If self-publishing represents a vital, resistive addition to the literary field due to its democratisation of the publishing process and, crucially, the manner in which it empowers new authorial voices and character representation, what are the implications for high fantasy authors and the publishing industry?

PhD Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis explores the persuasive effects of literature both personally and socially, via the codification of character archetypes in fiction (exemplified here in high fantasy fiction). This thesis firstly explores the manner in which literature can affect individuals' beliefs, and how certain representations of groups (in this case, women) can be inherited and maintained through genre norms, themselves maintained through traditional publishing models and financial concerns. Next, this thesis offers an analysis of self-published novels' responses to the archetypal representations of women within high fantasy, as exemplified in two popular high fantasy works, The Lord of the Rings *and* A Game of Thrones*, and four self-published novels (including the author's own). It then focuses on whether self-publishing allows for the highlighted genre norms to be more easily subverted due to the nature of the new publishing model. It concludes with a discussion on the possibility of a new form of literary understanding, termed by the author 'multiliteraryism'. Building on debates in the field of world literature and multilingualism, multiliteraryism, it is suggested, can offer a new method of understanding multiple voices and representations, absent any denigration in terms of the means of publication.*

Contents

A personal preface

In writing this thesis, I am trying to create something which is unbound by subject specificity. This is a research is, in degrees: a creative writing piece, an analysis of the still disenfranchised areas of self-publishing, a feminist argument, a social commentary, a speculation on the future of writing and authorship, a philosophical discussion on the nature of narrative, and, finally, an analysis of a genre I adore but find problematic, high fantasy fiction.

As is immediately apparent, not only is this thesis very much couched within the multidisciplinary but so, too, am I. My undergraduate degree is in Drama, Theatre and Television, my Masters in Applied Linguistics; my career is a university lecturer, teaching academic literacy. I have also founded a theatre-in-education company, acted on stage and in radio, and managed a comic book shop. I have self-published two novels and am currently (2018) working on two more. However, beyond a personal engagement in literature that has lasted a lifetime, and a critical mind that has been trained through an adulthood spent in academia, I have never formally studied English Literature. What I am writing comes not only from my own academic desire to know more about the subject but also from a very personal space. The thesis itself will lay out the theoretical standpoint of my research, but will not speak to my personal wish to explore this area. I would like to address the latter here.

I was functionally illiterate until I was about ten or eleven years old. I say 'functionally' because although I found reading and writing extremely difficult, I nevertheless was surrounded by words and stories. My parents met in the theatre, and both had a passion for the world of make-believe and fiction, something which they instilled in me. So, while I could not read myself, my mother and father would read to me for hours, acting out scenes in strange voices, painting pictures in my imagination of the worlds they were lifting from the page. And while the books they read to me were varied, by far, the majority were fantasy. One of my earliest memories is of my mother, Nina, reading '*The Hobbit*' and '*The Chronicles of Narnia*' to me. The first book I ever read by myself was '*Alice through the Looking Glass'*, which I devoured to the point where I could recite whole sections from memory, much to the amusement (and, occasionally, derision) of my schoolmates.

I was hooked.

As the years passed, my love of fantasy and make-believe grew. I went to university and studied a BA in Drama, Theatre and Television. However, it transpired that the degree was less about working in the theatre and film industry and more about what the arts could do to affect society. Led by Dr Michael Balfour and David Pammenter, themselves leading theorists on the subject of theatre and art as emancipatory mechanisms, it was on this degree that I learnt about the works of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, of art as social justice and political resistance, and the dangers of propaganda (specifically media narratives) to control and shape ideologies and social structures. Always politically minded, I had, however, not until this point joined the dots between social awareness and art. My life changed as a result of this degree. I was galvanised. At twenty, I co-created a theatre-in-education company and worked in prisons and young offenders institutes, using theatre and story-telling as a means to help the inmates engage with and explore the events that had led their 'characters' to commit crimes. It was also at this point that I became a feminist. I became passionately engaged in the principles of disenfranchisement, the concept of multi-identities theory, and of dialogical learning. Still, in love with fantasy, I wrote my undergraduate thesis on the eudemonic philosophy of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

In my early twenties, I volunteered to teach in a township in Africa. While I was there, I became aware of the importance of the English language and arguments surrounding linguistic power – arguments which grounded a lot of my early thinking in terms of self-publication and led to the idea of 'multiliteraryism', a (rather cumbersome) phrase I have devised specifically to invoke the work being done in applied linguistics to legitimate and re-enfranchise non-English languages which have been marginalised due to linguistic imperialism. Being able to speak, read and write in English is a way to escape poverty – however, it also means that other languages, and the cultures and histories they communicate, are being eroded or, in too many cases, lost completely. In the townships I volunteered at, films and books were in English. Whether this was as a result of donations, or simply because films and books were not written in the local languages, I don't know – though linguistic imperialism would suggest the latter. I returned to the UK and trained as an English as a Foreign Language teacher. I worked with people from all over the world, and the more time I spent with them, the more I realised how much power the English language exerted. I began to read books on the spread of English and the subject of linguistic imperialism. I learned about cultural capital, and social- and psycholinguistics, about the politics of accent and vocabulary, and feminist theories of language dominance. I began my

MA in Applied Linguistics three years after first qualifying as an ELF teacher, and one year after achieving my advanced teaching certificate.

And all the way through this long process to my current ideological position regarding the importance of multiple voices and multiple representations, which underpins this work, I reflected on the fantasy books I adored. I began to question the roles and characterisations that were presented within these books, the Eurocentric and masculine positionality that pervaded so many of my favourite stories. And, for a time, I fell out of love with fantasy. I was wholly disenchanted, my identity as both a feminist and a dialogical practitioner at odds with the tropes of the genre. How can it be, I asked myself, that a genre that allows dragons, vampires, magic and fairies, baulks at the idea of a woman being anything more than a reward for the hero? Fantasy is a genre that is open to intertextuality and experimentation, and so implies a readership that is comfortable with the same, and yet this was not what I was, in the majority, seeing.

When looking at the treatment of women across a number of my favourite fantasy titles, I couldn't help noticing that certain female character tropes remained, most of which saw the woman as a plot device rather than as a character with depth and agency. Even in more modern fantasy works, the female characters were often defined in relation to one of these elements, or were over-corrected to the point where they became a paragon of sorts: intelligent and worthy, certainly, but also in this role incapable of human error, of making the tough, morally ambiguous choices and facing the personal battles that made the male heroes so fascinating and engaging. For example, in the '*Song of Ice and Fire'* series by George R. R. Martin, two female characters, Arya and Brienne, must play boys in order to be violent, to be willful, to be independent and to have a level of agency (points that I return to in detail in the thesis). Not only this, but I began to realise that the women in fantasy were often kept separate from other women. While it was common to have groups of friends embark on a quest, more often than not these groups were wholly compiled of men, or where a woman was present, she was alone amongst these men (the so-called 'Smurfette Effect'). Another grand tradition of fantasy, that of the student and their mentor, was also often refused to women. The protagonist, setting off on the hero's journey, was male, and so was his teacher. While it is, of course, the case that not all fantasy portrays women in such a way, it still appeared that many did – especially within the sub-genre of *high fantasy*, arguably the most well-recognised sub-genre as it is this that includes the staples of magic, dragons, witches, wizard, barbarians and the like. As a result, I began to feel that women in high

fantasy were often denied certain outcomes, were limited in their abilities and/or agencies, or were confined to certain behaviour and stereotypes. I noticed that women were often not included as incidental, background characters, but were placed within defined physical types and social status/roles.

It was around this time (2012) that self-publishing began to gather steam. And so, in 2013, I began to write my own fantasy novel, '*The Fairy's Tale*', which I self-published under a pseudonym on Amazon in 2015. Taking advantage of the freedom self-publishing afforded me, I deliberately set out to counter a lot of the issues I perceived in traditionally published fantasy fiction. I had a predominantly female cast and included female characters in background scenes. I had women who were neither bad nor good but were simply people (or, rather elves, fairies, imps *and* people) trying to find their way through the problems I, as the author, was causing them. There was no 'romance'/'reward' role for my females, no long, non-story relevant descriptions of their beauty or ugliness; but there were fellowships, battles with monsters, and *heroines*' journeys. And it is here that I came upon my research question: is it possible that in the world of self-publishing something revolutionary was happening? Could it be that here, previously disenfranchised (character) voices were speaking up? Could it be that female characters in self-published fiction were moving towards their own literary emancipation?

Thus, the concept for this thesis was born.

However, as I began to research the literary importance of representation, I found – as most researchers often do – that the field was significantly more complex than I had at first considered. Specifically, as I read more and began joining the dots, it became very clear that literature itself had a unique and extremely powerful influence on the human mind. Narrative, I learned, has the power to both change the way groups are treated within wider society but also the way that individuals perceive them and the beliefs that they carry. Fiction can, and does, affect the way we think and understand the world. Given the at times appalling way that women are presented in high fantasy fiction, these discoveries alarmed me in no small amount – but they also highlighted for me the importance of my study and the great potential that self-publication has not only in helping multiple voices be heard but also, possibly, hopefully, challenging these harmful representations and in so doing, changing the social and psychological perceptions of the same via narrative influence.

And so, I return to the opening statement of this preface: that this thesis is a creative writing piece, an analysis of the power and potential of self-publishing, a feminist argument, a social commentary, a speculation on the future of writing and authorship, a philosophical discussion on the nature of narrative, and, finally, an analysis of high fantasy fiction. In order to achieve this, you will have to allow me, firstly, to take you on the same journey of discovery I undertook into the hugely important and at times deeply worrying influence that fiction has on human beings and society (imagine, if you like, that we both are hobbits off on an adventure into the unknown). Understanding this ground-work is vitally important to understanding, later, the potential that self-publishing has to offer, and why it is so important that it is recognised and (re-)enfranchised within the literary field. Once this journey has been completed, and the importance on narrative on the human mind understood, we will then look specifically at works of high fantasy fiction, comparing their representations of female characters, before concluding on a reflection of the self-publishing industry and those who choose to engage with it. Finally, I will return to that idea of multiliteraryism, in which I aim to draw together all the argumentative threads.

This paper has been, really, the work of my entire life. All the experiences I have had have led to the point where I was ready and able to consider these questions and, hopefully, to be able to offer something new, insightful and motivational to the debate around representation, literature, and self-publication.

1. Introduction

Stories help to make us what we are. This may seem to be something of a frivolous statement, a hopelessly romantic aggrandisement and generalisation, and yet it is true. By taking a cross-disciplinary approach, I will draw on elements of narrative theory, philosophy, psychology, linguistics, sociology, feminist theory and media theory to explore how fiction attracts us, creates us, and binds us. As I will detail, fiction has been and remains a vital part of what it means to be human, from a philosophical, social and cognitive stand-point, and thus the way that certain groups are presented within fiction is important. As I aim to show, fiction needs to have wide and varied representations of people, and it is my hypothesis that the new direct-to-reader model provided by self-publication is breaking away from genre-normative 'tropes', which are "a narrative device representing a sort of cognitive short-cut, a symbol of the widely accepted shared meaning that limits the need for further explanation or exposition" (Shepherd, 2013, p. 8). In this thesis, I will be looking specifically at how women have been traditionally represented within the narrative genre of 'high fantasy' fiction, their tropes, and in what ways these tropes are being adapted, subverted and/or maintained in self-publication. Self-publication is a method of publication that has grown in legitimacy over recent years (Baverstock, 2012; Hinke, 2001), and is also now much easier for authors to access via online publication tools and print-on-demand services.

High fantasy is a genre of fantasy which is "set in Otherworlds, specifically Secondary Worlds, and which deal[s] with matters affecting the destiny of those worlds" (Clute & Grant, 1997, p. 465), with magic being a central factor in these secondary worlds. High fantasy is rooted in fairy tales and medieval romance, and I take the liberty of assuming that readers are familiar with fairy tales and thus do not require a definition; however, I will state now that the fairy tale roots under examination are Western-European fairy tales, most notably those made famous by the Grimm Brothers. Medieval romance is not romantic literature as we would understand the term today, but rather refers to stories of quests, knights and kings, dragons and fair maidens – Arthurian-type legends, drawing on myth and magic, and couched in feudalistic, male-dominated societies. Thus, within high fantasy, women have traditionally had problematic portrayals,

resulting from the "chivalric standards and gender roles of medieval times" (Jones, 2012, p. 14) so common to the medieval romance/fairy tale motifs that have come to codify the genre (Kuznets, 1985; Mendlesohn, 2008; Williamson, 2015).

The question that this thesis seeks to explore is whether these representations are being maintained in new forms of publication, absent the commercial drive that is an integral part of the traditional publishing industry. Specifically, I will look at the way female characters are presented in traditionally published high fantasy, and then explore how – or, indeed, if – self-publication is subverting these representations. Self-published authors reach their readers directly, without engaging in the gatekeeping (and, potentially, genre-norm enforcing) processes of traditional publication. It is, therefore, my hope to argue here that self-published works are showcasing new representations of women, as a result of the freedom provided by their direct-to-reader model; to spark debate and to help widen the field of academic interest in these new models of storytelling; and finally, to argue for more varied representations of women within fantasy fiction, and a greater legitimacy for self-publication. Moreover, while I am focusing on female representation, I would like to note that much of the theory and argumentation made here could be applied to other traditionally marginally/poorly/stereotypically represented groups in fantasy and other fictional genres, such as members of the LGBT+ community, people of colour, or physically or neurologically diverse people (to name a few examples). It is beyond my scope to delve into such a diverse range of peoples, and I acknowledge that my working definitions of 'women' and 'female' are by necessity generalised around a cisgender view of these identities. This is due in part in response to the source material and in part because I do not have space here to work towards more complex and nuanced definitions, and to try to do so haphazardly would, arguably, cause harm to those communities. Regarding female representation, high fantasy is a rich genre to delve into. This is not only because of its ubiquity within popular culture but also because of its aforementioned roots in fairy tales and medieval romance, themselves archetypal genres that are intrinsically linked with the setting of cultural norms, especially as regards women (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003).

Fundamentally, at the heart of this thesis is the question of representation in narrative, why it matters, and that multiple voices and approaches to genre writing should be encouraged.

1.1 A Focus on Narrative

The ability to create narratives, to story our experiences, served initially as an evolutionary advantage (Sugiyama, 2001; Mellmann, 2012; Gottschall, 2013), helping us to pass on knowledge in a manner that was both memorable and experientially based (Zillmann, 2002). As we evolved, so did our use of stories, and narratives came to serve another distinct function: to socialise us. Stories provide a way to gain experience without having to physically undergo the situations presented in narrative[1], to develop our empathy and understanding of others, and to explore our identities. Understanding that identities are fluid and multiple (Byrd-Clark, 2009; Bruner, 1997), stories provide a space in which to practice, to experience different behaviours and reactions, and to learn how social interactions work or fail to work. Human beings are social creatures, and the ability to function within a variety of social spaces is imperative for survival; in fact, "the more complex a social structure in a species, the more important it is to observe and remember also other group members' conduct and experiences" (Mellmann, 2012, p. 35). Stories thus became guiding lights, helping us to navigate our way through social interactions, our identities, and positionalities (Gottschall, 2013). This is because, much like its evolutionary base, narrative provides a way to observe, remember, and learn social behaviours without the cost of trial and error.

Transportation theory (Gerrig, 1993) and theory of mind play important roles in our ability to learn from stories. As Cruikshank (1998, p. 2; original emphasis) states, "narratives are used to *establish* such connections – between past and future, between people and place, among people whose opinions diverge." Thus, as understanding changes so do stories, and, as is the case proposed here, as stories change, so does understanding. Recent research has begun to uncover the persuasive effect narrative can have on beliefs, although this still remains something of an emerging field (Appel, 2008). Prentice et al. (1997), Green & Brock (2000), Strange & Leung (1999), Strange (2002), Appelbaum et al. (2003), Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter (2006), Appel & Ritcher (2007), Appel (2008), Sebby & Johnson (2013) and Strömwall et al. (2013) have all conducted research showing that fiction can alter readers' real-world beliefs. When representation in fiction is considered in this light, the importance of a varied and balanced portrayal of a certain group, such as women, becomes increasingly urgent. In the same way that

[1] Although in terms of undergoing those experiences *psychologically*, this is a point that will be addressed frequently throughout.

fiction provides readers with 'experience' which they can then utilise in their own lives and identities, it can change views and beliefs, implicitly creating social norms.

The philosopher Bourdieu (2000; 1993) agued two concepts which are of importance in understanding how social and cultural norms can occur. The first is the relationship between *field(s)* and *habitus*, and the second the concept of *capital*. Looking first at the relationship between field and habitus, field refers to society, both as a whole and also as smaller, individual domains within society. For example, one lives in a national society, with its dominant rules, structures, and powers, but one also exists in sub-societies (or sub-fields), such as one's work environment or friendship groups, or fields that relate to political alignment, sexuality, race, or gender (identity). Novels and narratives, therefore, exist within the dominant field of society, but also within the subfield of 'art' or 'literature'. Looking within this, other subfields can be found. The 'publishing' field, which encompasses publishing houses and also those people who help to maintain the field, such as critics, booksellers, advertisers, and awarding bodies (e.g. the Man Booker Prize panel), and then also the 'author' field, encompassing authors, the writers or creators. This brings us on to the concept of habitus. To understand the rules of the field, one uses habitus, one's knowledge of the systems in place within that field which dictate behaviour (actual and expected), power relations, and status. Habitus, therefore, can be seen as the understanding (and often the acceptance) of the 'state of things' within the field. One's habitus is a culturally based framework, reflecting the power dynamics of the field, and often one is unreflective of it, following the rules automatically (Bourdieu, 2000); it is the subtle driving force behind the reasoning that 'things are what they are'. Habitus, therefore, is sub- or unconscious: the cultural and sociologically defined air that we breathe, and, like the air, it often goes unnoticed.

As such, Bourdieu argues that as a result of historical and cultural factors, we are all implicated in and connected to the culture (the field) we grew up in, and this connection shapes what we think and say, and how we interact with and judge others. Habitus, according to Bourdieu, is maintained through *doxa*, which is the actioning of the rules – the behaviour that is displayed and enacted. For example, there may be a field (a society) with the habitus (the culturally coded belief) that women should not drive. This habitus manifests itself in various ways: the things people say and think regarding women drivers; representations of women drivers in media and art, advertising, toys, etiquette… all these things are the enacted doxa of the

habitus of that field. In the field of literature, these dynamics are played out in the relationship between the publishing field and the author field, a relationship defined by the capital each field holds.

