites, 2014, p.37). Neurologically, scripts are simply a way for our brains to work faster.

When seen in this light, scripts seem like a fundamental aspect of functioning socially as a

human. Prior knowledge of similar situations cuts down on the minutiae we need to pay attention to, as we already know how to react. This idea becomes complicated when combined with what people expect of different genders. Trites elucidates, saying that “cultural narratives enscript cognitive conceptualizations, entailing them in ways that prevent people from considering alternative cultural narratives” (2014, p.96). Scripts can become unconscious stereotyping that limits not only what is thought others are capable of, but can also limit what an individual thinks they can accomplish.

In this chapter, I look for the scripts and schemata that have traditionally applied to girls in the real world (see Simmons, 2009), and see whether or not my selected texts confirm or disrupt them. First it is necessary to delineate which scripts specifically I am looking for, to discover why they have become scripts, and to determine ways in which they can be disrupted. I will then examine the depicted lives of Alanna and Keladry to see what similarities there are between the scripts that affect them, and how each of them deals with said scripts. Through both external description and internal representation, I will place the characters within the societies in the texts to see what is expected of a girl—in how she behaves, what she says, how she thinks, and so on. I hypothesize that there are similar scripts in my primary texts’ fictional land and our real world (see Simmons, 2009), in that the expectations for what a girl should be are different than for a boy. It will be important to conclude whether or not these characters have disrupted gendered scripts in a significant way, or if they are merely doing so as a token gesture.

Gendered Scripts

There are three major types of gendered scripts that I look for in my texts. To recognize these scripts in the narratives, I use a combination of schema theory and slots. Stockwell states that scripts are devised of slots that one assumes pertain to a situation, unless told otherwise: props, participants, entry conditions, results, and sequence of events (2002, p.78). In a limited or patriarchal gendered context, examples of these terms could be as follows: dresses, hair ribbons, makeup (props); mothers, daughters, caretakers (participants); the home, balls, social gatherings (entry conditions); marriage, housework, childbirth (results); and courting, romantic interludes, weddings (sequence of events). These are clearly limited ideas when it comes to females, and it is common in Western society for girls and women to surpass them. But if taken as a baseline for what it has traditionally meant to be female, one must go further, whether through reading or in real-life experience, to learn what else can be applied to the female script. Stockwell conflates script and schema theory, referring to certain things as schemata when I argue he should use the term script (2002, p.79). Therefore when he uses the word schema, I will add the word script, to

denote when both terms apply. His points about updating schemata/scripts are important. He uses three terms to describe how a schema/script can evolve: accretion, or adding new facts to the schema/script; tuning, or the changing of facts or relations within the schema/script; and restructuring, or the creation of new schemata (2002, p.79). All three can be useful for changing preconceived notions about gender, as they involve a person updating their ideas with new information. The last two are the most powerful, though, as they address a divergence from the originally held belief. They are part of Stockwell's ideas of schema/script disruption and schema/script refreshment. For while I am focusing on script disruption, the potential outcome from that is script refreshment. Script disruption results from a deviance from the norm that offers a possible challenge, but it is only when that challenge is taken up that script refreshment—the revising of a script so its elements and relations are recast—can occur (2002, p.80). It is when script disruption and then refreshment occurs that the slots of the script can be updated in a person's mind. Armor and trousers can be added to the props, warriors to the participants, battle and warfare to the entry conditions, and training in combat to the sequence of events. Script refreshment does not mean that the original slots are forgotten or subsumed, but they are updated and added to. And perhaps an entirely new script is formulated in a person's mind. While I discuss script disruption as a positive thing, scripts are, psychologically speaking, concepts that we created to better and more efficiently understand the real world. It is only when people see scripts as limiting their choices that scripts become problematic. The most obvious place to start with problematic scripts is with the idea of the traditional girl, since this is the commonly held stereotype of females in the Western world.

The Traditional Girl

The traditional girl is an umbrella term I use that also encompasses other, more minor scripts. I start with John Stephens' descriptors of schemata that apply to different genders (1996, p.18-19). Where Stockwell says that slots make up schemata, Stephens' schemata for femininity are adjectives that describe the traditional girl—what she is like, how she behaves, who she is. The following are the words he uses to define the schemata for femininity: beautiful, non-violent, emotional/soft/yielding, submissive/compliant, obedient/pleasing, self-effacing/sharing, caring, vulnerable, 'victim'/powerless, prize, dependent, passive, synthesizing, thinks qualitatively, intuitive (1996, p.18-19). This idea of a schema for femininity is not simply a definition bandied about in academic writing—several books and articles in the mainstream have been written on the idea that our culture thinks of girls in a specific, subordinate way (see Simmons, 2009, and Wardy, 2014).

While calling this script ‘traditional’ implies that it is located in the past, I use it because there is still a lack of exposure in the world for empowered/enabled women, meaning that there is a lack of social justice in terms of gender equality. In the new curriculum announced in British schools in late 2015, it “included three core political ideologies: socialism, liberalism and conservatism - but feminism was dropped as a named topic” (Burns, 2016). There was an outcry from female students, and a petition garnered more than 46,000 signatures to change the curriculum. While the response from students is heartening, that there needed to be a petition at all is an indication of how females are still regarded in society. In her 2014 book *Redefining Girly*, Melissa Wardy states that ideas of girlhood and what it means to be feminine is inculcated in young girls through the types of toys that are marketed towards each gender: “Girls = baby dolls, baby care items, princesses (all Disney), sexy fashion dolls whose faces and bodies look like they have been surgically altered, beauty/ makeup toys, play cooking and baking sets” (2014, p.4). Wardy says that this kind of marketing imbues in girls the idea that their only value comes from their beauty, youth, and sexuality (p.4). She concludes that media and marketing are resulting in girls being sexualized at a young age, which limits their potential. She draws the link between the significance of the child-to-adolescent transition for females, saying while it may seem harmless for girls to be thought of as sweet and frivolous, the message suddenly shifts to “sassy and sexy” during adolescence (p.15). Girls who are brought up from childhood to see that being beautiful and domestic is the only desirable way to be will have a harder time realizing that there are other options in the world—it limits their ideas and imagination, and results in gender inequality. The American Psychological Association created a Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls to undergo a comprehensive review on the ways in which the young sexualization of girls affects their lives, and found that adolescent females who frequently engage with mainstream media offer stronger endorsement of sexual stereotypes that depict women as sexual objects. They also place appearance and physical attractiveness at the center of women’s value (APA, 2007). Just as problematic are the general societal effects that this perception generates, which can include increased sexism, fewer girls pursuing STEM careers, and increases in sexual harassment (APA, 2007). It is evident that contemporary girls, when it comes to what the media is marketing to them, are being pushed towards traditional ideas of femininity. Beauty, meekness, and domesticity are traits that are still seen as valuable for girls in today’s modern society. Not only that, but girls who have this sort of propaganda targeted at them can think less of themselves, less of their gender, and that being a girl means certain things are not for them, whether that be a career as a scientist or speaking up against sexist treatment—which becomes a social justice problem because it does not only affect individual girls, but girls as a group, and results in a

grievous gender inequality when it comes to how girls are represented in the world¹⁸.

There is another term that sums up all these traits, and dovetails with my idea of the traditional girl: the good girl. Rachel Simmons, co-founder of the organization *Girls Leadership*, wrote that these subscripts of behavior of what girls should be like are compounded in the concept of being “good” (2009, p.1). She argues that being good includes girls behaving in an unerringly nice, polite, modest, and selfless manner, which curtails their personal authority (2009, p.1). As everyone seems to have a list of what is expected of girls, Simmons adds her own; a Good Girl is quiet, perfect, sheltered, a follower, honorable, polite, generous, kind, popular, respectful, flirtatious, average, a people pleaser, has to do everything right, has no opinion on things, does not show skin, has a boyfriend, listens, speaks well, follows the rules, and does not get mad, (Simmons, 2009, p.2). What makes Simmons list different from Wardy’s and Stephens’ is that she asked adolescent girls what *they* thought it meant to be a good girl. Not only are these perceived behaviors worrisome for adults concerned about adolescents, but for the adolescents themselves as well—acceptable schemata and scripts are ingrained and readily available to the adolescent brain. As Simmons says, “our culture is teaching girls to embrace a version of selfhood that sharply curtails their power and potential” (2009, p.1). That is part of the reason why adolescent literature that disrupts gendered scripts can be so powerful. Texts that show females behaving and thinking in ways other than what is represented by the good girl can be enlightening to those who think their future is prescribed already. It is important to note here that there is a danger of a reader thinking Alanna and Kel can do what they do because they live in a fantasy world, but I harken back to what I said earlier—social justice can be more easily affected in fantasy texts, but that serves as an example to readers that change *is* possible. Trites notes that scripts in adolescent literature are important because so few adolescents are aware of certain cultural phenomena, since they have been internalized and normalized in their cognition. She uses the example of few teenagers being aware of the objectification of the female body and date rape, which empowers males over females, and that the resulting non-thoughts further set “those stereotypical actions in their cognition as a script or set of scripts that contribute to the larger cultural narrative of differential power between the genders” (2014, p.49). Much as all

¹⁸ What complicates these ideas is that it is parents who buy gendered toys for their children, and cement stereotypes. Perhaps these parents themselves were brainwashed as children, and to this day do not realize that these harmful stereotypes are perpetuated through things like buying pink clothes. Or even if it is not the parents themselves, it is nearly impossible to stop friends from buying Barbie dolls and princess dresses for their children. It can be argued that while awareness of harmful gender stereotypes has become more known in the wider Western world, there are those who will either be ignorant of that or willfully ignore it. These types of stereotypes, it must be remembered, are culturally-bound—these behaviors are very American and British. Important to realize is that other cultures, such as Scandinavia, have traditions of strong and economically independent women, and that for centuries in Sweden, it was females who inherited family property.

scripts are simultaneously personal and societal, how one reacts to these scripts depends on one's life experience—or their reading experience. Readers with an awareness of gender scripts—even a subconscious awareness—are potentially more enabled to identify what society pushes as limiting, and to pursue their goals despite gender roles by breaking through social injustice.

In this chapter, I analyze my texts by searching for examples of the traditional girl script. I will look to see if girls are represented as passive or meek; if female characters go from (or are expected to go from) parental home to a small adventure to husband's home; if girls are expected to be, and perform as, nonviolent; if girls are seen as more sensitive than men, especially when it comes to romance and love. Potentially the most important thing to examine will be if female characters let their behavior be dictated by the expectations of males. These scripts are recognizable in Western society, which is where the literature I am researching comes from. They adhere to my implied and potential¹⁹ reader, which is someone who is Western, anglophone, most probably female, reasonably educated, and someone who reads this kind of literature as some kind of escape—someone who seeks worlds where people have more freedom (Blackford, 2004, p.8). This potential reader is someone who likely has prior awareness of the existing female scripts.

The Tomboy Girl Script

Logically, the next type of script I should look for is one where girls are represented as throwing off the mantle of the patriarchy, as that would seem to be the opposite of the traditional girl script. But what I must first analyze is determining if girls are behaving in a way that purposefully separates them from femininity *just* to be apart from it. Are they behaving as male characters in a hero saga would, without any change to their behavior or ideas? Or do their actions have some kind of meaning or purpose to them personally, and are they behaving differently from a stereotypically female script because of their inner desires and goals? While in theory this is a character who would be disrupting scripts, there is another type of script that she can easily fall prey to—the 'hero in drag' (Paul, 1990, p.162). A term I have come up with is the tomboy girl script, which is a script that occurs when girls think they are inferior to boys, and the way to overcome that inferiority is to become more masculine. The tomboy girl script is similar to Paul's description of the hero in drag, but slightly different.

The concept of Lissa Paul's 'hero in drag' is problematic. She defines it as what happens when a story "exchanges a female protagonist for a male one" (1990, p.162) without changing

¹⁹ In this case, both the implied and potential reader overlap in their qualities.

anything else in a typical hero-quest (Hourihan, 1997, p.68). There are terms that have become popular, “at least in liberal enclaves,” for girls who decide to break through the feminine performativity they are expected to exhibit: “gender-nonconformist” or “gender-expansive” (Meltzer, 2015). Author Marisa Meltzer states that girls who like sports or who want to cut their hair short are no longer called tomboys by these people, and the idea that these girls will grow out of such behavior is condemned (2015). And it is a laudable idea to no longer define girls in the context of boys. But it is hard to do in a world where masculinity has been held up as the standard for how to think and behave. There are some like Simmons, who reported in an interview with *The New York Times* that a tomboy is a girl who “flouts the unwritten rules of girlhood and femininity, who seems to have an unnatural level of un-self-consciousness in the face of powerful gender norms, who freely and bravely take on challenges and experiences and venture into places girls don’t go” (Meltzer, 2015). So a tomboy is a girl who is not a girl—she is someone who breaks the script of traditional girlhood, the ones I will look for in my primary texts. So is a girl who breaks the script of girlhood no longer a girl? Melissa Atkins Wardy, author of *Redefining Girly* (2014), stated in the same interview that “tomboy is an unhelpful word that suggests if girls are brave or athletic or strong, they’re tomboys, and being the opposite of those things is girly” (Meltzer, 2015). Using the word tomboy tries to define girls as a product of masculinity, and that anything that breaks the script of traditional girlhood is just being boyish. It is this idea that encapsulates my problem with Paul’s ‘hero in drag’—why could a female character behave *exactly* like a male one? Using terms like tomboy and hero in drag is a way to teach people how to perform gender roles. As Wardy says in the interview with Meltzer, people should not define who they are because of a gender role assigned to them (2015). While the concept of being a tomboy²⁰—that is, a girl who does not conform to an idealized picture of femininity—may seem helpful, these ideas further exacerbate the idea of female scripts, conforming to the concept of feminine and non-feminine. If gender is performative, then it should not matter if a girl is behaving ‘like a boy,’ because it is only the readers’ understanding of what it means to perform as a boy. Wardy writes that pursuits which are schematically and scriptically viewed as ‘girly’ are in turn seen as being frivolous, while at the same time a girl who appears interested in sports or STEM subjects is seen as ‘boyish’—both these labels are unfair, and point to a social injustice (2014, p.16). It is incorrect to define a girl as boyish because of how she performs, when that idea conforms to a gender binary that is purely a development of societal pressures. Ideas of gender performativity are especially apparent in stories where

²⁰ While it can be said that tomboy is an outdated concept, having been first used hundreds of years ago, a Google search today will find several references to tomboys in contemporary culture, so I find it pertinent to use it as a term in this thesis.

characters crossdress, or special attention is paid to the proper way they dress for their gender. It also calls into question what is ‘appropriate’ for a female character to do—the scripts that dictate girls are feminine, or they are not truly girls at all (see Österlund, 2002; Flanagan, 2008).

Oddly enough, in a world where women are the ones who are fighting to be treated equally, contemporary children’s literature has recently turned to showcasing boys who do not display traditional masculine qualities. Wendy McClure, a senior editor at Albert Whitman & Company, has said in an interview that books about “gender-nonconforming characters” are mostly likely to be about boys—as in *Jacob’s New Dress*, a book she recently edited (Meltzer, 2015). Perhaps this trend is a result of female characters often adopting traits traditionally thought of as masculine. Girls in modern society can wear pants (trousers) without fear of ridicule, both in real life and in fiction. But boys wearing skirts or dresses is still seen as unusual²¹, though it is no longer seen as ridiculous, as it was in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1884) (for examples of this, see Trites and Nikolajeva).

It is becoming more acceptable for boys to perform like girls, and I have found no one proclaiming that boys should now be called heroines instead of heroes. But the concept of the hero in drag is an idea that was clearly important twenty-plus years ago. Joanna Russ gives examples of gender-swapped stories, noting how ludicrous the female roles become (1995, p.80). She proclaims that this absurdity means that “they are tales for heroes, not heroines” (Russ, 1995, p.80) And an example of Russ’ sex-swapped stories does, at first, sound ridiculous:

An English noblewoman, vacationing in Arcadia, falls in love with a beautiful, modest young shepherd. But duty calls, she must return to the court of Elizabeth I to wage war on Spain. Just in time the shepherd lad is revealed as the long-lost son of the Queen of a neighboring country; the lovers are united and our heroine carries off her husband-to-be lad-in-waiting to the King of England
(Russ, 1995, p.80).

This retelling only sounds ridiculous because of readers’ preconceptions about gender. If this were a fantasy text, or an alternative history, then this story would be intriguing. It would make me wonder what kind of place this is—where, after all, they do have a Queen—and how women are considered the dominant gender. Russ even condescends to say that switching sexual roles may make good burlesque or fantasy, but that when it comes to ‘serious literature,’ it is ludicrous

²¹ Unless of course you consider Scotsmen and their kilts, though they will adamantly proclaim that these are not skirts.

(1995, p.83). While Paul and Russ were trying to create a landscape wherein women could be protagonists, which they meant to be a forward-looking ideal, they were also holding female characters back. They completely eliminated female characters from being *heroes*. They wanted them to be *heroines*. Which is saying that women cannot do what men can, and reinforces the gender binary. While Russ can perhaps be excused for this essay's message, since it was originally written in 1971, Paul came up with hero in drag in 1990. Russ' essay was written before the prolificacy of feminist fantasy published in the 1980s, and perhaps the idea that there are no 'men' stories or 'women' stories was not something she had considered. I think that Russ, Hourihan, and Paul were responding to the idea that "culture is male" (Russ, 1995, p.80). That is, that we live in a patriarchal society, and therefore our culture is imagined from the male point of view. So if women are writing stories about women, but treating them like men, then women authors are falling into the trap of writing like men, simply because that is the dominant way of thinking. But it discounts the idea that women could be aware of how the patriarchally dominant culture wants them to write their female and male characters differently, or the same, and then dismisses that and writes the characters as the authors see them. Russ saying that writers are restricted by the attitudes and expectations that already exist defeats the entire point of fiction being able to change people's minds (1995, p.81). At least one of the reasons why fiction exists is to expand worldviews—something impossible to achieve if authors do not push boundaries on what it can mean to be female or male.

The tomboy schema is not a solution today, even though it used to be—and that is not surprising. As it is currently defined, the word tomboy came into its current usage of "a girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy; a wild romping girl" (OED) in the 1590s. 400 years is a long time to define girls as boys. It can be said that the 1990s were the last years of the term tomboy's heyday, reflected by the third wave of feminism; Michelle Abate writes that "increasing gains by the feminist movement allowed adolescent girls and young women to challenge traditional gender roles" (2008, loc.3521). This time period reflected a growing public concern (at least in the Western world) for females to be overtly treated as equal to boys, and this feat was accomplished at times by treating girls *as* boys. With the introduction of Title IX in the US, equal funding had to be spent in schools on sports for girls as was on sports for boys. Girls were "no longer merely relegated to the feminine activities of cheerleading, swimming or gymnastics" and for the first time had the option to form rugby teams and lacrosse teams, as well as the bastions of American male-ness: American football and baseball (Abate, loc.3522-352). Clothing styles for Western girls started to reflect a tomboyish mode, from shirts that read "Girls Rule" and "Girl Power," to the fashion purported by the band the Spice Girls, whose mantra became "girl

power.” This phenomenon translated to mainstream television, with shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001) centered around assertive female figures (Abate, loc.3538-3539). But the problems I have identified with the word tomboy applied to these displays in the 1990s as well. It seems as if it is purporting to be “girls for girls,” but is instead displaying “girls as they are not girls” and “girls as boys.” Abate points to the conformity of seemingly gender-bending tomboys, saying it was most evidenced by “Girl Power” by ostensibly making a case for female empowerment, while actually advocating a limited and socially innocuous version of it. She says this is because rather than addressing actual female oppression, and discovering ways to eliminate those obstacles, the movement “merely offered a snappy catch phrase that could be printed on t-shirts and stamped on lunch boxes” (loc.3547-3551). And that is largely my issue with the idea of tomboys; it is a veneer of pro-female gender advocacy, which is actually just as hemmed in by gender norms as the traditional girl. There is still an overshadowing of gender, and what a girl should or should not be, hanging over it. It helps define the tomboy girl as a script, but does not make for well-rounded and gender-norm-free characters. The traditional girl script dictates a person’s identity and behavior because of a character’s gender—a girl must be girly. The tomboy girl script also defines a person by their gender—a girl must not be girly. Neither of these encapsulate what the potential a girl has to actually be, which is why I turn now to the last overarching gender script I discuss: the badass girl.

The Badass Girl Who Is Not Afraid to Be Girly or Boyish and Thinks You’re Stupid for Thinking In Binary Terms Like That Anyway

While I want to steer away from descriptive terms, this third script is what I would call the “perfect” girl. She is not perfect in a traditional sense, but instead a modern perfection. She is not a model; she is herself. She does not conform to that which is expected of the traditional girl script, nor does she conform to the tomboy girl script. Instead, she ignores the confines of gender expectations altogether—or, if she does not ignore them per se, she is aware of them and does not let them restrict her. She recognizes external representations of gender, and makes conscious decisions about how she wants to represent herself, but for her *own reasons*. That is the important difference between the badass girl script and the traditional and tomboy scripts. It instead describes a person who is fully herself, and makes decisions for herself—which has become a script in the past few decades of fantasy fiction, but not when Pierce was originally publishing. The character’s actions and behavior cannot be predicted by her gender, or the idea

that she is purposefully *not* conforming to gender scripts. She is presented as being aware of gendered scripts both of the traditional and tomboy girl, but she strikes her own path, either manipulating the scripts to her benefit or bypassing them altogether.

Manipulating scripts to her benefit may seem paradoxical, in that adhering to a script without questioning it is problematic. But someone who is cognizant of a script—even if they do not call it a script—and then consciously decides to behave in a way that adheres to that script to make a point, *that* is someone who has manipulated a script. Therefore, the ‘badass girl’ is a direct result of scripts, for it is a girl who behaves *around* the scripts, and has become an updated script. While such a term may be seen as unrefined, I have chosen the word badass for two reasons: the first is because it is *not* ‘kickass.’ Kickass connotes physicality, and brings to mind a person actually kicking someone. Badass, on the other hand, has no verb within it, and therefore is a less physical term. Violence or the ability to be violent does not encapsulate the badass girl script, even though the two characters I analyze in this thesis are focused on training as warriors. That is simply the way in which they fight social injustice in their world. The second reason why I have selected the word badass is because it is disruptive in and of itself—the academic world does not readily accept terms which do not seem to elevate the tone of the discussion. What I am writing about is important, and deserving of attention; that does not mean that everything involved in it is pretty and unblemished. I am advocating for the disruption of the accepted, and I see no better way of doing that than by using a term that has the potential to make people uncomfortable. If people are uncomfortable, they could be more likely to take notice of what is around them—to what is *wrong* around them. Social justice can be achieved on even the tiniest levels, from referring to a hypothetical person as ‘they’ instead of ‘he,’ to seeing how fictional characters right wrongs in their own societies.

I analyze how characters perform—both when trying to be female and when trying to be male—and how they think about gender. This analysis will be especially interesting when looking at girls depicted as consciously deciding how to perform. I look for characters who, like Judith Butler, oppose the ideas that certain kinds of gendered expressions are false while others are true (1990, viii), and I will identify them by their rejection of gender schemata and scripts. Will they evolve into empowered/enabled characters? Do they start by adhering to some type of gendered script, whether it be the traditional or tomboy girl, and then evolve past them? Or do characters like this exist at all?

In the following sections, I examine Alanna and Kel’s thoughts and actions in relation to each of the gendered scripts I have described. In doing so, I hope to show a myriad of ways that gendered scripts can affect female characters, and the ways in which these particular characters

are depicted as subverting some of them. Subverting these scripts is important when it comes to social justice, as the traditional girl script and the tomboy girl script have been indoctrinated in the minds of girls for years. That is the entire point of this thesis; that girls do not have to behave in a prescribed way dictated to them by their gender, despite the society around them that pushes that agenda. While scripts in and of themselves are not bad—they are just shortcuts for the mind—it is when they limit how a girl thinks she can be that it becomes a problem for the population at large.

Alanna

Vital for the concept of scripts are the expectations that readers bring to a story. Knowing Alanna is a girl, a reader may expect her to behave in a certain way, adhering to the feminine script that is built from gendered stereotypes. Even Alanna has preconceived notions about what a lady is. But what Alanna—and perhaps the reader—does not realize is that being a lady can mean more than walking slowly and sitting still. While declaring that she wants more than the enscripted life that is accorded to her sex, she is simultaneously saying that that is all there is to that role. She is working off of a stereotype. It is not surprising that all she understands are the schemata and scripts associated with what being a *lady* is, and declares, somewhat unfairly, “As if that’s all I can do with myself!” (Pierce, 1983, p.1). Though it may be somewhat convoluted, Alanna’s belief in the feminine stereotype is what leads her to be written as behaving in a way to disrupt the lady-script by becoming a knight. The idea that girls are not as good as boys is a subtly pervasive idea throughout the first book, though it simultaneously contradicts itself—Alanna feels that she is not worthy of training as a knight because she is a girl, while at the same time she works harder than the boys and is superior to them in several ways. Only at the end of the first novel does Alanna decide that being a girl does not make her less worthy—it is skill, not gender, that matters. In this analysis, I look at Alanna’s first and second books, as both have pertinent events that are vital to discussing scripts in the course of her depicted life.

A Traditional Girl?

There are strict societal codes that govern Tortall, especially when it comes to its aristocratic class. It is easy to associate it with what we know of medieval societies, because there are knights and princes, as well as people riding horses and living in castles. It also has medieval ideas about women. Much like females of years ago, despite being in privileged circumstances, Alanna has little control over the direction her life (Bovey, n.p.). The reader is aligned with Alanna from the start, as she is focalized, and her desires are stated on the first page: “D’you think I want to be a

lady?’ his sister asked. “Walk slowly, Alanna,’ she said primly. ‘Sit still, Alanna. Shoulders back, Alanna.’ As if that’s all I can do with myself!’ She paced the floor. “There has to be another way” (p.1). The idea that curtsying and sewing is all that a noble lady can do in Tortall is firmly entrenched in the reader through Alanna’s belief in it. And the reader is willing to believe Alanna is right, because she is quickly set up through the fantasy script as the hero, as she is the one the story follows. Early in the text we read: “All girls from noble families studied in convents until they were fifteen or sixteen, at which time they went to Court to find husbands” (p.9). Once girls find husbands they run his household—occasionally they will need to defend the estate from raiders while the husband is away, but only in extreme circumstances. And that is her life: home and husband. Now, for some young female readers this storyline will seem ideal—just as in fairytales marrying a prince is ideal. But the text subverts this concept, showing it to be the least desirable outcome by using terms that make being a lady seem akin to a hellish fate.