Capital is the second of Bourdieu's theories that is of importance; specifically, *cultural* and *social capital*. Cultural capital refers to certain 'assets' that a person may have, either by birth or gained through life, that promote their social standing or mobility within their field(s). Capital, therefore, forms part of the habitus of the field. Cultural capital can be gained through a plethora of desirable traits and aspects, such as education, accent, attractiveness, intellect, sex/gender, sexuality, race, as well as attitude and knowledge[2]. Social capital is closely aligned with cultural capital, in that it refers to one's group memberships, networks, and influence within and provided by those communities (fields). As such, field(s), habitus and capital enjoy a dynamic and often complex, interconnected and self-perpetuating relationship. For example, a literary agent has power (capital) because they are in a position to control which authors are accepted into the field of 'literature'. However, authors have capital as artists, the creators of the works that help to define the literary field, as well, usually, cultural capital in the larger field of society. Although, as Bourdieu (1993, pp. 30, original emphasis) notes, authors are often reliant on members of the literary field to give their work capital: "the literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces." As such, both[3] agents and authors are aware of this dynamic as a result of their habitus, their understanding of the rules of the systems. This understanding of capital is then enacted (realised) through doxa, in the way the agent and the author relate to and behave with, each other. In this thesis, I will refer to 'capital' as both cultural and social capital, unless otherwise specifically stated. Regarding fiction, I suggest that characters are also subject to the rules of habitus and capital, and they, too, exist within fields. By fiction, I refer to the 'narrative worlds' (a phrase coined by Gerrig, 1993, to be discussed) within stories, the places where the characters live, and the rules of those worlds. Let the narrative world be, in a sense, another field – another culture and society, only this one is make-believe, inhabited by unreal people. Indeed, most fictional worlds have internal structures and rules, with fields and subfields, capital and habitus that the

[2] It is worth noting that the concept of what is desirable is also an aspect of field and habitus, a point that is attended to within the academic field of world literature. For example, European texts were framed as 'high culture' within apartheid South Africa, leading Helgesson (2016, pp. 32, original emphasis) to remark that "the literary was *not* merely a personal matter but entangled with various forms of power – both oppressive and liberating."

[3] Or most…

characters must exist within and navigate. Characters, moreover, are not aware of the genre (the story type) they inhabit, again in much the same way that individuals may not be aware of the habitus or capital they are enacting/perpetrating and influenced by.

Genre is commonly understood as the rules of a certain type of narrative. For example, when reading a romance, one might expect certain beats to occur, such as the two primary love interests beginning in opposition or conflict before, via some kind of crisis, coming to love and respect each other. However, while these archetypal plots are certainly genre, the principles of genre theory demand closer inspection. Genre is codified not only in terms of the main story elements, but also in terms of character representation, the language used, thematic principles, and the reader's emotional journey through the story. Genre, then, is what allows someone to say that they are a fan of something, because they know, generally, what to expect both within the story but also regarding their own emotional response to it. Fantasy, like any genre, has its rules and expectations, rooted in its origins in myths, legends and fairy tales (Jackson, 1981; Tolkien, 1939/1983; Campbell, 1949/2004; Williamson, 2015). These genre norms can become part of the habitus, capital(s) and doxa of the real world, *our* world, especially with popular and culturally embedded story genres (See for example Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003; Appel & Richter, 2007; Bell, 2003; Bruner, 1991; and Gottschall, 2013). Thanks to the persuasiveness of narrative, readers (and viewers/listeners) begin to take certain genre elements as true-life representations, and, in so doing, these elements may become part of those people's belief systems, influencing their behaviour in real life. In short, authors write what they believe to be true representations of the dynamic between field, habitus and capital, which their characters then enact. In turn, what one reads helps to create what one believes to be true – one takes representations of capital and habitus shown in fiction and applies it to real life. Even in a genre so removed from the 'real world' as high fantasy, with its magic and monsters, certain 'truths' are embedded in the narrative world this way, and hold influence over readers' belief, as will be shown.

This complex, reciprocal relationship is explored in the concept of the *dialogical self*. The dialogical self originates in social psychology, and argues that the individual 'self' is not separate from the contexts and cultures they inhabit, but instead is intrinsically connected to them – how the "self navigates its course in light of the demands and considerations of others" (Ellis & Stam, 2010, p. 420). In essence, the dialogical self is a dynamic self, one that through its connections with others and with society is able to change and grow. As a theory, it is not only

connected with psychology, but also with social psychology and social constructivism, and is far removed from the positivist roots of psychology and the *Cartesian* view of the mind. In the Cartesian view, the mind is seen as something separate from the world: it is distinct and functions logically from this place of distinction (Shotter, 1999). According to this view, the way that we operate is less *within* the world and more as *external* observers of it, breaking it up and examining it.

The dialogical self, on the other hand, is in 'conversation' with the outside world in order to maintain itself; this exchange between self and society helps to create both. As Boesch (2008, p. 507) states, "subjectivity, in subtle or important ways, becomes predominant in culture"; a comment that aligns very closely with Bourdieu's theories of habitus and cultural capital. Cultural psychologists, accordingly, look at the self as being both *culturally embedded* and the *creator of culture*. By synthesising these theories, it is possible to see that the manner in which a group – in this case, women – is presented in fiction can have a very real impact in the way in which that group is then codified and treated within society, in addition to the already mentioned persuasive power of narrative. All this combines to create a complex picture, and one that needs to be understood both discretely and as a whole. Rather like Alice's experiences in Wonderland, we may find that everyday things behave in unexpected and alarming ways. It is not difficult, however, to see why continued and genre-maintained representations of women are potentially harmful. A feedback loop is created, in which female characters in (high fantasy) narratives may be presented in a poor or problematic light; this then affects beliefs about women, beliefs which are then codified and shared within culture and society via the dialogical self and habitus, which is then re-codified in narratives – the cycle repeats.

Self-publication may offer an alternative, however, to the treatment of women as codified within the genre norms of traditionally published (high fantasy) fiction. Self-publishing occupies the one end of a scale of publication, in which traditional publications occupies the opposite end. This is not to say, necessarily, the self-publication and traditional publication are at odds with each other (though this is a common perception and will be discussed in chapters 9 and 10), but rather simply that the availability of self-publishing extends the range of options for the presentation and dissemination of work, and this enables the availability of a greater variety of content. The central premise for this hypothesis is based on the proposition that, as a result of the removal of financially-driven gatekeeping processes, self-published authors are allowed more

freedom to publish stories which resist stereotypical, genre-bound character codifications, as they are unbound by concerns of selling to mainstream outlets and/or publishing houses. Essentially, the capital relationship between the field of author and the field of literature is disrupted, and as such certain habitus (or genre norms) lose their significance, as the self-published author is not required to engage with them to gain entry into the literary field via the status of 'published author', nor does s/he need the social capital of the publisher or agent to reach readers (again, as will be discussed). This is not to say that self-publication does not have its pitfalls or difficulties. It can be difficult for self-published authors to stand out from the crowd, especially without the financial might (or economic capital) needed to promote and advertise their books. There are also a number of dubious companies and individuals who offer promotional services to self-published authors in exchange for high fees, offering little return. Additionally, critics of self-published work often complain that the writing quality is low, either regarding proofing or in terms of craft, and thus there remains a general wariness around self-published works regarding quality, despite its growing popularity. Nevertheless, as Gerrig (1993, p. 5) reminds us, "one of the most profound aspects of the experience of narrative worlds is how very hard it is not to show some features of being transported, whatever the quality of the narrative."

Moreover, self-publishing has traditionally lacked cultural capital – as it has not been accepted into the field of literature via traditional publication, it can lack legitimacy. As Bourdieu (1993) comments, it is the systems that maintain art (the publishers, galleries, critics and awards panels) which also hold the power to proclaim the value of that art. Finally, the very thing that self-publishing allows – freedom of artistic expression – could also be its downfall, as readers' expectation is that stories will follow certain conventions and character tropes of the narrative's genre, and thus may be disappointed when stories fail to meet these expectations. Nonetheless, self-publishing is a growing field, with more readers and writers being drawn to it (Baverstock, 2012; Author Earnings, 2017), and it can offer a potential site for alternative readings and interpretations of genre norms. Thus, by looking at examples of self-published high fantasy works (including my own), I hope to discover whether the removal of the financial gatekeeping processes inherent in traditional publishing's commercial model allows for changes in the way female characters are presented, or if the conventions of the genre (its habitus and

doxa) are strong enough that female character tropes remain and are restated/reinforced by the authors through their own volition.

1.2 High Fantasy

I have chosen to focus my study on high fantasy for a number of reasons. Fantasy is an enduring and increasingly popular genre. Although it has had for many years a loyal fan-base, over the last twenty-odd years numerous fantasy works have risen to international fame, from J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* to George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, making fandom of the genre more socially normalised. Building on this, the success of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* movies, as well as the current surge in comic book movies and the huge popularity of fantasy computer games (for example the *Elder Scrolls*, *Witcher* and *Dragon Age* titles), have brought fantasy, and specifically high fantasy, further into the mainstream. In addition, self-published fantasy novels are amongst the most popular to write (Author Earnings, 2014; Sargent, 2014; Robertson, 2014; Self Publishing Relief, 2015). It, therefore, seems both appropriate and timely to use the genre of high fantasy as a method of exploring if and how self-publication is changing the way women are presented as a (possible) result of the removal of various gatekeeping forces.

Next, high fantasy also offers a unique opportunity to explore the representations of women, supposedly removed from real-world social conditioning. In this, I mean that high fantasy as a genre is deliberately, evocatively, removed from the 'real world'[4], and yet, paradoxically, the genre not only draws on and propagates problematic constructs of women (their agency, their value, and their role) from this world, but also draws these constructions from a distinctly problematic period for women in narrative, fairy tale and medieval romance. In a world created anew, in which magic and monsters exist without comment, one is forced to wonder why high fantasy representations of women are often so singularly tied to patriarchal and oppressive values. Indeed, while Jackson (1981), Luis (2016) and Tolkien (1939/1983) all argue that fantasy has the potential to highlight issues, injustices and dominant power statuses through the very fact that the worlds created in fantasy are *unreal*, each also acknowledges that fantasy

[4] Excluding urban fantasy, which is a sub-genre of fantasy set in the real world. Most horror stories, for example, might be considered urban fantasy, for while they include mythical creature such as vampires, fairies, or gods, the story itself takes place in the world as we know it.

authors and the texts they create are embedded in the societies, histories and dominant hierarchies for which and within which they were created. Tolkien (1939/1983, pp. 218, original emphasis) reminds us that:

> When we have explained many of the elements commonly found embedded in fairy-stories (such as stepmothers, enchanted bears and bulls, cannibal witches, taboos on names, and the like) as relics of ancient customs once practiced in daily life, or of beliefs once held as beliefs and not as 'fancies' – there remains a point too often forgotten: this is the effect produced *now* by these old things in stories as they are.

Or, as Jackson states, "fantasy is not to do with inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with inventing elements of this world, re-combining its constructive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* 'new', absolutely 'other' and different" (1981, pp. 8, original emphasis). The use of the word 'apparently' is important here. Jackson is acknowledging that, while fantasy may on the surface provide its readers with an escape from the normalcy of our world, it nevertheless may still carry within it the attitudes, values and representations, good or ill, that dominate the culture within which it was created. The fantasy genre as a whole holds a unique and historical position regarding cultural coding, a general fact of literature and art that is also picked up by Bourdieu (1993) when he discusses cultural production. As already mentioned, high fantasy as a genre has its roots in myths, legends and fairy tales (Jackson, 1981; Tolkien, 1939/1983; Williamson, 2015; Mendlesohn, 2008), story archetypes that, cross-culturally, have been used to frame cultural norms, explain unknown events and codify human behaviour types (characterisations and personifications) (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). For example, when looking at the treatment of women within high fantasy, it has become noticeable that the fairy tale female tropes of 'maiden/reward', 'mother/Goddess', and 'witch/evil Queen' still remain. As a result of this, women in high fantasy can often be denied certain outcomes, are limited in their abilities and/or agencies, are confined to certain behaviour and stereotypes, and are placed within defined

physical types and social status/roles. For a genre that is in many ways so flexible, this dogmatic thinking is both surprising and disappointing.

Finally, I have chosen high fantasy because of the nature of transportation (Gerrig, 1993) and the position that it holds in terms of cultural belief maintenance and creation. As already briefly mentioned (and to be explored in more detail in chapter two), stories evolved as a way to share information, and "myth-making could be considered the highest form of that common human pastime, story-telling […] which have been re-shaped according to the understanding and worldview of contemporary authors and readers" (Kazlev, 2015, p. 1), or, as Timmerman (1973) argues, "fantasy literature as a genre has the capacity to move a reader powerfully. And the motions and emotions involved are not simply visceral as is the case with much modern literature – but spiritual. It affects one's beliefs, one's way of viewing life, one's hopes and dreams and faith." High fantasy, therefore, enjoys a significant place in society in that it is inherently bound to the process of myth-making, of *mythopoesis*, a process that in itself also aligns with theories of habitus and cultural capital. Indeed, the fact that high fantasy is set in worlds removed from our own suggests that readers are, surprisingly, *more* susceptible to believing that the representations encountered therein are genuine and reliable: **"**Specifically, when readers encounter a claim about a world with which they are familiar in a work of fiction, they will evaluate the information given [with] what they know to be true. They will perform *no such evaluation* of claims about *unfamiliar* fictional worlds." (Prentice, et al., 1997, pp. 417, my emphasis). In this, Prentice et al. (1997) are making the point that the more removed or alternate the narrative world is from the real world, the less critical and more susceptible to persuasion the reader is.

Nevertheless, despite this danger, high fantasy still retains the possibility of challenging the dominant ideology as a result of its inherent, contrasting worlds (Jackson, 1981). By exploring the importance of story, and the effects that narratives can have on us, it may be possible to unpick firstly the problematic elements of engaging in story and then to deconstruct high fantasy's representation of women. From this, any shifts in the representation of women that occur within the new format of self-publishing may prove to be significant. High fantasy, with its potential to explore alternative positions, societies and worlds, is a prime site for this change – as much as it is also potentially a site to perpetuate damaging and harmful representations. In sum, "de-mystifying the process of reading fantasies will, hopefully, point to the possibility of

undoing many texts which work, unconsciously, upon us. In the end, this may lead to real social transformation" (Jackson, 1981, p. 10). While I do not suggest *this* thesis will transform society, I do hope to draw attention to direct-to-reader literature dissemination, self-publication, which may be helping to create such a transformation, using high fantasy as a site of this exploration.

I will be looking at selected works of high fantasy fiction from each publishing approach: *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones* will be explored as the traditionally published high fantasy examples, while *A Warrior's Path* by David Ashura and *Threads Sliver* by Leeland Artra will be used to explore self-published high fantasy, along with a critical reflection on my own self-published novels, *The Fairy's Tale* (Lee, 2015) and *The Academy* (Lee, 2016).

Of course, selecting only six examples from an entire genre will result in an analysis that is exploratory; there is no suggestion made here that these texts are the sole representations of the genre. As regards *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones*, these novels are chosen because they are arguably the most common/popular and thus are well-known examples of high fantasy with significant cultural reach (at the time of writing). *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien has been cited as the most popular novel in the BBC's 'Big Read' poll of 2003 (BBC, 2003), and has never been out of print (Mendlesohn & James, 2012); equally *The Lord of the Rings* provided much of the blueprint still used today when defining the genre of high fantasy (as will be discussed later). *A Game of Thrones* is the first novel in the high fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin, which, with thanks to an HBO television adaptation, is now one of the highest selling high fantasy series of all time (Flood, 2015a), enjoying a cultural reach of millions of readers: in 2015 the series had sold over 60 million copies worldwide (Alter, 2015), and been translated into 45 languages (Flood, 2015a). Thus, given that the nature of this work is to question the effects that narrative representations can have on culture and belief systems, and then to explore the types of representations of women in high fantasy, this selection criterion is, I argue, appropriate for a first 'rally' into the field. By this, I mean to say that the aim here is to focus on those examples of high fantasy which have made a considerable impact on the popular culture, outside of dedicated fantasy fandom, as it is through this reach that they can be argued to have a meaningful impact on both society and individuals.

1.3 Feminism and Fandom (A Reflection on Positionality)

The scope of this piece is framed by my own stance as regards the importance of representation and the need for multiple voices to create a rich and textured dialogue between fiction and reality, reader and writer, producer and consumer. Equally, in looking at the way women are represented in fiction, I align myself with feminist views and critiques, especially as regards the impact of representations of gender norms and stereotypes within literature and wider society (in particular, when discussing shifts in power and the opening up of access to the literary world which self-publishing can provide). As Dinshaw (2007, p. 11) notes, "postmodern literary practices like feminist critique are ideologically based", and my feminist enquiry is linked with the concept of "how our lives are mediated by systems of inequity such as classism, racism, and sexism" (Lather, 1992, p. 87) – specifically how representations of women are coded in a popular genre of fiction (high fantasy), and the effects of fiction, psychologically and socially, on readers. Sexism, in this case, will be explored in the ways in which high fantasy perpetuates harmful gender normative expectations of women's behaviours, agency, goals, and relationships. I do not align with positivist theories, but rather hold the view that exploration is key – the "generation and legitimation of knowledge about the world" (Lather, 1992, p. 87), with emphasis on the principle of generation. Regarding labelling my feminism, I find myself in the same position as van der Tuin, who argues that the tradition in feminist research to compartmentalise the field into 'waves' is problematic (van der Tuin, 2011). Van der Tuin makes the point that this separation of theory – the waves of feminism – has limited the scope of feminist enquiry, stating that "despite the continuous movement suggested by the metaphor itself, waves become locatable in time and space" (van der Tuin, 2011, p. 16), resulting in a loss of cross-theorisation. Instead, I take the view that it is useful to learn from the past in building the future. Thus, in this work I draw on multiple aspects of various feminist research positions, creating a multidisciplinary space from which to work, while I consciously and critically reject other elements of the field, as I will now explain.