As discussed earlier, destiny itself is a schema commonly used in the script of hero quests, where the protagonist is depicted as behaving as they do because it is fate. In tales such as these, the hero has little choice—little agency—about what path their life takes. While traditionally the hero would follow *his* destiny, that would rarely include being a girl and going to a convent—thus Alanna breaks that script both by not following her “fate,” and by choosing not to go to the convent.

Primary for Alanna is her agency—her ability to choose. On the second day of page training, Alanna quits—though she says that she is protesting unfair treatment, not quitting. Her objection is that she wants to do things on her own terms. She says, “I want to have time to myself. I want to learn to fight with a sword *now*, not when they decide” (p.54). Coram retorts that he did not think he had brought up “another soft noble lady,” and reminds her that he told her training would be “naught but hard work every wakin’ minute, and a lot of extra wakin’ minutes to boot” (p.55). At the end of this, Coram calls her Mistress, which is like a verbal slap, since Alanna is presenting as a boy. If she gave up now, she would only ever be a lady—never a Sir that accompanies an earned shield. To achieve her goal of freedom to do as she wishes, to accomplish great deeds and have adventures, requires Alanna to cede her immediate freedom. But it is presented in the text as *her choice* to do so, and therefore an exhibition of her agency. She has elected to give up her power for now, in a trade for more power later. And it will be a personal power, a power over herself and her own decisions, something that as a married noble lady she would probably not achieve.

Readers are given an insight into Alanna’s teacher and caretaker, Coram, when the text says: “With all his heart Coram Smythesson wished now, as he had in the past, that Alanna were

the boy” (p.15). Most of this desire is a selfless hope for Alanna’s wellbeing, for Coram recognizes that she would excel at a knight’s life, while she would constantly chafe under the constraints and expectations of a noble lady. A small part of Coram’s thinking is that if he were to take Alanna’s brother, Thom, to the palace, Coram would be embarrassed in front of his fellow soldiers due to his knight master’s ineptitude. This sentiment sums up Alanna’s place in society, as well as comments on the society itself—Coram does not question that Alanna cannot travel to the palace to be a knight. She is gendered as female and therefore is only allowed certain choices. Even though Coram knows that Alanna is not passive, quiet, nor meek, as girls are perceived in popular culture, he can only see an enscribed girled life for her. Upon originally hearing her twin-swapping idea on the way to the palace, Coram declares he is taking Alanna home, because it does not matter what she wants—she is a girl, and that is that. Only once he sees how determined she is, and is reminded of how much better a warrior Alanna is than Thom, is he willing to aid her in her subterfuge. He mentally overcomes that she is gendered as female and looks only instead at her abilities. Coram knows that Alanna is quicker than Thom, rarely tires, and has “a feel for the fighting arts, and that was something that never could be learned” (p.19). Coram has raised Alanna since she was a baby, and has a foster father’s love for her, which is accompanied by a desire for her to be happy. When the patriarchy’s ideas about gender are not an issue, Alanna’s qualifications make her a prime candidate to train as a knight. This transformation of mind that Coram undergoes is partially why I think that books with empowered female heroes are vital—like Coram, readers may need to overcome the gendered ideas they hold in their minds by seeing a girl do so herself²². Even though they may see this in their real lives, fiction has a way of driving home that point.

It becomes clear early in the novel that Tortall is a society that lacks social justice. Oziewicz specifically discusses the social justice script, which is the script novels take when they face a certain kind of injustice. He describes it as “a thought- and action-protocol for effecting positive change in one’s own society through eliminating aspects of inequality or unfairness embedded in its structures” (2015, p.203). It is triggered when the protagonist experiences some sort of injustice—in the case of Alanna, this occurs on the first page, when her father decides her life for her. But his decision is a symptom of a larger problem in their society—he will not let her become a page, not specifically because he wants to thwart her desires, but because girls cannot

²² It can be argued that it is problematic for Alanna’s story that her subterfuge is only possible because of Coram’s—a man’s—support. I disagree. Alanna could still be successful without Coram. I argue that Coram’s place in the narrative is to have a supportive and sympathetic ear for Alanna. Without him, there would be absolutely no one for her to confide in at the palace. That does not mean that his presence is required for her to be successful in training—ultimately, it is her choice to go there, and her choice to stay there.

be pages. Tortall must first welcome what is known in our world as second wave feminism; that is, where the inequalities are seen as a society-wide problem, and must be tackled in a generalized and political way. That is not what occurs in *Alanna*, though. It takes what Oziewicz calls the “rights track” of the social justice script, wherein a character fights to change the social system from within, even if expansive social change is not the protagonist’s primary goal (2015, p.198). This individualistic path seems logical in a novel that internally focalizes one person, since it is all about *her*. But Alanna would not have to fight inequality if it were not there. Throughout the course of the novel, Alanna comes to realize this social injustice, and it should become apparent to the reader as well. As with other social justice focused novels, “the aim is to help characters and readers alike develop attitudes necessary for identifying and correcting instances of remediable social injustice” (Oziewicz, 2015, p.204).

Before Alanna identifies injustice, however, she first thinks that she is the one in the wrong. When Duke Gareth, who is in charge of the pages, compliments her on the progress she has made in her first few months, “Alanna hung her head, hating herself for having to lie to someone like Duke Gareth” (p.67). She feels guilty²³ for having to lie to someone she cares for and respects, like the Duke. But her guilt is not enough to dissuade her from continuing to train as a page, for even though her thoughts tell her that she is in the wrong for being a girl, something else inside her realizes it is society that is wrong for barring this opportunity because of her sex. This idea is conveyed by her being at the palace, training, despite society attempting to stop her. This relates to Oziewicz’s idea concerning the script of social justice, for in the ideally just world, even the ‘good people’ hold assumptions that must be questioned (2015, p.197). There are ‘good people’ in her life that Alanna is forced to lie to. But she is only forced to because these men, un-self-consciously or not, hold to the idea of only males being permitted to train as knights. This concept of men being in the wrong is never stated outright in the first book, but it is subtly referred to from the beginning. Readers may or may not realize at first that females are barred from being equals in Tortall, but that inequality is present from the first choice Alanna is written as making. Alanna herself does not realize it is a gross injustice that girls cannot become pages. All that is important to her is that *she* is allowed to do so. Hopefully readers bring their own background knowledge of gender inequality as a social evil and understand that Alanna’s unquestioned acceptance of it on the whole is a false belief (Oziewicz, 2015, p.210). But it is possible they will not. It is perhaps difficult for readers to consciously conceptualize Tortall as a socially unjust place, since Alanna does not—in fact, her love of her country would often be seen as a positive ideal. But it is hopefully a concept that readers will

²³ I fully discuss the ramifications of guilt, a social emotion, and what that means for Alanna in Chapter Three.

comprehend from early in the novel, and will want Alanna to discover it as well.

The moment in the text that shows how entrenched the traditional girl script is in Tortall is when Alanna's sex is revealed to the court at the end of her second book. She has just been knighted—as Sir Alan of Trebond. During the Ordeal of Knighthood, she discovered that her suspicions about Duke Roger plotting against the royal family were correct, and she accuses him of treachery. As is his right, Roger calls for trial by combat, saying that if he beats Alanna in a fight, he is innocent. They proceed to swordfight, which leads to Roger's sword slicing through Alanna's special corset, and the form of her breasts showing through (1984, p.234). There could not be a more public way of Alanna's secret to come out—she has literally been laid bare for all to see. Her female body, the thing that was meant to bar her from becoming a knight, is on show. While it is natural for people to be shocked at her subterfuge, and to feel betrayed by her eight years of lying, once the shock wears off it should be logic that prevails—women are not allowed to be knights because it is thought that they cannot survive the hardships of physical and mental training, and that they will get those they fight with killed. Alanna has proven that none of those things are true. She has fought for and won her shield. She is a knight, and there is nothing that anyone can do now to change that fact.

But, of course, that is not how people react. Roger, who has already been bested by having someone discovering his secrets, is now in a fight for his life with a mere female—a female who broke through the powerful enchantments on his room to discover the proof of this. It is perhaps not wholly surprising that he feels particularly affronted at this turn of events; he calls her a demon who lies and cheats, and snarls in fury, prompting Alanna to fight back with renewed vigor, since he is treasonous yet still acting like he is the wronged party (1984, p.235-236). Fighting Roger after her sex is revealed can be seen as a milestone in Alanna's development. After eight years, her disguise is gone, and she is showing her unhidden self to the people she loves. Her “long-hidden anger” may not possibly only be aimed at Roger, but at the injustice she has endured for having to lie to those around her so they would treat her as well as a boy. That Roger immediately calls her a demon and says that she has cheated represents what many in Tortall and beyond will think of Alanna—that the only reason she won her shield was because of trickery and magic. People who think that girls can only achieve that which has traditionally been set aside for boys by cheating, or because they are unnatural, are the people whose minds most need to be broadened. It is in this moment, where Alanna's thoughts come through, she is affronted that Roger can behave like he has been wronged, when in truth she is the one who has been wronged her entire life. By others thinking that a traditional girl script is the only viable option for females, people have tried to force all girls into being one type of

person. Alanna refuses to follow the script.

Tomboy Girl Script

In the beginning of the first novel, Alanna herself falls into the trap of thinking of masculinity as strength: she shouts at Ralon, “I don’t have to pick on someone littler’n me to prove what a man I am, either!” (Pierce, 1983, p.77). To her, being a man concerns certain gender stereotypes, such as physical strength and the ability to beat someone in a fight. Although in this case she is using it in a derisive manner against her enemy, insinuating that to prove he is a man he must behave like a bully. But she falls into the pattern again when she says, “He can’t even fight in the open like a man” (p.95). Alanna’s own mind is against her when working within gender stereotypes. But Anastasia Salter (and Alanna) comes around to a different viewpoint, one that I agree with: Alanna is a hero in her own right (2013, p.165). Over the course of the novels, she develops into a unified subject of herself, and shows a mastery of both the masculine and the feminine, which “eventually gives her a sense of purpose and individual capability” (Flanagan, 2008, p.43).

There are three significant occasions in her first book where Alanna proves herself as a feminist hero by succeeding at a stereotypically male task (Trites, 1997, p.7)—but it is important to note whether she succeeds at these male challenges because she *needs* to as a person, or because they are stereotypically male. She does not set out to accomplish male-associated tasks, but that which she achieves often results in her overcoming the scriptically-male. The first is beating Ralon, her personal bully and tormentor, in hand-to-hand combat; the second is being terrible at swordplay and then, after hard work, becoming the best in her year; and the third is succeeding at a life-and-death test of her skills when she bests the mythical Ysandir in a magical swordfight. After each of these successes, Alanna is granted some form of approval by a male figure whom she cares for; it is not until the third challenge that she approves of herself, making it the most important.

Beating Ralon is hard-won for Alanna: “She was determined to beat Ralon—it would mean she had finally earned her place among the boys. It would mean that she could do anything larger and stronger males could do” (p.86). It says, “She would show everyone—including that part of her that was always wondering—that she was as good as any boy in the palace” (p.93). Yet once she does beat him, she throws up and thinks to herself, “She was still a girl masquerading as a boy, and sometimes she doubted that she would ever believe herself to be as good as the stupidest, clumsiest male” (p.99). Even though Ralon has bullied her from the start, even though she completed extra training for weeks, and even though she is his junior in both

years and size, she still feels she has used trickery to win. Prince Jonathan says that “after today we’re all going to think twice about whether you’re the weakest,” and that his friends call him Jonathan—as should she (p.100). This declaration from Jonathan is an unofficial welcome into the fold of the life of boys. But even though this is the first of many times that Alanna shows herself superior to a male, it is her guilt about lying that manifests itself as feeling unworthy because she is female. It is not something innate, but rather something that society has inculcated her with through years of the perpetuating idea that *girls cannot be knights*²⁴.

The second masculine challenge is less dramatic, though important to Alanna’s development as a knight, and another clear indication of hard work being worth it. Her first foray into swordplay is an abject failure. She humiliates herself. It cannot be stressed enough how much effort Alanna subsequently exerts in learning how to swordfight. It is therefore indicative of how potent her success is when she drubs her sparring mate at the next public test of her skills. While she still does not feel worthy of being at the palace, because she is not a boy, she does not feel guilty about her skill. It is a clear indicator to the reader that Alanna is talented, and that her talent is a result of long hours of hard work.

That to break the mold of a stereotypical lady she must become a boy could outwardly be seen as conforming to gender norms. Some would say that this makes Alanna one of Paul’s heroes in drag. Salter elucidates, saying that the idea of a girl warrior can be seen as empowering, but that it is “accomplished through the guise of masculinity is more problematic” (2013, p.163). In a literal sense, Alanna does dress in drag. What can give Alanna away is her body—her genitalia, and, once she has developed, her breasts. Keeping her body hidden is the trickiest physical challenge she faces—even more so than the training that she endures. This point is emphasized by her brother Thom and Coram both initially worrying about Alanna’s body, but *not* her abilities to train as a knight. When Alanna first thinks of switching places with Thom, his protest is that she will “turn into a girl—you know, with a chest and everything” (1983, p.3). His word choice indicates that Alanna is not yet a girl, but something else. Coram’s words are more apt when his protest is that she will “be turning into a woman” (p.17). Alanna’s response to both of them is that she will handle it by hiding it. If no one sees her biological sex, then all they will see is her represented gender. At the age of ten, a haircut and clothing by themselves accomplish that. By hiding her sex, Alanna stops others from judging her as she judges herself, and prevents them from placing stereotypes upon her. They cannot deride her for being a girl if they do not know she is one. That does not, however, stop her from doing it herself.

Stories that have a girl switch places with and dress as a boy are not uncommon, both in

²⁴ I analyze the empathic ramifications of this passage more fully in Chapter Three.

literature and real life. It usually has a young girl who feels limited by the patriarchal society she is living in, and, in order to escape, dresses up as a boy. In doing so, she finds a whole new world of freedom, solely because of an outward appearance (Flanagan, 2013, p.20). In the Chinese story of Mulan, her father is too old to go to war and she takes his place; English maidens would crossdress as a soldier to “follow her lover to war” (Duggan, 2013, p.36); and the French Léonore replaces her dead brother at court and on the battlefield. There are several other examples of girls dressing as boys (see Österlund, 2002); thus, Alanna switching places with her brother is not an unusual script. Doing it because she wants to, and not because she is forced into it by obligation, is slightly different, but other crossdressing women become successful warriors and begin to enjoy their lives as men. Terry Pratchett’s *Monstrous Regiment* (2003) displays several girls going off to war disguised as boys. The female characters trying to pass as male think that farting, belching, and cursing will make their performances believable—especially with the appropriate anatomical placement of socks. While to any man this may seem laughable, the male characters’ views of women are just as ludicrous—that ladies are weak and demure and afraid of fighting. And while the text overtly points out the scripts that are commonly believed about females and males, it does not lead to females living openly as soldiers and females. It is the largest script disruption of all when it turns out that the majority of the army’s commanders are females disguised as males—and that none of them knew the others were pretending. Once they are ‘outed’ to each other, it would be logical to think they would be done with the charade and present themselves as they truly are. But they continue their performances as men, because even though it has been made abundantly obvious that not only can women fight, they can *lead*, it is still embarrassing to be a girl in the army. Despite (fictional) decades of proof of their ability, these women do not believe enough in themselves that they can be successful *and* be female. Pratchett’s (humorous) work is more of a subversive statement on how women think of themselves and of the world, rather than one that disrupts scripts about how women can actually behave.

There is one character that stands out from the rest of crossdressing warrior women—Lady Oscar from *The Rose of Versailles* (Ikeda, 1972-1973), which focuses on Oscar, a girl raised as a boy, but whom everyone knows is a “woman in men’s clothing” (Duggan, 2013, p.40). She is the only literary figure I have found that does not revert to wearing women’s clothing and renounce her life as a warrior once she ‘comes out’—because she does not have to. The French court all know she is actually a woman, and therefore she has nothing to hide, and does not have to make a choice between being a woman and being a warrior. The only problem I can find with her story is that she never accepts the female side of herself. She does become engaged to a man,

but never says she is a woman herself. It is a fact that is there, but it is not said out loud—perhaps if it were to be, her carefully constructed veneer of male-ness and strength would slip away forever.

As common as female crossdressing is, both in literature and history, it “is still represented in children’s literature as unconventional, and as an act of social rebellion” (Flanagan, 2013, p.22). That is because it is not so common as to be the everyday. Perhaps there are enough token characters that can be pointed to and said that they crossdress, yet not so many of them that it feels like a script—maybe to children’s literature and gender scholars, but not to an average reader. What I argue is it is the ideology behind the need to crossdress that is the script—the tomboy girl script. The script is as follows: girls think that they are inferior to boys, but then they think that they can become worthy by becoming masculine. Thinking of masculinity as the appropriate form of behavior for warriors, that it is *right* to behave that way themselves, is a script that girls must be on the lookout for.

While adolescence is a time of great change and new opportunities, it is also a time when immutable alterations occur. Alanna has, to this point, refused to let anything slow her down. But then her breasts start growing, and she has her first menses, and has no idea what is happening. This marks a significant change, because it is the first time she has to accept something she cannot alter about herself. In getting her period, the book itself is breaking the script that Diana Wynne Jones points out (1996, p.184): females in fantasy books never menstruate. It is also a script disruption for adolescent fiction, for Flanagan posits it is one of the few “narratives that attempt to deal specifically with the issue of physicality” (2013, p.27). And the action surrounding this physicality has a huge impact on Alanna. It is Alanna’s attitude to getting her period that marks her as adhering to the tomboy girl script. It is a problem that surfaces from Alanna growing up socially as a boy—several of the issues that girls turning into women deal with are left out of her education. As a virgin, knowing what sexual intercourse is like from the male perspective is not that prohibiting, but not knowing about menstruation can become a traumatic experience—especially when she wakes up in a bed drenched in blood. There are several realistic adolescent books that have narratives dealing with a girl’s first menses, but they usually deal with girls who know it is coming²⁵, or at least do not have the problem of pretending they are boys. Alanna hates being a girl only because of the society she lives in, and it is only the biology of it that hampers her. If she were allowed to train as a knight openly as a female, she would have little problem with her sex. She “fears the loss of power that female aspects of her body represent” (Salter, 2013, p.161). But the constraints it puts upon her ultimate

²⁵ Though actually getting it is a shock, which is another script.

goal force her to hate the changes her body puts her through²⁶. Menstruation is only another aspect of herself that she needs to hide, along with her developing breasts that she has to painfully bind flat to her chest.

The text does not tiptoe around the practical implications of getting a period: Alanna “got out of bed—and gasped in horror to find her things and sheets smeared with blood” (1983, p.168). She knows she cannot go to the healers at the palace, because they are men, and “the bleeding came from a secret place between her legs...Her hands shook. Her whole body was icy with fear” (p.168). Much as when the text describes Alanna experiencing magic, the words anchor Alanna’s feelings in her body: shaking hands, body cold. She is not sure what is causing this bleeding. Not to mention that it talks about the blood coming from between her legs. That it is called the ‘secret place’ probably has to do with Alanna being raised as a boy, and words such as vagina are not a usual part of her vocabulary. It could also stem from the idea that it is her vagina that must be kept secret at all costs. Now that it has started bleeding, something completely beyond her control, that secret is in more jeopardy than ever. It forces her to take a calculated risk. It is the first time that Alanna reveals to someone who only knows her as ‘Alan’ that she is, in fact, a girl: George, the King of Thieves, is the only person Alanna trusts to keep quiet about her secret, and the only one she thinks who can help with this specific problem. Not Jonathan, her best friend and prince, not Gary or Raoul who have helped her accustomed herself to being a page—only George. He is outside palace life, and is perhaps the only person who would not judge her for attempting to win her shield as a girl. As a commoner, he does not have the aristocratic stigmas that prevent him from realizing that Alanna is one of the most skilled pages to ever come to the palace—something that Alanna, as a noble, does not even believe.

That George has “always known there was a secret to Alan” (p.170) but never guessed what it was is a testament to the believability of Alanna’s disguise. He takes her to a healing woman—his mother—who has to explain what is happening to Alanna’s body:

Too ashamed to speak, Alanna either shook her head or nodded, depending on the question. There were others so personal she wanted to hide when she thought about them. Her embarrassment only tripled when Mistress Cooper began to laugh. ‘You poor child,’ she chuckled. ‘Did no one ever tell you of a woman’s monthly cycle? The fertility cycle?’ Alanna stared. Maude had mentioned something, once— ‘That’s what this is? It’s normal?’ The woman

²⁶ I am not saying that only girls who are pretending to be boys hate their periods. I am saying that Alanna hates her period for a reason most girls do not have to face—that if the people around her discovered that she had her period, her disguise would be ruined and she would be prevented from achieving her goal to become a knight.

nodded. 'It happens to us all. We can't bear children until it begins.' 'How long do I have to put up with this?' Alanna gritted. 'Until you are too old to bear children. It's as normal as the full moon is, and it happens just as often. You may as well get used to it.' 'No!' Alanna cried (p.173-174).

This is the crux of Alanna's development. Even though she has had to disguise her sex, she has claimed a remarkable amount of power for herself by being in control over much in her life. She wanted to be a knight, so she came to the palace; she wanted to be a great swordfighter, so she trained for extra hours; she wanted to hold her own as a wrestler, so she practiced with those bigger and more skilled than her. There has been nothing in her life so far that she has had to *accept*. But in this story there is nothing she can do to stop the biological course her body has set for her, and she has a hard time believing that. Alanna's reaction is scriptically tomboy girl: she wants to reject the female-ness of her own body, because she sees it as a weakness she cannot control. Her response is classic abjection as described by Julia Kristeva (1982), wherein she finds something about her own body repulsive and wants to eject it from herself. She finds her period abhorrent—it is Other. It is a new secret of being female, one that will serve as a constant reminder to her that she is a girl. It is one more aspect of herself that she will have to hide.

Mistress Cooper sees straight to Alanna's problem of needing control: she asks, "'You're not used to your body doing things you haven't asked of it, are you?'" (p.175). Everything in Alanna's life is set in the context of her goal, and if she can conquer her body then she thinks she can conquer the challenge she has set herself. Growing breasts and bleeding once a month are aspects of her development that she cannot control; even considering that she is a fictional creation, it would be incongruous and unbelievable for the text to have her be a girl who does not grow breasts or get a period²⁷. And it is important that the text gets into such detail about the physicality of it. When Alanna asks what she needs to know about "this thing," Mistress Cooper does not leave anything out:

'Will it slow me down?' 'Not so long as you stay out of men's beds. A babe will certainly slow you down.' Alanna shook her head. 'I don't plan on children.'
'Many girls don't.'...She looked at Alanna carefully. 'I'll give you a charm against your getting pregnant, then. If you change your mind, you can throw it away'

²⁷ Though hard physical training can delay both periods and body changes for years in some females, it does not always happen.

(p.175-176).

The preceding passage straddles the line between tomboy girl script and badass girl script. As Jones (1996) writes, pregnancy is not an issue for females in fantasy books—they can have all the sex they like and never need to concern themselves with babies. But the reality of Alanna's world does not permit for the impossibility of that. Dealing with that breaks the tomboy girl script. Alanna's reaction to it, however, adheres to it. When she says she does not plan on children, she means that she does not want them ever—nor does she want the marriage that stereotypically comes with that for someone of her socioeconomic status. She rebuffs and rejects the ideas of marriage, sex, and children, thinking that she will never want any of them. This reaction can be seen both as a result of her age, but also from her desire to distance herself from anything that can be construed as feminine—again, another example of Kristeva's abject. The passage then returns to breaking the tomboy girl script by introducing the concept of birth control, another practical and physical reality that is usually not only ignored but completely left out of fantasy fiction (Jones, 1996, p.184).

When Alanna bemoans that it is unfair she was born a girl, something in keeping with the tomboy girl script, it is George who sets her straight: “‘Bein’ a girl hasn’t slowed you down yet” (p.177). Even though he is not part of her life at the palace, he is aware of her skills nonetheless. It is here that Alanna reveals her eventual plan, that she will tell everyone the truth of her sex when she is eighteen and successfully won her shield: “‘If they hate me— well— I’ll have proved I can be a knight, won’t I? I’ll go into the world and have adventures. They needn’t ever see me again”” (p.177). This attitude conveys how Alanna thinks others will think of her, and in turn shows how she thinks of herself. She knows she is a girl, and is thinking like the tomboy girl script would have her, in that anything feminine—be it the truth that she is female—is repugnant. It is George, a man, who has to convince her that not everyone thinks so starkly about what girls should be—inadvertently putting him into the badass girl camp. He tells her: “‘I haven’t heard such foolishness in all my life. Are you tellin’ us Jon will hate you? Gary? Raoul? Or your friend, Sir Myles? My ears are deceivin’ me!”” (p.177). Even when she protests that she is “‘doing men’s things,”” George rebukes her and says that she does “‘them better than most”” (p.177). Not only does this rebuttal serve to mollify Alanna’s fear of what her friends will think of her once the truth is out, but it solidifies for her (and for the reader) that her disguise as a boy is believable. In believing her performance, he gives her a reason to continue with it. In this situation, where she has revealed her sex *and* had the reality of menstruation foisted upon her, this believing in her masculinity demonstrate how fluid gender is as a concept: “‘She has

internalized the attributes and behaviors associated with masculinity and is perceived by others as having a masculine identity” (Flanagan, 2013, p.29). Alanna is capable of going back and forth from one gender to the other. She prefers the outwardly masculine one at this time, as it suits her needs.

Accepting that, unless she becomes pregnant, she will bleed every month is a metaphor for her needing to accept that she is both a female and a fighter, but it can become applicable for readers as well. It can be as simple as accepting something they cannot change (like menstruation), or the grander idea of refusing to let something small prevent them from fighting towards their goals. It is a definite signpost for refusing to let one’s sex stand in the way of anything. Readers must realize that Alanna can only become truly powerful when she accepts both halves of herself.

Badass Girl

What qualifies Alanna ultimately as a badass female hero is the last challenge she faces in her first book. In it, she uses both magic and swordplay to defeat the Ysandir, who are evil magical beings. She accomplishes it on equal footing with Jonathan, as they hold hands and use each other’s strengths throughout the entire battle. Alanna’s sex is revealed to Jonathan, so even he is aware of the combination of female and male. After they have defeated the Ysandir, Alanna comes to realize how much she has accomplished in her years as a page, how hard she has worked, and how skilled she has become. Jonathan asks who he should pick to be his squire, and Alanna unabashedly says, “Me” (1983, p.273). When needled by Jonathan, who retorts “you’re a girl,” Alanna lists all the reasons why she is the best, only to discover that Jonathan already thought exactly that and chosen her as his squire before their battle. She takes the first step towards accepting herself: “All at once she felt different in her own skin” (p.273). That is what makes Alanna special—she can walk and fight in the boy’s world, but she now knows she can do it as *herself*. Flanagan remarks that children’s narratives effectively demonstrate that people need to be judged for who they *are*, not for what gendered role they are supposed to fulfill (2008, p.48). That idea ties into the concept of social justice, for if we abandoned the rules of gender roles, and banished the concept that a person should behave a certain way simply because of their *gender*, then gender inequality would essentially be vanquished. The fight for social justice often focuses on people being treated unfairly because they are behaving in an unscripted way—whether that be with gender, or sexuality, or socioeconomically. Flanagan’s idea of people being judged for who they are, instead of what society dictates they should be, is one that perfectly encapsulates the idea of social justice. Reacting against the traditional girl script and the tomboy

girl script, as shown through Alanna's actions, demonstrate to potential readers that those scripts are not the only ways to exist.

Alanna's second book sees her question exactly who she is—a girl who wants to be a boy, or a girl who knows she is a girl, wants to be a girl, but also wants to be a knight. Her crossdressing is a convenient disguise, which “allows her, as a feminine subject, to gain unprecedented access to masculine spaces and masculine privilege, permitting her to experience all that is usually forbidden to women because of their perceived inferiority” (Flanagan, 2013, p.24). I discuss now what it means for Alanna to crossdress as a crossdresser—that is, having presented as a boy for six years, suddenly trying to behave as a girl proves to be a difficult performance for Alanna. Learning the behaviors that accompany being a girl, from how to dress to how to walk, are backwards from what Alanna has spent six years living. In this going back and forth from presenting as a boy to presenting as a girl, Alanna demonstrates the extent to which gender is a performance, and it does not necessarily need to be a fixed identity. Initially, she was eager to acquire masculine behavior, which debunked “the myth that gendered behavioral attributes are natural or inherent: initiative, strong powers of observation, and a few training sessions are all that stand between her and a successful masculine performance” (Flanagan, 2013, p.26). If it were only a one-way process, that the only gender that requires a performance and set of knowledge of behaviors is the male one, the gender divide would seem unbalanced. But at sixteen, Alanna finally decides that presenting as a girl is not necessarily a bad thing.

She goes to Mistress Cooper again for knowledge on how to be a girl. When asked why Alanna wants to dress as a girl, she responds:

‘I don’t know. I just—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. Why shouldn’t I start practicing now?’
(1984, p.142).

Alanna saying that she will have to be a girl *someday* implies that she is not currently a girl. And while the ideas of liking pretty things and wanting to look pretty for a man are aspects that would usually fall into the traditional girl script, because it is Alanna, they does not. She has spent so many (fictional) years of her life rejecting anything feminine, afraid it would make her appear feminine—or worse, non-masculine—that she rejected the traditional girl script to fully embrace the tomboy girl script. That she has cycled through the tomboy girl script to come to

the realization that maybe looking like a girl is not a bad thing, and could even be something that she wants, place this desire into the badass girl. In the fourth book, Alanna must be presented to court, and she refuses to do so wearing a dress, for she says it would be like “crawling back with [her] tail between [her] legs” (1988, p.266). She rejects the traditional girl script, for she feels it would be saying to the world that she never meant to disrupt that script, and she wanted to be a traditional girl the whole time. Neither does she wish to present herself as a man, devoid of the “pretty things” she has come to like—that is, she rejects the tomboy girl script. She instead compromises, wearing a beautiful tunic and pearl earrings, with a sword at her side. Alanna presents herself as a warrior *and* as a woman, encapsulating the badass girl script by disrupting the other two. She forges a new path for social justice within her society, for her actions have a direct result on how Tortall treats its girls.

As Alanna suspected when she was a child, performing as a woman has a lot to do with what she wears. But it is more than that—it is how she walks, how she behaves, how she wears her hair, and countless other small things she does not know because she has presented as a boy for her adolescence. When she puts on a dress for the first time, Mistress Cooper has to stop her from sitting down like a man—or like someone would who did not have skirts. Alanna remarks, “It’s going to be as hard to learn to be a girl as it was to learn to be a boy,” to which Mistress Cooper responds, “Harder...Most girls don’t have to unlearn being a boy” (p.145). There are court manners to learn—from the girl’s side, not the boy’s side, which Alanna already knows; there is how to behave when gentlemen come calling; there is how to serve tea to strangers. In essence, there are thousands of minutiae that consist of how one must act if one is to present as a girl. Through learning about her as a character, readers will potentially pick up on that as Alanna comes to accept all the disparate aspects of herself as a person, the more blended her gendered performance becomes. In essence, she slowly becomes her true self, and sheds her gendered preconceptions.

Ultimately, there are two important facets of Alanna’s story that lead to large script disruptions: she is one of the only female warriors in literary history who, when her sex is revealed, remains a warrior, *and* she does not give up her life of fighting once she is married. This occurs at the end of the fourth book, *Lioness Rampant*, and is not my main focus in this chapter, but I find it important to mention here. She does ‘come out’ as a girl, but does not give up her sword and shield, nor the power that she gained while presenting as a man. She breaks through all the previous scripts, because unlike all of those other characters (like Mulan), she does not *only* take up ‘womanly’ duties and demurely stay at home. In a later quartet of Pierce’s, *The Immortals*, the reader discovers that Alanna has had children, and does occasionally stay at home

with husband and kids. But she still (literally) rides out on a horse to fight ogres. She is proof to readers that sex and gender are not prohibitive factors when a person has the determination to persevere. Readers, already active from noticing script disruptions, could potentially seize upon that concept and let it imbue their cognitive models.

Alanna is not perfect. But her actions led directly (in this fictional society) to changes for social justice when it comes to gender equality; she is the reason why it became legal for girls to train as knights. The ramifications go beyond that one thing—as is shown in the later books, women take more prominent roles in both ruling the country and in fighting for the country. By disrupting the traditional girl script and the tomboy girl script, and embodying the badass girl script, Alanna's actions can show potential readers that it is possible for them to accomplish similar things in their lives, and to enact change on the world. It takes twenty years, but eventually a girl takes up the challenge. Kel faces many of the same gendered scripts that Alanna did, but she also faces an entirely new slew of them, for unlike Alanna, everyone around her knows that Kel is a girl. Kel will have to fight even harder to avoid conforming to the tomboy girl script, and consciously work toward behaving solely as her own person.

Kel

In the real world, we see history progress and we note its trends—for example, we can look back on the timeline of disenfranchised groups and pinpoint what actions helped them gain their rights. In fiction, we can do something similar, with the caveat that there is an author who has written this history, and therefore is a clearly manipulated thing. This awareness does not change the veracity of the texts' represented history, since, as stated previously, texts should preferably have a believable mimesis. If readers do not believe the story, whether it be from a causal perspective or a story-world perspective, then the trust in a book falls away. When that occurs, nothing is believable, and the reader loses interest in the story.

In regards to the fictional progression of time from Alanna's years as a page to when readers are introduced to Kel, there have been many societal changes. This passage of time is indicated in both our world and the fictional world; there is a quartet that came out in between Alanna and Kel's books (*The Immortals*), and Alanna is now portrayed as an adult. Kel discusses Alanna as her hero—more than anything, she wants to be a knight just like Alanna. But the two do not meet in person until the third of Kel's books, *Squire*. Most important for my purposes is the law that forbade females to train as knights has been rescinded. This singular action speaks volumes of the change that has occurred in Tortall, which is a reflection of the changes that were happening in the real world. As discussed in my introduction, the 1980s were more supportive of

the ideas of second-wave feminism, whereas the late 1990s and 2000s had become open to the concepts championed by third-wave feminism.

Traditional Girl?

Like Alanna, Kel has *chosen* to go down this path of knighthood. She has not been coerced or frightened or manipulated in any obvious way. One of her key defining traits is her staunch belief in fairness, which is what almost prohibits her from starting her knight-training. Although legally girls can train now as knights, the same ideas about girls persist in many characters' minds as did in Alanna's, especially in the older generations of Tortall: Lord Wyldon, the knight in charge of training, says, "Girls are fragile, more emotional, easier to frighten. They are not as strong in their arms and shoulders as men. They tire easily. This girl would get any warriors who serve with her killed on some dark night" (1999, p.4). This description spells out traditional gendered scripts. Even though Alanna has already shown that girls can become knights, rumors spread insinuating Alanna used trickery and magic to win her shield. In many ways, Kel will be the one to prove to the world that girls can actually achieve knighthood, since she will do so openly as a female and un-Gifted person. She also faces overtly gendered-schemata and scripts in ways that Alanna never did—since Alanna performed as a boy, she did not have to prove anything about her sex except to herself. Kel is heavy scrutinized from the moment she steps foot in the palace—from before, even, since it is decided that she will undergo a probationary year before she will be admitted as a true page. She remarks, "It isn't right...No boys have probation. I'm supposed to be treated the same" (p.8). If she followed Alanna's path and pretended to be male, Kel would, feasibly, have an easier time in training. As the first female openly training at the palace, a great burden has been placed upon her that Alanna never had to undertake. While Alanna had to face many of the same challenges that Kel does, she was largely proving to herself that girls can do anything that boys can—Kel is the one who will have to prove it to everyone else. Alanna is shown as thinking, "it had been ten long years since the proclamation that girls might attempt a page's training. Alanna had nearly given up hope that such a girl—or the kind of family that would allow her to do so—existed in Tortall, but at last she had come forward" (p.1).

Even though because of Alanna the law has changed, Kel almost does not have a chance to take up the challenge, due to Wyldon's probation. No boy has ever had to prove himself in this manner before—all that need qualify them to train as pages is that their family is noble and sends them to the palace. For now, it is Wyldon who thinks that girls can only follow the traditional girl script, and he tries to keep her from training. When she arrives, he informs her:

‘You have a year in which to prove that you can keep up with the boys. If you do not satisfy me on that count, you will go home.’ He’s never said that to any boy, Kel thought, glad that her face would not show her resentment. He shouldn’t be saying it to me
(p.27).

Kel had deliberated thoughtfully over her decision on whether or not to accept the probation, and though she begrudges it, she assents to it. It is unfair and sexist, but she goes into it knowing that. It is when Wyldon says, “‘You will get no special privileges or treatment, despite your sex’” (p.27), that his true hypocrisy comes to light. She *is* getting special treatment, and it is entirely Wyldon’s fault because of his opinions of her sex. But this irony is lost on the training master—hopefully it will not be for potential readers, who needed to identify social injustice on their own in Alanna’s story, and who will potentially see it in action here as well.

Lord Wyldon also sexualizes Kel—not in a predatory way, but in the way he is portrayed discussing her and talking to her, and through her, all females. When welcoming Kel to the palace, he instructs that he “‘will not tolerate flirtations. If there is a boy in your room, the door must be open. The same is true if you are in a boy’s room’” (p.27). An important plot point to note here is that all boys have their own rooms, as well as Kel—but she is given a bathroom of her own, which is a different policy from Alanna’s time, when pages all had their own rooms and bathrooms (otherwise her disguise would have been revealed much sooner). When her father responds that his daughter is only ten, and therefore “‘a bit young for that kind of thing,’” Wyldon responds, “‘My experience with females is that they begin early’” (p.27). The text leaves it unclear what kind of experience Wyldon has with females, since he is portrayed solely as the pages’ training master, meaning that thus far he has only trained boys. The rest of his life is an unknown at this point, but his view is entrenched in the traditional girl script—he does not make boys leave their doors open when they visit each other, despite that they, too, could be flirting or having sex with each other. He believes only in heterosexuality, and that it is the girl who is the seducer as opposed to the boy. Wyldon is not the only one who holds such opinions; in the second book, pages are required to wait on nobles during a feast, and when the people at her table realize she is a girl (because she physically resembles a boy at this point), they make their opinion known:

‘It’s not decent,’ the man’s wife said huffily, her eyes filled with dislike. ‘One girl,

and all those boys.’ ‘My advice to you, lass, is to go home and hope your parents can make a proper marriage for you,’ the oldest of the guildfolk informed her. ‘Ladies have no place bearing arms.’ Kel bowed, her face like stone. She wouldn’t let them see that her feelings were hurt (p.76).

The implication of Kel being the only female surrounded by boys is that something sexual is occurring. Again, they are willfully ignoring the idea that the boys could be engaging in sexual behavior amongst themselves—something that in *Tortall* is not seen as ‘decent,’ either. Their advice is similar to Lord Wyldon’s: she should go home, submit to her parents (both of whom not only tolerate her training to be a knight, but actively encourage it and are proud of her), and concern herself only with marriage. A proper marriage, that is—presumably to someone who would not let her fight. Despite years of change in *Tortall*—Alanna successfully being a lady knight, Queen Thayet starting a group called the Queen’s Riders who must be able to fight and ride as well as dance at a ball—these people hold onto their belief that women should not bear arms. Societal changes have occurred in *Tortall*, making it a more just place, in direct relation to what Alanna did many years ago, and it has had a trickle-down effect throughout the realm. Kel is aware of these changes, and at no point does she fall into the traditional girl script. Salma, a housekeeper at the palace, talks to Kel about people who do not see so clearly, asking, “‘What do they think [the ladies] do, when the lords are at war and a raiding party strikes? Stay in their solars and tat lace?’” (p.33). Clearly not everyone is under the misconception that women are useless when it comes to fighting, but some of the people who are still blinded are people in positions of power, like Lord Wyldon. It is fortunate that he has an innate sense of fairness, and adheres to the challenge he issued at the start of Kel’s year: if she proves herself worthy as a page, she can remain. If only he could coalesce the two ideas—of Kel being worthy as a page *and* being a girl—and break past his blinders of the traditional girl script.

Even at the end of Kel’s first year, Wyldon is not convinced of her conviction to becoming a knight. Wyldon simultaneously tells Kel that she has passed her probationary year and can stay, *and* that she should not. He says by passing her first year, she has ‘made her point,’ and she should quit while she is ahead. Like women in the workplace have reported, her body becomes an issue he, her superior, thinks he can discuss as an opposition to her chosen goal. He tells her to:

‘Consider the future. Soon your body will change. The things that you will want

from life as a maiden will change...What if you fall in love? What if you come to grief, or cause others to do so, because your thoughts are on your heart and not combat?’
(p.225).

He might as well ask her what she will do if she falls pregnant—something illegal in the real world. It has been shown that often people do not hire younger women so they do not have to worry about maternity leave (*Guardian*, 2014), indicating that some people see women of a certain age as unlikely to be good at their jobs because they will almost certainly leave to have a baby—a social injustice bleeding into Kel’s world from the real one. The idea that even after she has passed all of his tests and proven herself as worthy of staying past her probation that Wyldon still does not want her to stay is proof of how entrenched his bigotry is. He would presumably never ask a male page what would happen if he fell in love, or if his mind was focused on his heart instead of his task at hand—much like employers in the real world do not tend to ask men if they plan on having children soon. In the third book, the text offers several examples of boys falling in love and thinking of their beloved instead of their first priority as fighters, but Wyldon never suggests that this makes them unworthy to be knights. And if readers have already encountered *Lioness*, they will know that Alanna fell in love three times and still managed her emotions while becoming a successful warrior. Readers are presented with evidence in both quartets of characters (of both genders) falling in love and still tending to their knightly duties.

Kel does not behave according to the traditional girl script; it is those around her that do so. In the second book, Kel’s breasts begin to develop. She finds this new growth a nuisance, as it means she will have to wear breastbands and change her clothing. She does not think of her breasts in terms of her femininity. They are simply part of her body. At first, Kel does not even notice them. Unlike Alanna, who had to monitor any outward sign that could give away her secret, Kel does not have to be as worried about her body. She is more concerned with strengthening her arms than her developing breasts. It takes Lalasa, Kel’s maid, to inform her that her body is changing:

‘Most girls pray for this, my lady. You’re getting them young. I didn’t show until I was fourteen.’ Realizing that Kel still didn’t understand, Lalasa cupped her breasts and let them go. Flabbergasted, Kel stared at the front of her nightgown.

Sure enough, there were two slight bulges in the proper area for such things
(p.60).

At eleven years of age, Kel's body is starting to show visible signs of the woman she will grow into. It seems unfair to include breasts with the traditional girl script, but it is how others see her breasts rather than how Kel reacts to them that does this. Kel is almost never guilty of thinking of herself, or of any other female, as only being able to accomplish the traditional girl script. Her experience with budding breasts could not be more different than Alanna's reaction of "tears of fury" (1983, p.134). Unlike Kel, who does not notice her breasts, Alanna does the first time she spots them in a mirror. And unlike Kel, Alanna does not have another female there to explain what is happening, or to talk to about it. She tells Coram to fetch her bandages, from which she fashions a tight binding to keep her breasts immobile. Kel has Lalasa, who creates tailor-made breastbands for Kel, providing her support without hurting her. Kel immediately accepts it with the resignation of knowing she cannot change it. Because of what Alanna did, Kel has the opportunity to react in such a way. When Lalasa tells Kel that "most girls rejoice at this" and see it as a sign they have entered womanhood, Kel responds that "most girls don't want to be knights" (p.60). Lalasa's opinion at first is the reaction expected from a traditional girl script—girls are expected to welcome womanhood, ignoring that growing breasts may get in the way of physical activity, or cause any sort of discomfort. It is Kel's practical response that starts to change Lalasa's mind (and perhaps that of readers):

'If this keeps up, eventually I can stop wearing dresses to remind them I'm a girl. I hope it takes a while.'...Lalasa muffled a noise with her hands. It sounded remarkably like a laugh
(p.60-61).

This passage serves as a reminder that before growing breasts, Kel essentially looked like a boy. She had to purposefully wear dresses in order to make it obvious to others that she was a girl, indicating that she knew from the start that gender indicators are outward trappings that can be displayed and hidden. It is Lalasa's laughter that indicates that she is starting to change her mind about what it means to be a girl. She is a girl from a lower socioeconomic status than Kel or Alanna, and has been abused by her father and brother; she has come to the palace to escape them and attempt to make a life for herself. Yet she is startled by Kel at first, shocked that a girl would do the things that Kel does—that a girl *can* do the things Kel does. Fighting with boys,

not wearing dresses all the time, and defending herself from physical confrontation: all of these are actions that Lalasa does not understand as being possible for a woman. That Lalasa can laugh at Kel's attitude toward her breasts is a textual indication that her mindset is morphing to understand that the traditional girl script is not the only viable option for females. Lalasa's changing perspective is an example of what can happen to potential readers from reading books like these ones—Lalasa's mind is being expanded to encapsulate new ideas of what gender itself is, and what being a girl can entail. Before being exposed to Kel, Lalasa had only encountered people around her who emphasized the traditional girl script. That was the only way Lalasa saw of being. But seeing Kel disrupt that script has convinced Lalasa otherwise, which is exactly what I postulate reading books like these ones can do. It starts with one person breaking the mold, and another person seeing it, and that expanding and growing until it attacks the social injustice from within.

The same year Kel's breasts grow is when she starts to menstruate. It is a less traumatic experience for Kel than it was for Alanna—she knew what it was, and had someone she could openly talk to it about:

Blood was on her loincloth and inner thighs. She stared at it, thinking something dreadful was happening. Then she remembered several talks she'd had with her mother. This had to be her monthlies
(p.97-98).

Kel has had a mother to discuss this with, and while she initially thinks she has wet herself, she is not terrified by what she finds in her underwear. Again, the description is rooted in the physical—blood on her thighs—but the physicality is different than it was for Alanna. The text has evolved from talking about blood coming from a 'secret place' to blood being *on* Kel. While these aspects of a period may seem commonplace to many, that it is discussed with such frankness breaks fantasy scripts²⁸. What is problematic is Lalasa's reaction, or what it represents. She tells Kel, "Congratulations...You've become a woman." (p.98). It is understandable why in the past periods were linked with a transition into womanhood—biologically, it means that the body is ready to have a baby. But the idea that to be a woman, one needs to have a menses, or that when it starts, a person magically becomes a woman, fits into the traditional girl script. It is

²⁸ Although not contemporary realistic young adult fiction scripts, which started as early as 1970 with Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, and have since grown from discussing belts to pads to tampons. While there are many layers to the menstruating script in young adult fiction, realistically described periods do not usually occur in speculative fiction, thus the physicality of menstruation in both Alanna and Kel's stories breaks a fantasy script.

an implicit self-bias, which could make it tricky for readers to identify that thoughts such as Lalasa's follow the traditional girl script. As I have said, some girls may take pride and relish parts of the traditional girl script, but stories like Kel's demonstrate that the traditional girl script is not the only way girls can think and behave. At no point is it remarked upon that bleeding is a frequent occurrence for warriors, and that combat could be the most common reason for Kel to bleed in the future. For Lalasa (and even Kel to a certain extent), blood in this case only signifies "woman," not "warrior." It is Kel's later actions that meld those two concepts together, in a similar way that Alanna did before her.

Kel does not let herself get stuck in the traditional girl script, but there are those around her who would feel more comfortable if she did. Kel provides textually what Alanna did not—a girl who is overtly known as a girl, both to others and to herself, and experiences things that are unique to the female body. But she still does not have the traditional girl reaction to these occurrences. I now look to see if she rejects these things simply to avoid the feminine, like a tomboy, or if she goes beyond that.

Tomboy Girl Script

There are some biological traits of Kel that she has no control over that nonetheless schematically associate her with masculinity. She is tall, and solidly built, and has trained to fight with the Yamani (a fictional people similar to the Japanese), who believe that women should be able to defend themselves; Pierce did this purposefully to represent a different type of person than Alanna, since Alanna is small in stature, and had little combat training when she arrived at the palace. Pierce wrote the following to explain part of the impetus she felt in writing Kel:

I'd been watching the plight of tall broad girls who are not necessarily fat but they're big. People are always on them to lose weight, and the guys are looking at them and saying, 'Well, she's a good bud, but she's a moose.' I wanted a book for that kind of girl, to show her, 'Yes, you can be beautiful and strong.'
(2002, n.p.).

Pierce's description here obviously leads to Kel, and she shows Kel struggling with accepting both her bigger physicality and her overtly feminine physical traits.

Sometimes Kel falls into the script of conceptualizing that boys and girls are different in how they think, and that because she is a girl she is the only one who thinks the way she does. While there is some evidence that male and female brains are different (see Cahill, 2006), I argue

that this does not preclude males and females from equally believing in justice. As discussed earlier, Kel's underlying ethos is her belief in fairness. When the group of pages asks her why she did not ask them for help in eradicating bullies, she tells them: "I figured I was the only one here who thought it was all wrong. I thought maybe I saw it different because I'm a girl. I could do something about it, but I didn't think you would" (1999, p.166). While she would not say that she is being particularly 'girly' (as in the traditional girl script) by fighting with boys who are older and bigger than her, there is a sort of mothering instinct that guides her actions. Which is potentially the reason why she did not invite her male friends to assist her—they are boys, and therefore they would not think of helping those who are in need of protection, even though that is the touchstone of what being a knight *is*. Kel thinking that she wants to help others only because she is a female is a tomboy girl scripted thought, and it is one that the boys help break for her, just as she is the one who helps make the boys into better knights-in-training by helping them see the injustice occurring underneath their noses. It is a product of social injustice, for in a socially just world, people would want everyone to be treated fairly. That Kel does not think that the other boys would want to help her is because they have thus far ignored the injustice of the bullying—much as they have largely ignored the injustice of Kel's placement on probation. Kel recognizes that there is not true gender equality in her world, but that does not prevent her from trying to make the world fair for everyone, no matter their gender. Kel's attitude truly conveys social justice.

While I showed earlier that Kel is more accepting of her feminine physical side than Alanna was, there is still some of Kristeva's (1982) abjection occurring in her reaction to her getting her period. The text reads: "To her intense shame, tears began to roll down her cheeks" (2000, p.98)—for someone raised in the Yamani islands, where showing emotions is the height of rudeness, that Kel is overtly displaying how she feels is an indication of how strongly she feels sad and frustrated. She puts it in the same context Alanna did—not appreciating when she does not have complete control of her body: "I hate my body doing new things without telling me," (p.99). She also wants to reject this female aspect of herself, for fear it will slow her down. Kel sees it as something unnecessary to her chosen way of life, and that if she has no use for it, it should disappear. She rails about pregnancy in a conversation with her mother: "I'm not looking to have babies, ever.' I don't recall the gods ever asking women if we want these things,' her mother pointed out" (p.124). Here, it is Kel's mother who is breaking the traditional girl script and the tomboy girl script, because she does not say, 'Well, you'll want babies someday, just you wait,' like the traditional girl; nor does she say, 'Let's find a magic potion to get rid of all your physically feminine attributes,' like the tomboy girl would want to. It is Kel who is rejecting

pregnancy and babies because she sees them as belonging only to the traditional girl script, in a similar way that Alanna does, because she thinks that she cannot have babies *and* be a warrior. Alanna breaks that script (in *The Immortals* quartet) by being shown as having children and fighting ogres, but Kel has not seen that, because she has not been permitted to meet Alanna yet. Much like Alanna originally struggled, Kel too does not yet see how she can successfully be a woman *and* a warrior—that is because the world she has grown up in still predominantly tells her she cannot. The social injustice is visible in the private act of a girl disliking her period, and by conforming to the tomboy girl script.