Regarding the feminism of the 1970s (the second wave), much was achieved to create an academic space for feminist research and theory (van der Tuin, 2011), and as such has created a research space for my own work. However, some ideologies associated with this period I cannot align with. Second wave feminism was a response to the initial stages of emancipation which occurred in the west; however, in some cases it sought to exclude certain groups from the feminist movement – for example, referencing Germain Greer's controversial comments about

transwomen (Saul, 2015) or the debates around sex workers/the sex industry within the feminist movement (Dworkin & McKinnon, 1988). These divisions, in which some aspects of 'being female' or 'performing female' were considered unacceptable, are not in line with my own feminist views. Nevertheless, second-wave feminism was a site of exploration, particularly regarding the dynamic relationship between psychology, sociology and the self (Eagleton, 2007), a dynamic I explore at multiple points in this thesis. More recently, post-feminism has been described by Schubart (2016, p. 113) as a site of "openness to new ideas and optimism about the future", a concept I am in alignment with when reflecting on my own feminist values. However, Schubert (2016) also goes on to state that post-feminism does not view the individual as being determined by outside forces, but rather being able to choose their own actions. Regarding this claim, I find I am not so convinced. As the world currently stands, I find I cannot agree that individuals are free from outside determination, especially in light of the arguments already given regarding the dialogical self, as I will argue in terms of the persuasiveness of literature (chapters two and three, specifically). Indeed, As Plain & Sellers (2007, p. 1) state:

> Journalists and commentators write of 'post-feminism' as if to suggest that the need to challenge patriarchal power or to analyse the complexities of gendered subjectivities had suddenly gone away, and as if texts were no longer the products of material realities in which bodies are shaped and categorised not only by gender, but by class, race, religion and sexuality.

Thus, as a goal to be reached, I find Schubert's (2016) definition of post-feminism motivating and aspirational, but I do not agree that this freedom from determination has occurred (yet).

Exploring representations of women frame this piece as a feminist text. However, I will also draw on those aspects of feminism which speak to the dynamic relationship between the self and the world, both connected to and removed from explicit reference to women, and certainly with no exclusionary categories in mind, despite my aforementioned focus on cisgender female representations. In keeping with my central ideology that hidden voices need to be heard, I see feminist critique as a framework which can advocate for marginalised groups outside of the

notion of the 'female' and 'femininity', which are themselves complex, social, historical, and political sites, incorporating the experiences of members of the LGBT+ communities, as well as heterosexual men and people of colour, and those marginalised by other dominant forms of capital, such as class and wealth, education and religion, for example. Thus, while I will speak of women, a number of the theories and arguments put forward in this piece could be applied and explored in relation to other groups, and I encourage this exploration by those perhaps better placed than me to do so. Third wave feminism embraces these complex relationships, seeking to problematize but not to exclude. It is a movement of feminism that may at first appear haphazard when compared to the cartographical approaches of second-wave feminists, but which, I feel, offers greater movement and flexibility to explore ideas of identity and representation; much like the reed in the storm, third wave feminism *bends*, but ultimately is stronger for its suppleness. Third wave feminism foregrounds and emphasises personal narratives, illustrating an intersectional and multi-perspective analysis; it recognises post-modernism and champions for multiple voices and for action. Finally, third wave feminism stresses an inclusive approach in which the boundaries of the political feminine are not policed (Snyder, 2008).

Each of these three pillars is closely aligned with my analytical approach in this thesis: Individuals are connected to the world they live in (a connection that can be enforced or shaped via literature) and thus representations matters. However, with an opening up of the publishing spaces (via direct-to-reader distribution and self-publication) multiple voices can be heard; self-publication is an *active* and *agented* way of augmenting literary genres. Finally, self-publication can be seen as a means of encouraging and creating inclusivity within the literary field. Third wave feminism is a "politics of coalition" (Snyder, 2008, p. 176), something which I hope can be achieved with regards the traditional publishing industry, self-publication, readers and writers, to everyone's benefit. Therefore, building on the academic foundation second wave feminism created, I draw on the ethos and ideology of third wave feminism in the hope of helping in some small way to create the world that post-feminism describes but which I feel does not, yet, exist.

This work does not set out to define, but rather to open up new avenues for discussion and exploration. Thus, I find that I am following the path laid out by others before me, especially in terms of style and approach. Moretti (1983/2005), a literary critic whose focus is on the interaction between stories and society, states that he feels he has always approached literary criticism in an "occasional, intuitive and concrete way" (p. 1), and thus, rather than setting up a

theoretical framework, instead his task is to examine, correct or falsify existing frameworks. In a similar spirit, Mendlesohn (2008) acknowledges the difficulty in trying to accomplish an empirical and definitive set of 'rules' for a whole genre of fiction. Rather, she states, she is drawing on her subjective viewpoint to highlight and explore *possible* interpretations and meanings, and to begin a discussion on the underlying frameworks which *may* exist within the genre. In this work, my aims are similar. As with Mendlesohn, it is not my intention to lay out an empirical, quantitative study of all representations of women in high fantasy traditional publications and self-publications – indeed, such a task would, I suggest, be near impossible for any one person to complete. Instead, I hope here, in the same spirit as Moretti and Mendlesohn, to explore and to sketch out an area of investigation; to shine a light on an area so that others might be inspired to venture further.

Building on this, I must also acknowledge my own personal interest in fantasy fiction. I am a fan of fantasy and have been all my life, and I write in the fantasy genre; however, this does not mean that I cannot also, from this position, take an academic interest in the genre. *Aca-fandom* is a term coined to account for the recent wave of researchers who take a dual positionality, placing themselves in the centre of the Venn diagram of academia and fandom. Indeed, a number of academics are self-identified aca-fans (e.g. Hills, 2002; Thomas, 2002; Phillips, 2010; Evans & Stansi, 2014). Aca-fandom is a field that is interdisciplinary, incorporating scholars from "English literature, anthropology, sociology, psychology, film studies, communication studies, gender studies, and media and cultural studies" (Evans & Stasi, 2014, p. 6), and is increasing in exposure and academic recognition. Two peer-reviewed journals deal explicitly with fandom study and aca-fandom, *Transformative Works and Culture*, which has been in press since 2008, and the *Journal of Fandom Studies*, which has grown from one issue per year in 2012 to three issues a year in 2015. Moreover, journals from a variety of fields have published articles in this area (e.g., *The Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, *Poetics*, *E-Learning*, *Popular Communication*, and *California Law Review*) and a number of books and edited volumes have been published dealing with the subject of fandom and/or aca-fandom (e.g. Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Hills, 2002; McKee, 2002; Thomas, 2002; Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Ross, 2014).

Additionally, a fan-based study is particularly appropriate to my research, as such work is often concerned with the way "the audience, the production of media texts, and the way texts,

identities and industries interact" (Evans & Stasi, 2014, p. 8), a focal point of this discussion, echoing the feminist principles of multiple realities and voices (Plain & Sellers, 2007). Fans have a history of participatory engagement in their fandoms, seeking to interact with it and to claim and reclaim its elements for their own enjoyment (Kelly, 2004). This engagement, at least on a personal level, speaks explicitly to my own attempts via self-publication to offer different representations of women within high fantasy, as a fan of fantasy myself. However, this is not to say that engaging in the academic study of something which one is personally attached to is without its potential pitfalls. Criticisms have been raised on two counts: firstly, aca-fandom has been accused of taking an overly confessional stance to academic investigation, and secondly that there is a tension between the identities of the aca-fan, as they co-exist between both academia and fandom (Hills, 2002; McKee, 2002). McKee has argued that aca-fans are at risk of subjectivity as they are so engaged in their subject matter, stating that they are fans "who are lucky enough to get paid to be fans" (McKee, 2002, p. 69).

These concerns are, perhaps, methodological issues focusing on researcher integrity, rather than issues with the subject. In this sense, it is important to distinguish methodology from methods – methods being the tools used to gather data (for example, interviews, questionnaires, focus groups), while methodology can be aligned with a more intrinsic, point-of-view stance (Evans & Stasi, 2014). For example, one researcher's methodology may be positivist while another's is interpretivist, but both researchers could use methods centred on questionnaires (although it is true that certain methodologies align more closely with certain methods). Aca-fandom, with its diverse participants, accordingly brings with it a diversity of methods and methodologies. Thus, in fields where autoethnography[5], textual analysis[6], and qualitative participation[7] are the methods adopted, all of which are common in aca-fandom studies, a methodology that includes reflective transparency need not raise issue, and in fact may lead to a greater depth of analysis (Phillips, 2010). In both qualitative and reflective research methods, it is necessary – indeed, arguably, desirable – for researchers to engage in self-analysis in order to maintain transparency, aiding in critiques of their work and future application by other scholars. In this sense, taking a confessional stance and openly acknowledging one's own identity as a fan as well as a scholar need not be detrimental to the process of enquiry – it for this reason that I

[5] Reflective/reflexive writing, which is then analysed and applied to wider social, cultural or political questions.
[6] Usually extended literature review and analysis of a text/texts, with no human participants, such as this piece.
[7] In which the researcher participates and interacts with the participants.

will offer my own self-published writing to showcase how I myself have approached the issues I will raise in terms of female representation in high fantasy. You, the reader, may then be better placed to evaluate my position as a fan, a self-published writer, and an academic, and can build on or dismantle my arguments accordingly. However, fields that incorporate methodologies that are more data-driven, such as the traditional sciences, may find this fluid and interactional approach difficult to come to terms with, and so have issue with the increasing legitimisation of aca-fandom. Thus, it could be said that while the methodological, confessional approach to aca-fandom is not suited to all researchers or, perhaps, all fields, this does not diminish the insights that can be gained through this type of study.

1.4 Analytical Approach

Although my main focus is on written fiction, for my theoretical underpinning I will draw at times on fiction as it is presented in film and television, particularly when discussing the social and cognitive effect that story holds, in line with Mar et al.'s (2011) process of narrative analysis. As has been briefly alluded to and will be explored in more detail, the social world and the narrative world are inextricably linked, one creating the other, in a cycle reminiscent of Bourdieu's (2000; 1993) capital, habitus and doxa dynamic. Like any form of literature, high fantasy does not exist separately from the social, historical, political, sexual or economic contexts in which its authors exist and within which its genre behaves and reflects, for all that its worlds, creatures and possibilities are so far removed from the 'real' world. There are various theories that relate to the structures and motifs often encountered in high fantasy, such as the monomyth (Campbell, 1949/2004), master narrative (Lyotard, 1984/1993) or syntagmatic structures (Propp, 1968), all of which centre around the proposition that there are fixed structures which narratives conform to, particularly in the case of fairy tale/mythic narratives, which form the foundations of high fantasy (as will be shown). These structures are important in terms of this analysis, as they offer a means of understanding the creation and the maintenance of the genre of high fantasy and help to understand the potential differences in representations of women that self-publishing can provide. The structures that are most significant in terms of high fantasy are the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949/2004) and the female bildungsroman[8] arc (Jones, 2011), both

[8] Coming of age

of which can been seen in the high fantasy novels under examination, and both of which can trace their origins through the genre back to fairy tale and medieval romance (as will be shown).

However, the use of such structures for analysis has not been without its criticism. Specifically, structural codification, while offering a means for comparison and analysis of different story types, does not in and of itself encourage the exploration of the social or cultural values that may have led to the creation and maintenance of such structural elements. Bourdieu (1993), Casanova (2005), Moretti (1983/2005), and Dundes (1968) all argue in various ways against the tendency of literary criticism to separate the novel from the social and political landscapes which both inform it and which it in turn informs. Moretti (1983/2005, pp. 131, original emphasis) explains that too often, literary criticism has been predisposed to "*confirm* its sociological premise […] Literary research adds *nothing* to what is already known about society." Bourdieu picks this thread up, discussing the fact that texts become destabilised when they are removed from their cultural context, arguing that "Ignorance of everything which goes to make up the 'mood of the age' produces a decentralisation of works: stripped of everything which attached them to the most concrete debates of their time […] they are impoverished and transformed in the direction of intellectualism or empty humanism" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 32). This is a view shared by Dundes: it is not possible, nor advisable, to try to separate the story from the cultural influences that helped to create it. Where Moretti argues that such division can offer nothing new, Dundes takes the view that "the form must ultimately be related to the culture or cultures in which it is found" (1968, p. xiii). Looking at this separation from the other side, Casanova (2005, p. 71), an advocate of world literature, argues that post-colonial criticism has the habit of viewing literature as solely political, and as a result removes from the discussion the "aesthetic, formal and stylistic characteristics that actually 'make' literature." In this, he is arguing that there is a distinction between internal criticism (that is, of the art of the novel) and external criticism (the socio-political analysis) and that these distinctions need to be married. As such, Moretti, Bourdieu, Casanova and Dundes all argue that literary analysis needs to attend to both the novel in and of itself and the political and social situations in which the novel is sited. Moretti, therefore, advises that both the function of a text (its purpose) and the structure (the way it is written and the characters within it) are considered alongside social context and influence, in order to create a dynamic that "adds to our knowledge of society" (1983/2005, p. 131).

Moretti argues that a reading that is focused solely on either element, syntagmatic or paradigmatic, would lessen the depth of analysis and understanding possible. Looking specifically at the Sherlock Holmes canon, he demonstrates a combined approach, in which the structure of the story is unpacked along with the internal characterisation and the external social forces that helped to codify such characters and structures. This is what he terms a structural and a functional approach to literary analysis. However, Moretti is careful to point out that these two approaches, structural and functional, do not need to be equated with each other; the argument is not to combine the approaches into one system, but rather to engage with both in order to create a deeper reading of the text: "Structure and function define one another: they constitute their specific identities through their relationship. The sociology of literature must reproduce these two identities and their connection conceptually" (Moretti, 1983/2005, pp. 120-121). Thus, by engaging with both approaches, each one can be used as a way to 'check and balance' the claims of the other. Dundes (1968) supports this view, arguing that structural analysis in and of itself is a starting point to literary analysis, rather than the sole way to approach the task. "It [structural analysis] is a powerful technique of descriptive ethnography inasmuch as it lays bare the essential form of the folkloristic text. But the form must ultimately be related to the culture or cultures in which it is found" (Dundes, 1968, p. xiii). Essentially, the argument being made by both Moretti and Dundes is that an in-depth exploration of a piece of literature requires a combined analysis of both its structure (how it is put together, the plots and characters one finds within it) and the social function of the text (how the text encodes and represents the culture from which it comes).

I intend, therefore, to engage with both the structure and the function of my selected high fantasy texts, looking at the syntagmatic structures (Propp, 1968) of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949/2004) and the female bildungsroman arc (Jones, 2011), their codification within the genre of high fantasy and how this realises itself in the treatment and representation of female characters, and also the social effect that such works (may) produce in readers and, more generally, culture. I am also interested in the narrative world (Gerrig, 1993) which characters inhabit and interact with, seen from within the story itself. In line with transportation theory, narratives have a greater persuasive effect when readers immerse themselves within the world, and this speaks to the social function of the text as a creator of beliefs. The narrative world also speaks to the structure of the text when considered in terms of high fantasy. High fantasy, as I

will outline in detail in later chapters, tends to have strongly codified expectations of how characters will behave and navigate their world, and this again speaks to the maintenance of certain representations and to the genre as a whole.

Building on this, I will be referencing the principle of *double articulation*, which describes the multiple processes of interaction that exist within mediated texts (Bednarek, 2012). According to this theory, communication within fiction occurs in two spaces, the first and second articulations. The first articulation relates to the communication that exists between characters within their own narrative world (the narrative field, as I mentioned above); their relationships with each other, their social and cultural capital within their fields, and the social fields in which these characters exist. The second articulation refers to the communication between the narrative and the reader and is "designed with this target audience [readers] in mind, aiming for common ground" (Bednarek, 2012, p. 203); it is the way the story connects with and speaks to its audience. Thus, double articulation is used to help build an affinity or relationship between the consumer (the reader) and the artefact (the text), of central importance to this study. Following the principle of double articulation will also, hopefully, help me to avoid the systematic analysis of art which Bourdieu (1993, p. 33) criticises and which can, as he states, "Refus[e] to consider anything other than the system of works" which can lead to ignoring the capital, habitus and fields within which such works function and which it can perpetuate, subvert, transform or parody. Double articulation will allow me to look at both the internal power relations within the narrative world and the external power that these representations cause, effect and mediate on the reader.

In order to utilise these various approaches, the early sections of this work are less interested in literature as novels to be analysed – in the style of traditional literary criticism – as they are focused on literature as a social and political device. This background is necessary in terms of underscoring the importance of literature as a socially embedded entity and the effects of narrative on the self and on society, in order to stress the importance of the representation of women. After this foregrounding is complete, this work will then look at specific texts as *novels*, offering a more traditional literary critique of the internal aspects of the narratives, their characters, plots and world-building, *and* how these elements interact with the external, socio-political concerns which I will have raised. By adopting this approach, I hope to marry together the aesthetic and the political as exemplified in my source texts, to create a holistic, multi-

disciplinary analysis. As such, it should be understood that this work is by no means a traditional piece of literary criticism. While there is a focus on problematizing and critiquing text, as found in literary criticism, I am also exploring the *product* and *production* of high fantasy novels. Thus, I am able to synthesise different aspects of theory and analysis, creating a richer theoretical basis for my own analysis. Moreover, my educational and professional background is not in literary criticism, though I have engaged in the field as a hobbyist, for want of a better term. I am trained as an applied linguist, specifically in the area of sociolinguistics; however, a background in linguistics, and in particular sociolinguistics, is not necessarily a barrier to such an exploration as this. As Barthes (1975, p. 241) states when discussing narrative works, literature cannot stand free of linguistics: "language never ceases to accompany discourse, holding up to it, as it were, the mirror of its own structure. Doesn't literature, more particularly in our day, turn the very particulars of language use into a language of its own?" I will, therefore, draw on a wide variety of theories and disciplines to help me light my way, including a reflection on my own self-published work to offer the reader an insight into my own position. I offer this reflection to acknowledge my vested interest in the subject, in line with my position as a reflective practitioner and researcher. Still, the main drive of my enquiry is in written fiction, and so I would suggest that this work nevertheless be considered a piece of literary analysis, if not exactly critique.

Accordingly, this work is in parts a sociolinguistic analysis, a literary analysis, a genre study, a reflection on my own self-published work, a work of 'fannish' enquiry, and a call for others to explore, refute, or build on the ideas and arguments raised. As with Mendlesohn (2008), I acknowledge my own subjectivity in the ideas put forward, and, like her, will use the first person throughout to underscore this. Equally, I am disinterested in writing a text that is in its style dense and intractable, as is the case with some academic works. The purpose here is to create something that can be read and accessed by any who wish to. Hills (2002) discusses specifically the divide between the academy and those he terms 'fan-scholars', who analyse and critique without the 'discipline' of academia and as such are often ignored or spoken down to. This is a lamentable division which only serves to rob both sides of the opportunity to learn from each other, and one which I hope to avoid by writing in as accessible a manner as the mode allows.