It is Kel's relationship with her mother that best shows how complicated gendered scripts can be. In the first book, the text reads "it had taken a great deal of persuasion for Kel to convince her mother that her quest for knighthood did not mean she wanted to settle for second best, knowing she would never marry" (1999, p.12). In this instance, it is Ilane who is portraying the tomboy girl script, because she is depicted as thinking that training as a knight is a consolation prize for Kel never marrying. Kel had to argue with her mother to make her see that a knighthood was not what Kel *said* she wanted, just because Kel thought no one would ever love her or want to marry her. A knighthood is what Kel *needs*, because it is in being a knight that she would gain the training and the status required for her to protect those who are abused and taken advantage of throughout Tortall—it is a way for her to bring about the social justice she feels that has not been afforded to her. It is Kel who wants to right the greater wrongs, be they related to gender inequality or not. But then, one book later, Ilane has a frank conversation with Kel, informing her that she is in a unique position wherein, because she does not want or need to marry, she does not need to worry about having to be a virgin, and can have sex for pleasure, saying: "Remember—you may be able to do so, but no one can force you to have babies. You do have a choice in these things. I'll get you a charm to ward off pregnancy until you are ready for it" (2000, p.124). Much like the birth control pill let women have pregnancy-free sex for the first time, and to focus on their careers without worrying about having children, Kel has that freedom. Although her mother does say "until you are ready for it," which indicates that Ilane still thinks that, one day, Kel *will* want to have children (part of the traditional girl script). But the overarching idea of Ilane reminding her daughter that she is in a position of sexual freedom is one that leans towards the badass girl, especially because it is an aristocratic mother telling her daughter to not feel bad about wanting to or actually having sex—something usually unheard of in fantasy and some contemporary young adult fiction. Yes, mothers are often the ones who introduce their daughters to birth control, but it is usually in a forbidding "if you are going to have sex then I'm going to make sure you don't get pregnant" sort of manner—both in fiction

and in real life²⁹. Ilane's reaction is script-breaking because she is encouraging her daughter to *enjoy* sex—responsibly. She is making sure Kel knows it is up to her when (or if) she has children, and it does not have to be a great moral dilemma.

Ilane's development from protective mother to empowering mother may be subtle, since she is not the main focus of Kel's books. But her influence on Kel is important. Ilane is a woman who has followed the traditional girl script in many ways, by marrying young and having many children. But she also fought off raiders to protect Yamani scrolls, which brought her family to the attention of the Yamani emperor, and promoted Kel's family's status—breaking the traditional girl script *and* the tomboy girl script by not relegating certain things as belonging only to the realm of women. As a secondary character, her story may not be the one readers remember the most, but possibly her impact on Kel will be more memorable for readers. She is a demonstration of how women can be complex, and do not need to let gender stereotypes influence their actions—be that in following them, or in breaking them. Ilane is, in a subtle way, a badass girl, and even though she initially does not want it, it is clearly something that has influenced Kel into wanting to be a knight. Her letting Kel train as a knight, and her treatment of her daughter, is, in its own small way, a fight for social justice—she recognizes that even though the world expects Kel to follow the traditional girl script, neither she nor Kel has to do so. And there is no way to escape that the world will change from Kel training as a knight. Alanna's actions had monumental reactions, and she was doing it in hiding. Kel has the ability to start righting the wrongs of gender inequality on an even larger scale.

Badass Girl

Kel has *chosen* to train as a knight. But she almost did not choose it, because of the blatant unfairness of Wyldon's probationary year. Similar to Alanna deciding to quit page training on her second day there, Kel decides to quit before even starting because she is not being treated fairly. She recognizes the idea that boys and girls are meant to be equal under this new law, and it is the authority who is incorrect: ““They ought to treat me the same. All I want is the same chance as the boys. No more, no less”” (p.11). At age ten, Kel already identifies the social injustice of what is being done to her. She does not compare herself to boys, simply stating that they are being given a better chance to succeed. Not because they are stronger or more skilled—they are just not being tested in the same way she would be. She originally decides to do something else instead, despite the fact that it is her dream to be a knight. There are options available to her that

²⁹ For examples of this, see *Gilmore Girls*, season 1, episode 9, or www.popsugar.com/moms/Putting-Teens-Birth-Control-27333435, or <https://www.stayathomemum.co.uk/my-kids/parenting-style/when-should-you-put-your-daughter-on-birth-control/>

Alanna never had, such as the Queen's Riders. Knighthood is not the only way for women in Kel's time to become respectable and renowned warriors. But ultimately, that does not matter; Kel wants to be a knight. If she had let others bar her from becoming a knight, she would be succumbing to social injustice—something that affects how she is treated, but not something she lets her behavior be affected by. If she had done something else, because of how she thinks she will be treated because of her gender, she would have succumbed to the tomboy girl script. Instead, aware of the gender-biased attitudes and unfair probation foisted upon her, Kel makes the choice to be true to herself. Like Alanna does not let gender restrictions limit her decision, Kel does not either—though in the opposite way. For Alanna, the palace will not allow girls to be pages, so she hides as a boy; for Kel, the palace will not allow girls to be treated fairly, but she goes anyway. This decision on Kel's part demonstrates a difference in attitude between her and Alanna—while Alanna sees the ban on female knights as a personal affront and tackles it individualistically, Kel sees her probation as a universal unfairness and thinks it unjust for a girl, *any* girl, to be treated thusly—she sees the social injustice that Alanna did not. Despite the differences in their situations, Kel is shown as taking Oziewicz's rights track towards social justice, just like Alanna. The other way would be the freedom track, which involves leaving the unjust society behind and attempting to change it from the outside in. Kel is shown as being more aware of the social injustice of Tortall than Alanna was, and thus being more aware of the potential role she could play in improving lives for girls.

What ultimately sways Kel in her decision is her first encounter with a spidren—the scene described earlier where she witnesses it eating a kitten alive. During that altercation, she had no weapons except the rocks she could pick up from nearby. And she does not have the training to get over her fear of heights, or other, more appropriate ways to fight spidrens. She tells her parents, “I want the training, and the right weapons” (p.19). Although arguably she could achieve that by training to fight in any discipline, not just that of being a knight, it seems, in a way, it is an excuse for her to accept the unfair treatment she is being offered. Again, this helps align her as a badass girl, who is exercising her agency to achieve what she wants. It may not be as good a chance as is offered to boys, but she decides to succeed despite that.

When she arrives at the palace, Kel originally decides to draw the least amount of attention to her different sex as possible—a mindset that would place her into the tomboy girl script, for she would be rejecting the feminine solely to appear masculine for masculine's sake. When Alanna was a page at the palace, she spent most of her time trying to eradicate anything about her person that would alert others (or herself) to the fact that she is female. The most overt way she did this was in her attire—she dressed as a boy. One way in which Kel can help others

ignore her sex is by always dressing in trousers—appearing as a boy. And that is her decision, until she walks into her room in the palace for the first time³⁰. She finds that someone has trashed it, ruining bedclothes, upturning furniture, and dumping her packs on the floor. Writing on the wall reads, “No Girls! Go Home! You Won’t Last!” (p.31). Kel’s depicted thought process at seeing this mess is elucidating, for the reader is permitted to see how even Kel thought of herself almost as a type of boy. The text reads, “She’d thought that if she was to train as a boy, she ought to dress like one” (p.32). In that thought, she shows again her initial tendency to follow the tomboy girl script—she is training to be a knight, not training to be a boy. But the pervasive social unjust—and incorrect—concept of knights being male is so ingrained in her, that she thinks of training as knight is equal to training as a boy. Her plan had been to avoid any undue notice that performing outwardly as the traditional girl script would have garnered (though it is obvious from the treatment her room received it does not matter to the others how she dresses), and in that avoidance of attention she had hoped to present as a boy. Having read the words on her wall, however, indicates to her it makes no difference what she looks like, how she behaves, or even how skilled she is at fighting; the people who did that to her room only care that she has the wrong genitals, and everything that scriptically accompanies that. After processing the damage that has been done, she makes the choice to *not* dress like a boy: “She was a girl; she had nothing to be ashamed of, and they had better learn that first thing. The best way to remind them was to dress at least part of the time as a girl” (p.32). Kel is depicted as understanding gender performativity, and her change of stance from being a girl who will dress as a boy to being a girl who will dress as a girl is not due to her wanting to embody the traditional girl script. Rather, she shows that she understands that a dress is a prop in one of the slots of the traditional girl script, and she is using it to her purpose. In doing so, she breaks the traditional girl script and the tomboy girl script by rejecting both of them, and forms a part of the new script: the badass girl script.

In a way, Kel is breaking the crossdressing script that Alanna nominally falls under, along with others like Mulan and Jean d’Arc. She is not crossdressing when she wears tunic and breeches, nor is she crossdressing when she wears a dress—she is not being forced to crossdress to achieve her goals. Both girls’ and boys’ clothing is available to her, and therefore she has broken past the need to adhere to a crossdressing script. She is not trying to be ‘one of the boys,’ nor is she trying to be ‘just a girl.’ She is depicted as wanting those around her not to forget that she is a girl, and to accept that and respect it, and therefore that what the boys are doing (that is,

³⁰ To note, all boys have their own rooms, though Kel is the only one who has her own bathroom, which she has been given explicitly because she is a girl. During Alanna’s time, private rooms and bathrooms were the norm.

training to be knights) is not something that can be delegated as a male-only task any longer. While Alanna had to try to avoid attention being paid to her boy-disguise, Kel is purposefully attracting attention by wearing a gown whenever she can—not because she particularly wants the attention, but because she does not feel ashamed of her gender or her sex, and has no reason to hide it: “These days, however, Kel wore dresses whenever possible. She was not about to let the pages forget that there was a girl in their midst. Gowns at supper were just one way to remind them” (p.90). Going from reading a character like Alanna, who rails against her femininity for several years, refusing to let it affect her in any way, Kel embraces it from the start, recognizing that she cannot cut a part of herself away to fit into the idea of what a page *should* be. She does not wear a dress to be girly, nor is she doing it just to ruffle people’s feathers—there is a point to her clothing option. She has chosen her clothing as part of a performance, in a backwards way from what others would expect from a person who can be seen as breaking past gender performativity. Unlike Paul’s hero in drag, Kel seamlessly moves from one costume to another, embracing both the masculine and the feminine, helping to create the badass girl script.

Illuminating of Kel, as both a character and as to the scripts she performs, she begins to clean her destroyed room. Cleaning is linked to domesticity, which places it into a slot of the traditional girl script. But Kel does not think in those gendered terms. Despite this, when the head servant, Salma, sees the state of Kel’s room and what Kel is doing, she says, “I told you, it’s your job to perform a warrior’s tasks. We do this kind of work” (p.33). When she says ‘we’ she does not mean women—obviously so, since she is aware of Kel’s gender. She points the writing on the wall which reads “Girls Can’t Fight!” (p.33), which prompts her to ask what the boys think their mothers do when the men are away and their estates are attacked. When Kel responds that her aunt lit barrels and catapulted them onto enemy ships, Salma responds with, “As would any delicately reared noblewoman” (p.33). Kel and Salma are more aware of how females can actually behave, and that being women does not preclude them from being warriors. Preventing Kel from tidying her room does not stop her from being a girl—it is simply that in this instance, Kel is here to learn to be a knight, and cleaning her room is not a part of that lesson. Learning to persevere in spite of societal pressure to follow the traditional girl script is a lesson that Kel is constantly reminded of, and does her best to overcome.

Defining what a girl is through what a boy is or is not—or even through what a girl should or should not be—is not a productive or egalitarian way of describing females. It does not need to be thought of as Alanna or Kel being as good as the boys, although that is how Alanna thinks at first, and how many of the people during Kel’s training think. The framework for discussing girls and femininity could instead be about what girls are capable of—what they can do, what

they want to do. Kel starts to think along these lines, showing that although she is aware of her status as “The Girl,” she does not need to think of herself in the context of males: “I’ll work hard, she promised herself. I’ll show everyone what girls can do” (p.52). She does not think, “I’ll show everyone I’m as good as a boy” or “I’ll show everyone that girls can do everything that boys can,” because she is not defining herself with those limitations. At least, she is not only defining herself that way. She holds up the warrior as the ideal, as opposed to the male. Others have no problem defining Kel as only being a person in relation to men. One of her classmates yells ““A woman out of her place is a distraction to men!”” (p.161) and ““It’s time for you to take your place behind the veil, where you belong!”” (p.161). For Kel, gender does not form part of whether or not she is worthy as a warrior. The concepts are disassociated from each other, because one’s ability to fight has nothing to do with one’s gender. That is a concept of social justice, and one that Kel knows does not yet exist in Tortall, but one she fights for through her presence at the palace.

Overall, what potential readers might learn from Kel is that being a girl is complex. She is different from Alanna in how she accepts that she is a girl, and does not try to be a boy—but training to become a knight is still complicated. She feels less guilty than Alanna does, because she is not lying to her friends, but she still has a pervasive sense of duty, which comes through more in her later books. In short, Kel is a well-rounded character that does not present an easy version of girlhood, while still depicting a decidedly different form than Alanna does. That is, they are two different people, and face both personal and social justice challenges in different ways, providing readers with two different female heroes—two different female badasses.

Conclusion

There are several types of gendered scripts, and in this chapter I analyzed three of them in-depth: the traditional girl script, the tomboy girl script, and the badass girl script. The most problematic of these scripts, for this thesis, is the traditional girl script, as it is the one that most blatantly states that girls should only behave in one way because of their assigned gender. It also becomes complicated when girls adhere to this script, because then the question arises if they are behaving in such a way because they are expected to, *or* if they are aware of the gender expectations they have been inculcated with and select certain ones which they actually want to follow. At some point, going down that train of thought becomes pointless and cyclical, because it is almost impossible to tell if a person is doing something genuinely because they desire it, or if it is because they have been raised to believe it is what they want. For this conclusion, it is sufficient to say that Alanna and Kel significantly disrupt gendered scripts, specifically the traditional girl

script and the tomboy girl script that I have identified. While these are two types of behavior that have been discussed by other scholars, I am the first person to coin these terms and define them in such an in-depth manner with these texts. My aim is to give a solid groundwork for these terms to be taken forward and applied to other adolescent feminist fantasy fiction, to determine whether or not female characters are feminist heroes or not; to see if those characters break into the badass girl script, the third term I have coined, wherein they get to show that they are well-rounded characters—like they are real people. Like real people, they struggle with a lack of confidence, brought upon by the negative way in which people of their gender are treated. This idea could be relatable to potential readers, and they could see how Alanna and Kel react to these scripts as a way that they can react to them as well. When faced with gender discrimination in their real lives, readers could take what they have learned from Alanna and Kel, and still try to accomplish their goals. They could see that at the end, Alanna and Kel come to terms with both their genders and their societies around them, and have become confident people—while in the beginning, neither of them were sure they could do what they wanted. Seeing characters that are supremely aware of the gender constructs and constrictions around them, and who manipulate that gendered system to constantly fight for their goals, could prove to readers that this type of behavior is realistic and repeatable. That they, too, could fight for social justice.

As to why readers would specifically be able to do that, I turn now to look at empathy, both in how it can affect real people and in how it is demonstrated by Alanna and Kel. It is empathy that has the potential to affect real change—specifically empathic concern—and the next chapter delves fully into that idea.

Chapter 3: Developing Empathic Concern as a Path to Social Justice

While empathy in and of itself is a good social skill to have, what research suggests is possible is that reading fiction can promote empathic concern, which is a powerful motivator for helping others and a force for social justice. Empathic concern is possible because reading fiction about characters that people do not encounter in their everyday lives—whether someone of a different race, sexuality, gender, socioeconomic status, culture, or anything—enables them to imagine existing in other people’s situations (Oatley, 2016, p.619). Being able to think of someone who initially appears to be different in monumental ways as a person “like me,” with thoughts and feelings similar to yours despite the other differences, promotes a desire for everyone to be treated fairly. The main argument of this thesis is that by reading Pierce’s works, and, by extension, other adolescent feminist fantasy texts, there is the possibility for potential readers to change their thoughts and behaviors when it comes to gendered stereotypes. Books like *Lioness* and *Protector* have the power to show potential readers how these female heroes developed from not having self-esteem and not believing themselves as worthy to attain their goals, to understanding if they work hard enough, nothing as trivial as their sex or gender can hold them back. In this chapter, I examine how Alanna and Kel grow from having little self-confidence and primarily being focused on their own well-being or the people in their immediate surroundings, and change into people who believe in themselves, which then develops into empathic concern and a desire to create positive change in the world for others. To accomplish this analysis, I look at some of the different narrative tools used to develop characters, and the gender-related cognitive impact that can have on readers.

This chapter is about both thinking and feeling. I focus on cognitive empathy (mind-modelling), and how the representations of characters inner and outer lives display character development, and how these texts can provide examples of mind-modelling for readers. As I have already shown, Alanna and Kel are characters that challenge gender scripts—this chapter focuses on how they have changed from the beginning of their quartets, and how potential readers could be affected by that change. I take that idea further by discussing embodied emotion and how moral empathy (also known as empathic concern) is shown as developing in the characters—and how that can potentially be mirrored in readers, which is what could inspire them to change their outlook on life.

There are three types of empathy, and I posit Alanna and Kel are shown as developing

through these three types as their characters mature, much as I think is possible for readers.

They are as follows:

—***cognitive empathy/perspective taking***: when we apply reason to working out how someone else feels and can effectively put ourselves into the mind of other people

—***affective empathy/affective sharing***: when we resonate with what someone else is feeling; it reflects the natural capacity for us to become affectively aroused by others' emotions

—***moral empathy/empathic concern***: a powerful motivator for helping others, a force for social justice; corresponds to the motivation of caring for another's welfare (Decety and Cowell, 2015, p.3; Kokkola, 2017, p.99).

The significance of this development is that as the characters mature, that change can affect the potential readers through mirror neurons, and as the characters' empathy grows from one type to the other, so too could it happen to the reader—and the reader is the one who stands to benefit from being affected enough to change the real world.

The growth of empathy does not necessarily go from cognitive to affective. Affective empathy is the type of empathy that is most automatic and reflexive, since it involves identification with another's feelings, meaning it is likely elicited from similar groups and individuals (Bullen, Moruzi, and Smith, 2017, p.8). When people speak of emotional contagion (like what happens in mobs, from "catching" someone else's feelings (Kokkola, 2017, p.95)), they most likely mean what can happen with unchecked affective empathy. That is where cognitive empathy comes into play—it provides a healthy and necessary distance between the original feeler of emotions and the person empathizing with them. It allows you to understand a person's emotions, but not necessarily feel compelled to share them if the reasoning behind that emotion is unwanted—for instance, to avoid falling under the charismatic spell of dictators like Hitler and Chairman Mao, even though the emotions those around you feel toward those people are overwhelming (Kokkola, 2017, p.95). Cognitive empathy is what lets you see why people are behaving the way they are, but provides enough emotional distance so you do not get caught up in it. But before we can think cognitive empathy is all good and affective empathy bad, it is important to note that without affective empathy, we could lack compassion—similar to how psychopaths operate (Bullen, Moruzi, and Smith, 2017, p.8; Kokkola, 2017, p.98). People must have the ability to experience both affective and cognitive empathy before they can pass onto moral empathy—to understand the why of someone's feelings, as well as the what, and to then

be compelled to act altruistically for that person's benefit. That is, ultimately, what I am positing is possible from potential readers reading books like *Lioness* and *Protector*— after reading these books, readers could have grown into being able to elicit moral empathy, and to use that to positively change their views and behaviors regarding gender equality social justice.

Before I discuss the three types of empathy in depth, I first turn to a closer analysis of mirror neurons, for they are what makes empathy in fiction possible—and powerful—and are what make moral empathy a possibility.

Mirror Neurons

Patrick Colm Hogan explains that mirror neuron systems “fire either when one does something oneself or senses someone else doing it. Thus, a mirror neuron response to someone else's smile involves the activation of neurons that fire also when one smiles oneself” (2011, p.49). He says that, on a simple level, “the brain reacts in much the same way to seeing a cup and imagining a cup” (2011, p.54). In a similar way, reading about something triggers the same kind of neural response that experiencing something does. Mirror neurons “fire when we see others expressing their emotions, as if we were making those facial expressions ourselves. By means of this firing, the neurons also send signals to emotional brain centers...to make us feel what other people feel” (Iacoboni, 2008, p.119). Mirror neurons seem to be the brain's building blocks of empathy. In the real world, over time, people learn to notice others' emotions and thoughts from observing their facial and bodily expressions, along with what they do and say, which triggers mirror neurons to fire (Decety and Jackson 2004; Preston and de Waal 2002).

The most important facet about mirror neurons for my research is that “mirror neurons are not a response to one's own emotion, but a reflection (‘mirror’) of the emotions of others: empathy” (Kokkola, 2017, p.100), and mirror neurons also fire in people's brains when they are reading fiction (Cheetham et al. 2014; Djikic et al. 2013; Kidd and Castano 2013; Mar and Oatley, 2008). Thus, reading fiction is neurally similar to imagining something, and imagining something is neurally similar to actually seeing it. Mirror neurons make it so the brain responds to the imagined, fictional phenomenon as it would to the real one. When reading about emotions, especially strongly felt ones that are expressed clearly in the text, readers almost cannot help but have the same emotional response as well. Elaine Scarry (1999) has conducted work on the literary imagination, and she posits a reader's response to imagined experiences may be partly due to the approximation of the actual experience, which ties in directly to the concept of mirror neurons; she then states that this is one of the reasons for the emotional power of literature. Therefore, reading fiction helps develop empathy, and reading about characters'

emotions and thoughts can cause readers to share them.

I now discuss cognitive empathy (mind-modelling) in more detail, as a way of describing what mirror neurons are causing the brain to do, and how it relates to the narrative mode of focalization, as it is one of two types of empathy needed before moral empathy can be achieved.

Cognitive Empathy: Mind-Modeling/Perspective Taking

Cognitive empathy, or mind-modelling, as stated before, is the ability for a person to attribute mental processes to another person. Peter Stockwell and Michaela Mahlberg explain mind-modelling by saying humans assume that a mental representation of another person is created as a template; it begins with the presumption that “the other person is a person, and since the most viable and vivid model of a person is yourself, all interaction begins by modelling the other person as having your own experiential qualities” (2015, p.133). Each person’s self is the baseline for assuming and guessing what other people’s minds are like, and these baselines can be added to or subtracted from. But initially that other person is thought to have consciousness, beliefs, imagination, aspirations, and an outlook that is basically human. That can extend to understanding that the other person has memories, emotions, a sense of ethics, and certain physical sensations—though much like each and every person utilizes scripts, scripts can also be informed by a person’s experiences and culture—and people’s minds can be shaped by those as well (Stockwell and Mahlberg, 2015, p.133). Each person is a person, while simultaneously, each person is different. As stated, how each person perceives themselves is a baseline for how they perceive others—to understand that people are “like you,” you do not have to think each person you meet is a clone of yourself. Stockwell and Mahlberg state that the principal innovation of their theory of mind-modelling is that people do not assume that others are a ‘blank slate’ when imagining them—they understand that other people have minds like they do, that have a myriad of experiences and mindsets that the original person may not have (2015, p.133). The idea of mind-modelling is that it is an action that is constantly being updated by individuals when they consider or imagine others—cues about what a person is thinking, or what that person believes, all help in remolding the baseline. But the idea that people think of others “like me,” and perhaps a reason why identifying oneself in a character is so prominent, is how the baseline is formed. When it comes to a literary context, unless there are textual clues to prompt people to think differently, readers will initially think of characters as “like them.” It is the stimuli “derived from the text during reading serve to alter the basic assumed model of a person” (Stockwell and Mahlberg, 2015, p.134). This process is one of the reasons why reading fiction is useful when it comes to real-life social interactions. Readers can be exposed to a plethora of characters in

books, and learn more and more about them as the stories continue, much as they can learn more about a person the longer they know them. Keith Oatley points out that stories can be conceptualized of as pieces of consciousness that are externalized by authors in a way that can be passed to others, so that they can internalize these ideas as wholes, and make them their own (2016, p.624). In stories, evil characters who commit terrible atrocities can be safely approached and learned about—and perhaps readers can learn how to avoid such people in real life. In Voldemort’s character history, readers can learn about Tom Riddle, a handsome boy who is able to charm everyone—but his true nature is revealed throughout the course of the Harry Potter novels, and readers have the chance to learn that just because someone is outwardly pleasing, in both mien and words, does not necessarily mean that the mind behind that outward appearance is not twisted. Still, readers are given the opportunity to empathize with Voldemort—though he is a more sympathetic character when he is an abandoned orphan as opposed to when he’s a mass-murdering despot—to see what goes into creating a person like that. Fiction allows readers to expand their mind-modelling skills by giving them access and insight into the types of minds that may not be available in everyday life.

Oatley discusses how there are two predominant ways for engaging in fiction: inference and transportation. Inference involves understanding characters by making the same sort of inferences that are used in conversations about what people mean and what sort of people they are (2016, p.621). It seems to mimic real-life interaction with people, and dovetails with Stockwell and Mahlberg’s denoted ways of readers understanding characters through direct descriptions of physical appearance and manner, gestures and body language, as well as presentation of speech for an autonomous sense of characters’ personality, mood, and perspective (2015, p.134). While one of the great benefits of fiction is that the inner thoughts of characters can be made explicit, it is also advantageous when readers are forced to guess what the characters are thinking—to infer. This advantage comes from readers having to cognitively work harder to ascertain the subtleties of what a character means. For instance, when study participants were given two versions of the same piece of writing by Alice Munro; one version was exactly as Munro had written it, and one changed the writing to explicitly tell readers how the narrator felt. The ones who read Munro’s exact words had to make inferences about what kind of person the narrator was, and what it was that she felt, which resulted in them attaining a deeper understanding of the protagonist than did those who were told directly how she felt: “Engagement in fiction can be thought of as practice in inference making of this kind” (Oatley, 2016, p.621). That is, engagement in fiction is akin to what David Kidd and Emanuele Castano (2013, 2016) mean when they discuss “literary” fiction—if fiction encourages readers to think,

reflect and analyze on what they have read, they have engaged with it.

The second process Oatley identifies for engaging with fiction is transportation, which is something I discussed thoroughly in the introduction to this thesis. To reiterate, it is the extent to which “people become emotionally involved, immersed, or carried away imaginatively in a story. The more transportation that occurred in reading a story, the greater the story-consistent emotional experience has been found to be” (Oatley, 2016, p.621). That corresponds with the concept of mirror neurons—the more emotions from the text are felt in the reader, the more consistently those ideas are conveyed and understood. The more powerfully concepts are understood from a story, the more likely a reader is to remember them—and the more likely they are to affect all types of empathy. Readers “might develop cognitive empathy with these literary characters” (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2017, p.116), and the more developed their empathy, the more likely they are to take that step into empathic concern, wherein they take action to change their behavior and thoughts. One way in which readers can be transported is through a feeling of intimacy with a text, and I posit that one way to accomplish this is through internal focalization, which is related to cognitive empathy, both of which I now discuss.

Focalization

While there are several types of textual signals given to readers to help them engage with a text, important ones for my research are internal and external focalization, which seem like the narrative version of mind-modelling—the narrator focalizes a character’s thoughts and actions, and the recipient then mind-models that focalization. External focalization occurs when the narrative reports what would be visible and audible to a virtual camera, and is therefore potentially the most mimetic type of narration, as it mimics how people operate in the real world (Jahn, 2007, p.98). We do not know the unspoken thoughts of the people around us, much the same those as reading an externally focalized story. Internal focalization occurs when the narrative is focalized through the minds of one or more characters, and “narrative information is restricted to data available to their perception, cognition, and thought” (Jahn, 2007, p.98). For texts that are narrated in third-person, focalized through one character, readers perceive it as her story because although we are not always in her head, we see almost everything through her perspective and through her mind. Lydia Kokkola states that if readers are granted “total access to a fictional character’s mind,” then it is like they have been granted magical abilities to literally read that person’s thoughts (2017, p.100).

The primary texts I have selected utilize multi-focalization, though in a limited way—there are a few passages in each book that are focalized through a different character than the

protagonist. These sections are so few that the books predominantly seem to have a fixed focalizer, making it feel like an almost-intimate experience between character and reader (Jahn, 2007, p.98). Even though the reader knows an author has written the story, it will feel like the character is the one giving information.

Sara K. Day writes that narrative intimacy is created by “a first-person narrator who self-consciously discloses information” to a perceived reader (2013, p.4). In a simplified format, it occurs when the reader knows secrets about the protagonist that the other characters do not. While Day says this only occurs in first-person narration, because then the narrator is giving this information willingly, I suggest that an intimacy is created in narratives where the protagonist is internally focalized. Gerard Genette (1980, p.182) would argue that there is no difference, as impersonal narrators focalize characters and personal narrators focalize themselves, but both can reveal or omit information—I would say that in novels such as the ones Pierce has created, there is a *feeling* of intimacy due to the closeness and revelations of the narrator about the character. An internally-focalized third-person narration can seem intimate because the reader knows facts about the protagonist that no one else in the novel does, and because with internal representation the reader can feel like they are in the protagonist’s mind. The stronger the narrative intimacy between a reader and a character, the stronger the empathic bond potentially will be, which could result in a reader being more engaged with the text. Oatley remarks that readers’ relationships with characters are called parasocial, as they are one-way: “characters cannot interact with a reader. Nevertheless, these relations can be intimate and important to the reader” (2016, p.623). That is because these relationships foster emotional understanding of other, real people, that can be studied in a personal, intimate way.

Both *Lioness* and *Protector* utilize covert narrators in that there is no narrator making its presence known (Chatman, 1978, p.197). This narrative technique is useful in an internally focalized story, especially one that feels “intimate”—it makes it seem like the character herself is giving the information, as opposed to an outside and obvious other person. This type of narrator limits the barriers felt between reader and character, making it feel like there is less emotional distance between the two. Seymour Chatman writes that “the narrator's presence derives from the reader's sense of some demonstrable communication. If it feels it is being told something, it presumes a teller. The alternative is a ‘direct witnessing’ of the action” (1978, p.147), which is what I argue occurs in both Alanna and Kel’s stories. This narration occurs because the author seems to have made special efforts “to preserve the illusion that events ‘literally unfold before the reader's eyes,’ mostly by restricting the kinds of statements that can occur” (Chatman, 1978, p.147). At no point does the text read, “Let me tell you a story about a girl called Alanna,” or,

“That was when I first noticed that Kel didn’t believe in herself.” Such statements would be overt, and draw the reader’s attention away from feeling like they were present in the story themselves.

But as Day says, the significance of an emotional response is more indicative of the “success of the narrative techniques than of individual readers’ actual experiences of specific feelings” (2013, p.16). The narrative techniques I look for to denote an internal focalization are when the narrative is largely concentrated on one character, when we get to read her thoughts through quoted monologue, and when we have to pick through what the narrator is saying in free indirect discourse. The third-person provides a simultaneous closeness and distance that is potentially helpful in successfully engaging critically and empathize with a character. This distance in narration can perhaps result in defamiliarization for the reader, stemming from when authors “use stylistic means to invite emotional reflection and reappraisal” (Oatley, 2016, p.622). Reported to only occur in “literary” fiction, it requires active participation from readers to make meaning from the text. Roland Barthes called this “writerly” fiction, as opposed to “readerly” fiction, which was idle and required little effort from readers (1975, p.5). While I agree with the sentiment, I disagree with the idea of literary fiction being superior to popular fiction. I see no point in the demarcation. It is impossible to categorically state what kind of fiction will make a particular reader reflect or think analytically, as each individual reader is different. Perhaps it is better to think of them as familiar fiction and defamiliarizing fiction.

Naturally, defamiliarization can occur in texts that are not written in the third-person. Other aspects in a text can garner notice by the use of foregrounding, which includes using different points of view, “in order to emphasize certain emotional conditions” (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2012, p.131). One of the most critical cognitive challenges readers will face with *Alanna* is Alanna’s pervasive false belief that because Alanna is a girl she is not good enough to be at the palace. That this sentiment is a false belief requires more extensive mind-modelling more than anything else in the novel. Lisa Zunshine explains some of the processes of mind-modelling that occur in the mind when dealing with fictional situations like this: by following the readily available representations of characters’ mental states throughout the narrative, and by “comparing our interpretation of what the given character must be feeling at a given moment with what we assume could be the author’s own interpretation, we deliver a rich stimulation to the cognitive adaptations constituting our [mind-modelling]” (2006, p.24-25). This behavior presupposes a mature reader, however, and less sophisticated readers may fail to do so in every instance. Readers must constantly try to sift between what they understand the protagonist to be thinking and feeling, and compare that to what they think the author is trying to impart. This

cognitive-gymnastics does not happen automatically; the text needs to manipulate the reader. In my primary analysis, I find textual evidence that readers are supposed to see through focalization. Readers could see this built gradually through the character development, specifically in how Alanna and Kel grow their self-esteem and their belief in their abilities. I show this below through close-readings of several passages from different points of the texts, to demonstrate that readers will be wiser after they have read the books.

I turn now to affective empathy, for, when combined with cognitive empathy, it has a vital part to play in producing moral empathy.

Affective Empathy

In general, empathy is seen as a positive thing; it is certainly the predominant way it is used in this thesis. The capacity to understand other people's emotions, and the situations that caused those emotions, is a great way of expanding people's worldview to encompass more than previously.

But it should be noted that there are those who do not find the eliciting of empathy to be an always-good phenomenon. Adolescents are prone to following their emotions, and can be swayed to follow their feelings over reasoning (Crone, 2016, p.7). As mentioned before, untampered affective empathy can lead to blindly following strong emotions, regardless of the facts. Dylan Evans points out that emotions are strong persuaders in those that feel affective empathy, and "appealing to people's emotions may offer a more direct way of changing their mind than rational argument" (2003, p.93). While this phenomenon is part of what I posit can happen to readers from reading Pierce's books, I see it in a positive light because I think these texts relay positive gender ideas to those who read them. But there may be those who disagree with what I view as positive—just as there may be texts that are as emotionally stimulating as Pierce's, but impart what I see as negative ideas. If readers do not have some kind of understanding of the world they believe to be morally good, then blindly falling into an emotionally-stirring book with an evil protagonist could lead to a poor outcome. For example, in Marie Lu's *The Young Elites* trilogy (2014-2016), the books are predominantly, though not exclusively, focalized through Adelina, a young woman who initially inspires cognitive and affective empathy—she has been abused by her father for years, and is a general outcast from society due to her physical marking from surviving the blood fever. When she attempts to escape her father selling her, Adelina's powers are unleashed for the first time, inadvertently killing her father. She is then arrested and sentenced to burn, intending to stir outrage and distress on the part of the reader at the unfairness of her treatment. As the books progresses, though, Adelina's

alignment with fear and fury start to overpower her sad past and good intentions, and she becomes a first-person focalized villain. She kills for her benefit alone, and decides to become queen of her nation, simply for the joy of holding power over others. If readers were to affectively empathize with her without any kind of cognitive empathy tempering that, they could be swept into thinking that murder is an acceptable action when it directly benefits you. However, while the potential readers I am discussing are not experts, I do not find it likely that anyone with the mental capacity to read and understand books such as *The Young Elites* would also find murder acceptable. I will admit, though, that there is some discernment needed in readers as to what actions and emotions they seek to emulate from fiction, and that books such as *Pierce*'s help to guide them in figuring that out.

Emotions are complicated concepts. Narrative are one way in which humans can sort through their feelings and try to assign meaning to them. Hogan states that “stories in every culture both depict and inspire emotion” and that a good story is defined by one that is particularly effective at both tasks—“representing the causes and effects of emotion as understood or imagined in that society and giving rise to related emotions in readers” (2009, p.1). Not only are emotions exciting, they are interesting—from an egotistical point of view, humans like stories that rouse their emotions because so much of human life revolves around emotion. Thus when a story elicits emotional reactions from us, readers are more likely to engage with a text, and therefore more likely to utilize their empathy. Stories that readers engage with further are more likely to be remembered, and that much more likely to have a lasting effect on readers. We see different versions and different possibilities of ourselves when we read stories, and emotions are a conduit through which we do that. Oatley writes that emotions in fiction are important, because in an experiment on empathetic effects, his team found that “the more readers were transported into a fictional story, the greater were found to be both their empathy and their likelihood of responding on a behavioral measure” (2016, p.621). He states that vividness during reading has been found to “increase empathy” (2016, p.621). While he discusses vividness of imagery, I would focus on the vividness of the descriptions in general—in particular, the vividness of the emotions. The more vividly conveyed, the more emotions can pull a reader in. I now discuss emotions themselves in more detail, and then go on to discuss embodied emotions, as writing about emotions in an embodied way is a vivid way of describing what a character is feeling—and, as just stated, the more transported a reader is through vivid emotions, the more likely they are to respond empathetically and then change their behavior, exactly what I have been discussing for this entire thesis.

Emotions: Embodied

The building blocks of emotion are called basic emotions. They do not need to be learned, and are present in every culture. They are hardwired into the human brain. Evans explains that researchers disagree about how many basic emotions there are, but, as stated before, that most would include the following: joy, distress, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust (2003, p.5). That they are universally present is clear, because babies who are born blind still make facial expressions that correspond to these emotions, by smiling or grimacing and so on (p.6). These facial expressions are useful when it comes to communicating without language, since they seem to be part of how our brains are wired—when you do not speak the language of a place, smiling and pointing can be handy. This idea has been tested by anthropologists when they come into contact with a previously isolated people—the tribespeople instantly recognize smiling, and may even smile in response, to show that they share the same feeling (Evans, 2003, p.8). While that is a fairly simplistic explanation of basic emotions, that is what is needed for the start of understanding emotions as they are discussed in this thesis.

But emotions, much like scripts and people's mind-modelling, are also affected by culture and personal experiences. Beyond basic emotions are social emotions, which are also universal, but which exhibit more cultural variations. They include love, guilt, shame, embarrassment, and so on (Evans, 2003, p.21). From an evolutionary standpoint, social emotions can serve to protect humans in social interactions, whereas basic emotions serve to protect humans from the natural world. For example, when a person feels disgusted by an immoral act, which is the basic emotion response that keeps people away from harmful things, it has been co-opted for the social function of separating them from harmful people (Evans, 2003, p.21). Basic emotions naturally feed into social emotions—for instance, love can make you feel joy or distress (or any other multitude of emotions), but love is also its own separate emotion.

Emotions seem to serve as one of the highest forms of motivation. Humans often try to accomplish goals that will, when completed, give them a sense of contentment, achievement, and happiness. Conversely, in general, humans try to stay away from situations that will cause them grief, anger, or distress, proving to be another motivator in behavior.

An important part of narrative, especially with how the reader can engage with the characters, comes from the embodied descriptions that are used to depict the characters' emotions (Trites, 2014, p.3). Embodied emotions are feelings that are situated within the body³¹, even if they are descriptions and not physical reactions. Embodied emotions, by being described in the physical body, have the ability to ground bizarre emotions and sensations that readers may

³¹ Which all emotions are, even though we do not always think of them as such.

not have the experience to understand. In presenting these embodied emotions, the text offers realistic connections to what can be bizarre happenings. Embodied emotions are an important concept because everything that humans experience is processed through the body. Even when humans think, that thinking is located in the mind. Roberta Seelinger Trites states that “no one creates a text without employing either hands or mouth (or both); no one experiences a text without perceiving it through eyes or ears or fingertips” (2014, p.35). Reading is an experience of the body; thinking is an experience of the body. Human beings do not exist in a vacuum unto themselves, and our bodies react to both thought and feeling.

As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, embodied emotions are feelings that people have that are described metaphorically through the human body. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson discuss how emotions are abstract, and the best way to understand them is by describing them as tangible concepts—through metaphors (1980, p.115). Metaphors are essential, automatic ways that people think, often doing it without thinking about it. Trites has written an entire book about how humans think of development as growing, or as a journey, despite that a person can develop without any kind of physical growth, and does not need to travel anywhere (see her *Literary Conceptualizations of Growth: Metaphors and Cognition in Adolescent Literature*, 2014). Embodied emotions such as “icy fear” or “burning anger” are metaphors—to feel iciness or burning insinuates the presence of a body, because humans experience cold and heat through the body. It does not have to be as explicit as “she felt anger burning in her stomach,” although that would also work. That something is hot or cold necessitates physical feeling—a body. This idea relates back to what Oatley says about vividness in fiction transporting readers more into a story, which can lead to them reacting more empathetically, as well as being more likely to change their behavior (2016, p.621). Therefore, texts that represent emotions through embodiment help potential readers connect more with the emotions portrayed by the characters, and the more likely those texts are to affect readers and grow their moral empathy, which is what I posit potential readers can develop through reading my primary texts. I discuss moral empathy in further detail now.

Moral Empathy/Empathic Concern

Reading fiction about characters that people do not meet in their regular lives—whether or not that is a person of a different socioeconomic status, culture, race, sexuality, gender, or anything—lets people imagine what it could be like to be another person (Oatley, 2016, p.619). That is what makes moral empathy possible. People who initially appear to be monumentally different from each other can change into thinking of that person as “like me,” with emotions

and thoughts comparable to yours—despite other differences. Feeling a similarity between yourself and others, realizing that *everyone you meet*, despite how dissimilar you may seem, is a person just like you, promotes a want for people to be treated justly. The gist of this thesis is that reading Pierce’s works, which I argue are exemplary of adolescent feminist fantasy fiction, has the power to be positive for potential readers by changing their behaviors and ideas when it comes to gendered stereotypes, something that can be achieved through a developing of moral empathy. I argue that potential readers developing in such a way would be a move toward social justice.

Marek Oziewicz has examined justice as a script in speculative young adult fiction, and I find both his general discussion, as well as his specific commentary on the social justice script, particularly useful for my work. He states that people’s understanding of justice is shaped by “exemplary, even stereotypical, causal chains of events that involve beliefs, motivations, and other mental states of their actors, but these stereotypical, exemplary scripts continually evolve” (2015, p.6). Justice, and a proclivity for righting injustice, is tuned to each individual person. And it is constantly changing and updating due to people’s new experiences, much like scripts are updated with new information. He points out that what has not changed are the “cognitive systems and processes through which the human mind makes available to consciousness such complex concepts and associated thought- and action-protocols as justice” (2015, p.6). What I think he is saying here is that the way the human brain works is itself not changing—our experiences change and update who we are as people, but not how we function. So if what we experience updates what we think of as justice—and perhaps, more importantly, what we think of as *injustice*—causes it to encompass more situations and is more nuanced than before, then, possibly, the more we are exposed, the more we see as unjust. It is impossible for one person to experience all that the world holds, from all the different societies and cultures and people—but with fiction, people have the opportunity to vicariously experience so much of it.

Jean Decety and Keith Yoder conducted empirical research to determine what inspired people to feel sensitive toward injustice towards others, and discovered that a stronger predilection toward empathic concern and cognitive empathy predicted sensitivity to justice for others—but not emotional empathy on its own (2016, p.1). Oziewicz defines social justice script as people believing there are unjust laws that are degrading not only to whom they apply but also to those who institute them—that these laws must not be allowed to stand and must be changed. It then follows that positive peace, which is the presence of social justice, is better than negative peace, which is the absence of tension. What one person does affects others, and what affects one person affects all—all groups within society are interrelated (Oziewicz, 2015, p.198). Decety

and Yoder posit that in order to promote social justice, it might be more effective to “encourage perspective taking and reasoning to induce concern for others than emphasizing emotional sharing with the misfortune of others” (Decety and Yoder, 2016, p.1). It should be remembered that perspective taking is like mind-modelling, or cognitive empathy—they are all the same. But what was especially interesting about Decety and Yoder’s study was that too much emotional contagion—*affective empathy*—could become a bad thing.

Personal distress could be detrimental to empathic concern. People who experience emotions intensely are more prone to personal distress based on the recognition of another’s negative emotional state. While the somewhat logical conclusion to end the feeling of personal distress would be to end the other person’s negative emotional state by ending the injustice being done to them, for people with low-levels of emotional resilience that may take too long. They need to end their personal distress as quickly as possible. It seems that emotional contagion—*affective empathy*—can be detrimental to social justice, because people want so much to stop themselves from feeling badly that they simply ignore the problem. They absent themselves from the issue to avoid the upset of others, which, through *affective empathy*, has become their own upset (Decety and Yoder, 2016, p.10)—when related to fiction, the person could just stop reading the book. Therefore, texts that aim to elicit empathic concern must walk a fine line between being too distressful and just distressing enough.

Sensitivity and receptiveness to emotions can thus be a double-edged sword; if a person understands another’s emotions, but becomes overwhelmed by said emotions, then they are less likely to take action to right the injustice in that person’s life. It also makes sense in a literary context; when reading a novel, if a reader is so involved with a story that their emotions start to become overbearing, they can simply put the book down—or they can go on reading, but notice only emotions while ignoring the injustice in amorality (for a discussion of this, see Nikolajeva, 2017). This action is one of the benefits to reading fiction, since it provides a safe space to experience possibly traumatizing events and emotions—and also is a format that can be put down and picked up again when ready.

Decety and Yoder’s findings that cognitive empathy *and* empathic concern lead to an increased sensitivity to injustice also lend themselves to the idea that having some emotional distance is beneficial:

Conscious attempts to adopt another person’s perspective may prompt perceivers to consider that person via cognitive processes typically reserved for introspection about the self, leading to greater overlap between self and other in cognitive representations and neural computations subserving such

representations

(Decety and Yoder, 2016, p.10).

This sentiment is similar to the idea that empathically identifying with a character is more mature than simple identification with a character. While readers do not necessarily need to become the protagonist themselves, they can begin to feel as if the characters are real people. Zunshine points out that not much is needed in a narrative for the reader to think of a bundle of words as “an entity capable of self-initiated action” (2006, p.22). But this mental functioning is useful to authors, since readers with some modicum of developed mind-modelling and empathy can enter into a novel ready to attribute mental states to characters, even if we are not given descriptions of their minds. We may only read about a physical action, but our minds give it a hidden motivation (Zunshine, 2006, p.23). Maybe we are so ready to accept characters written out of words and who only exist on the page because that is how we know other people—in words. We may have physiological reactions to people we come into contact physically, but we think about them in language. We can have an un-language understanding of someone, but when tasked with considering those people, we form them into words. Which is exactly how we think of characters, because they are words. I am not saying that characters and people are the same thing: obviously they are different. But we describe them in roughly the same way—with words. We can talk about their previous actions, about their physical characteristics, about their goals—the same as we can do with real people. Everything comes back to language. Language defines our reality, and one of the reasons why people made of words are so easily thought of as people made of flesh and bone. We automatically think of characters as real people, so the lessons we take away from reading about their most intimate moments seem more genuine, and therefore more applicable to our own lives. The more readers can passionately engage with a text, the more likely they are to remember those experiences and translate them to their own lives, which is what I hope that readers will do after reading my primary texts.

I am interested in how an increase in empathy in the potential reader could possibly lead to changed behavior towards others, but also towards themselves. I postulate that upon reading stories that heavily engage potential readers’ empathy, real readers will be spurred to seek justice. I am aware that this sounds noble and chivalrous (perfect for knights), but I mean it in an individual way. Alanna and Kel do not consciously seek glory for themselves, nor do they think in world-changing ways. But they see injustice in their lives, and they seek to correct it. In this case, the injustice is the unequal and unfair treatment of girls; this is then expanded for both characters when it comes to people who cannot defend themselves. They are depicted as changing their own behavior to help others, which is a reflection of their inner moralistic drives.

Hypothetically, readers could empathize with Alanna and Kel, and in turn see that they do not have to accept the injustices in their own lives. These are two slightly different aspects: one, how characters' empathy and ethics are represented; second, how texts manipulate readers to develop empathy and ethics. They are connected, but still separate.

Injustice is still rife in the world; specifically, in this case, when it comes to how people are treated because of their gender. Some of this is a result in what individuals deem to be fair—what I think of as right may be another person's epitome of wrong. But an idea I put forth in this work is that gender equality should not be, for the most part, difficult to comprehend as an idea of social justice. It is, however, a concept that needs to be taught and cultivated, much like people's mind-modelling and empathic skills can be fostered through reading fiction. Decety and Yoder note that the term justice sensitivity is a variable trait that reflects the importance of justice issues in people's lives, and that while it is relatively stable, it is constantly developing and "susceptible in predictable ways to previous justice-related experiences" (2016, p.2). These justice-related experiences could come from the same place that mind-modelling and empathy building comes from: fiction.

Wanting to do something, the impetus to do something, and actually *doing something* about a perceived injustice are different things, none of which I can measure here, as I am not dealing with real readers. But the idea of a person changing their behavior would logically seem to start on a personal level. While it may be that moral empathy/empathic concern is needed to form sensitivity to injustice for others, it seems rational that a person would begin to make changes in their personal lives before changing the lives of others. That is, even when a person does something new for the cause of someone else, it is still an individual change to that person. Wanting to affect change because a person has been treated unjustly themselves, or because they have seen others treated unjustly, results in that person changing. While it would be easy to say that this change is always for the better, that is again something I cannot measure. But it would logically follow that if a person sees injustice, either on a personal or social level, and feels the need to end that injustice, that this is a good thing. It becomes more complicated when it comes down to *how* that person wants to affect change.

In the previous chapters, I have analyzed how the protagonists from the primary texts I have chosen each have shown that they feel the need to enact change on a personal level. While it is vital to understand how mind-modelling and emotions are represented in these texts, and the potential engaging effect that can have on readers, it is also important to note the development Alanna and Kel have exhibited throughout their books. These aspects are all connected to each other—thinking, feeling, and behavior. The following primary analysis looks at all of these facets,

and especially the two separate issues of how these two characters are growing into showing empathic concern for those around them, which can potentially lead to social justice in the characters *and* the readers.

Closing in on Characters: How Two Characters Change Their Own Prejudices Against Themselves

My primary texts emphasize mind-modelling through focalization and different types of empathy through embodied emotions, and I posit that the more they successfully do so, the more potentially engaging they are to readers. If texts inspire readers to actively engage with them (and other texts like them), they are more likely to imbue the sentiments related from said texts—in this case, the primary idea that gender does not need to influence thoughts, attitude, or behavior; or, that if it does, it does not mean that girls cannot do anything that boys can as well. When it comes to the characters, I am specifically looking at how they are depicted as developing through the three types of empathy: cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and moral empathy. It is a similar type of growth that the potential reader may experience, or could be encouraged to experience, as, I have shown, it is moral empathy that is most likely to inspire changes in behavior and thoughts.

Alanna and Kel are developing from cognitive and affective empathy into moral empathy, as they begin to look outwards from themselves and want to change the way other girls are treated. I say that this is potentially what will happen to the potential reader as they read these books, due to the internal focalization, which displays the thoughts of the characters (possibly eliciting cognitive empathy), and represented embodied emotions, which potentially elicits affective empathy. As the potential reader reads the texts, and sees how Alanna and Kel transition to acting on their developed confidence in themselves to enact change for the greater good, they will possibly be inspired to change their own behavior in a gender-positive way. The types of empathy between character and potential reader are different, naturally, as one is a representation on the page and one is a real behavior in the world, but the one displayed on the page can affect the one in the real world.

It is sometimes difficult to extricate cognition and emotion from each other, as they are such linked concepts. It can also be challenging to delineate between diegetic and extradiegetic empathy; that is, the empathy I see as exhibited in the characters, as opposed to the empathy that I think can be felt and then acted on by the potential reader. In my analysis, I have attempted to both keep emotion and thought clear from each other, as well as diegetic and extradiegetic empathy, but there will naturally be some overlap. What is important to recognize, though, is

that when I discuss moral empathy as depicted through the characters, this is a pre-thought-out and written display of how a character is specifically being shown as portraying, whereas moral empathy as possibly felt by the potential reader is nearly impossible to pin down in its specificities. That is, while it can be predicted that a fictional text can elicit moral empathy from its potential reader, it is not known exactly what form this moral empathy will take in the real world. Again, this unsureness is a reason why I have included two analyses of different kinds of characters—whether or not a reader will or will not connect with Alanna or Kel, as based on personal preference, can impact on the moral empathy that can be elicited.