1.5 Overview

I will begin by offering a review of the literature in terms of the scope, power and importance of narrative, including the worrying issue of narrative persuasion. I will then move on to discuss the genre of high fantasy specifically, looking at issues of genre codification and multiple theories on the nature of high fantasy. Next, I will offer a review of the manner in which female characters have been presented within traditionally published high fantasy, looking firstly at fairy tales, the root of the genre, and the works of Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*. I will follow this by looking at the genre norms of current high fantasy, highlighting both inherited links and innovations, before analysing George R. R. Martin's novel, *A Game of Thrones.* Next, I will offer an analysis of two self-published high fantasy novels, *A Warrior's Path* and *Thread Slivers*. I will follow this with a similar analysis of my own response to the highlighted genre-normative representations of women in my self-published novels, *The Fairy's Tale* and *The Academy*. A discussion on the nature of self-publication will next be given, looking at how the mode has developed, the potential it offers to shift the dynamics of capital with the literary and publishing fields, and also current threats to self-publishing's continuation. Finally, I will offer a conclusion in which I will call for a widening of the concept of literary critique, which I term 'multiliteraryism', which would encompass both traditional and new, direct-to-reader forms of publication, recognising the strengths and weaknesses of both, and hopefully helping to legitimise the latter.

2. Storying Our Psyche

Stories are important to human beings. There is not, nor has there ever been, people without narratives (Barthes, 1975). Our lives are couched within stories – whether it is a case of telling our friends or family what happened to us during the day, recounting brave struggles to catch the bus, fight the traffic or make the train, or heroic battles with evil bosses or crazed customers. Or, perhaps, in the hours we spend absorbed in media, watching stories play out in the form of soap operas, dramas, comedies; or lost in computer games; or disappearing into online fan fiction or comic books, or even, finally, reading a (e-)book. We are hopelessly, impossibly, addicted to stories. The average UK citizen spends thirty-one hours a month browsing the internet on a P.C. or laptop (Ofcom, 2016) – to say nothing of how much time they clock-up online via mobile phones and tablets – and over three hours a day watching TV (Ofcom, 2016). Mintel, a consumer market research group, predicts that the online streaming service Netflix will, by 2019, be worth over £1bn of the UK market (Savvas, 2015). It is not just electronic media that people are turning to. The Nielsen Book Research Project, which gathers book sales data from both online stores such as Amazon and Play.com and traditional, real-world bookshops, stated that in 2015 printed book sales rose 6.6% on the previous year, totalling over £1.5bn in the UK (Abrams, 2016).

This fiction addiction is nothing new. As Gottschall (2013, p. xiii) informs us, "tens of thousands of years ago, when the human mind was young and our numbers were few, we were telling one another stories", and we have not stopped since. High fantasy especially, with its tales of heroes, magic, and of monsters, of bravery and quests, has performed a significant role in many cultural myth creations. High fantasy is built on the myths and legends that were used by our ancient ancestors to make sense of the world, to codify behaviour and social norms, to explain the inexplicable (Alexander, 1971; Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003; Bell, 2003; Campbell, 1949/2004; Mendlesohn, 2008; Tolkien, 1939/1983; Gottschall, 2013). This thesis is an analysis of the ways in which female characters are presented in high fantasy texts which have each been differently published, in order to explore whether new methods of publication are producing new representations, or if they simply maintain the representations codified within the traditionally published genre. However, before that analysis can begin, it is necessary to first

understand why representation matters, not only in terms of a socio-political, feminist reading of the narratives but also in terms of how narratives affect us, as human beings. As will be shown in this and the next chapters, the power narratives have is significant, to say the least. Therefore, the question that this chapter aims to discuss is why stories are so embedded in our lives, and how it is that human beings are able to relate to strongly to imaginary worlds and unreal people, to the point where both can seem real.

2.1 Stories as Experience

Stories began as a means of survival. Narratives have been used across cultures for thousands of years to help people understand the world that surrounds them and their place within it. Sugiyama (2001) outlines the evolutionary significance of narrative as a survival trait. Looking at hunter-gatherer narratives, she explains the vital role that these played in creating what she terms a "productive advantage" (Sugiyama, 2001, p. 235) – essentially, in order to preserve cognitive economy, it became evolutionarily advantageous for human beings to be able to extract vital information from the general buzz, to be able to isolate "experiential chunks from the continual flow of information about their environments" (Zillmann, 2002, p. 19). By categorising such vital events into 'lumps' of similar experience, human beings were able to manage knowledge, storing it as easily-remembered occurrences. Not only did these groupings of experience allow for better information management, they also enabled us to communicate events that occurred to third parties, across time and distance. These grouped together experiential accounts were stories. In addition to information sharing, stories may also have been one of the ways that humans used to attract a mate: the ability to captivate an audience, to shock and surprise, to make people laugh and cry, being a demonstration of one's mental acuity (Gottschall, 2013), or, in even simpler terms, the ability to hold others' attention being a sign of status and power (Boyd, 2001), all of which show breeding potential. Sugiyama (2001) thus seeks to strengthen the connection between the importance of narrative and survival: stories came out of the surrounding environment (how to hunt a certain animal, which berries to avoid eating) and helped to shape early humans' interaction with both that environment and each other.

As such, stories could be classified as *adaptive evolutionary strategies*. However, there is not universal agreement on the extent to which this point holds true. Evolutionary adaption is, in

most cases, embedded within the physical, which storytelling clearly is not; stories are an act of the imagination. Specifically, 'adaption' in evolutionary terms refers to three distinct elements: firstly, 'adaption' can be seen as a process of changing, in which the organism better suits itself to its environment; secondly, 'adaptiveness' is the state of being adapted; and, finally, an 'adaptive trait' is the ability of an organism to fulfil the first two functions (Dobzhansky, 1956). For example, the human thumb is an adaption that, firstly, we were physically capable of acquiring and, secondly, that benefitted our species and so survived the process of natural selection. Adaptive strategies are, therefore, both the *ability* and the *process* of making a species better able to survive the environment. Certainly, like our physical traits, storytelling appears to be a function of our cognition – we have the inherent, inbuilt ability for narrative. For example, children as young as eighteen months spontaneously develop the ability to tell stories, while even younger infants have been shown to recognise the differences between narrative and non-narrative language (Sugiyama, 2001; also see Gottschall, 2013), and it has been shown that understanding narratives is a crucial part of a child's social and empathic development (Guajardo & Watson, 2002), something which would seem to be of evolutionary benefit, if not from a physical standpoint then certainly from a social one. As regards the process of telling stories, of using this ability, it is clear that this has occurred.

The difficulty here is in where the border lies between physical and cultural evolution. Both Sugiyama (2001) and Mellmann (2012) make the connection between storytelling and cognitive-social evolution. However, they differ on where they draw the line. Sugiyama argues that storytelling arose as a result of both biological adaptions (nature) and social-survival necessity (nurture), and that the need to tell and be told stories exists as a result of evolutionary decisions that arose due to the necessity of sharing information quickly and in a manner that would be easily memorable and recountable. Thus, accepting that humans as a species are social creatures, it follows that "human thought and behaviour are the output of this interaction, and hence fundamentally dependent upon both influences" (Sugiyama, 2001, p. 326). Mellmann (2012), on the other hand, takes a subtler view, arguing that storytelling is a "convergent effect of a suite of adaptions to different selection pressures" (p. 33), i.e., that our need for narratives is a result less of biological adaption and more of a socio-cultural exploitation of pre-existing traits. Building on this, she questions whether storytelling is truly an evolutionary adaption or is, perhaps, related to (or born out of) other aspects of being human, most notably the ability to

speak and communicate. However, despite their subtle differences, both Mellmann's (2012) and Sugiyama's (2001) viewpoints identify storytelling as a vital human ability.

Indeed, it is perhaps more correct to view our inbuilt need for narrative as a synthesis of both aspects. As Gottschall (2013, p. 30) states, "it would be difficult to get rid of the evolutionary bathwater of story without also throwing out the baby – without doing violence to psychological tendencies that are clearly functional and important." It can, therefore, be argued that information gathering as a cognitive skill was as important a development as any physical trait. For our prehistoric selves, survival skills were learnt in two ways, either by active participation-observation or by passive learning through narrative; of these two approaches, a narrative approach to information gathering was (and remains) much the safer and less time-consuming route, while also allowing for greater knowledge to be shared. As Sugiyama explains (2001:237; original emphasis):

> It is extremely improbable that a single individual could acquire through experience *all* information necessary or potentially useful to the multitude of fitness-related tasks encountered over a lifetime.

Put simply, the ability to learn how to hunt and kill a tiger through listening to and understanding a narrative was much safer than learning through trial and error. Equally, being able to teach others dangerous skills through the telling of a story rather than through physical demonstration was preferable. In addition, it has been noted by Schank & Abelson (1995) that stories are easier for humans to memorize, thus also allowing for the retention of skills and knowledge. Building on this, Schank & Berman (2002) also argue that stories produce better memory representations than more abstract, theoretical texts, such as expository or rhetorical texts. Stories thus not only allow information to be shared but also to be remembered and reused. Indeed, in terms of fantasy – and most certainly high fantasy, a genre which has its roots in fairy tales and the myths, themselves designed to teach and guide social behaviours (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003) – this connection to experiential learning is also noted (Donelson & Nilsen, 1997, p. 161):

> Fantasy has also been labeled [sic] escapist literature, and, of course, it is in several ways. Fantasy allows readers to escape the mundane and to revel in glorious adventures. For some readers, escape is all that's demanded. For other readers, venturing on those seemingly endless quests, encountering all those incredible obstacles, and facing all those apparently tireless antagonists to defend the good and defeat the evil lead to more than mere reading to pass time. The escape from reality sends those readers back to their own limited and literal worlds to face many of the same problems they found in fantasy.

The importance of storytelling is not limited to dangerous acts, however. Narratives also help us learn about our society and culture, our history and our local/national identity. "We glean ideas and ideals about the world and our place in it from the stories we are told; we reproduce those ideas and ideals in the stories we tell" (Shepherd, 2013, p. 3). The term *cultural transmission* is used to refer to the use of narrative not only to transfer skills of the kind discussed by Sugiyama (2001) and Mellmann (2012), but also information related to socialization and enculturation (Cheverud & Cavalli-Sforza, 1986). Thus, the ability to tell and understand narratives was not only an evolutionary survival function but also formed the basis of the evolution of both our cognitive ability and social make-up. In this way, fairy tales were used in part to teach children how to behave appropriately within their cultures, embedding in them (gendered) behaviours and expectations that were deemed normative (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003), while high fantasy has been argued to provide readers with the means of combatting everyday trials and tribulations as a result of experience gained through the quests and battles so common to the genre (Pierce, 1993; Donelson & Nilsen, 1997).

Human beings are embedded in the world and the relationships that support or challenge their place within it, and so there are implicit cultural and historical forces which shape how we think and what we say (Bourdieu, 2000). Identity is thus increasingly recognized as being "fluid, not fixed or static in a moment or specific context" (Byrd-Clark, 2009, p. 7): we create ourselves through dialogical discourse, a complex interweaving of ourselves and others (Day, 1993). Indeed, the common understanding of 'the self' is based on reflexivity and experiential

understandings of culture (Taylor, 1989). Thus, our experiences influence how we respond when we are spoken to, and what we elect to say (or not to say) in any given situation (Shotter, 1999), they help us decide how to behave when we are the object of events positive and negative, and to plan out and prepare for the various possible effects of our actions. Our minds do not function devoid of context; instead, we play out different aspects of ourselves, different identities, based on influences and conditioning that come from our experiences and understandings of the world. Like any skill, these identities are the result of practice, of testing different behaviours, of exploring the effects of different actions or experiencing different emotions. Djikic et al. (2009) posit that part of the definition of 'personality' must include interaction with one's self and one's environment. Building on this, it is possible to suppose that the basis of those interactions – whether successful or unsuccessful, fulfilling or frustrating, helpful or harmful – will in turn influence the type of personality one develops. This development is an ongoing process: studies by McCrae et al. (1999; 2000) and Costa & McCrae (2006) have shown that one's personality is open to change well into adulthood. If we accept this as such, the need to develop ways of interacting is of vital importance.

This practice can occur as a result of journeys into the imaginary worlds of fiction. It is our imagination that allows us, via fiction, to practice our behaviour, experiment with our reactions and to gain knowledge of how we will negotiate and manage unknown situations. Indeed, so important is the ability to imagine that children begin to show the ability for pretence from between 18 and 24 months old (Leslie, 1987; Singer & Singer, 1990), an ability that takes them no particular effort to acquire (Weisbern & Bloom, 2009). Gottschall (2013) offers a review of the literature on children's pretend play, highlighting the fact that children's make-believe stories are as much narrative worlds (Gerrig, 1993) of existential exploration, of good and evil, birth and death, of being lost and found, as they are of fun and imagination. This is because children use stories to help them solve problems or to prepare themselves for possible hardships (Gottschall, 2013). Indeed, the evolutionary and cognitive-social developmental aspects of stories highlight the fact that storytelling is a foundational part of what it is to be human. Yet so far, I have not looked specifically at *reading*. How is it that the human mind is able to imagine and believe so vividly in the worlds and characters that narratives create, when these worlds are simply not real? This is the subject of the next section.

2.2 Transportation Theory and the Narrative World

In order to understand how we are so adept at losing ourselves in a book, we must first consider how the mind works. How it is that when one reads a book, one can forget completely the real word, but instead find oneself fully within the world the narrative creates? We are able to achieve this immersion into the fictional world due a mental process termed *transportation* into the *narrative word* (Gerrig, 1993). Gerrig draws a distinction between what is a *narrative text*, the linguistic aspect of story, and what is a narrative world, the place that stories take us to. He does this by highlighting the fact that the language used in a narrative text may be poorly written or even at times incoherent, but that the reader is nevertheless transported into the narrative world of the story (Gerrig, 1993, p. 4):

> If we define the experience of narrative worlds with respect to an endpoint (the operation of whatever set of mental processes transports the reader) rather than with respect to a starting point (a text with some formal features), we can see that no a priori limits can be put on the types of language structures that might prompt the construction of narrative worlds.

Gerrig is arguing[9] that there are no abstract, theoretical rules that govern whether a person is absorbed into a narrative world. Rather, a narrative world is defined by its ability to engage the reader in the mental process of imagination, empathy, and suspense; a story is a story because of *where* it takes you, not *how* it gets you there, a further codification of what Nell (1988, p. 8) termed "being lost in a book."

Transportation is a powerful effect, building on our aforementioned social-cognitive ability and predisposition to use narratives for experiential growth. Crucially, this process can alter the way we think about the real world, if the transportation is immersive enough. Gibson (1980, p. 1) explains that when we read, we are visitors in another land, and as such we must

[9] It should be noted that Gerrig is not suggesting that **all** readers will enjoy **all** books: "a text cannot force a reader to experience a narrative world" (1993:5). Rather, he is stating that for enjoyment to occur, the reader must be transported to the places in which the fiction is situated, and this transportation does not rely solely on the 'standard' or 'coherence' or the text – as anyone who has read and enjoyed, for example, '*Catch 22'* by Joseph Heller, '*Slaughterhouse Five'* by Kurt Vonnegut, or '*Fifty Shades of Grey*' by E. L. James, will surely attest. Green & Brock (2000, p. 703) also assert that "Of course, not all works of fiction are equally transporting for all readers; even a devoted teacher of literature could be quite bored by some canonical works."

adapt our customs to fit the local environment: "We assume, for the sake of the experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume, and, if we cannot assume them, we throw the book away." As such, a fully transported reader is able to train and enrich their mental scripts (Mellmann, 2012) as a result of their time in the narrative world. When we are shocked, surprised, delighted, horrified by the events in the story, by the actions of the characters, we are awarded the chance to practice our own responses in similar, real-life situations. Thus, naturally, these elements can be seen in the best, most memorable and affecting narratives, like those myths and legends that have proven to be so enduringly popular, and the characters we see as being 'real'. Indeed, it is via the characters and their experiences that we are able to get our 'view of the world', to learn experientially in the manner described above; we learn from the experiences we gain and the cultures we immerse ourselves in when we enter the fictional world. While this effect can make our reading more pleasurable, Gerrig (1993) also argues that through transportation we can reconstruct real events to fit the view of the real world that fiction has given us, even when these events are clearly incompatible to this. We may, essentially, learn false truths from narrative worlds which we then force upon the real world – a point I will return to in the next chapter.

Transportation theory is based on the understanding that human beings are connected to the world, real or not, and to the experiences of others, real or not, through their ability to empathise. The human capacity for social situatedness, that is, for being deeply embedded in the people, communities and cultures that surround us, whether real or via transportation into the narrative world, is one of the truly unique, defining points of what it means to be human. Human beings, unlike other animals, have what Boyd (2001, p. 200) terms an "intuitive" sociology and psychology – a result not only of our nuanced linguistic capability, but also our strengthened capacity for empathy, self-awareness and control, and curiosity. Increasingly, modern understandings of human cognition are more prepared to admit that our processes of making sense of the world are inherently dynamic and complex. The mind and identity are qualities which are seen to be in a state of flux, dialogically responsive to the world (Shotter, 1999; Day, 1993; Shepherd, 2013). Transportation allows us to understand and interact with the narrative world, to hone our intuitive psycho-social natures. It lets us engage in imaginary journeys, to step outside of our own mind and into the mind of another, albeit unreal, person. Fantasy, especially, is a genre of fiction that is most often introduced to readers in childhood and then, for some,

continued into adulthood: "among those books that we love as children, that we remember best as adults, fantasy is by no means the least" states Lloyd Alexander (1971), author of a series of high fantasy novels, *The Chronicles of Prydain*.

It is at this point that the reason why we find imaginary worlds and unreal people so deeply fascinating begins to make sense. Much like young children playing out their own problem-solution stories (Gottschall, 2013), adults use the pretend worlds of fiction as a means of breaking down and understanding the world, too[10]. Fiction helps us to better grasp which behaviours might be successful in a given situation, and/or how to perform our various identities. In a sense, fiction provides us with experimental habitus, the unspoken rules of a field, which then offers us a better understanding of the doxa, the behaviours which are appropriate in that field, thus negating any potential loss to our capital. Indeed, narratives are so closely tied to the ways in which we have developed our understanding of the world and each other, that certain structures – plots and beats within a narrative – have been repeated and passed down across multiple generations, creating what has been termed *monomyths* (Campbell, 1949/2004).