Alanna: From In to Out

Alanna as a character has been shown to have a complicated relationship with herself, and with the fact that she is a girl. Her sex and gender do not seem to bother her when she makes the decision to train to be a knight (except for the obvious fact that she will have to disguise herself as a boy); she is skilled enough and desirous of the outcome enough. As shown before, she does not think that she cannot accomplish her knighthood because she is a girl. That is, until she reaches the palace and is surrounded by boys. Her initial conviction of her skill and her worth in being there quickly devolves into self-loathing and guilt. There are several times readers see into her mind, whether it is through the direct thought of, “*I’m just a girl*” (1983, p.73, emphasis original) or through statements such as, “This wouldn’t have happened to a *real* boy,” (p.79, emphasis original). These thoughts are indicative of three things: first, that Alanna does not have confidence in herself or her abilities as a warrior (yet). Second, that Alanna thinks that her inability to perform as well as the boys is due solely that she is the wrong gender: a girl. Third, and most importantly on a larger scale, that girls do not have the abilities to do the same things that boys do. That she is breaking the law by disguising herself as a boy to train as a page indicates that, contrary to her displayed thoughts, she innately believes that she, as a girl, is worthy as training as a knight. Extrapolating from that, it can be argued that she thinks everyone should have the opportunity to do as she is doing, regardless of gender. It is her journey from vocalizing these negative thoughts of her inability to do what has traditionally been dominated by males (being a knight) to her actively trying to change the rules that inhibit girls, over the course of four books, that shows her development from focusing solely on herself to opening herself up to moral empathy.

I show in this section passages from two of the *Lioness* books to demonstrate the development that Alanna is depicted as going through, primarily focusing on how in the first passages she is not confident in herself due to both her discomfort with her gender and her

magic (which, as previously discussed, is a metaphor for her gender); the second set of passages proves her improved confidence and skills, and her belief in herself. It also documents an awareness that has grown over the books; that is, Alanna has gone from focusing solely on herself and her own problems to realizing that they are problems that affect her greater fictional world—the social injustice of gender inequality. I analyze each passage for several components; looking at the focalization and the embodied emotions displayed in each section, and how she develops to showing moral empathy. I posit it is possible for the potential reader to engage with the written material and for their behavior and thoughts to be potentially affected.

Alanna's Disbelief in Herself

While Alanna's disbelief in herself and uneasiness with her sex continues well past the first and second book and into the third, I initially return to the first book to demonstrate the great extent Alanna goes to so she can believe that she is unworthy as a warrior because she is the wrong sex. Having been bullied mercilessly from her first day as a page by an older boy called Ralon of Malven simply because she is small, Alanna has gone to great lengths to learn how to wrestle and improve her bodily strength to defend herself. In the following paragraphs, I analyze the relevant text describing the aftermath of Alanna having finally beaten Ralon in a fight:

The first section is:

'Ralon of Malven has left Court,' Myles went on, sitting in her only chair. 'Your servant Coram is bragging to his fellow Guardsmen that he knew you could do it all along. The other boys want to celebrate— they think you're a hero. Isn't that what you wanted?'

This section is comprised of direct speech from Myles, as well as a line of narrator's discourse—"Myles went on, sitting in her only chair." While the potential reader is still aligned with Alanna's point of view, the only line of text that is tenuously focalized through her is the narrator's discourse, as it references "her only chair." This section's primary function is to inform Alanna (and thus the potential reader) that she has been successful not only in defeating her bully, but that she has impressed her wider social circle—Myles, Coram, and the other boys. While this knowledge is useful from a plot perspective, it is most valuable in that it confirms that Alanna is, despite her sex, a warrior. It is not merely something she wants to attain, or something she says

she is capable of achieving—it is a status that she has reached. That Coram reportedly said that he knew she could always achieve it is an even more resounding affirmation of her abilities, because he has always known her true sex. Myles reporting the other boys' thoughts of her being a hero add the confirmation that she was not in the social or moral wrong in defeating Ralon—the boys, too, knew Ralon was a bully and deserved to be punished. But it was Alanna who he primarily tortured, and therefore Alanna's battle to fight. In winning it, she has shown herself not only as the superior physically, but morally as well. But Myles, being a smart and educated adult, understands that even though Alanna is technically the victor, she may have misgivings about what she did—though he can only guess to the reasons behind that, as at this time, he has no inkling that she is hiding her sex and is not the boy she says she is. By coming to her room—Alanna's personal, private space, and the only place she can usually take off her disguise—Myles is depicted as a caring and responsible adult who understands complex thinking, and as giving 'Alan' the opportunity to think his thoughts through aloud.

As it relates to the potential reader, who is possibly young and inexperienced at processing their emotions, what Myles is doing is potentially beneficial as well. He is not explicitly telling Alanna to discuss her thoughts and feelings, but that is what he is encouraging her to do—and this is possibly how the young reader thinks through complicated ideas as well.

The second section is:

She splashed cold water on her face. 'Is it? I don't know.' She rubbed her face dry and looked at him. 'I threw up after,' she confessed. 'I hate myself. I just knew more than Ralon did. And he always loses his temper when he fights— I took advantage of that. I'm as bad as he was.'

This selection is focalized through Alanna, and is made up of narrator's discourse and direct speech. It can be argued that in these few lines, the narrative is externally focalized, since no inner thoughts or feelings are expressed. That does not mean that none are given, though. The act of splashing cold water on her face can at first be interpreted in many ways, such as her being warm, or her face being dirty. But as soon as she says, "I threw up after," it becomes clear that she splashed her face due to some kind of physical discomfort, as a result of emotional turmoil—made even clearer by her next direct speech line, "I hate myself." Thus, what seems at first like external focalization is instead simply an external descriptor of an emotion—it is not quite an embodied emotion, but it is hinting at it.

That the narrator has used the word "confessed" implies that there is something of the

confessional in Alanna's telling Myles what she did, as if it were a sin—an indication that she thinks throwing up after a fight is in some way a sin of a warrior, and that a 'real' warrior would not have vomited. This idea is confirmed when she directly says, "I hate myself," and then explains that the reason for that is because she feels she manipulated Ralon.

There is allusion to an embodied emotion in that she "threw up after"—while not necessarily always connected to an emotional state, the potential reader can infer that it is here related to a strong feeling on Alanna's part, since she gives it to Myles as an answer to his question as to whether or not beating Ralon was what she always wanted, and it is followed by the strong statement that she hates herself. The indication is that her body reacted so strongly—importantly, *after* the fight, so it is not caused by the physical fight itself—to the decision she had made and the outcome of the fight. Therefore, while the emotion is not explicitly stated, it is logical to figure out why Alanna would vomit after succeeding in a challenge she set for herself. More than that, Ralon had made her life miserable by bullying her both psychologically and physically—her beating him in physical combat is retribution for months of torture. Thusly, Alanna's vomiting is an indication not only of a strong reaction, but a complicated one. That the text does not attach a specific emotion to it is even more of a trial for the reader, because they must determine what exactly it is that she is feeling.

That she "knew more" than him is, to Alanna, not an indication of her superior skill and knowledge as a fighter, but somehow something she should feel guilty about. Because she purposefully sought out knowledge of specialized hand-to-hand combat, and put in several hours of grueling physical practice, she interprets her actions as deceitful—she thinks that because Ralon did not have this experience, she treated him unfairly. She has conveniently forgotten that Ralon is older and larger than she is, with several extra years of page-training underneath his belt. There is an innate, underlying sense of guilt (a social emotion) in whatever Alanna does when she is disguised as a boy, and the reason for that is twofold: one, that she is lying to the people around her, and two, *that she is a girl and girls do not deserve to be fighters*. Despite the fact that she put in the time and the practice to become a better fighter, that she specifically went out to learn more than Ralon did, now that she has bested a male she suddenly finds her actions unworthy of praise, whether it comes from others or from herself. It is important to note that guilt, a social emotion, is "reliant on the ability to empathise" (Kokkola, 2017, p.107), because it requires the feeler of the guilt to imagine what it is they are doing that is causing or going to cause distress in the other person. Thus while Alanna is experiencing a false belief—that she is not good enough to be a knight because she is a girl, and she is lying to everyone around her—she is simultaneously exhibiting her ability to empathize by feeling guilt.

Myles attempts to correct Alanna's thinking when he states: "I doubt Ralon ever threw up after he beat someone smaller and younger than he was." Even this direct speech from an older, respectable male teacher does not immediately pacify Alanna, for her response is: "Alanna frowned. 'You think so?'" Again, the noting of Alanna's frowning is an external indicator of her inner mood. This outer representation is a complex indication of Alanna's feelings. From the textual clues surrounding the line "Alanna frowned," and knowing the fight she has just been in and the conversation she is having with Myles, the potential reader should be able to ascertain that she is not frowning because she is sad, but rather frowning because she is confused and having a difficult time processing what Myles has said to her. On the one hand, Myles' speech could be interpreted as him saying that Ralon was a real warrior who never threw up after a physical confrontation. Or, and the more likely reasoning, is that Ralon never threw up after he beat up a weaker opponent because he did not face the inner turmoil that Alanna is currently experiencing—the moral dilemma of whether or not it is right to fight someone with fewer skills than you, even though fighting them is what must be done.

The next section is direct speech from Myles wherein he tries to explain that idea to Alanna:

'I'm sure of it.' Myles nodded. 'Alan, there will come a time when you, a knight, will have to fight someone less well trained than you. It can't be helped, and it doesn't make you a bully. It just means you learn to use your skills wisely.'

What Myles is explaining is a complicated thought. That there can be some sort of obligation to fight someone who is not as big as you, or as skilled as you, can feel morally reprehensible if there is no good reason to fight them. The question becomes what is a "good" reason? Because your overlord commands you to? Because they have broken the law? Perhaps there never is a truly "good" reason to fight and defeat someone who is not as talented as you, and there will always be some moral confusion. Myles is hinting at this when he says that he does not think Ralon ever threw up after he beat someone smaller than him—feeling no moral confusion after a battle means that you have given up the higher considerations of why you fight, and are doing so for the brutish enjoyment of it.

But at the moment, it is too complicated for her, because she does not have any other context to put it into. The next section of the text is focalized through her: "Alanna thought about this. At last she sighed and shook her head. It was too much just then." The internal focalization is especially evident in the line "It was too much just then". Transposed into direct

thought, it would read: “Alanna thought, “It is too much just now.” The idea still makes sense, proving it is a clear inner thought from Alanna, only given to the reader through focalization—and thus explicitly helpful in mind-modelling. They are not words that Alanna would be likely to use herself, which is why the narrator simply says it was too much. Too much for a girl disguising herself as a boy, lying to her friends, thinking she is unworthy because of her sex, but persevering nonetheless, to comprehend. It is an indication of the level of Alanna’s thought- and emotional-processing—namely, that she is not yet an expert, and still struggles with certain concepts.

That she still finds some ideas challenging is evident from the next section:

Myles ruffled her hair. ‘So now you’ve proved you’re a warrior to the whole palace. Surely you want to celebrate.’ Alanna made a face. No matter what Myles said, she had used fancy tricks to beat Ralon, that was all. She was still a girl masquerading as a boy, and sometimes she doubted that she would ever believe herself to be as good as the stupidest, clumsiest male.

The beginning line of direct speech from Myles mirrors what he said to her earlier in the passage—“Isn’t that what you wanted?” That he ruffles her hair is an indicator that he thinks the mood has lightened, and that they have covered the troubling aspects of what she has done. But the rest of this selection belies the truth of that. The line “Alanna made a face” is externally focalized, but the rest of the passage is internally focalized to inform the potential reader what it is Alanna is truly thinking—thoughts she does not bother vocalizing to Myles, even though he has tried to help walk her through this complicated experience. To her, it does not matter that she put in more effort to train than Ralon did, that she sought out special help in the skills she knew would help her defeat him, or that she had the moral high ground when it came to challenging him. It does not matter that by beating Ralon she has proven that she is in fact *better* than the “stupidest, clumsiest male”—she feels she has been deceitful, and therefore does not deserve the merits of the win. While the text uses the phrase “fancy tricks,” it immediately moves on to say she was “a girl masquerading as a boy”—*that* is the true fancy trick she is using. Somehow, if Ralon knew she was a girl, it would not be fancy tricks that defeated him, but her. Or, if she were a boy, she would not have needed the “fancy tricks” in the first place, since some innate boy-ness would mean she would have prevailed. There is nothing that anyone can say to her to make her feel she has done the right thing—only she can come to terms with being both a girl and a skilled fighter. But at this point in her development, that is not something Alanna can

admit to herself.

Hopefully, it is something that the potential reader will see, not by immersively identifying with Alanna but instead by engaging with her empathetically. That is, they will understand why she thinks and feels what she does, but will also know that she is thinking such thoughts because of an innate sense of unworthiness, and not the facts of the situation. Zunshine (2006) states that younger, less expert readers may not have the skills to separate from the characters like that, but I posit it is something potential readers could do here, due to the text elsewhere stating how good a fighter Alanna has become. While Myles is diegetically having a conversation with Alanna, extradiegetically it is like he is telling the reader the same thing he is telling her. By ruffling her hair and saying that surely she wants to celebrate, he is confirming to the reader that he thinks she has done the right thing. Standing up to a bully—especially one who is bigger and stronger than you—is the morally correct course of action. Though he does not know she is a girl, and that part of her emotional confusion stems from her disguise, he would not change his mind if he suddenly gained that knowledge. (That can partly be ascertained from the later knowledge gained from reading the further books, and knowing that Myles approves of Alanna's becoming a knight as a girl.) Myles, as a learned adult, is firm in his belief that Alanna behaved correctly, and hopefully that is something the potential reader will understand.

It is important to note that in this passage, Alanna is focused on herself—she fights Ralon to avenge the wrongs that he has inflicted upon her. It does not matter to her that the other boys know that Ralon is a bully, and that he has terrorized other pages besides Alanna. She learns how to fight better for the simple reason that Ralon has hurt her unfairly, and therefore she must right that wrong. It is a personal injustice. But it is the beginning of a life of fighting injustice when she finds it, whether it be personal or social. One of the reasons why the others find it acceptable for Alanna to have beaten Ralon is because of the social injustices he had perpetrated; he is the embodiment of the strong picking on the weak for no better reason than he knows he will always win, and always feel superior. He is never portrayed as fighting for the greater good, or to right a wrong—Ralon is the wrong. Alanna may attack him because he has wronged her specifically, but it is the start of a career of defeating those who would commit injustices on many—specifically, in those who would prevent girls from behaving in a certain way just because of their sex or gender.

As stated at the beginning of this section, Alanna's disbelief in herself continues well past the first and second book. Despite the fact that by the third book, *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*, she is portrayed as having proven to herself and to the world that a girl can successfully

become a knight, Alanna is shown as feeling unsure of her magic, of her relationships with women (and sometimes men), and, most importantly, how she thinks she fits in the world. The third book opens with Alanna and Coram in the desert in search of adventure when they are set upon by bandits. While fighting them off, a group of Bazhir come to Alanna and Coram's aid. With the bandits killed, Halef Seif, the headman of the Bloody Hawk tribe who has assisted them, calls Alanna the "Woman Who Rides Like a Man" (1986, p.9).

The introduction of the Bazhir, which is a society where girls are overtly treated differently from boys, is a useful exploration of Alanna's understanding of sexism on a wider scale—that which goes beyond her personal scope. It is the first time that social justice seems to enter her consciousness—when she sees how poorly treated Kara and Kourrem, two girls who have been assigned to serve Alanna, are because they are girls who wield magic, and have therefore been ostracized from the rest of the tribe, she witnesses firsthand how poorly those of her sex can be treated. She has lived primarily among boys and men for the past eight years, and, having presented as a boy herself, has not seen as an adolescent how unequal the treatment between men and women can be.

While readers of the first two books may think that Alanna has developed into a character who would fight injustice wherever she sees it, it is not true at first in the third book. She does not have the confidence in herself to enact change in her world for others. Even though she sees the ill treatment of Kara, Kourrem, and Ishak (a young outcast boy of the tribe), she does not break Bazhir law and custom to help them. It is illegal for anyone but the shaman of the tribe to teach its members magic; unfortunately, Akhnar Ibn Nazzir, the shaman of the Bloody Hawk, is a selfish, paranoid old man, who does not want anyone (but especially women) to know magic except for him. It is important to know this plot point, as it helps lead Alanna from affective empathy to empathic concern in regards to Kara, Kourrem, and Ishak. When it came to changing the Bazhir's traditions to help herself, Alanna had no problem doing so—she fought in hand-to-hand combat against a male member of the Bloody Hawk and bested him, meaning that for the first time in Bazhir history, a woman was adopted into the tribe and welcomed to the tribe's fire as a warrior. She was able to do so partly because of the training that she received to defeat Ralon eight years previously, and partly because she did not think for one second she should not fight this man because she was a woman and did not deserve to. But it was for her benefit—literally, to stay alive at this juncture, as if she did not engage in combat she might be executed by the Bloody Hawk. At no point does she stop to think she cannot do it; simultaneously, she never stops to think, "Oh, if I defeat this man then I will be fighting stereotypes against women, and helping to change the way the Bazhir treat women in general."

Initially, Alanna refuses to do anything to better the lives of Kara, Kourrem, and Ishak. This refusal stems from two reasons: the first is it is against Bazhir law for someone besides the shaman to train anyone in the tribe in magic. The second is that Alanna, fresh from killing Duke Roger, currently only associates magic with evil. When Ishak first asks her to teach him magic, her response is:

Alanna knocked his hand away, breaking Ishak's concentration. "I know nothing of magic," she said harshly. "And I want to know nothing of magic. The Gift only leads to pain and death"
(p. 17-18).

Despite that the reader will have seen over the past two books that magic is used just as often for good as it is ill, and that Alanna's confidence and adeptness at it has grown enormously, her one encounter with Roger has tainted her feelings against magic. Much like after she beats Ralon in the fight, this feeling is associated with her discomfort with being a girl. When she defeated Roger, he unmasked her for the entire court to see by cutting through her chest bindings and exposing her breasts—not the gentle reveal Alanna had been hoping for. Somehow, in a process somewhat occluded for the reader, Alanna has gone from a confident Gift-wielder to one who wants nothing to do with it, and it is all tied together with her feelings about being female.

I point out this passage in particular because it demonstrates that Alanna has not yet developed empathic concern. She demonstrates cognitive and affective empathy through the narrator focalizing through her—in a scene where Alanna is shown understanding and responding to Kara, Kourrem, and Ishak's thoughts and feelings. The text portrays more of Alanna's mind-modelling when it reads: "The wistful look in Kourrem's eyes tugged at Alanna's heart" (p.62). Alanna is the one interpreting Kourrem's eyes as wistful, and she is depicted as having an emotional reaction to it. The next sentence reads: "Ishak never stopped trying to show her his magic" (p.62). This sentence requires more interpretation from the reader, since it carries no emotional connotation in and of itself. Readers must intuit that in Ishak constantly trying to display his magical prowess in front of Alanna that he is trying to convince her that he is good at it—that he deserves to learn more of it. The reader knows that he knows that Alanna knows how to do magic; furthermore, at this stage in the novel, the reader knows that Alanna knows that Ishak wants to learn magic and that he knows Alanna could teach him. Ishak's actions in taking every opportunity to show his magic to her, when taken by themselves, do not necessarily mean anything in particular. But if readers use their mind-modelling, they could potentially

realize the significance of this statement. This display of Alanna's mind-modelling continues: "Kara was Kara, anxious, ready to please, expecting a curt word or a blow rather than Alanna's gruff thanks" (p.62). All of these descriptors are presented as being focalized through Alanna; she is the one thinking and interpreting these actions and feelings of Kara's. The text has presented Kara as the kind of person described in that sentence, but it is at this point that the reader could see that Alanna is consciously aware of it as well. No one has ever explicitly stated that Kara has been beaten, but Alanna uses her mind-modelling to analyze Kara's actions and has come to the conclusion on her own. All of these mind-modelling observances on Alanna's part pull her towards actions, but she is not sure of the correct way to fix these young people's lives—or if it is truly her place to do so.

Alanna's Belief in Herself

To actively change Kara, Kourrem, and Ishak's lives, Alanna must develop empathic concern, and, to do that, her self-esteem must grow so she feels confident about being able to enact change. Kokkola writes that empathically mature individuals are moved to alleviate the suffering of others—while simultaneously maintaining a clear boundary between the self and the other, as to protect themselves from self-harming acts of caring (2017, p.106). The reader can see firsthand through the focalization of Alanna that she sees the suffering of others—Kara, Kourrem, and Ishak—and soon becomes motivated to do something.

The explicit reasoning behind Alanna's desire to fix Kara, Kourrem, and Ishak's place in life is revealed:

The knight had been something of an outcast since the day she had revealed her secrets; she didn't like that life for her young shadows. Although her southern exile was voluntary, she had few illusions about the welcome that would be hers if she returned to the palace too soon (p.62-63).

This narrator's discourse in the above lines gives the reader a direct look into Alanna's thoughts and feelings of social distress. While Alanna actually became an outcast once her secret was revealed, it could be clear to readers that she has always felt like a bit of an outcast—a girl wanting to do "boy things," being the only girl among a bunch of boys (though only she knew it), and having a myriad of confusing secrets she has to keep (mostly) to herself. Alanna sees something of herself in the three youths—and understanding their distress so clearly, almost

taking it on herself, is a clear indication of affective empathy.

Alanna's moral empathy asserts itself when she confronts the males of the Bloody Hawk, saying, "If I waited for your Balance to right itself, I'd be some lord's wife right now, not knowing anything more than my home and my lands" (p.61-62). This sentence epitomizes Alanna's outlook on life—she acts. Up until this point, she has acted to change the world for herself. Yes, she has fought in battles, and arguably saved people's lives as a healer. But the only way in which she has truly upended customs and prejudices is in her own life. As I have said before, she did not set out to make sweeping changes—the kind of changes that lead to Kel being able to train openly as a girl. When it comes to the Bloody Hawk's outcasts, though, Alanna decides to do something to change their lives. Before, she found injustice that existed in her world and did something about it; she has now found injustice that exists in others' worlds, and she cannot abide it.

She takes it upon herself to right that wrong. While she initially attempts to convince the tribe's shaman, Akhnan Ibn Nazzir, to help the outcasts, he has entrenched prejudices against magic-wielding women. Unsurprisingly, he attempts to kill Alanna, forcing her hand. In the ensuing fight, he drains himself of his life force in an attempt to overpower her. Being the cause of his death, Alanna becomes the tribe's new shaman. It is this abrupt change in status that allows Alanna to begin righting the wrongs she sees, and she takes the three youths on as her apprentices: "One of Alanna's first acts as shaman of the Bloody Hawk was to approach Ali Mukhtab and Halef Seif about training replacements" (p.76). She ostensibly does this so she can find replacements for herself and have the freedom to roam again; it would also give the outcasts shaman status, which "would go a long way toward redressing the wrong Ibn Nazzir had done them, to her way of thinking" (p.77).

Training Kara and Kourrem as shamans also breaks another barrier: "To make girls shamans is a new thing...but this tribe has done many things that are new since the coming of the Woman Who Rides Like a Man" (p.77). Women have never held overt positions of power among the Bazhir; Alanna has become the first shaman who is a woman. This statement about the Bloody Hawk trying many new things since her arrival is indicative of the changing of opinion since Alanna killed Ibn Nazzir. Before, Ali Mukhtab said that the women were frightened of Alanna because she brought too much change; now he is saying the tribe is changing because of Alanna. He does not say that the Bloody Hawk are resisting the change, or balking at it; he simply states that they have done many new things. Perhaps for even those who accepted Alanna as the Woman Who Rides Like a Man before she killed Ibn Nazzir, they may now see her as a real force for change since she rid them of such a backwards-thinking man.

Alanna has turned several Bazhir traditions on their head in her short time with the tribe; she, a woman, has been accepted as an equal to the men; she has become a shaman, the first female ever to do so; she has taken on two girls as apprentice-shamans; and she insists that all three of her apprentices join her at the nightly fire where the men gather to eat and discuss the tribe's business. It is oddly in this place where most people do not think of Alanna as a woman, and one that gives women so little credence, that she comes to not only accept herself more as a woman, but to become a true advocate for a woman's worth. She has gone from focusing solely on her own growth to realizing that others need her help as well. The development of her empathic concern over the course of the books has been demonstrable, as has her confidence in herself. It is possible that, through mirror neurons and developing empathy, that readers could see Alanna as not only an advocate for themselves, but an advocate for women's rights in general. If, for some reason, readers do not engage with Alanna's story, there is a chance that they would with Kel's. Their stories are similar but different—in one large way, because Kel has had a much more developed sense of empathic concern from the beginning of her story, which could result in readers reacting more strongly. I now turn to analyze passages from her books, to demonstrate the differences between Kel and Alanna's characters.

Kel: From Out to Really Out

It could be assumed that everyone who has read *Protector* would have already read *Lioness*, but they may have not. Some potential readers may not read Alanna's story at all, or they may read Kel's before they read Alanna's. But for those who have read Alanna's story, and understand that Alanna's situation preceded Kel's, they will be an informed reader who could be able to see how the characters develop in different ways. Alanna is much more confused about her sex and her gender, because she has had to masquerade as a boy for so long; Kel, on the other hand, is always up front that she is a girl. Alanna has almost no one to talk to about the particular trials that come with being a woman in a male-dominated world; Kel has female friends who she can confide in, who know exactly what her situation is. The transition from Alanna to Kel reflects the sociocultural and historical situation in real life—as mentioned before, Alanna is more representative of the second wave of Western feminism, while Kel champions the third. Like girls in the 1990s and 2000s, Kel has opportunities that Alanna did not, *because* Alanna made that possible, just like the women in the second wave did for those in the third wave. Alanna and Kel exist in two time periods of changing conceptions about gender and what it is possible for women to do, but Kel's situation is only possible because Alanna existed and fought her own

fight.

Perhaps this difference is one of the reasons that Kel has a much more developed sense of moral empathy than Alanna did—Alanna was forced to fight for herself so she could accomplish her goals, whereas Kel did not have to fight (as much) for herself (though this is also because Pierce had time to reconsider what kind of character she would write, much like Ursula K. Le Guin did with *Tehanu* in 1990). Kel faces many gender biases in her time training to be a knight, but that she can openly do so as a girl is a massive development from Alanna's days. Kel does not have to focus so much on herself, so she focuses on achieving justice for others. As recounted earlier, Kel puts herself in danger to rescue a sack of kittens. Later, she goes on a mission to stop older pages from bullying younger pages. She cared for a baby griffin, even when she knew that if his parents smelled him on her, they would kill her. Her sense of justice has always been acute, and she almost always (sometimes after prolonged thought about what is wrong and right) acts on it. When asked why she behaves this way, she replies: "I do it because I can. I've been treated badly, and I didn't like it. And I hate bullies" (Pierce, 2002, p.36). The important change in Kel is going from not having the confidence to think she can or should behave in a certain way (that is, assertive and like a leader), to having the self-esteem to behave as a fair and confident leader over all kinds of people. It is an internal change wrought through external actions, as I will show in the analysis of the following passages, first by looking at Kel's disbelief in herself, and then through her growing self-confidence.

Kel's Disbelief in Herself

In *Squire*, the Chamber of the Ordeal offers a look into Kel's mind that gives readers a glimpse at what is happening in her unconscious. That is, it makes the implicit explicit. Within the first few pages of *Squire*, Kel is shown visiting the Chamber chapel and placing her hand on the door. The magic of the Chamber mentally transports her, foregrounded and signified to readers by switching to italic typeface. In this vision, Kel is "sat at a desk" and "splotches of ink stained her fingers," and then:

She looked at her tunic. She wore the badge of Fief Naxen, Sir Gareth's home, with the white ring around it that indicated she served the heir to the fief. Her knight-master was a desk knight, not a warrior. Work is work, she thought, trying not to cry. She still had her duty to Sir Gareth, even if it meant grubbing through papers
(Pierce, 2001, p.6).

If these words, along with the knowledge gleaned from the first two books, did not alert readers to Kel's feelings about this, the line, "Work is work, she thought, trying not to cry," should do so (p.6). Neither Kel nor the narrator have to explicitly state "Kel was sad because she was stuck at a desk while she really wanted to be fighting, but she was duty-bound to follow her knight-master and therefore could not say anything because it would be seen as shirking her responsibilities." Readers are given the opportunity to recognize the embodied emotion of Kel's distress through the words of her "trying not to cry," a feeling which adolescents are more than likely abundantly aware of. If Kel were the kind of (fictional) character who did not have a strict sense of what being a knight meant, she would not try not to cry—she would cry. Kel is depicted as understanding that sometimes hard work means doing things you do not want to do, but not complaining. That does not always mean training hard with weapons, or waking up early to practice more, which are the sort of challenges that Alanna had to undergo; sometimes it means doing your duty, no matter how abhorrent you may find it.

As stated, duty is a strong social emotion, linked to the feeling of guilt (Nikolajeva, 2014, p.204–210), as it is the sacrifice of one's own needs for the sake of other people. Nikolajeva points out that aligning with duty over personal desire is a demonstration of maturity and socialization (2017, p.84). An argument can be made that potential readers, from previous experience of reading fiction, might associate Kel doing her duty as a convention of heroic fiction—namely, that she makes the right, dutiful choice for the simple reason that she is the hero (Nikolajeva, 2017, p.86). When it comes to Kel, I disagree; she has shown her strong link to empathic concern from the beginning—she chooses duty because it is part of who she is, and sees it as a way of bettering people's lives. But she does not always choose duty as society sees it, but rather as she sees it—for example, when she goes on patrol to stop older pages from bullying the younger ones, even though it is technically a time-honored tradition. She is following her own ethical compass, although Nikolajeva argues that the definition of duty is "an ethical capacity to act against one's own desires if you believe that it is the right thing to do" (2017, p.93), whereas I posit that there is a difference between a knight's duty and a person's ethical duty. There was no knightly obligation for Kel to stop the bullying, and no one else saw it as something they should act to stop. But it felt wrong to her, so she ended it. She differentiates herself from Alanna in doing this, because Alanna felt a personal vendetta against her bully, and wanted to specifically stop him from hurting her. Kel wanted to stop a widespread wrong because she felt it was an incorrect way of living. Presenting two ways of facing bullies, neither of them being erroneous, demonstrates empathic concern that Kel has shown from the start.

Potential readers could notice this difference, and align more or less with one of the characters because of it. Readers' judgment on who has acted better, Alanna or Kel, could be crucial to their lives. Since some readers have a limited understanding of the consequences of their actions, they may be used to the egocentric idea of wanting the immediate reward for themselves, and not the wider repercussions—and they may transpose this onto the protagonist, thinking that instant gratification is better than duty that may or may not lead to happiness. As Nikolajeva states, “the cognitive imbalance between the adult author and the young reader makes presenting a young audience with ethical issues a highly delicate matter” (2017, p.93), but one that I think is not only necessary, but unavoidable. Duty as it is a knightly obligation, and less of a moral empathic choice, is thrust in both the reader and Kel's face when she encounters the Chamber. Her reaction to it is perhaps more of duty for duty's sake, heroic-for-the-hero, kind of behavior, as it is about her knightly duties:

Kel scowled at the iron door. ‘I’ll do my duty,’ she told the thing, shivering. Jump whined again. He peered up at her, his tail wag in consolation. ‘I’m all right, Kel reassured him, but she checked her hands for inkspots. The Chamber had made her live the thing she feared most just now, when no field knight had asked for her service. What if the Chamber knew? What if she was to spend the next four years copying out dry passages from drier records? Would she quit? Would paperwork do what other pages’ hostility had not— drive her back to Mindelan? Squires were supposed to serve and obey, no matter what. Still, the gap between combat with monsters and research in ancient files was unimaginable. Surely someone would realize Keladry of Mindelan was good for more than scribe work! This was too close to feeling sorry for herself, a useless activity. ‘Come on,’ Kel told Jump. ‘Enough brooding. Let’s get some exercise.’
(p. 6-7).

Immediately following her statement to the Chamber, the narration slips into free indirect discourse: “What if the Chamber knew? What if she was to spend the next four years copying out dry passages from drier records? Would she quit? Would paperwork do what other pages’ hostility had not—drive her back to Mindelan?” (p.7). This continuation of Kel's thoughts, in the narrator's words, further drives home the point of the inner turmoil she is experiencing. It ties back into the main challenge Kel has faced in her time training thus far: the hostility from her peers, specifically boys (as there are only boy pages). Thus far she has not let her gender become

a factor in her decisions in her training, and has shown herself to be a successful combatant in several forms of fighting. But now she worries that her gender is preventing a combat knight from selecting her as his squire. She does not mention her gender, rather only citing the other pages' "hostility" towards her. This hostility stems solely from her being a girl, and therefore the root of her fear ties back to her gender.

It is important to note that Kel herself does not mark her gender as a problem—that is left to the narrator. After Kel has left the Chamber, she falls into a gloom, and the text reads:

As the first known female page in over a century, she had struggled through four years to prove herself as good as any boy. If the last six weeks were any indication, she could have spared herself the trouble. It seemed no knight cared to take The Girl as his squire
(p.7).

"It seemed no knight cared to take The Girl as his squire": the downtrodden cast of this sentence (using the word 'cared' in a pejorative manner) reflects Kel's current mood, and referring to herself as 'The Girl,' the nickname the hostile pages foisted upon her, indicates that this sentence is Kel's own thought slipped in, to convey how sorry she feels for herself. It is unusual for the narrator to use such qualifying terms when discussing Kel—in general, the narrator in Pierce's books refrains from passing judgement on the protagonist. The two sentences before the free indirect discourse line are just as important, though they are stated more explicitly. They verbalize what Kel already knows, and would therefore feel no need to explain. The third sentence is a further demonstration of the frustration and sadness she feels about the unfairness of her treatment on the basis of her gender.

There is one person that seems the logical choice for taking Kel on as a squire: Alanna. There is no one who could better understand what it is to be a girl training to be a knight than someone who has already accomplished that, even if she were disguising her gender at the time. Kel herself brings the reader's attention to this when the text reads:

She didn't mention her bitterest disappointment. For years she had dreamed that Alanna the Lioness, the realm's sole lady knight, would take her as squire. Kel knew it was unlikely. No one would believe she had earned her rank fairly if the controversial King's Champion, who was also a mage, took Kel under her wing. In her heart, though, Kel had hoped

(p.9).

This is a point in the story where readers must hearken back to the opening of the first book, which is when they were privy to the King forbidding Alanna to interact with Kel during her training. While this forbidding is a reaction to exactly the reasons Kel spells out—some people do not believe Alanna fairly won her shield, and would therefore not believe Kel could do so under Alanna’s tutelage—Kel still hopes.

That Kel will not voice her ‘bitterest disappointment’ is more proof of her stoic outer demeanor but turbid emotions of frustration and anger. If readers have forgotten this facet of Kel’s personality, they are reminded when the text reads that “six years of life in the Yamani Islands had taught her to manage her emotions” (p.10), since the Yamani are a people who view the display of emotions as an embarrassment. In this particular context, Kel is trying to forget her frustrations by tilting at the hardest target she can put up: a circle hanging from a tree branch on a windy day. While this particular type of stress relief will more than likely be alien to readers, the emotions of anger and distress may be all too familiar. Being disappointed with something in your life that you have no control over (Kel’s inability to force a knight to choose her), you may try to distract yourself in an attempt to relax (Kel’s decision to tilt). The process that Kel goes through to relieve her distress is similar to anyone trying to de-stress: “She breathed slowly and evenly, emptying her mind. Her green-hazel eyes took on their normal, dreamy cast. Her shoulders settled; her tight muscles loosened” (p.10). These familiar motions could help to further engage readers who have never sat on a horse, let alone tried holding a lance. The embodied nature of Kel letting go of her emotions could prompt readers to empathize with her in this unfamiliar situation.

Fortunately for Kel, she is selected by a knight master to be his squire: Sir Raoul of Goldenlake and Malorie’s Peak, who may be familiar to readers as Alanna’s friend from her days as a page. Before he selects her, the narrator’s discourse informs readers that “She liked him: for one thing, he treated her just as he did boy pages” (p.11). While I stated earlier that comparing girls to boys in this way is not useful (that is, saying she is “just as good as the boys”), I posit that here Kel’s meaning goes slightly deeper than that. What she seems to mean, given through the narrator’s discourse, is that Raoul does not treat her differently because of her gender. The only other people like her—that is, pages-recently-become-squires—are currently boys. She could have just as easily said Raoul did not treat her any differently from the other squires. But while that is true for Raoul’s character—he knows firsthand from his friendship with Alanna that gender does not have any bearing on one’s ability to be a successful knight—it is important for

Kel's character that the narrator discusses her by saying 'boy pages' and not just 'pages' or 'squires'. The narrator is indicating that there is still a deeply rooted feeling in Kel that she *is* different, and it is because of her gender. It inhibits Kel from having confidence in herself, and from acting like the leader she could be—a leader that she is shown as transforming into by the fourth book as a result of a growth in her confidence and her belief in herself.

Kel's Belief in Herself

While it is an internal change in confidence that is the most important for Kel's character, it is interesting to note that her abilities and behavior eventually win over Lord Wyldon, the person who was initially dead set against any girl being allowed to train as a knight. He has tried to convince himself and others that girls have no place in combat due to their frailty of mind and body. But, in *Lady Knight*, it is he who puts Kel in charge of the sprawling refugee camp, which he calls "the hardest assignment of any knight in this district" (p.64) and gives valid reasons for doing so: Raoul "'trained [her] in matters like supply, the building and defense of a fort, and how to command. [She] helped him recruit new personnel for the Own, and he says [her] work in supply and logistics is superior'" (2001, p.66). Kel interprets this position as a confirmation of her worst fears: that Wyldon does not want her in combat. Her response is focalized through her, and described with embodied emotions:

She swallowed hard to fight off the urge to cry, then cleared her throat. A knight didn't complain. A knight did her duty even when the duty was unpleasant. Even when everyone would say Wyldon had so little confidence in her that he was tucking her away behind the front lines
(2001, p.65).

As described earlier, the embodied emotion of Kel trying not to cry has appeared before, as it is a particularly useful and universal way to convey the strength of her frustration, anger, and sadness. The narrator's discourse gives readers Kel's thoughts, and again, it is brought back to duty. When it comes to knightly duty, it seems that there are types that Kel can only consider as disappointments—namely, anything that is not combat. This type of duty has nothing to do with her moral empathy, but rather her sense of obligation. What Kel does not realize is how difficult the task is that Wyldon has set her, and even he explains that she is the only one he can trust to do the job properly—and it is due to her sense of justice, a product of her highly developed empathic concern. Wyldon says:

‘You care enough about commoners to do the task well...Anyone else will order them about, create more resentment, and turn the place into a shambles— or pursue his own amusements and leave them to get into trouble.’ Kel rubbed her face. He was right. She’d heard her peers’ opinions of commoners, had been accused of caring too much about them...A noble owed a duty to those who served him, but such duty was not glorious. Fairness and consideration were unnecessary; the affairs and pride of commoners were unimportant. The noble who worried too much about them was somehow weak. Kel knew her world. Her respect for common blood was a rarity. Her father’s grandparents were merchants. Every branch of their family save his was still merchants to the bone. Perhaps it was also because her parents, as diplomats, were so used to *seeing other points of view*, foreign or Tortallan, that they had passed their attitudes on to their children
(p.71-72, emphasis mine).

There is direct speech from Wyldon, and then focalization through Kel, giving the reader her thoughts uncensored. What is important to highlight from this passage is the phrase “seeing other points of view”—this line is given as reasoning behind why Kel, through her parents, is used to viewing the world from beyond their own perspective, and also why Kel possibly has so much empathic concern. She has been brought up to consider others—and while the text reads “foreign or Tortallan,” the reader can infer from the immediately preceding narrator’s discourse that Kel’s ability to empathize extends to those not of her rank. Being able to put herself in people’s shoes of a different socioeconomic rank than hers is a skill that clearly not many nobles share. Again, duty is brought into it, and this time a knightly duty to care for those who serve you—but here it aligns with Kel’s ethical duty, which she has developed due to her empathic concern, and is one of the true reasons why she feels like she must behave in an honorable way towards commoners. While Alanna’s empathic concern is shown as developing to right the wrongs of other women’s lives (Kara and Kourrem), and therefore through people who are similar to her, Kel’s is demonstrated through all kinds of people, regardless of gender or status (or species—when she cares for the griffin). It makes Kel the ideal person to be in charge of common people who have been forced from their homes and made to live together in a hodge-podge of classes and attitudes. While this thesis is primarily concerned with potential readers gaining the ability to develop empathic concern to change situations of gender equality, having a

character who is simultaneously doing so because she *is* a woman breaking boundaries *and* uses her empathic concern to treat others equally as well is a good way to show that to right gender wrongs does not mean you have to shut yourself off from righting other wrongs as well.

Even though Kel does not want to be in charge of Haven, the refugee camp, it is here that she comes into her own as a leader, and gains the confidence in herself that she had been missing. It is what Raoul saw in her when he took her on as his squire, and what Wyldon sees when he puts her in charge—only Kel does not think she is capable of it at first. She faces many challenges as the leader of Haven, just as Wyldon knew that she would, but she overcomes them, both through her abilities as a leader and as a fighter. She treats the refugees as if they all have the same socioeconomic status, regardless of their rank or status—ruffling many feathers along the way. The longer she is in charge of Haven, not taking any nonsense from anyone, the more she realizes she has the ability to do so well. This change happens over many passages in *Lady Knight*, and it would take too long to recount each of them here, so the following is an example of the change that has been wrought in Kel's assertiveness and confidence. A man has angrily expressed disbelief that Kel is in charge of Haven, and shouts in front of the entire camp, "I will not be governed by a, a shameless girl, a chit who's no better than she ought to be!" (p.155). Kel's response is a demonstration of her acceptance of herself as a woman, as well as a competent leader:

Though her veins hummed with anger, she made herself smile mockingly as she looked at the Tirrsmont women. 'Mistresses, have you ever noticed that when we disagree with a male— I hesitate to say 'man'— or find ourselves in a position over males, the first comment they make is always about our reputations or our monthlies?'...Kel looked at the man, who was momentarily speechless. 'If I disagree with you, should I place blame on the misworkings of your manhood? Or do I refrain from so serious an insult'— she made a face—'far more serious, of course, than your hint that I am a whore. Because my mother taught me courtesy, I only suggest that my monthlies will come long after your hair has escaped your head entirely.' That brought a laugh from most of the Tirrsmont refugees and guffaws from Kel's soldiers. Kel hardened her face. 'I am Keladry of Mindelan, lady knight and the commander of Haven,' she said icily. 'My reputation is no concern of yours' (p.155-156)

The embodied emotion of her veins humming with anger belies the smiling facial expression she puts on for the man's benefit, and is a departure from her usual Yamani expressionless. That she feels free to discuss a woman's body—their periods and sex, through the mention of prostitution—in defense of herself, and women in general, is an indication of her feeling more comfortable with her being a woman. While it is never something Kel has shied away from (at least, not since she decided to wear dresses to dinner as a page), she has never openly discussed the physicality of being a woman in front of her fellow soldiers before. Now she uses it to her defense, as a sign that she does not care if it makes others uncomfortable, and that she realizes she can use such talk to her advantage. Kel is a leader *and* a woman. She has learned how to bring lightheartedness to a potentially serious situation, and to channel her anger into a productive channel. Going from the embodied emotion of anger and frustration at this man who does not respect her simply because she is a woman in charge, to portraying sarcasm, and then hardening her face and speaking icily (both embodied emotions), show a rapid transition of Kel's feelings—but at no point has she lost sight of what is important in this situation. She gets laughs out of the refugees and guffaws out of the soldiers, indicating that the majority of the people there accept and respect her as a leader—while it may seem odd that this is gained through laughter, it is laughter in support of Kel, and a recognition of the ridiculousness at the man who has challenged her.

Kel's growth as a confident leader has another consequence as well, though not an unforeseeable one—she becomes emotionally attached to the refugees at Haven. After hard work together, they have come to respect her, and do not care that she is a woman—only that she is a good leader. It is Kel's developed empathic concern that leads her to make a decision that could be a sacrifice of all she has worked for. When a raiding party attacks Haven when she is not there, most of the refugees are killed, and the ones that are not are taken over the border to become slaves. Kel is distraught at the discovery, but her superiors do not believe it to be feasible (or necessarily worth it) to send healthy fighters away from the main fighting to go on a rescue mission. Kel is ordered to report to headquarters (called Mastiff) for further instructions. The following passage is focalized through Kel, and goes through her thought process as she debates her actions:

She was about to destroy all she had worked for to recapture her people. If she could. She was only one person...But she had to try, because she couldn't live with an obedient return to Mastiff, leaving her people to the Scanrans. She had promised to keep them safe. She had failed at that, but she must not fail to bring

them home
(p.258).

The preceding is an example of the duty that Kel's moral empathy makes her feel, as opposed to the knightly duty she should adhere to—as seen, she is going directly against that. By disobeying this order, Kel could be accused of treason, stripped of her shield, and sent to prison. The reader will potentially align with Kel's thinking here, as it is likely that they have come to care for the refugees as well, over many pages of emotional interactions and growth throughout the book. It is likely that their empathic concern will be elicited as well, because the reader will not want to see these people disappear or die without a fight. Therefore, even though it could legally be seen as the incorrect thing to do, the reader will possibly agree with Kel that going after the refugees is worth the risk of losing her shield—even though that is what they have spent the past three and a half books reading about. The narrator's discourse gives a direct line into the troubling emotions and thoughts that Kel is experiencing—guilt over disobeying orders and potentially losing her shield, but also guilt about having failed to protect the people she said she would keep safe. This guilt is wrapped up in other kinds of unstated, social emotions as well—love for her people. Bringing them home is the only way that Kel will feel redeemed, and the only way she can live with herself.

Going into enemy territory to save her refugees is a combination of Kel's empathic concern and her personal desire to go to Scanra to find Blayce (the Nothing Man) to kill him. This blend is a useful plot device, as it placates both Kel's moral duty and her own goals. It can also be seen as the fulfilling of destiny, to a certain extent, since the Chamber of the Ordeal told Kel to kill Blayce—though it giving her a task is less a foretelling of her future and more along the lines of secret orders. What the reader (and Kel) do not know at this point in the story is that the refugee children are being taken to Blayce to be used in his experiments, so Kel's two desires merge into one: killing Blayce will both save her refugees, placating her empathic concern, and it will also fulfill her promise to the Chamber. It also serves to accomplish something that Kel has not discussed or been shown to be thinking of—killing Blayce will bring her glory. While I have not discussed it much in this thesis, as it does not directly pertain to my main argument, Blayce has created mechanical killing devices that are powered by killing a child and putting their soul into it—these devices are then used to devastatingly attack the Tortallans. Killing Blayce would stop the production of these machines, and it is the only act that could potentially redeem her in the eyes of the crown, since she explicitly disobeyed orders by going into Scanra. Seeing as this would resolve the conflict readers could feel about Kel following her empathic concern by trying

to rescue the refugees, it is a convenient plot point that assuages any dissonance.

A demonstration of just how much Kel's confidence in herself has grown, and her belief in her abilities, is in the following passage:

You're going to take them all by yourself, are you? jeered part of herself. Just you, your glaive, and some ragtag dogs and birds. I'll think of something when I see what I'm up against, she told that part firmly. I can't plan with no information. Once I know more about their numbers and how far we must go to reach safety, then I'll worry about how to do it
(p.258-259).

Here are examples of direct thought, from the two different beliefs that she has—the one that thinks she can save the refugees, and the one that does not. Importantly, there are no italics or quotation marks that mark these phrases as different from regular narration; while it is not difficult to tell it is Kel thinking to herself, it is not as obvious as it has been made in the past, indicating that Kel and the potential reader have matured. It also shows that she is not rushing off to save the refugees without thinking about the practical side of it—that the word “jeered” is used in her metaphorical conversation indicates that there is a part of herself that realizes the impossible odds she is up against. But she responds to that side of herself calmly and firmly—not emotionally. It is her empathic concern that has led her to take action, but once she has made that decision, it is confidence in herself that propels her forward in her plan. She thinks to herself that she does not yet have enough information to be worried, and that she will only do that later. Though that is what she says, it is clearly not what she actually feels, as indicated from the passage I discussed before this one—she is worried that she will lose her shield, *and* she is worried about the refugees. But importantly, she is not worried about going after them, or how she will save them. Those are the things she feels confident about, because she knows they are the right things to do. It is where the title of the quartet comes from—Kel really is the protector of the small.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed several passages from *Lioness* and *Protector*, to demonstrate Alanna and Kel's development of confidence and expanding empathic concern (though, as noted, Kel's has always been more advanced than Alanna's). What research into mirror neurons and empathy suggests is possible is that reading fiction can develop moral empathy, and I

suggest that by reading Alanna and Kel's stories, potential readers have a good chance of specifically forming empathic concern that relates to them changing their behavior and ideas about gender equality for the better. Reading about Alanna and Kel lets readers experience characters who are experiencing things that the readers will never (probably) encounter—that is, training as knights and using/being near magic. What both these characters do go through that readers might be able to see reflected in the real world is unequal treatment due to gender equality disparity, and it is my proclivity to think that Alanna and Kel's experiences on the page will transfer to the reader through the vividness of the descriptions of their thoughts and embodied emotions. I now turn to the conclusion of my thesis, where I discuss the broader implications for reading these books, as well as other books that fall into the category of adolescent feminist fantasy fiction.

Conclusion

When I started this thesis, I selected *Lioness* and *Protector* because I thought they might contain examples of feminist heroes, and that these books might evoke cognitive development in readers. In the beginning, I simply knew that Alanna and Kel, and other characters like them, had the potential to leave lasting impressions on readers, and that they were girls who wanted to accomplish tasks that were barred to their gender. I thought that there was something about Alanna and Kel that could translate into real-life change in readers' opinions and actions, but I did not know *why*. I have spent the past few years researching cognitive narratology, and the primary texts themselves, to discover what about these books could impact readers to the extent that they changed their behavior and thoughts. At the start, I did not have the criteria to analyze them definitively—developing my thesis has given me the tools to do that.

Based on the work I have done in this thesis, I conclude that by reading Tamora Pierce's *Lioness* and *Protector* quartets, potential readers can increase their empathy, which can help them translate what they have read on the page into real-life coping strategies. This phenomenon could be exceptionally potent if the readers are adolescent girls, as they are the people who could be most helped by the reinforcement of the idea that gender should not be a prohibitive factor in what a person can do and what a person can be. I have shown this by analyzing and exploring several different empirical studies, and by then applying what I have learned from them to *Lioness* and *Protector* to demonstrate how Alanna and Kel are examples of feminist heroes. The purpose of this thesis was to show how characters like Alanna and Kel could affect the lives of potential readers, much like reading *Alanna* when I was a child inspired me to go out for the all-male basketball team. Based on these criteria, I conclude that these two quartets are representative of adolescent feminist fantasy fiction.

But, as I have shown in this thesis, stories like this have the potential to go much further than that, with all kinds of people. Like reading fiction was shown to affect the pupils of Gay Ivey and Peter Johnston (2013) as I discussed in my Introduction, perhaps after reading these books people might feel like they have more agency and power over their own lives. Maybe a girl who did not think she should pursue science at high level, after reading about Alanna, will stick with it. Or perhaps a big girl will, after reading Kel's story, decide she can go out for the football team, because her size is something she can use to her advantage. Or maybe a girl will realize that she can like rugby, a male-dominated sport, and also like frilly dresses and dating boys, and *that is okay*. It does not matter if what you like is "for boys" or "for girls," and you should not let any kind of gender stereotype stand in your way. And while these scenarios may seem basic, they

are actually powerful. The idea that reading stories about girls who become empowered can change how a person thinks about themselves, and how they think about the world, to the point where they do not think that gender is a prohibition—that is *profound*, even if it shows itself in what seems like minor ways. As I have shown from deciding to use the word “they” instead of “he” throughout this thesis, it is the minor things that can have the biggest impact.

In the Introduction to this thesis, I said I would look for whether or not Alanna and Kel are feminist characters according to Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997, p.6). In Chapter One, I said I would determine whether or not they are heroes—to me, a hero cannot be a hero unless she is also a feminist. Alanna and Kel are feminist heroes. As I showed in Chapter Three, they are more aware of their abilities to assert their own personalities at the end of their quartets than they were in the beginning. They have enabled themselves, just as I posit readers can do from reading these texts (Bandura, 1997, p.477).

Alanna and Kel both start their stories not truly believing in themselves. Both of them want to become knights, and both quickly become dedicated to that idea. But as soon as they arrive at the palace, they start to doubt their original confidence. This doubt happens to Alanna because she feels guilty about lying about who she is, which translates to her feeling unworthy because she is a girl. For Kel, it happens *because* everyone knows she is a girl, and it seems at times that no one wants her there. Only over the course of four books does each character, after a lot of hard work, convince herself and those around her that she is worthy as both a warrior and a woman. This triumph is conveyed to readers in a potent fashion for cognitive engagement, as each quartet is internally focalized (predominantly) through each protagonist, which gives them a direct line into Alanna and Kel’s thoughts and feelings.