2.3 Monomyths and Master Narratives

Barthes (1975, p. 237) states that "there are countless forms of narrative in the world", seemingly in opposition to the often-repeated adage that there are only seven stories. And yet, both statements are, in a sense, true. Barthes talks of written and oral storytelling, pictures, paintings and films, of different genres of story, and the huge variety one can find there. This presents some difficulty for the analyst. One no doubt recognises a story when they hear or read it, but what exactly is it that has made this object a narrative? How does one read *story*, as opposed to read *a* story? Barthes (1975, p. 238) wonders how one is able to "extract, from the apparent anarchy of messages, a classifying principle and central vantage point" to recognise a narrative and to understand it. In answer to this question, Brewer & Lichtenstein (1980) argue that a retelling of events – that is, actions that occur in time – is not the same as the telling of stories. Rather, they posit that for a story to be considered a story, it *must* elicit an emotional response: "The discourse force of stories appears to be to entertain the reader by arousing certain

[10] It is also possible that 'fictionalization' is form of social survival within small communities, as to speak plainly within such close quarters may have long-lasting negative effects. Thus, it has been argued that by turning potentially problematic or face-threatening critiques or cautionary tales into fairy stories or songs reduces the risk of causing social friction. This is a process called 'Indirection' (Heeschen, 2001).

affective states - not simply to transmit information about sequences of events" (1980, p. 4). Thus, in order for a text to be effective as a 'story', it must have structures that include either suspense and resolution or suspense and surprise (Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1980). Stories must play out situations – structures and plots – that are valuable for us to experience. These are the structures which spread, becoming in some cases so embedded within cultures that they take on mythic status, not only underpinning how people choose to live their lives and understand the wider world, but also, in some cases, becoming foundational elements of the (inter)national culture.

Indeed, these structures have been found in a huge array of narratives, no matter the specific genre or actual text. These structures work on three levels, each one more specific than the last: the monomyth (Campbell, 1949/2004), the overarching plot; the syntagmatic structure (Propp, 1968) and character elements that define the genre; and, finally, mythemes (Levi-Strauss, in Barthes, 1975), the smallest units of narrative grammar. At the highest level, the monomyth, has been coded by Campbell into the *hero's journey*, and typically follows twelve steps:

1. Ordinary world (the world the hero inhabits, which is familiar to him.)
2. The call to action (the hero is 'invited' to begin the adventure/quest.)
3. Refusing the call (the hero does not want to leave their world.)
4. Meeting with the mentor (the hero meets someone who can help them complete the quest, usually negating their refusal.)
5. Crossing the threshold (the hero is now embroiled in the narrative, they cannot refuse or return home.)
6. Tests, allies, enemies (in which the hero meets the antagonist(s), undergoes trials, and meets allies. The hero learns about the world, and we, in turn, learn more about the hero.)
7. Approach the innermost cave (the hero must face something 'within' themselves, they are challenged on a deeply personal, often psychological level. This is also the moment when the hero must prepare for the upcoming ordeal.)
8. Ordeal (the hero must wrestle within their internal conflict and also may have to face various physical ordeals. The threat to the hero is great, and literal death is possible. A psychological or metaphorical death may also occur at this moment, granting him the power or insight needed to succeed.)

9. Seizing the sword. (The hero defeats the enemy and receives his reward. He emerges from the previous four stages stronger and wiser for his experiences.)
10. The road back. (Believing the battle won, the hero now returns home, benefitting from his experience and bringing his reward with him, if it is physical.)
11. Resurrection. (This is the most dangerous part of the journey, in which the hero faces a test more significant than those that have gone before. If he fails, it is likely his failure will have dire consequences. If he wins, he will be forever changed.)
12. Return with the elixir. (The hero arrives home, bringing with him the benefit of his resurrection. His return brings with it hope. He may have found the solution to a problem or be able to inspire others).

The hero's journey was codified by Campbell as a result of building on the work of the philosopher Carl Jung, among others. Jung had been investigating the principles of '*archetypes*', which he believed to be universal concepts that all people, regardless of race, language, gender or nationality, could attach meaning to. Jung posited that there is a universal blueprint, a shared understanding of what a story is and who the characters are. In this way, Jung accounted for the fact that certain story archetypes – myths – can be found repeated in hugely diverse cultures and across eras. Campbell built on this philosophic foundation from a psycho-analytical and ethnographic basis, further defining Jung's archetypes as monomyths, the greatest of which being the hero's journey. While recently criticisms have been made regarding the Eurocentric nature of Campbell's analysis[11], in terms of high fantasy, this model remains largely extant (perhaps due to high fantasy's roots in European fairy tales).

On the second level, below the hero's journey monomyth, Vladimir Propp offered a syntagmatic means to map literature for analysis. 'Syntagmatic' refers to the formal structure or organization of text – in Propp's original work, fairy tale texts[12] – in which chronological and linear elements can be picked out. "Thus," Dundes states (1964, p. xi), "if a tale consists of elements A-Z, the structure of the tale is delineated in terms of the same sequence." Propp (1968) was able to codify various specific structures and characters (archetypes) found in folk narratives, and from this to create a series of elements that one would expect to find in these

[11] Not the only criticism, but this will be addressed later.
[12] In terms of fairy tales, the Arne-Thompson Uther index (the ATU) is also of note as a guide to the syntagmatic structures used and will be addressed specially in chapter five.

monomyths. These syntagmatic structures and character archetypes allowed narrative theorists to work at a more specific level than the monomyth, being able to categorise sub-genres of narrative (although, invariably, the hero's journey was still present, though not every step was always attended to). This resulted in a morphology that went on to inspire much of literary criticism in the 20th century (Dundes, 1964).

Finally, at the most distinct level, Levi-Strauss worked with *mythemes* (Barthes, 1975). A mytheme is a minimal unit, a small, isolated factor of a story which, when grouped together, create the character archetypes and syntagmatic structures that themselves go on to build the monomyths. Mythemes are significant because they "appear in clusters which in turn combine amongst themselves" (Barthes, 1975, p. 242). Thus, both Campbell and Propp were able to codify the various mythemes that are found in narratives (either generally in the monomyth or more specifically in syntagmatic structures and character archetypes). The presence of mythemes, individual units that could nevertheless be seen repeatedly grouped in various narratives across a number of cultures, is equated by Barthes to the various units of language. Discourse (the monomyth) is made up of sentences (the syntagmatic structures and character archetypes); but sentences can occur in any number of languages, using disparate grammars and lexis to make them logical. However, words are made up of generally universal units of sound, regardless of the language being spoken: phonemes. This role, that of the universal minimal, is the role mythemes play in the overall discoursal function of narrative. This dynamic interplay between these three levels prompts Barthes (1975, p. 243) to state that:

> To understand a narrative is not only to follow the unfolding of the story but also to recognize in it a number of "strata," to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative onto an implicitly vertical axis; to read a narrative (or listen to it) is not only to pass from one word to the next, but also from one level to the next.

The success of the monomyth, an overall story structure which can be found in numerous narratives from a variety of cultures (though most commonly European in origin), is the result of the human desire for powerful stories. The more engaging the story, the stronger the cultural encoding and repetition of mythemes, creating again the repetition of syntagmatic structure and

characters, which go on to become monomyths. It is a dynamic process, working in much the same way as capital, habitus and doxa work within fields (Bourdieu, 2000), as discussed in chapter one. Equally, within this structure, certain qualities become codified – we begin to recognise from the mytheme, for example, what is expected of a hero, which then allows us to recognise in both the unique structure and character of the narrative those qualities, which then are codified at the highest level of understanding, the monomyth. We know who the hero is, and we know why he is the hero, without needing to be told 'this person is the hero' (and it is this way that tropes can be formed). Thus, we are able to draw on narratives to help us understand the culture we live in, its rules and expectations, because these narratives repeat and codify those rules and expectations.

Religious narratives are a prime example of this. "The great religious texts form and are made up of narratives", Day (1993, p. 217) tells us, and these stories impact on our lives, whether or not we actively believe. Taking Christianity[13] as an example, the story of the birth of Jesus and his crucifixion are marked within many cultures. The narrative of a deity, born of a virgin woman, who faces numerous challenges, meets allies and enemies, is killed and resurrected, and finally provides greater hope and meaning, is one resounding in monomythic quality. It is also part of a larger community narrative, used to mark social inclusion, to guide behaviour, and to set social norms (it is part of a field's habitus and, resultingly, doxa). People engage with these stories because they are able "to locate themselves in the network of performance and recognition that those [religious] stories delineate" (Day, 1993, p. 217). It is this ability to locate oneself within the performative network, the monomythic narrative, which allows a sense of community identity to grow. By being able to recognise the mythic structure, people can then recognise themselves and others as having a shared ideology; to feel, as Bell (2003, p. 64) says, "a powerful sense of belonging" which is "a prerequisite for the formation of the inside/outside, self/other, us/them boundaries that define the topography of nationalist sentiment and rhetoric." (Inter)national mythic narrative structures, whether religious or otherwise, allow communication between both small and large groups of people, and from that, a shared sense of understanding grows. Indeed, so well accepted are these steps that the hero's journey has been used to help children and young adults understand their journey through

[13] The main religious culture in which I was raised, although certainly not the only religious narrative either in the UK or the world.

education (Lambert, 2014), to aid mentally unwell individuals through their journey to mental health and self-acceptance (Rebillot, 1979; Robertson & Lawrence, 2015), in the transition from clinical counsellor to supervisor/mentor (Duffy & Guiffrida, 2014), in the field of social work to help social workers understand service users' journeys (Dybicz, 2012), as well as in tourism studies (Robledo & Batle, 2015). And why not? The hero's journey is a tale that, arguably, most people would like to be the protagonist of.

In a somewhat 'chicken and egg' scenario, it is this wider social participation and acceptance that allows the cultural transmission required to create a monomyth and thus, in turn, creates a greater spread of the narrative, again mirroring Bourdieu's social theory of habitus and doxa. This is because if narratives are maintained simply between two people, this is a 'vertical' or 'horizontal' transmission and, according to Cherverud & Cavalli-Sforza (1986), this type of transmission allows for little adoption. However, when this transmission is 'contagious', that is, shared among many people, it is much more effective. Whether grand or local, successful narratives are designed to be memorable and emotionally affective, thus allowing information to be shared and built upon. And the more relevant the story, the wider its spread will be. In terms of high fantasy, it is again the monomythical structure of the hero's journey which is commonly employed. For example, the story of the lowly hero who, through his wit and/or natural superiority, overcomes the hurdles put in front of him to achieve great feats, is a recognized and enduring plot. This accounts for the longevity of fantasy narratives, and high fantasy specifically, due to its close ties to these narrative structures. However, I will discuss in closer detail these structures and their cultural influences later; for now, it is enough to know that such monomythic structures exist, and they have come to be so strongly coded due to their contagious transmission, a transmission that continues to this day.

Moreover, by understanding the monomythic structure, the repeated story arcs, character archetypes and plots, it is made easier to analyse narrative and its effects. Returning to Barthes' (1975) questions about how one can analyse a text, he points out the fallacy of the assumption that one must study all the genres, periods and the societies, in order to create an analysis – a point which, as discussed, has received criticism. Nevertheless, by drawing comparisons with linguistic studies, Barthes points out the fact that numerous valuable insights have been found, not by studying every discrete aspect of language(s), but by working deductively from models of description, such as the hero's journey, and then to "proceed gradually from that model down,

towards the species, which at the same time partake in and deviate from the model" (Barthes, 1975, p. 239). Building on this foundation, Lyotard (1984/1993) explored how such pervasive structures can be used to understand the culture, using the term '*master narratives*'. Master narratives are the "pre-existent socio-cultural forms of interpretation" (Herman, et al., 2003, p. 287). Master narratives are, as the name suggests, overarching stories that shape cultural, national and, in many cases, international ideologies and groupings. Lyotard exemplified both the Enlightenment and Science as master narratives – one being the narrative of liberty and progress, and the other of positivism and 'pure' knowledge. As a result of conceptualising knowledge as master narratives, Lyotard was able to challenge the idea of what is 'true', instead asking what stories are being told and believed, a key focus of this thesis. This shift in perception has allowed both macro and micro exploration of socio-culturally dominant ideologies, such as those I am exploring within the representation of women in high fantasy, and how these representations both reflect and create a social perception of women. Essentially, Campbell provided a universal blueprint for how stories progress structurally, especially Eurocentric mythic tales of heroism, while Lyotard explained how such ubiquitous narratives can be used to unpick and critically assess the culture(s) from which they arise, arguing against a positivist, didactic view of knowledge and truth. Indeed, "social 'realities' are always discursively produced" (Baxter, 2002, p. 830), and fiction – myths and legends included – plays a significant role in this.

Thus, the monomythic structure serves a number of functions. It situates us within our local sphere and helps us to perform our identity and it helps us make and make sense of our history, creating a wider sense of group participation and of national identity. As Shepherd (2013) states, some stories may be local, and some may have wider reach. Through syntagmatic structure and archetypal characters, narratives allow us to create our own power and status (our social and cultural capital) by positioning ourselves and others as recognised character types, introduced at a 'known point' in our own personal life story. Narratives allow us to *be* human, in the sense that being human means to be socially situated within our communities and cultures. Stokes (2003, p. 67) explains this dynamic thus:

> It seems a basic human characteristic to tell stories about ourselves,
> about our world and about people and phenomena we encounter.

> Some of the most ancient forms of culture are in the form of stories, and the foundations of the world's major religions are conveyed from one generation to the next in narrative form. Stories are fundamental to the oldest known cultural forms: myths, ballads and poetry are all driven by narrative.

We can, therefore, begin to understand two aspects that are important to narrative theory and the question of how narratives can affect people's identity formation and the way they perceive the world: "*We are all stories*" (Shepherd, 2013, pp. 3, original emphasis). We have so far seen that from an evolutionary standpoint, human beings have been primed to pay specific attention to narratives (Sugiyama, 2001; Mellmann, 2012; Gottschall, 2013). We have also seen how certain narratives, beginning at the level of grouped mythemes, can grow to become monomyths, stories which spread across time and cultures, to become universal touchstones not only in terms of stories, but also in terms of our understanding of our own mental health (Rebillot, 1979; Robertson & Lawrence, 2015), and our communities, our religions (Day, 1993) and our cultures (Stokes, 2003; Lyotard, 1984/1993). As Bahtkin (1984:287, in Schotter, 1999, original emphasis) explains, "to be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another*." Thus, the creation of believable characters is a vital step in the processes of creating a complete narrative world, into which a reader can be transported. Much like our innate cognitive ability to lose ourselves in fiction, so too does our mind help us to perceive imaginary characters as 'real'.

2.4 Characterisation and Anthropomorphism

While Gerrig (1993) has theorised on the power of transportation to place the reader inside the narrative world, Gardner & Knowles (2008) build on the concept of anthropomorphism to explain how it is that readers are able to relate to fictional characters as if they were real. Anthropomorphism is the ability of human beings to imbue non-humans, such as fictional characters, with human behaviours, motivations, emotions and characteristics (Epley, et al., 2007). It has been empirically shown that readers (and viewers) are able to perceive fictional

characters so completely that they can attribute actions and motivations to those characters based on complex extrapolations from what is known within the text to what is unknown. Once again, it a human being's ability to engage and empathise that allows this to be possible. For example, Barret & Keil (1996) used a combination of narratives featuring God, a recall test and a questionnaire, in order to test whether participants applied human characteristics to a God entity. These narratives were built to include a set of base items in which the correct answer was either 'yes' or 'no', with questions relating to items which were not included in the original stories but which did suggest "particular dimensions of an anthropomorphic concept" (pg 220). As a result, if participants answered 'yes' to these items, it was considered to evidence the fact that certain abilities which were not ascribed to God in the story, such as God needing sensory input in order to gather information, were, therefore, anthropomorphic interpretations. Alternatively, Aggarwal & McGill (2007) found that anthropomorphism can also be incongruous; that is, if the behaviour of the anthropomorphised characters does not marry with the evidence given, or with the reader/viewer's schemata for how such a character should behave, the reader/viewer will not accept that behaviour and reject the character. The illusion will be broken. Thus, when creating a character, authors must build a person who behaves logically in terms of a) the world in which they exist, b) their experiences and actions within that world (both currently and historically), and c) their personality. Moreover, the author must consider how these aspects can be presented as logical to the reader's expectations of how such a person, in such a world, *would* behave. Reader expectation is important. While an author cannot be expected to know their reader's life experiences – their total schematic worldview – they can make assumptions based on shared cultural values and the narrative expectations set forth within the genre of the text.

Like in narratives, anthropomorphism can also have its villains. While readers may feel satisfied that their expectations of behaviour have been appropriately mapped onto the character, these expectations may still be negative. A character, no matter how well created, may still be disliked; equally, a character who is a villain can still be liked. This powerful relationship between attachment and the successful anthropomorphism of fictional characters is explored by Gardener & Knowles (2008), who used anthropomorphic theory to analyse attachment between viewers and fictional television characters. Drawing on theories of parasocial relationships, Gardener & Knowles wanted to investigate whether anthropomorphism was caused by qualities

found only in the television character or if viewers' feelings towards the character need to be taken into account. They explain the conundrum thus (Gardener & Knowles, 2008, p. 157):

> "If I imbue my dog with more human–like thoughts and feelings than my neighbor's dog, it could well be due to stronger affection to my own dog, or alternatively, it could be because I'm more familiar with my dog than my neighbor's dog, or even because I chose my dog based on idiosyncratic anthropomorphic considerations, such as similarity in appearance to myself."

In order to untangle this question, Gardener & Knowles conducted a test to look at positive and negative feelings towards liked and disliked characters. Participants were asked to name their favourite and least favourite characters from television shows, with characters from ensemble narratives being selected in the majority, though not all characters were live action (e.g., characters from the cartoon series '*Family Guy'* were given by participants). The participants were then assigned randomly into groups, one for favourites and one for least favourites. Questionnaires were given to participants to measure their familiarity with the characters, asking questions based on the characters' given habits, histories and attitudes. Participants were asked to rate, firstly, how familiar they were with the character, with no significant difference being found between either favourite/non-favourite or real/cartoon characters. They were then asked to rate the 'realness' or the character by answering Likert-scale questions such as 'She/he is warm', 'I definitely know where she/he likes to hang out' and 'I sometimes make remarks to him/her when watching the show'. The results of this study showed that liking a character did indeed make them seem more real, even in the case of animated characters. However, as study one was based on self-reports, Gardener & Knowles decided to dig a little deeper.