Over the course of this thesis, I have developed new critical tools that can be applied to any text with a girl protagonist. The traditional girl script is a concept that has been discussed by many scholars, but I have given it a name. The tomboy girl script and the badass girl script are again terms that I have coined, which I hope will add to the conversations children’s literature scholars have about feminism in the field. These terms will hopefully lead the way to others using them to build upon them, and discover more ways in which they can be used. They are a significant contribution to children’s cognitive narratology, as they could help empirical scientists to ask the right kinds of questions when they look into how reading fiction affects the brain.

Beyond that, what I have discovered can be used as a model for any kind of text, to determine if that book is adolescent feminist fantasy fiction; if that book contains certain types of fantastic and gendered scripts (and if it disrupts them in a badass girl kind of way); if that book internally focalizes characters to give them unfettered access to their minds and emotions

(in an embodied way); and, importantly, if the book demonstrates the characters exhibiting empathic concern. If you take all of those parts and put them together, they are ways of seeing the portrayal of empowered female characters and how they can potentially empower readers in turn. I have shown narrative strategies that allow for cognitive and emotional engagement with characters, which we now know allows readers to potentially change. The main idea of this thesis is: if these characters can, you can too.

Other Empowerments: Future Scholarship

Adolescents need to read about empowered female characters in their books now, in 2018, because girlhood can still be construed as the traditional girl script, meaning that gender, even though its connotations are becoming more fluid, is still rigid in its expectations. Our world has progressed from the second and third waves of feminism, but it is not enough. Already in 2018, Trites has come out with a new book on feminism in children's literature in response to her work *Waking Sleeping Beauty* from 1997. When addressing why she would need to write another book on feminism in children's literature, twenty-one years later, she writes that in her classes in 2017, she never thought she would "still need to stave off attacks from defensive students about the 'feminist agenda'" (p.xi). She rails against students who still think that feminists are man-haters, or are people who "just want to be men" (p.ix). Even though I would say that the #MeToo movement of the past six months has successfully highlighted some of the sexual harassment women consistently face in their daily lives, I still agree with Trites when she says that there are media distortions connoted with the word feminism. Some people still do not understand that being a feminist is being a person who believes in equality for everyone, no matter their gender, sexual orientation, race, ability, socioeconomic status, or anything else. More work needs to be done to counteract this misinterpretation of feminism, and, more importantly, more work needs to be done to ensure equality between people of all genders. Educators and librarians and parents—and *readers*—need to think about these kinds of books because they have the power to have an impact on how adolescents think and act. Curricula can be developed around them because while Pierce's books are great examples of adolescent feminist fantasy fiction, a plethora of that genre is being produced today.

Though I have specifically studied Alanna and Kel's stories, these characters are in a fantasy situation, where, as I have discussed, it is easier to show agency. To reiterate, that does not mean it is completely irrelevant for realism—these characters are shown to have to *work* at what they do, as opposed to having it given to them. And although I have chosen to use fantasy to show agency, it is not the only way to empower women. The way in which I analyze my texts

can be used by other scholars to examine fantasy texts—and realistic ones.

A brief example of how that would work in a realistic book is as follows. In Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* (2017), Starr is a sixteen-year-old black American girl living in what she calls the ghetto, where she lives primarily among other black people, but she goes to school at a predominantly white prep school. While the fantasy fiction scripts obviously do not apply to this book, there are examples of the traditional girl script (Starr's friend Kenya, who predominantly talks about how she looks, how Starr looks, and about the boys she likes), the tomboy girl script (Starr rationalizing to herself why it is okay to not look feminine with her ponytail and wearing her brother's hoodie), and the badass girl script (Starr successfully playing basketball, and wearing Jordan sneakers without a thought to whether or not they are feminine or masculine). At the start of the novel, Starr does not know who she wants to be—she cannot find her voice. This information is conveyed to the readers through the internally focalized narrative (in first-person), giving unfettered access to her thoughts and emotions. The most significant example of the badass girl script in the book is how she reacts when she witnesses her friend Khalil murdered by a white police officer. She struggles with how she wants to handle it, and ultimately, her goal becomes to try to achieve some kind of justice for Khalil—a form of empathic concern. Through doing that (and working *hard* to do so, both with how to protect her privacy and keep herself safe from a gang that would think she was talking too much), Starr eventually finds her voice—and becomes a badass girl. She breaks through her behavioral scripts, and consciously decides to not let her social surroundings dictate *who she is*. In acting up for justice for Khalil, Starr is also acting for herself, and demonstrating that being a girl does not mean you have to stay quiet, or not ruffle feathers, or be the “good girl.” You can do what you think is right, even if you have to work hard, and even if it is dangerous. Even, perhaps, if it does not lead to immediate benefits—Khalil's murderer goes unpunished, complicating the narrative (and adding to a much-needed discussion on racism and the police in the USA). But Starr has pushed back against the world that tried to silence her, and that is important.

The ending of Starr's story is perhaps what delineates it most as a realistic novel instead of a fantasy one³²—in a fantasy text, there would likely be a more obvious conclusion, with the protagonist being shown to have a bigger effect on the larger world. Realistic and fantasy fiction can have different, and yet still empowering, benefits, but fantasy is especially beneficial because it can give those big, satisfying conclusions. Starr's story would not be believable if everything were wrapped up neatly at the end, because this book is a reflection of the current times in the USA. If it had been a story in a fantasy world, the protagonist could show greater agency by

³² Obviously excluding the fact that there is no magic in Starr's world.

doing more than speaking at a rally, which might allow the conclusion to be grander than a character deciding not to stay silent. Realistic fiction cannot provide the possibilities fantasy fiction can, and is therefore limited by what it represents.

My approach to examining *Lioness* and *Protector* could be used on a number of contemporary adolescent fantasy texts, to determine whether or not they are feminist books, as well as how they potentially engage readers' empathy. A short list of the most recent examples are: *The Rebel of the Sands* trilogy (2015-2018), *Everless* (Holland, 2018), *Children of Blood and Bone* (Adeyemi, 2018), *The Hazel Wood* (Albert, 2018), *The Belles* (Clayton, 2018), and *The Cruel Prince* (Black, 2018). All of these books are fantasy fiction that feature internally focalized female protagonists. These texts can be analyzed using the criteria set forth in my thesis: fantasy-specific scripts and fantasy-gendered scripts, the traditional girl script, the tomboy girl script, the badass girl script, and how emotions and empathy are demonstrated by the characters. Do they fight for social justice, whether or not it starts as a fight for that? Does she promote gender equality? Does the protagonist go from limited agency to full agency? Does she find her voice? These questions, and others raised throughout this thesis, could be used by children's literature scholars to further the conversations we have about feminism in children's literature. They can also be used in classrooms to dissect books like the ones listed, to help readers engage critically with these stories. They are already proving popular among readers, with several of the above already featuring on the New York Times bestseller list³³. There is clearly already an appeal for these books from readers, and engaging with them using the tools I have provided could provide a bridge from pleasure reading to classroom reading.

If I were to continue this project, I would start by analyzing the books just mentioned, to see specifically how (or if) the traditional girl, the tomboy girl, and the badass girl scripts have changed. What new types of scripts are there in the twenty-first century? I would also choose texts where more than one race is discussed in a meaningful way for its female characters, as I think that intersectionality is an incredibly important tool when looking at feminism. Some of Pierce's other books do this, including her most recent foray into Tortall. In fact, at the time of writing this conclusion, the #1 bestseller in young adult hardcover is *Tempests and Slaughter* (2018), Pierce's latest Tortall book. It is different from her previous books, in that it predominantly focalizes through a male character. It is so new that I have not had the chance to read it yet, but I suspect it promotes gender equality nonetheless—something Pierce has been doing for almost forty years through her fiction. That she was a groundbreaking voice in the 1980s and continues

³³ <https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/young-adult-hardcover/?module=DropDownNav&action=click®ion=navbar&contentCollection=Books&version=Childrens&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.co.uk%2F&pgtype=Reference>

to be so now is a testament to her writing capabilities, and proof that there is still an audience for her work. New readers can discover Tortall for the first time, and others (like me) get to return. More and more people will learn through her words that gender should not be a factor when it comes to what you want to do with your life. It is a fight that Pierce continues to battle, and this thesis is my own contribution.

Appendix A: Important Terms and How They Are Used

In this work I use several different terms, some of which may or may not be familiar to readers. While I define them as they come up, they have been scattered throughout this entire work. To simplify this process, I define some of these important terms here, to serve as a useful reference point, and as an emphasis of this thesis' vital terminology.

adolescence/adolescents - the period between childhood and adulthood; while the clear beginning of adolescence appears to be going through puberty, with physical changes marking children as growing, it is harder to tell when adolescence ends; cultural markers that used to denote the start of adulthood, such as choosing a career or getting married, are being pushed back or ignored; adolescence can now stretch past the teenage years, which is one reason why I do not refer to my primary texts as teenage fiction, or young adult literature

cognitive narratology – a field that merges literary criticism and neuroscience and psychology, which “focuses on how brains receive and respond to various aspects of narrative; this field thus encompasses the study of both the textual features that trigger brain responses and the brain’s perceptual processes that allow for the completion of meaning-making” (Trites, 2017, p.102); fiction provides vicarious experiences of imagined spaces and situations that can help shape our perceptions of the real world, our social others, and the self (Fong, Mullin, and Mar, 2015, p.10)

empathy – in general, understanding and resonating with another person’s feelings, while keeping them separate from your own

—*cognitive empathy/perspective taking*: when we apply reason to working out how someone else feels and can effectively put ourselves into the mind of other people (see also mind-modelling below)

—*affective empathy/affective sharing*: when we resonate with what someone else is feeling; it reflects the natural capacity for us to become affectively aroused by others’ emotions

—*moral empathy/empathic concern*: a powerful motivator for helping others, a force for social justice; corresponds to the motivation of caring for another’s welfare.

gender – typically known as the state of being female or of being male, from a cultural and

performative point of view; arguments can be made that gender is a spectrum, and more research is being done into this concept, meaning that these terms are shifting at a rapid rate; a person's biological sex and their gender do not have to be connected at all.

mind-modeling (theory of mind) – (see also cognitive empathy above) the ability for a person to attribute mental processes to another person. It is a natural ability that appears at around three or four years of age, but must be trained for it to fully mature (see Blakemore and Frith, 2006); mind-modelling is useful in literary theory because it deals with representations of people—much like fiction deals with representations of people (namely, characters); Peter Stockwell and Michaela Mahlberg explain mind-modelling by saying that the same sort of assumptions we make about other people are the same kind of assumptions readers make about characters

potential reader (as opposed to the **implied reader**) – real flesh and blood readers that can be affected by reading books. It is an abstract concept, but it is a concept that is imperative for this thesis. I am extrapolating what possible outcomes exist for factual people. Similar but not identical, the **implied reader** is something that exists within the text, and is constructed by that text.

schema (plural *schemata*) – basic building block of intelligent behavior (Piaget, 1952); pre-existing structures that direct perceptual activity and are modified as it occurs (Neisser, 1976, p.14); 'index cards' filed in the brain telling an individual how to react to incoming stimuli or information (Wadsworth, 2004); mental structures of preconceived ideas; "Whenever there is any order or regularity of behaviour, a particular response is possible only because it is related to other similar responses which have been serially organised, yet which operate, not simply as individual members coming one after another, but as a unitary mass" (Bartlett, 1967, p.201); Perry Nodelman states that "the placing of objects into preestablished groupings or types or categories is the very thing that allows understanding of how objects are separate and distinct, the foreground to what then becomes their background. Without a perception of similarities to preestablished categories, distinctness itself is literally unthinkable" (2008, p.108)

script - stored memories of ordinary events that we do not need to consciously think about; once readers recognize a script, they form expectations of what will follow, based on what has happened previously in the same situation (Stephens, 2011, p.15); an example of a script is when we see an old crone hand a young girl an apple, we expect that the girl will take a bite of it and fall ill because the apple is poisoned; we then expect the old crone to be revealed as the evil stepmother and for a handsome prince to save

the girl; this script includes the schemata of the evil stepmother, and the poisoned apple, two constructs which our brains connote with fairytales

sex – a biological determination of female or male, based on genetics and sex-organs; does not need to be related to a person's gender

Appendix B: Summaries

The following are summaries of Tamora Pierce's quartets used in this thesis.

The Song of the Lioness

Alanna: The First Adventure

Ten-year-old Alanna, who aspires to be a knight even though she is a girl, disguises herself as a boy to become a royal page, and learns many hard lessons along her chosen path. She works harder than she believed herself capable of; makes lifelong friends (prominent among them is Prince Jonathan and George, the King of Thieves); defeats Ralon, a bully who makes her life miserable; meets Duke Roger, who becomes her bitter enemy; and battles and conquers the magical people called the Ysandir with Jonathan, with her sex being revealed in the process.

In the Hand of the Goddess

Pursuing her desire to be a knight, Alanna learns many things in her role as squire to Prince Jonathan. She learns what it means to be a girl, both in wearing dresses and falling in love (and having sex) with Jonathan. She fights in battle for the first time in the war with Tortall's enemy, the Tusaine, where she is captured for a short period of time. She passes the Ordeal of Knighthood, successfully becoming a knight of Tortall. Immediately after accomplishing this, she challenges Duke Roger, saying that he has conspired to kill the royal family so he can be king. In the ensuing duel, he cuts through her breastband and reveals to court that she is a female. She kills Duke Roger, thus saving the royal family. Though she is not punished for her disguise for eight years, at the end of the book she leaves in a self-imposed exile.

The Woman Who Rides Like a Man

On her first tour as a knight errant, Alanna assumes a position of influence with a fierce desert people known as the Bazhir (with the tribe of the Bloody Hawk), makes some changes in the role of women in the society, and continues her own emotional development. She becomes shaman to the Bloody Hawk tribe, and trains two female apprentices to take her place. Jonathan asks her to marry him, and her refusing him causes them to fall out. She finds solace in the arms of George, her longtime friend who has loved her for years. The book ends with her attempting to rescue a woman mage from being burned at the stake by her village—the mage dies later in Alanna's care, but beforehand gives Alanna a map to the Dominion Jewel, which leads to Alanna's next adventure.

Lioness Rampant

Alanna continues to create her own life as a female warrior when she and new companions journey to the Roof of the World seeking the powerful Dominion Jewel. She meets Liam Ironarm, a renowned warrior known as the Shang Dragon, and they begin a romantic relationship. Also introduced are Thayet and Buri, two women who become important in her life. At the same time, Thom, her twin, has raised Duke Roger from the dead. When Alanna returns to the palace for the first time since winning her shield, she and all of her friends must fight to defeat Roger and his cronies before they bring down all of Tortall.

Protector of the Small

First Test

Roughly twenty years after Alanna's story ends, ten-year-old Keladry of Mindelan, daughter of nobles, wants to train as a knight. It is now legal for girls to do so openly, but the training master, Lord Wyldon, will only submit to accepting her if she passes a probationary year of training. While railing against the unfairness of this, Kel goes to the palace, where she faces bullies, cruel pranks, and the physical hardship of training as a warrior. She also makes friends, both human and sparrow, and is instrumental in hunting a group of immortals called spidrens (giant spiders with human heads and pointed teeth). She successfully completes the probationary year.

Page

Keladry of Mindelan continues her training as a page with the aid of a new maid (Lalasa), the support of her friends, interference from some other pages, and some serious, even dangerous opposition. She successfully leads a group of pages in defeating a surprise attack from bandits, earning the respect of many. The day of her examination to qualify as a squire, Lalasa is kidnapped, forcing her to miss the exams to search for her. This is seen as an act of chivalry and responsibility, so Kel is allowed to take the exam the next day. She passes, successfully becoming a squire.

Squire

Kel is chosen by the legendary Lord Raoul (first seen in *The Song of the Lioness* as Alanna's friend and page-mate), commander of the Kings Own, to be his squire, and the conservatives of the realm hardly think she is up to the job. They tackle problems around the realm, though the main focus is the Progress of the monarchs throughout the kingdom. Kel earns respect and admiration among the men, as well as the affection of a fellow squire (Cleon). She also saves and takes care of a baby griffin, despite knowing that if the baby's parents find her with the baby (or just with its scent on her), they will kill her for kidnapping their young (though when the parents eventually do find them, Daine successfully communicates that it was not Kel that stole the baby, and the parents then reward Kel instead of killing her).

Lady Knight

When she became a knight, eighteen-year-old Kel hoped to be given a combat post in Tortall's war with Scanra, but instead she finds herself named commander of an outpost of refugees (called Haven). (Simultaneously, the Chamber of the Ordeal told her to kill the Nothing Man (Blayce), a mage who is killing children and using their souls to power giant mechanical "killing devices" that are laying waste to the Tortallan army.) Once she has established herself as a competent and confident leader, and has earned the respect of the refugees and soldiers alike, the Scanran army attacks Haven while she is away. They kill several people, and kidnap the rest. Kel feels guilty about being away during the attack, and that she could not save the people she sword she would protect. where she must face the unnatural forces of the evil Blayce (known as the Nothing Man).

Appendix C: Important Characters

The Song of the Lioness

Alanna of Trebond – The protagonist of the series: a noble-born, stubborn tomboy with bright, violet eyes and a wicked temper, but capable of earning loyalty. She is the first female knight in centuries in the land of Tortall, after pretending to be her brother, Thom, throughout her training.

Thom – Alanna's twin brother, who detests fighting and prefers magic; he goes to the City of the Gods to learn how to be a powerful mage.

Coram Smythesson – Alanna's first teacher of fighting and hunting at Trebond, he accompanies her to the capital as her manservant; one of the few who knows her true sex.

Prince Jonathan of Conté (later King Jonathan) – At the beginning of Alanna's story, Jonathan is thirteen years old and the heir to the throne of Tortall. He is an older page when Alanna first arrives at the palace. He befriends Alanna, eventually choosing her as his squire when he becomes a knight. Their relationship turns romantic. They eventually break up, leading to emotional uproar in Alanna's life, though she never loses sight of Jon as her sovereign. He becomes king of Tortall in Alanna's fourth book, which is when he also meets and marries Thayet.

George – When Alanna meets George when she first arrives at the palace, he is King of Thieves in Tortall. He is the first person she reveals her true sex to after she arrives at the palace.

Mistress Eleni Cooper – George's mother, a healing woman; she is the person George takes to when Alanna urgently finds him in the first book to ask for a healing woman (needed because her period has started, and she does not know what is happening to herself). Later she becomes a friend and mentor, and eventually marries Myles of Olau.

Gary (Gareth the Younger of Naxen) – One of Jonathan's and Alanna's friends and Jonathan's cousin. Easygoing and funny, with a sharp tongue and sharper mind, he acts as her sponsor when she arrives.

Raoul of Goldenlake – A fellow-student of Jonathan and Gary's; Alanna's friend; large, taciturn, and shy.

Alex of Tirragen – A fellow-student of Alanna's; at first Alanna's friend, but later her rival. Slain by her in the final book.

Sir Myles of Olau – A middle-aged knight who teaches the pages and squires at the palace about history and chivalry. He takes a particular liking to Alanna, and is the first person to guess that she is actually a girl and not a boy (this happens when she heals Jonathan during the Sweating Sickness and she channels to Mother Goddess, speaking in a grown woman's voice). As a page and a squire, Myles treats Alanna fairly and fondly, inviting her to his estates (where she finds her sword, Lightning). In the third book, Myles asks Alanna if she will let him adopt her into his family—she agrees, officially becoming Alanna of Trebond and Olau. He eventually marries Eleni Cooper.

Duke Gareth (the Elder) – The man who oversees the training of the pages and squires, whom Alanna respects and regards fondly. He is Gary's father.

Ralon of Malven – One of the pages who bullies Alanna when she arrives; she eventually beats him in a fight and he leaves the palace in furious disgrace. He later became involved with the Court of the Rogue under the name 'Claw,' and was eventually slain by George Cooper.

Duke Roger of Conté – Jonathan's adult cousin, a powerful magician and second in line for the throne; Alanna mistrusts him but initially has no evidence to support her suspicions; Jonathan trusts him completely. He is suspected by her in the first book, killed by her in the second, absent from the third (because he's dead), and brought back to life by Thom in the fourth book, where he is again slain by Alanna.

Thayet jian Wilima (Later Queen Thayet the Peerless or Thayet of Conté) – An exiled Saren princess befriended by Alanna; later married to Jonathan; a deft horsewoman and archer. Graceful, intelligent, confident, and compassionate.

Buriram "Buri" Tourakom – Thayet's fiercely loyal bodyguard, an adolescent girl of the K'miri horse tribes in Saren.

Liam Ironarm – A martial-arts champion, called the 'Dragon of Shang,' who attaches himself to Alanna, alternately as paramour and instructor. Slain by her enemies defending the Tortallan crown.

Protector of the Small

Keladry "Kel" of Mindelan – The protagonist of the series, a young noble striving to become the first official Lady Knight in Tortall in over 100 years. She is the youngest daughter of Piers and Ilane of Mindelan, and has several older siblings. She spent six years of her childhood in the Yamani Islands, where her father, a Tortallan diplomat, negotiated a peace treaty between the two countries. As a result, Kel adopted several Yamani customs, which she continued to practice after returning to Tortall.

Ilane of Mindelan – Kel's mother; when she, Kel, and Kel's father lived on the Yamani islands, Ilane won respect of the emperor by defending important magical scrolls from bandits, using only a glaive and her wits. She is an inspiration for Kel.

Wyldon of Cavall – Lord Wyldon, nicknamed "the Stump" by Neal, is the stiff, conservative training master when Kel tries for knighthood, and is the one to demand a year of probation for her, because she is a girl.

Nealan "Neal" of Queenscove – Kel's first friend and year-mate in the training program. He is the son of Duke Baird of Queenscove, the chief of the palace healers. Neal has got a very strong healing Gift, which, like his father's, is emerald green. Neal is several years older than his year mates, since he initially studied healing at the university of Corus before deciding to carry on the family tradition of always having a Queenscove knight in royal service.

Joren of Stone Mountain – One of the pages who is a ringleader amongst the bullies; an enemy of Kel, and tries to drive her out. He has a group of followers who are against women being knights. He bullies first-pages, claiming that it is making them obedient.

Lord Raoul Goldenlake, Commander of the King's Own – The same Raoul from *The Song of the Lioness*; now the commander of the King's Own, a fighting unit usually tasked with the protection of the king, but Raoul has expanded it to function like a protective police force throughout Tortall. Although he was accused of only taking her because Alanna asked him to, Raoul was genuinely interested in Kel's skills, particularly her knowledge of the Yamani Empire. He treated Kel well and became very fond and supportive of her. He taught her various skills, including command, logistics and supplies, and tilting.

Dom – is a sergeant in Third Company of the King's Own and the cousin of Nealan of Queenscove, whom he calls Meathead. He is one of Kel's first friends in the King's Own. At the end of Lady Knight it is hinted that Kel and Dom may develop a romantic relationship.

Blayce the Gallan (the Nothing Man) – a powerful mage. Kel also referred to him as The Nothing Man because his appearance was not imposing, and he wreaked so much havoc. She first saw him in a vision in the Chamber of the Ordeal during her Ordeal of Knighthood. He is primarily a necromancer, which he achieves through infanticide.

Cleon – He was a page and squire at the same time as Keladry of Mindelan, although he is two years older than she is, thus he was a third-year when Kel began her probationary year. He developed a strong attachment to her, which resulted in love.

Sparrows – Because of the presence of Daine the Wildmage, a flock of sparrows by Kel's window became incredibly intelligent, almost like humans. The flock followed Kel around, and was able to lead Third Company of the King's Own to a spidren nest. The flock accompanied Kel on many of her outdoor adventures, including the time when Kel and her group were chased by bandits during the summer camp. Kel sent the sparrows for help. The flock were also useful in fight situations, as their beaks and claws were sharp and able to pierce through flesh.

Jump – A dog who was raised at the Royal Palace around Daine the Wildmage, making him far more intelligent than animals who hadn't spent their lives around her.

Veralidaine "Daine" Sarsasri – She is known as the Wildmage as there is currently no other possessor of wild magic with such power. Daine also taught the pages in magic. Later helped Kel with her horse Peachblossom, convincing him to behave better and in turn telling Kel not to use the spurs on him. A year later Daine treated the dog Kel had found, Jump. Kel had asked her to keep Jump, but Daine told her that she wouldn't force him and that he probably wouldn't stay with her, which proved to be true.

Peachblossom – A gelding and heavy warhorse of Keladry. He has a mind of his own and likes neither the company of other horses nor that of humans. There are only a handful of people for whom he behaves, of whom Kel becomes one.

Lalasa Isran – A maid to Keladry, and niece to Gower Isran. Joren hired two thugs to kidnap her, and this made Kel face her fear of heights and overcome them.

Buriram “Buri” *Tourakom* – The same character from *The Song of the Lioness*; now Commander of the Queen’s Riders, and Raoul’s love interest

Tobeis “Tobe” *Boon* – An orphan of unknown parentage, taken on by Kel as a servant after she becomes a knight—done so because she sees how horribly his current master treats him, so she rescues him.

Fanche Weir – A Tortallan commoner who lived as a refugee at Haven during the Scanran War, was a member of the rescue party that Keladry of Mindelan led, and then became headwoman of New Hope.

The Chamber of the Ordeal – A magical entity. It gives the Ordeal of Knighthood, and, more rarely, the Ordeal of Kings. Prospective knights must go through the Ordeal to become a knight. The Chamber itself is both an entity and a room. The exact nature of the relationship between the ‘Chamber’ and the chamber is not explained in the first three series, *The Song of the Lioness*, *The Immortals*, or *Protector of the Small*. The Chamber is not a true ‘god,’ in the way that the Goddess is. It is a being of balance, existing to ensure that mortals, the divine, and what lay between remain in sync. It communicates with Kel in a way it does not do with any other by sending her visions—before her knighthood, it sends her visions of her greatest fears, and after she becomes a knight, it sends her visions of tasks she must accomplish (namely, killing Blayce).

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