The second study conducted by Gardener & Knowles (2008) investigated whether participants' behaviour was modified by exposure to their favourite character, looking specifically at social facilitation and inhibition. In this study, Gardener & Knowles wanted to investigate what effect exposure to a favourite character had on participants, and specifically whether this exposure resulted in improved social facilitation, as it does when time is spent with

actual people (as opposed to anthropomorphised, fictional characters). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the results of this second study supported the proposition that being in the 'company' of favourite fictional characters did have a positive effect on participants. Crucial, however, is the type of task being performed. Tasks that are well-known are performed better when in the presence of another person, while unknown tasks are hindered. Gardener & Knowles found that the same is true when the fictional character was present, in this case in the form of an image on a screen while participants performed familiar and unfamiliar tasks. Essentially, not only do we feel our favourite fictional characters are real, but we gain the same task-based benefits from their company as we do from our favourite real people.

The findings from this study are interesting when considered in terms of both narrative persuasion and in terms of familiarity. As Pinkola Estes (2003, in Campbell, 2004:xxxvi) states, stories "are meant to be conveyed in blood-red wholeness and authentic depth." The perception of a character's realness must surely account for some of this 'wholeness', and it would seem that liking a character has more of an impact of their realness than simple knowledge of their habits, histories or attitudes. Building on this, Epley, Waytz & Cacioppo note that anthropomorphising non-humans, such as fictional characters, can have a significant impact on "whether those agents are treated as *moral* agents worthy of *respect* and *concern* or treated *merely as objects*, on how people expect those agents to behave in the future, and on people's interpretations of these agents' behaviour in the present" (Epley, et al., 2007, pp. 864, my emphasis). The central point here is that readers treat characters as real people, and as such are open to the same influences from them that they would be of any real person with whom they interact. This is, I argue, fundamental to the power that fiction has in shaping our beliefs and our worldviews. Fictional characters are among the people we learn from, and from whom we can also therefore benefit from experiential learning. Even characters that are not strictly speaking human can be anthropomorphised (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007), as long as we able to connect to them via theory of mind and transportation. Equally, a character's alignment with 'good' or 'evil' does not affect our attachment to them (Prentice, et al., 1997). As long as a character can be recognised as real, it is extremely likely that we will begin to conceptualise them as such, applying motivations and desires to them that are not given in the text, as well as being able to extrapolate from the text actions and abilities on their behalf.

Two reasons for anthropomorphising are given by Aggarwal & McGill (2007). The first is that anthropomorphising occurs in response to loneliness – people who wish to have better or more friendships humanise non-human entities to fill this need. A second possibility is that human beings anthropomorphise to better make sense of the world. This reason aligns neatly with theories of narrative importance already outlined, that is, that narratives and narrative worlds are both a biological and a social evolutionary tactic developed in order to gain physical and psychological experience without the risks involved in actually engaging in the necessary learning behaviours. A third theory, put forward by Guthrie (in Aggarwal & McGill, 2007), adds a further connection between anthropomorphic theory and narrative theory. Guthrie argues that it is by anthropomorphising that human beings are able to interpret the world as being basically 'human-like', thus giving priority to higher level interpretations of events, allowing them to maximise predictability – something which is again very similar to the theory that narratives allow people to practise social interactions without the risk of losing social inclusion due to potential errors in judgement. Alternatively, Voloshinov (1986, in Schotter, 1999) argues that individuals' inner-worlds, that is, their thoughts and beliefs, are stabilised as a result of *social audiences*. These social audiences are made up of the interactions that create motives, reasons and values; of the things we hear said around us, and the motivations we attribute to them. This principle in turn aligns with the concept of the dialogical self and the relationship between doxa and habitus, both outlined in chapter one. Voloshinov goes on to state that, "in point of fact, *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant... Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'" (Voloshinov 1986, in Schotter, 1999, p.78, original emphasis).

This analysis reflects closely the principle of double articulation (Bednarek, 2012) in narrative, and the manner in which anthropomorphism can create a character that is both believable and relatable – a character who appears *real*. The first articulation, you may recall, is concerned with the communication between characters within the text, while the second articulation relates to the communication between text and reader. Such stylistic choice – narrative writing as opposed to rhetorical writing – is what allows characters (and thus their lives) to become 'real'. We are able to empathise with them because the manner in which they convey themselves, their speech, and their thoughts are similar to our own. This ability to empathise is termed *theory of mind* by cognitive psychologists (McEwan, 2005), and explains

most people's innate ability to imagine themselves in someone else's shoes, to empathise with others and to form relationships. Theory of mind is crucial to the success of a narrative because, as Benjamin (1968/2006, p. 87) states, "the storyteller takes what he tells from experience - his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale." Characters are a large part of the way that human beings use stories to navigate the world. A character's experiences, their drives, relationships and behaviours, are what root us in the narrative world. We are able to achieve this connection through anthropomorphism and ability to engage in theory of mind, to empathise.

2.5 Conclusion

We are, as a result of both our evolutionary and societal nature, programmed to respond to story. Stories are "sociolinguistic manifestations as well as discursive constructions of an array of social processes" (Gimenez, 2010, p. 199). What this means is that a narrative both contains and constructs social representations – narratives are, in a sense, both a *product of* and a *producer of* the world. Stories are thus codified into the society they emerge from, and become not only a way to understand the world, but a part of the world itself. Long before the printed word, stories were used to help create the culture which they in turn sought to maintain. Ideologies were captured and then codified and solidified within that society or community. This is why "no matter how hard we concentrate, no matter how deep we dig in our heels, we just can't resist the gravity of alternate worlds" (Gottschall, 2013, p. 3). Metarepresentations of the kind provided by fiction make it possible for us to "monitor our own reactions, to select one choice and reject another to produce this or that effect" (Boyd, 2001, p. 199; Day, 1993). Indeed, our need to story our lives and to understand ourselves through the archetypes of story is so integral to our psychological wellness that psychoanalysts seek to 'repair' damaged stories, understanding that a person's self-concept or self-identity is the product of adapting narratives from one's cultural myths. Polkinghorne (1991, p. 135) argues that when a person is under stress, their self-narrative (their personal mythology) deconstructs, causing psychological and emotional

pain, even damage, and that "one function of psychotherapy is to assist in the reconstruction of a meaning-giving narrative of self-identity"[14].

Truly, the pervasiveness of narrative in our social and cultural evolution is a reflection of the embedded social-psychological nature and the function of story-telling. Teaching our ancestors how to hunt and gather, our children how to understand and deal with the problems and fears of their new lives, or helping us to negotiate our culture, our society and our place/behaviour and the place/behaviour of others; all these things are inextricably tied up with the master narratives of our mythologies. Our brains have adapted to allow us this connection to stories, to give us the ability to be transported into another world to the extent where that world can appear real to us. Equally, as a result of our theory of mind, we are able to anthropomorphise unreal, even non-human, characters with human qualities, so much so that we can confidently predict what that character's behaviour would be in situations never encountered in the text – situations we might create in our own imaginations, for example. Characterisation is an important part of narrative. While a narrative world might appear real, it is the people who inhabit it that give it value for us. It is from the characters that we gain the experience that narrative provides. Thus, the way that characters are represented and what happens to them is important in understanding why certain representation may be harmful or problematic, such as the representations of female characters within high fantasy.

Later in this thesis, I will look specifically at the narrative worlds which the women of high fantasy inhabit, and the roles that they are given to perform. However, in the next chapter, having established that narratives allow us to gain experience, to help shape our understanding of the world, the monomythic structures that are so embedded in cultures and narratives, and the strong psychological and emotional connection that readers can have to both narrative worlds and to characters, I would like to look at what can happen when stories teach us lessons and behaviours that are harmful.

[14] Another psychotherapist, John Adlam, knowingly uses narrative and narrative allegory to recount his experiences and research in publication (see, for example, Scanlon & Adlam, 2011; Adlam 2014).

3. There And Back Again?

Language has power – this seems to be something that all instinctively know to be true. Novelist, poet and playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton is credited with coining the phrase "the pen is mightier than the sword" in 1839, but the concept behind the famous adage is almost certainly based on the connection that human beings have to story to formulate their social situatedness, as discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, such is the power of fiction that it is often credited with influencing real-world events. *Neuromancer*, by William Gibson, is argued to be a precursor to the internet and electronic social connectedness, while *The World Set Free* by H. G. Wells is said to have foreseen and perhaps inspired the invention of the atom bomb (Jackson, 2011). *Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley, is implicated in dissuading then U.S. present G. W. Bush from pursuing embryonic stem-cell research (Lefkowitz, 2008). Other books created whole genres, most famously J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth series, which is widely credited as the forebear of modern high fantasy (see chapter 4). Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* is, states Walton (2009), a key part of the change in how the concept of gender is understood in the 20th and 21st century, while Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* series is believed to be a direct challenge to the trope (the fictional cliché) of the masculine, distant, violent hero of both fantasy and mainstream literature, and to the oft-held adage that boys won't read a book with a female protagonist (Bell, 2014). Indeed, the power of narratives to affect beliefs and to cause (sometimes unwanted) change has long been understood and, in some cases, feared – otherwise, as Green & Brock (2000) argue, censorship would not be so ubiquitous, to say nothing of the burning of books throughout history.

People brush up against the power of words in every aspect of their lives, whether consciously or unconsciously: once you see a word, you read it. In fact, once you have learned to read, it is impossible *not* to do so. Thousands if not millions of words enter a person's mind every day with or without their permission. However, these words are not harmless ghosts, sharing our space passively. Narrative, and in particular *fictional* narrative, can control what we believe (Strange & Leung, 1999; Prentice, et al., 1997; Green & Brock, 2000; Djikic, et al., 2009), and can also limit our ability to recognise falsehoods and inferences (Appel & Richter, 2007; Appel, 2008). In short, "we are created by words as well as being creators of them" (Day,

1993, p. 214). As was discussed in the previous chapter, human beings use stories to help them learn about the world socially and pragmatically: to navigate their place and identity within it, to 'practise' their behaviour, and to develop, via theory of mind, their empathy and understanding of others. As a result, it is the embedded and, crucially, subtle nature of language and the influence of story that are of serious concern when considering the effect that fictional narratives can have on the reader. This is because in the same way that language can affect how we perceive the world, so can story (Appel & Richter, 2007; Appel, 2008; Green & Brock, 2000; Gottschall, 2013; Djikic, et al., 2009; Schank & Berman, 2002).

3.1 Just World Belief and Narrative Persuasion

One of the ways that fiction can affect our beliefs and views of the world is through either the *belief in a just world* (BJW) or *belief in a mean world* (BMW) theories. Appel (2008) investigated the differing influence between fictional and factual television narratives, and what he discovered is both interesting and alarming. Appel showed that when engaged with fictional narratives, people are more likely to subscribe to a belief in a just world, whereas those exposed to rhetorical narratives (such as news articles) are more likely to believe in a mean world. Fantasy readers, it would seem, are more likely to believe in a just world, at least insofar as the structure of the genre gives any indication. Fantasy, and particularly high fantasy of the kind most commonly associated with Tolkien, is based on the monomyth of the hero's journey, with character archetypes and syntagmatic structures found in European medieval romance (such as Arthurian legends) and fairy tales (Jackson, 1981; Tolkien, 1939/1983; Williamson, 2015; Mendlesohn, 2008). As previously described, the hero's journey involves the hero being rewarded for his adventures; in the syntagmatic structure of medieval romance and fairy tales, he is rewarded by becoming king or marrying (or both), his resurrection healing the land. Thus, the battle against evil is fought and won, and good prevails. Indeed, "fantasy creates hope and optimism in readers. It is the pure stuff of wonder, the kind that carries over into everyday life and colors the way readers perceive things around them" (Pierce, 1993, p. 50). In this, Pierce echoes almost exactly the argument made above by Appel – the world is just, and high fantasy/hero's journey monomythic narratives confirm that. It may at first appear that a belief in a just world is a positive thing to subscribe to. However, the effects of this belief can be

alarmingly negative: people who have been found to have a high BJW have also been found to be more likely to blame the victims of criminal events or negative experiences, such as HIV infection (Hafer, 2000), other illnesses (Scott, 2008) or those receiving welfare support (Appelbaum, et al., 2003), or rape (Strömwall, et al., 2013). For example, Strömwall et al. (2013) found that in cases of rape, people with a high scoring BJW were more likely to blame the victim for the incident, especially in cases where the rapist was a stranger.

While all of these effects are profoundly concerning, given the focus in this work on the representations of female characters in high fantasy, I would like to look now at the effects of victim blaming in terms of rape culture and narrative. Rape culture is a phrase used to define the fact that many aspects of the general culture (both globally and in the West) condone rape and sexual violence, including through the practice of blaming the victim for their assault, or not fully (or at all) legally punishing the perpetrator. In recent years, the subject of rape culture has become more prominent, both within social media and traditional media spheres. Ferreday (2015) discusses how the dominant narrative deals with issues of rape in Western society, drawing on examples from both the UK and the USA. Ferreday unpacks the tendency within both judicial circles and the media to view rape as either the fault of the victim, or, alternatively, to view the punishment of the rapists (all of whom are male in the examples she gives) as having their life stories in some way disrupted or derailed as a result of conviction. She states (2015, p. 22) that the "narrative of bright male futures interrupted by a cruel justice system – and by the implied vindictiveness of the victim – is repeated", citing numerous cases to support her assertation. Although Farreday doesn't explicitly make this point, the parallels between her analysis regarding the fact that "whose stories are told, whose future is at stake, and how rape culture is discursively constructed" (2015, p. 22) speaks to the issues surrounding both just world beliefs and the ubiquity of the hero's journey structure and the archetypal characters presented in monomyths (especially in high fantasy, to be discussed).

In many of these cases, the young male rapists were white, of good birth, and on track to become functioning members of society (or at least, to complete higher education, often classed as the same thing). In this, they are codified along the same lines as the archetypal hero of numerous narratives, the 'prince' or 'white knight'. On the other hand, the victim of the rape is portrayed counter to the archetypical representation of the good woman, based again on the archetypal characters and syntagmatic structures found in medieval romance and fairy tales: she

was sexually active, or she was drunk, or she was out alone, or she was in the company of men – she was not behaving as the 'maiden' should. Essentially, the monomythic structure and archetypal character behaviour systems have broken down; the 'just' or 'happy' ending is in jeopardy. Thus, often in rape cases the victim is cast in the role of 'villain' while the rapist may be painted in a sympathetic light in the media and/or given a lenient sentence by the courts. Farreday gives a moving and very specific example of this practice, which I will quote in full (2015, pp. 21-22):

> In August 2012, the Steubenville rape case became the occasion of feminist rage, protest and activism. A female high school student was repeatedly sexually assaulted by several of her classmates while unconscious, the assault filmed and shared on social media and through emails and text messages. Despite this unprecedented body of evidence, including comments from the perpetrators and their contacts which made it clear that they saw what they were doing as rape, only two men were convicted, both of whom were given derisory sentences, of one year' and two years' imprisonment respectively. Despite this, commentators and news outlets seemed sympathetic with the rapists, especially in respect to the effect on the 'promising' futures denied to them by a criminal record. CNN reporter Poppy Harlow infamously stated that it was 'Incredibly difficult … to watch what happened as these two young men that had such promising futures, star football players, very good students, literally watched as they believed their lives fell apart'.

While Farreday does not reference the hero's journey or just world beliefs, she does, however, draw a comparison between media discussion and representations of rape culture and a specific episode from the television series *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011 - present), and it is in this analysis, I suggest, the comparison is clear.

Rape is a common narrative tool used in many stories as a trope to show which character is the villain. However, in the television series *Game of Thrones*, a high fantasy television show

based on the ongoing *A Song of Ice and Fire* high fantasy novels by George R. R. Martin, the archetypal character of the 'prince' is disrupted, and the hero's journey placed in flux. A main protagonist on the show, Jaime Lannister, has been for a number of seasons undergoing an 'arc of redemption', in which an initially wicked character moves to good[15], and "accordingly, readers' and viewers' perceptions of him [Jaime] […] is likely to be more positive" (Gjelsviv, 2016, p. 62). However, against fans' anthropomorphic expectations of Jaime's redemptive arc, in 'Breaker of Chains' (4.03), he rapes his sister[16]. As Farreday reports, the backlash against this amongst both fans and commentators was significant, causing "outrage at the perceived violation of readers' expectations" (2015, p. 29). Indeed, "The stories we tell about rape, who gets to speak, and which acts can be named are thus of central importance in understanding rape culture" (Ferreday, 2015, p. 25). We are trained by narrative to expect a certain outcome, and for people to behave in certain ways – when this is challenged, our beliefs are challenged[17]. This is a point picked up by Shepherd in her work on gender and violence in popular culture: people expect a happy ending in life and in the media they consume, and if this outcome is denied, it is "profoundly unsettling" (2013, p. 4). This can be seen in the disruption of Jaime's arc and the fans' reaction to it. As Gjelsvic notes, "Many fans responded negatively to this scene, first and foremost because the rape was seen as inconsistent with Jaime's character" (2016, p. 62). Note here that is not the act of rape itself which caused the aforementioned fan censure, but rather the negative effect the act of raping another person had on Jaime's character and *his* hero's journey.

Thus, to return to the subject of just world beliefs, one reason for the fact that people who believe in a just world are more likely to blame victims is given by Mendonça et al. (2016), who state that when unjust behaviour is observed, those with a high BJW will cognitively reconstruct the event to better fit with their own perception that the world is just. Sebby & Johnston (2013) provide support for this reasoning, stating that when a victim is perceived to be innocent or in some way similar to the person with a high BJW, that person is more likely to denigrate the

[15] Again, this arc can be seen in the hero's journey. The 'ordinary world' is one in which the character is wicked. S/he then progresses through the same steps, with the 'entering the cave' and 'resurrection' stages solidifying their move to good.

[16] For the uninitiated to *Game of Thrones* or the novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the fact that Jaime rapes his sister may seem additionally shocking. The question of incest is well beyond the scope of this study; I will simply say that up until this moment, his sexual relationship with his sister, Cersei, had been shown to be consensual.

[17] Interestingly, this scene from the television series is markedly different from the original novel in the series, *A Storm of Swords*. In the original, the scene is shown to be consensual, with Cersei vocally agreeing and encouraging the act. Gjelsvik (2016) gives a detailed discussion on the possible commercial reasons why HBO might have sought to make such changes to this interaction, noting that while generally the television series has been faithful to the novels, this is one of the most stark departures from the original narrative.

victim in order to preserve their belief in a just world. Essentially, it is easier to believe that the victim is at fault than to believe that bad things can happen to good people. This is not to say, though, that all people who believe in a just world will blame victims whose experiences jeopardise this worldview. However, the above research does indicate that those who subscribe heavily to this view are more likely to do so – as Lerner (1980) explains, while everybody holds to the belief in a just world to some extent, there are certain individuals who believe more strongly than others.

There is also a significant difference between the creation of beliefs about real-world events and a person having their beliefs shaped by a fictional story. High fantasy, especially, is very deliberately removed from the real world. The mechanics of high fantasy demand that a new world is created, one in which magic exists, and to which its own rules, laws and logic apply. In short, a high fantasy world must be *a fantasy*. It cannot conform, at least in whole if not in part, to the rules that govern the real world. Therefore, while the evidence above deals with the fact that individuals prone to a just world belief may then cognitively reconstruct the events in rhetorical narratives (for example, a news article) to better fit their worldview, it would seem logical that such mental gymnastics would not occur when faced with a fictional world. However, this is not the case. Of those individuals who believe more strongly, they are much more likely to be actively engaged in fiction (Appel, 2008), and predominantly so with fiction in which the monomyth of the 'happy ending', that the wicked are punished and the good prevail, is prevalent – such as in high fantasy. Thus, the situation occurs where "people who watch fictional stories on television, stories that portray a just world, tend to believe that the real world is a just place" (Appel, 2008, p. 70), even to extent where they will create a cognitive disconnect, or dissonance, from the facts of situations which contradict this view.

This predisposition to hold a BJW and in turn to victim blame/shame highlights the influence of stories on the unconscious mind in a manner that is both worrying and intriguing. So strong is the belief in the ideals put forward in fiction that Gotschall (2013, p. xv) states, with something akin to wonder, "how bizarre it is that when we experience a story – whether in a book, a film, or a song – we allow ourselves to be invaded by the teller." And why not feel so amazed by this curious effect? When reading a book, or enjoying any kind of narrative, it is natural to disappear into an alternative world. Indeed, if a story *fails* to take us to another place, most people would agree that it is a bad story. As explained in chapter two, our enjoyment of

narrative is based around the principle that it allows us to experience something 'other', whether that be new relationships, new behaviours and/or new identities. Emotional connection to a story to the point where one becomes completely absorbed in the fictional word is vital, to the extent where one will feel 'in the mood' for one particular book over another. And, as Mar et al. (2011, p. 818) explain, "emotions continue to play a role after one has chosen a book and begun to read, with characters and situations eliciting affect in a number of ways, including the evocation of personal, emotion-filled, memories." Crucially, it is the concept of 'memory' that offers some insight into the way that fiction can influence real-world beliefs. Our knowledge of the world is based on what we remember, consciously or unconsciously – it is these events that make up our experiences. For this reason, "story-congruent memories evoked during reading should be included in the subset of exemplars sampled at judgment" (Strange & Leung, 1999, p. 437), i.e., when we make judgements, we may also use experiences gained from stories, held in our memories, to help us. Indeed, as the following will show, the fact that some experiences come from 'unreal' fictional worlds does not negate their influence over us; it can, in fact, *strengthen* it.

3.2 The Dangers of Transportation

Transportation can be extraordinarily immersive, whether one is reading, listening or viewing a narrative – although Green et al. (2004, p. 312) hold that reading allows for "more imaginative investment from the individual." It is through this imaginative immersion that our beliefs may begin to be altered. Green & Brock (2000) investigated the effects of transportation on readers' story-consistent beliefs, their empathy with the protagonist, and their acceptance of falsities within the text. The aim of their research was to discover whether fictional narratives, as opposed to factual rhetoric, can persuade the reader into changing their beliefs regarding issues contained both explicitly and implicitly with the text. Green & Brock asked a sample of 274 participants to read a narrative entitled '*Murder at the Mall'*, and then to respond to a series of Likert questions based on Gerrig's (1993) transportation scale. An alternative text, '*Bubbles at the Mall'* was also used; whereas in '*Murder at the Mall'* a young child is killed by a psychiatric patient, in '*Bubbles at the Mall'* a young child is made to laugh by a clown blowing bubbles. Factors such as gender, age, and predisposition to become 'lost' in a narrative were accounted for in the interpretation of the results.

'*Murder at the Mall'* carried within it a number of implicit belief-statements. Firstly, as the murder took place within a shopping mall, the implication is that malls are unsafe; secondly, the murderer was a psychiatric patient, implying such people are dangerous; and thirdly, the victim was a young child, implying a mean world rather a just world. Green & Brock also manipulated the narrative status of '*Murder at the Mall'*, so that for some participants it was presented as a factual story, while for others it was presented as fictional. These manipulations were made explicit to the participants, so that those who were reading the 'factual' text knew it was 'factual', and vice-versa.

As they predicted, Green & Brock found that participants who were highly transported reported story-consistent beliefs, as well as viewing the protagonists in each story more favourably. They also found that participants were equally transported into both the fictional and 'factual' texts, and that "individuals did not appear to be differently persuaded by factual versus fictional narratives" (p. 707). Building on this, Green & Brock conducted a second study in which they set out to gauge the extent of transportation by having participants circle 'false notes' within the text - that is, parts of the text which they felt were untrue - a process they termed 'Pinocchio circling'. In this experiment, Green and Brock discovered that even those readers who were deemed to have a *high need for cognition* were still transported into the text and thus did not show any increased levels of doubt or suspicion compared to those deemed to have a *low need for cognition*, even when the text was clearly labelled as fiction. Need for cognition refers to the way in which a person approaches a text. Those who are found have a high need for cognition were presumed to be more likely to critically question and evaluate the text, whereas those with a low need for cognition "tend not to think unless external forces motivate them to do so" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 708). However, even those participants who were expected to be critical of both the explicit and implicit facts of each text were, in fact, not.

Initially, there may be issues with Green & Block's discoveries. Firstly, it may be possible that participants did not fully understand the nature of the Pinocchio circling task, and so did not highlight all the false notes they noticed. It is also possible that the '*Murder at the Mall*' text played into beliefs that the participants already held, for example with regards to the possibility of a mentally ill person being violent. However, other studies have found corroborating information, proving that transportation can affect real-world beliefs. Strange & Leung (1999) investigated whether fictional or factual accounts could affect readers' perceptions

about society at large. Specifically, they were interested in *causal generalisations*, a term which refers to the general causes attributed to an event based on specific examples. In their research, they presented readers with the story of a high school drop-out and tested whether these readers would attribute the causes for the specific high school drop-out in the narratives to national (USA) reasons for dropping out of school. Strange & Leung used both rhetorical and fictional tests, and presented two scenarios, personal problems or situational problems, to explain the cause of dropping out of high school. They found that when reasons were given in the text for dropping out of high school, participants then attributed the same reasons to the real world. In another study, Prentice et al. (1997) showed that people were convinced to accept false propositions in a story when it was placed in a setting away from them (in this case, a different university versus their own university), concluding that readers must *actively engage in disbelieving* a text when reading. The significance of this is not small. According to Prentice et al.'s analysis, readers must make an effort to disbelieve the texts they are reading, something which goes explicitly against the aims of transportation when reading (Gerrig, 1993).

In a later study, Djikic et al. (2009) found that people experienced significantly increased personal belief changes when reading *fiction*. Thus, while some studies (Wheeler, et al., 1999; Green & Brock, 2000) contradicted Prentice et al.'s (1997) assertion that persuasion was more likely if the setting was unfamiliar, this referred to real-world settings (e.g., the other university campus). However, the function of setting in narrative texts could speak to the power of fictional worlds and the need, as Gibson (1980) states, of becoming a native of that world in order to become fully immersed within it. That is to say, one may be better able to actively disbelieve a text when one has some knowledge of the real world, its rules and social norms[18] – whereas when a narrative text is set in a wholly new world, as is the case in high fantasy, the reader must suspend disbelief in order to be fully engaged with the narrative world. As with Gerrig, Green & Brock see transportation as full immersion into the fictional world, to the extent that the world of origin (the 'real' world) is no longer mentally accessible to the reader. The result of this full immersion is that the reader is not able to access real-world facts, being wholly accepting of the fictional world. This loss of the real world can be, they state, both physical and mental: "a transported reader may not notice others entering the room, for example – or, more importantly,

[18] Or possibly, at the very least, stories which are set within one's own culture and habitus. I suspect the same results that Djikic et al (2009) found could also be found when one is reading a narrative set in a culture with which one is unfamiliar – though this is only speculation on my part.

on a psychological level, a subjective distancing from reality. While the person is immersed in the story, he or she may be less aware of real-world facts that contradict assertions made in the narrative" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 702).

It is worth noting at this point that the cognition that is required to engage in written fiction is significantly different to that required when watching films or television. When watching television or a film, viewers are presented with rich audio-visual stimuli that helps to depict character, emotion and events. Text, on the other hand, provides "more minimal information: mere words that must then be transformed into characters, perceived events, and situations in our mind" (Mar, et al., 2011, p. 821). This is not to say that one cannot escape into a novel – far from it. According to Gjelsvik (2016), when discussing engagement with audio-visual narratives and written narratives, the difference is in the act of imagination. Written narratives require the reader to place themselves mentally within the narrative world (the act of transportation) whereas audio-visual narratives are able to show the viewer the narrative world: "a novel engages the reader's imagination, whereas plays, films and television immerse us through the perception of the aural and the visual" (Gjelsviv, 2016, pp. 69-70). Thus, the way in which readers engage mentally with written narratives has been the subject of some review over recent years – and, particularly, how readers are persuaded into believing the contents of a novel.

Previously, models of persuasion were based around the critical attention of the reader to the text. The *elaboration likelihood model* (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) describes a reader who is cognitively and critically engaged in the narrative, and as such is systematically processing and considering the central arguments of the text. However, the ELM is focused on the *text*, not the *narrative world*. The reader of a rhetorical text is not immersed in the way that a visitor to a narrative world is (Green & Brock, 2000; Appel & Richter, 2007); rather, the reader of a rhetorical text, such as a journal article or newspaper, is actively and cognitively aware that they are reading, and so are (potentially) better able to process the persuasive elements therein. This model, therefore, is reminiscent of Prentice et al.'s (1997) finding that readers must actively engage in disbelief when reading but goes on to suggest that this disbelief is readily achievable. Transportation, however, reduces or negates this cognitive reasoning, resulting in transported readers being "less likely to disbelieve or counter argue story claims, and thus their beliefs may be influenced" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 702). In addition to this, transported readers are also more likely to experience the narrative world with the same affect that they would the real world.

For example, when a character dies in a story, the reader may feel genuine grief[19]. These experiences play into our theory of mind and are extremely influential when considered in terms of belief change. In this way, transportation in the narrative world is a convergent process, while elaboration – such as argued in the ELM model – is divergent (Green & Brock, 2000). This means that a transported reader only has one focus: the narrative world and its inhabitants; all mental processing is converging on the narrative world. Conversely, a reader of a rhetorical text will be processing the text and their knowledge of the world, other facts and other opinions; their thoughts are divergent, focusing on multiple sources of information.

Readers are able to enter the narrative world so fully, without the audio-visual aids provided by film and television, as a result of a complex dynamic interplay of both their emotive connection to the text (based on empathy and theory of mind) and the use of their *schemata* (Appel, 2008). Schemata refers to the ability to apply knowledge from one's own experiences, or from one's understanding of how the world works, or based on one's experience and familiarity with similar stories, to the new context; it is a cognitive network of associations between topics, stimulus, attributes and relations between attributes (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). Essentially, schemata can be thought of an unconscious road-map to aid understanding and manage expectation. As Gotschall (2013, p. 5) states, "our minds supply most of the information in the scene – most of the color, shading, and texture." Thus, when considering how immersion into narrative worlds can affect how we perceive the real world and the people within it, we need to first understand the complex relationship that exists between reader and text.

When we read, magic occurs – or at least, a very special kind of illusion. While we may never have ridden a dragon like Daenerys from *A Song of Ice and Fire,* nor travelled in ancient underground dwarven cities like Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings,* we are nevertheless able to understand what these experiences might be like. The same is true for any kind of reading, but fantasy certainly helps to highlight it. So how is it possible that you know all these things about this unreal world, one which you will never – can never – actually visit? The answer is twofold. Partially, you are applying your theory of mind. You may not have ridden a dragon, but perhaps you have felt something similar to the way Daenerys feels, the excitement and exhilaration, the fear and sense of wonder. In addition to your theory of mind, you are also able to apply your

[19] Indeed, when the author Terry Pratchett passed away in 2015, I found myself extremely affected – not only for the loss of a favourite writer but, significantly, because I had also lost characters for whom I had very deep affection.

schemata. Schemata provides you with a scaffold, a way to map the physical and emotional landscape of the new narrative world. Fiction follows generally accepted schematic elements, usually resulting in a 'happy' conclusion (the just world) in which the good are rewarded and the bad are punished, that "the challenges and trials of daily life […] will eventually provide for a satisfying outcome" (Sebby & Johnston, 2013, p. 135). Indeed, as was discussed in the previous chapter, so common are certain elements in fiction that they have become monomyths, allowing for detailed categorisation of certain fiction elements from the macro, such Propp's (1968) syntagmatic structures or Campbell's hero's journey (1949/2004), to the micro, such as Levi-Strauss' mythemes (Barthes, 1975). And, rather than being off-putting, this expectation is what the majority of readers seem to crave.

It is at this point that one's emotional affect, our empathic connection to the text and its characters, interplays with schemata. This occurs in a process termed the *mood-management theory* (Zillmann, 1988, in Mar et al., 2011). Essentially, the mood-management theory speaks to the propensity people have to turn to fiction to improve or heighten their mood. A reader who is happy will select a narrative that maintains that emotion, while readers who are unhappy will choose to lift their mood with a happy story, for example. At first, it may seem that this theory is too simplistic, especially when one considers the popularity of harrowing or gruesome stories. For example, George R. R. Martin's series of high fantasy novels, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and the television series *Game of Thrones* which is based on them, are famous for their dark nature and violent content, and yet are also both wildly popular. The book series had, of 2015, sold between 58 and 60 million copies worldwide, depending on source (Alter, 2015; Flood, 2015b), while the television series has the honour of being both the most popular HBO show (Beaumont-Thomas, 2014) and also the most illegally downloaded (BBC, 2015), demonstrating its popularity beyond those viewers who have access to pre-pay television content. However, the mood-management theory accounts for the popularity of such ostensibly grisly fare. Zillmann (1988, in Mar et al., 2011) has argued that the anxiety and suspense readers/viewers experience when immersed in dark fictional events makes the final, just outcome all the more rewarding, amplifying the relief experienced when the resolution – the happy ending – occurs. Oliver (1993) was able to verify this proposition, finding that people who view sad films reported increased positive responses after watching, with women responding especially strongly. When the protagonists finally achieve their reward and the villains their punishment, the fact that the

journey to get there was particularly harrowing or brutal only serves to intensify the feeling of satisfaction and appropriateness, a process called "*excitation transfer*" (Oliver, 1993, p. 317).

It is also possible that empathy and theory of mind play a part when considering transportation into seemingly off-putting narrative worlds. As already discussed, fiction is vital for human beings as it allows us to experiment and to explore, both in terms of our own identity but also in terms of our relations with other people and in society. Grisly, sad or frightening stories provide a way to test the limits of our tolerance for such unpleasant emotions, sometimes even evoking physical reactions, such as increased heart-rates, chills, or tears (Green, et al., 2004). This type of transportation and the emotions it provokes allows a temporary experience from which to learn, and as such can be seen to be as emotionally and cognitively useful as any other type of fiction. Finally, individual differences also affect how people respond to sad or distressing fiction. Oliver's (1993) research indicated variables depending on levels of empathy, gender alignment (those who were more feminine reported higher excitation transfer[20]) and, unsurprisingly, those who generally had a more positive affect towards sadness were more likely to enjoy sad stories. It is also possible that a reader's ability to be interested in a story will trump their emotional response to it, at least regarding their immediate reaction (see Turner & Silvia, 2006). For example, for all that a reader may find a particular trauma a character is subjected to upsetting, they are committed to finding out how the story ends.

Certainly, it seems safe to conclude that "our motivations for selecting media, with respect to the emotional experiences they offer, appear to be multifaceted" (Mar, et al., 2011, p. 820). Of course, there are stories that do not follow the schematic expectation of a happy ending, but these tend to be exceptional, and are usually lauded or derided as a result. Most commonly, however, it is these 'foregone conclusions' that are the very point of schemata, for good and for ill. We know, ultimately, what to expect from a story, and this knowledge provides us with a safety net. In the same way that we use stories to help us develop our experience and to learn

[20] See Oliver (1993) for further discussion and qualification of this. In addition, Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter (2006) found a difference between men and women in terms of how they use media to maintain or dissipate negative moods. In their study, they asked both men and women to read articles which had been marked extremely negatively, in order to elicit feelings of anger and/or injustice. Participants were then told they would have the opportunity to confront the marker. Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter (2006) found that male participants would continue to read the negatively marked papers, while female participants switched to positively marked papers, once they were given the opportunity to. It appears from this study that the male participants wished to 'hang on' to their negative feelings in preparation for the confrontation with the marker, while the female participants chose to alleviate their initial negative reactions. However, whether the results from this study can be applied more generally to the two sexes – let alone considered in terms of gender alignment – is hard to say. What, perhaps, can be taken from this research is that people will select reading material to 'self-medicate' their mood, or even to elicit a particular emotion for future use.

how to behave within our cultures and with other people, or to experience the thrill of socially divergent behaviour without the risk, so too are we allowed to experience these things in a cognitively safe space, protected by our general schematic knowledge of the genre.

As has already been outlined, for all that such predictability provides comfort, it can also be very damaging. Readers select a text because they know schematically what they are going to experience, at least in general terms, and they are then transported into that text as a result of their emotional connection to it. This process is what allows us to have favourite stories, ones we return to again and again, even though we know what happens. It also allows us to become fans of particular genres or authors. Ostensibly, of course, there is nothing wrong with this. And, indeed, we are not slaves to a book. As Mar et al. (2011) point out, when reading we can control the pace of the narrative, and also we have some measure of control over our imaginations; it is up to us to envision the frightening monster, for example. Although they also acknowledge that "one may well tend to imagine the monster in a book as precisely the sort of monster that scares one the most" (Mar, et al., 2011, p. 821). Nevertheless, even though it has been shown that those readers who have a high need for cognition are nevertheless transported fully into a narrative world, it is still possible that when they return to 'real life' they are fully aware that the world is not (always) just, but can, in fact, be mean. Crucially, however, not every falsehood contained in fiction is so obviously marked. As Green & Brock (2000, p. 718) warn, "If individuals can be easily swayed by realistically presented fiction, or if they ignore the sources of the information they receive, they may be at the mercy of manipulative communicators." And, as Appel & Ritcher (2007) explain, while it is not an expectation that the author of fiction holds completely true to the real world, nevertheless, fiction will contain information that one cannot help but apply to the real world. It is in this synthesis of truth and invention that one of the more alarming aspects of transportation can be found:

3.3 The Sleeper Effect and Narrative Persuasion

The *sleeper effect* is a psychological process that occurs over time, resulting in people accepting into their belief systems information which is untrue. Worrying as that initial proposition is, what marks the sleeper effect as being extremely unsettling is the fact that the propensity for someone to believe a falsehood *increases* over time, and that this occurs even

when the original message was known to the reader at the time of reading to be untrue (Hannah & Strenthal, 1984; Appel & Richter, 2007). What this means is that even when a text contains discounting cues, that is, 'warnings' or disclaimers that it may not be reliable, with the passage of time, the reader is likely to disassociate the general message of the text with the discounting cue, to the point where they accept the falsehoods contained therein into their belief systems. For example, a reader may pick up a leaflet produced by a pharmaceutical company, in which they advertise their newest medicine. As required by the Advertising Standards Authority[21], the leaflet also contains various warnings and disclaimers as to the medicine's efficacy and possible side-effects. However, with the passage of time, the reader is unlikely to remember the disclaimers, instead holding on to the message of the advertisement, i.e., that the medicine is effective. Moreover, the more time that passes, the more the reader disassociates the disclaimer (the discounting cue) from the advertisement. It makes no difference if the reader is provided with the discounting cues before or after reading the text, or if they are embedded within the text (Hannah & Strenthal, 1984). This is the sleeper effect.

Initially, the sleeper effect was something of an enigma. The most crucial aspect of the sleeper effect is the passage of time: at the time of reading, a reader is aware of the discounting cues – they are conscious that what they are reading may not be wholly true, or may contain certain biases. It is only as a result of time passing that the disassociation between the discounting cues and the text's messages occurs, and thus the falsehoods are ignored. As a result of this, although many researchers were convinced of the sleeper effect's existence, it at first proved difficult to verify under controlled conditions (Hannah & Strenthal, 1984). In order to account for this, in 1979 Cook et al. produced a series of fail-safes under which to test for the sleeper effect:

- A message with a strong initial impact on attitudes
- A discounting cue that inhibits immediate attitude change
- The dissociation of the discounting cue and message over time
- The rapid dissociation of the discounting cue and message so that the message has some residual impact

[21] UK – see https://www.cap.org.uk/Advertising-Codes.aspx.

Using these guidelines, the sleeper effect could be proven if it was found to be apparent when these conditions were met. Or, to put it another way, the sleeper effect could be disproven if, despite the above, a participant did not dissociate the discounting cues from the message of the text, after a period of time. However, while these guidelines provided a way to show the sleeper effect, they did not account for how the effect occurs (Hannah & Strenthal, 1984). As a result, Hannah & Strenthal set out to uncover the cognitive underpinnings of the sleeper effect. They hypothesised that if the information contained in the persuasive text was seen as favourable to the reader, this promoted the sleeper effect. This is a process called the *availability-valence hypothesis*, and refers to whether "individuals' attitudinal judgments in response to a persuasive message are determined by the favorableness – or valence – of the issue-relevant information available in memory at the time of judgment" (Hannah & Strenthal, 1984, p. 633).

Essentially, according to this theory, readers only have so many cognitive resources available to them at any one time, and so, Hannah & Strenthal proposed, it is unlikely that all information that is relevant to the text will be available to the reader at the time of reading. Rather, readers will pull on related knowledge only when it is consciously thought to be relevant; any other knowledge they might have that relates to the text but which they do not perceive to be 'favourable' will not be activated. Valence determines what information is given advocacy in regards to the text's message(s). In this way, as a result of limited memory capacity, valence dictates that readers may change their beliefs when pre-held ideas are replaced or augmented by information from the text that is decided to be "more or less favourable" (Hannah & Strenthal, 1984, p. 633). Equally, readers may have information related to the text, but are unable to activate it because they have reached their cognitive capacity. What Hannah & Strenthal hypothesised is that those readers whose evaluation was delayed, either as a result of unfavourable information within the text or due to cognitive overload, would not recall discounting cues and instead only recall the message of the text – which is designed to be persuasive. Thus, these readers would have their beliefs altered over time, resulting in the sleeper effect.

There are a number of points that need to be attended to with regards to Hannah & Strenthal's original framework, all of which add to the worrying notion of the sleeper effect. Firstly, one can draw a similarity between the availability-valence hypothesis and need for cognition, in that readers who have a high need for cognition should be able to access a greater

amount of relevant information pertaining to the text, while others may not – as Hannah & Strenthal (1984, p. 633) state, "the greater the cognitive elaboration in processing information, the greater its availability in judgment." Additionally, both these theories (the availability-valence hypothesis and [high] need for cognition) imagine a reader who is practiced in critical reasoning skills, something which takes time, energy and a willingness to learn (Mize, 1978; Mendelman, 2007; Rice, 2007); put simply, criticality is not an innate skill. What this shows is that the sleeper effect is a result of cognitive limitations, and that to have any hope of overcoming it, one must be a highly skilled reader – and even then, there is no guarantee that one will be immune to it, as will be discussed later.

Secondly, most studies into the sleeper effect looked only at rhetorical texts (Appel & Richter, 2007), building on either the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) or the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) (Chaiken, 1980) of persuasion. As previously discussed, the ELM imagines a reader who is critically engaged in a text, making evaluations and judgements as they read. In other words, the ELM posits that it is by consciously thinking about the narrative content – a meta-analysis, if you will – that other, additional beliefs can be used to support or refute the messages being conveyed in the text. As a result, while beliefs may be affected when reading fiction, as already shown, the ELM does not allow for the sleeper effect to occur in fiction because for something to be persuasive over time, it is argued that it must be consciously reinforced. The HSM flips the coin, looking at persuasion from the point of view of superficial processing: a reader who pays little attention to the text, relying on only the most obvious of discounting cues, will not be significantly persuaded or have their beliefs substantially changed. As such, according to this model, belief change over time via narrative fiction is unlikely, as the reader is only peripherally aware that they are reading. In sum, while both the ELM and the HSM can allow for belief change when reading fiction, neither model supports the suggestion that belief change via fiction can survive the passage of time, nor that discounting cues can be forgotten or ignored, both necessary conditions of the sleeper effect. Therefore, while the sleeper effect could be proven to exist, it was thought to only pertain to rhetorical sources, such as advertisements, news articles and political campaigning.

However, recently this proposition has been called in to question. Crucially, neither the ELM nor the HSM account for the fact that fictional texts are not written with the express intention of persuasion, as are rhetorical texts, but rather to entertain the reader. Nor do fictional

texts generally contain propositions that are related to claims of truthfulness, unlike many rhetorical texts. Instead, "fictional narratives usually follow a plot line with more or less schematic elements" (Appel & Richter, 2007, p. 117), as previously discussed. As a result, different models of persuasion, ones that take into account the inherent nature of fictional texts, are needed to understand the effect of fiction on one's beliefs and to explore whether fictional texts can also create a sleeper effect.

As we have already seen, Gerrig's (1993) transportation model highlights the different ways in which the reader engages with fiction. While the ELM relies on a consciously critical reader, transportation theory does not necessitate this level of meta-analysis. The very purpose of transportation is to lose yourself in a new world, not to consciously monitor your thoughts as you read. Thus, the successful and engaged reader of a fictional text is not involved in the same mental processes as the ELM-compliant reader of a rhetorical text. Transportation relies on the degree to which the narratives engages imagination and theory of mind, factors which themselves depend on a complex series of elements, including but not limited to: reading goals, schemata and genre familiarity, motivation to read, excitation transfer, and empathy and interest in the characters. In addition to these affective aspects, the way a reader cognitively engages with fiction differs to the manner in which they engage with rhetorical texts. Strange (2002) highlights the fact that readers use the framework provided *within* the narrative as a way to reference and evaluate assertions and facts presented within the story, while Gibson (1980) states that readers must embrace and accept the rules of the fictional world in order to be transported. Appel & Ritcher (2007) also explain that when readers are transported into a fictional world they do so in an unreflective and uncritical manner, paying only superficial attention to the text itself, relying instead on the story's "perceptual, spatial, temporal, and emotional information" (p.117). As Mellmann (2012) concluded, stories are powerful conveyors of knowledge and experience, and we are designed to understand them: "So even in the most elaborated kinds of artful ("literary") storytelling there is nothing that clearly exceeds the already present cognitive capacities (including developmental mechanisms) and would thus require special explanation" (p.38). Thus, the processes that factor into whether a reader's beliefs are changed as a result of reading fiction are different from those used when reading a rhetorical text, in contradiction to the principles of both the ELM and the HSM models.

Having accounted for differences in terms of mental processing and persuasion, the next question to consider is that of the discounting cue. In rhetorical texts, the discounting cue, necessary to test for the sleeper effect, is present in the form of disclaimers (as in advertisements), or concerns over the partiality of the source/author (as in political texts); with fiction, the discounting cues are not so obviously available. However, Appel & Ritcher (2007, p. 118) argue that the fiction itself can be considered the discounting cue:

> Readers of fictional narratives know that it contains information that is to some extent untrue in the real world (Prentice & Gerrig, 1999) and, consequently, may consider the text genre of the source as a discounting cue.

Essentially, what they are arguing is that because fiction is known to be untrue, to be *fictitious*, the discounting cue is embedded throughout the entire text. Or, as Zillmann (2002, p. 21) states, "fictional narrative favours the exceptional over the ordinary."

What then of the sleeper effect? Given the above, one might assume that fiction by its nature is immune to this kind of persuasive effect, and yet this is not the case. However, it would take some twenty-three years from Hannah & Stenthal's original study to develop an effective method of testing for the sleeper effect in fiction. Green & Brock (2000), Strange & Leung (1999), Wheeler et al. (1999), and Prentice et al. (1997) have all shown that fictional texts can change someone's beliefs. However, the nature of these studies precluded any proof of the sleeper effect, the issue being that these tests were conducted immediately after the participants had read the sample stories, and without the passage of time, there is no way to state conclusively that the sleeper effect in fiction exists. Other studies appeared to hint at the possibility, but they did not specifically speak to it: Marsh et al. (1993) found that after a delay of one week, readers were less able to attribute information correctly to the story source – that is, it became harder for them to remember that their information had come from a fictional narrative. Remember as well that according to the evolutionary theory of narrative, as detailed in chapter one, stories work so well because we are able to remember the key events of the narrative – but crucially, not necessarily that the knowledge came *from* a story. *Exemplification theory* (see Zillmann, 2002) also suggested that the sleeper effect may be found in fiction. Exemplification

theory argues that human beings benefit from the ability to group experiences into stories, as discussed in chapter one. In terms of the sleeper effect, exemplification theory suggests that by grouping such events in vivid, emotive or case-based narratives – as fiction must, if it is to be absorbing – discounting cues are forsaken for the benefit of the grouping. We sacrifice our criticality and our knowledge that what we are reading is inherently untrue (the discounting cue) in order to better be transported, to better enjoy, the narrative. In 2007, building on the above, Appel & Ritcher (p. 118) proposed that the sleeper effect was possible in fiction, and could be tested under the following conditions:

- Memory for the source decays relatively fast or is dissociated from the memory for content of the narrative
- Memory for belief-relevant information encountered in the narrative is relatively stable

Appel & Ritcher put their hypothesis to the test. In line with the above mentioned research into narrative persuasion (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013), they conducted various tests involving stories with both true and false information, also making sure that readers were aware at the time of reading of the discounting cue(s), and also accounting for readers with a high need for cognition. However, unlike previous research, they also included in their testing two extensions. Firstly, readers' beliefs were measured immediately after reading, and then again after a two-week interval, to account for both the strength and persistence of those beliefs. Secondly, at the two-week interval, participants were also asked to gauge how confident they felt in their belief-congruent responses. This is because, as Appel & Ritcher state (2007, p. 120), "beliefs held with a high certainty are especially powerful in predicting behaviour: People tend to behave consistently with their beliefs only when they are certain about their beliefs." By taking this measurement, Appel & Ritcher were able to measure the extent to which the belief-incongruent information in the narratives, that is, the false information, had been accepted into the readers' beliefs. If so, the sleeper effect would be present.

As they predicted, Appel & Ritcher found that not only did beliefs shift after the two-week waiting period, but that the strength of beliefs changed when compared to the immediate

measuring. Specifically, they discovered that at the time of reading, belief certainty was low, i.e., that participants were able to discount false information; however, this belief certainty returned to the baseline after the two weeks, showing that long-term belief change occurred with time, with the discounting cues within the text being overlooked: "long-term persuasive effects of fictional narratives turned out to be stronger than short-term effects in two different ways: The belief change induced by false information was more pronounced and the changed beliefs were held with a higher certainty after a 2-week delay" (Appel & Richter, 2007, p. 127/8). In sum, Appel & Ritcher's research shows that the acceptance of explicit or implicit propositions, and (crucially) false ones, in fictional texts are still believed after a two-week delay, and these beliefs are stronger, not weaker.

Thus, it can be said with a good level of confidence that the sleeper effect is possible in fiction texts, in addition to rhetorical ones. In sum, not only can readers' beliefs be changed, but even those facts which the reader knows at the time of reading to be false can nevertheless be absorbed into the reader's worldview.

3.5 Conclusion

Readers have a very strong tendency to believe what they experience in fictional worlds, even when this information is inaccurate or false – and even when they initially know that it is inaccurate or false. This belief change may be due to high levels of transportation, and the employment of both theory of mind and schemata to support these (sometimes false) propositions. In addition to this, Appel and Richter's (2007) research into the sleeper effect shows that even when a reader applies critical evaluation to a text, this evaluation is weakened with the passage of time, so that any discounting cues within the text are weakened or forgotten, leaving only the persuasive message intact. As Prentice et al. (1997, p. 417) conclude, when reading fiction, readers need to engage in a "*willing construction* of disbelief" (original emphasis); one must make a conscious effect to not believe what is being read if one is to overcome the sleeper effect. As Mellmann (2012, p. 38/9) states:

> Our interest in others, our preference for the "unusual", our unabated appetite even for inaccurate information, and the

> sophistication of event representation through language all point to pragmatic factors of storytelling.

Of course, there are fictional conceits that people are, in the majority, easily able to continue disbelieving, such as the existence of monsters. Although there are certainly some who subscribe to the existence of vampires, fairies or other fantastic creatures, for the majority of people the continued absence of these individuals in the real world serves to maintain their disbelief. However, many stories also contain smaller, more subtle conceits, which are harder to spot and be critical of, even without the added influence of just world beliefs, transportation and the sleeper effect. As has been shown, these effects can result in people believing in something so strongly that they are prepared to adapt the reality of a situation so that their beliefs remain intact. This is particularly worrying when harmful representations are presented to readers and viewers repeatedly[22], as is the case if such representations are norms of the genre. Moreover, things that appear to be true in real life are easier to believe in fiction, and things that appear true in fiction are easier to believe in real life. For example, Prentice et al. (1997) looked at the issues of mental illness as presented in fiction, finding that readers were unlikely to evaluate – and thus were accepting of – the premise within a fictional story that mental illness was contagious. As they stated, "Readers know that mental illness is not contagious in their experience and can reject the assertion out of hand if it is applied to their real world. But how are they to evaluate the contagiousness of mental illness in a fictional world? And why, for that matter, should they undertake such an evaluation?" (1997, p. 417). The issue is twofold: propositions within the fictional world become beliefs in the real world, and these beliefs can then go on to effect actual change in the real world. As Pinkola Estes (2003, in Campbell, 2004:xxxvi) reminds us, stories make us who we are:

> If one did not know oneself, one could listen to a dozen profound stories that detail the pathos of the hero's or heroine's failures and victories. Thence, with some guidance, a person would soon be far

[22] See Hannah & Strenthal, (1984:641 onwards) for a discussion the increased persuasiveness of repeated exposure to a particular source, in which they state that "repeated message exposure is expected to stimulate the elaboration of message information as well as favourable associations to the source, and thus induce a favourable attitude toward the communication advocacy."

> better able to name, in oneself and others, those critical and resonant elements and facts that compose a human being.

Pinkola Estes talks here of the factors that make up a human being, and how those factors 'critical and resonant' to being human can be found and learnt from engaging in fiction. Taking what we now know of the power and influence of narrative worlds, the fact that fictional characters themselves can also have such an impact on readers/viewers is significant. The fact that narrative stories are unreal, and that readers/viewers know them to be unreal, does not change the fact that the culturally coded expectations of behaviour and just endings represented can affect people's real-world beliefs of the same. In terms of the representation of women, it is important to note that gender is regulated, and transgression against socially held views of gender and gender performance are actively punished (Shepherd, 2013). An aspect of this regulation of gender – or 'gendered ordering' as Shepherd calls it – is in how gender and gender norms are represented in media, including literature. Media, as a field within society, represents a method of policing gender, to the extent that the way media frames behaviours, choices and actions can be seen to condone violent or punitive behaviour, as exemplified above in terms of just world beliefs, rape culture, and the disruption of the male's hero's journey. These expectations are in turn solidified into habitus and capital, which itself is maintained in no small part by the way groups, women in this case, are represented in media; literature and narrative, specifically. Thus, one of the questions of this thesis is, what kind of female fictional characters, experiencing what kind of events in what kind of worlds, are readers of high fantasy being exposed to? Regarding transportation, just world beliefs and the sleeper effect, high fantasy's reliance on the monomythic hero's journey arc, and the syntagmatic structures and character archetypes inherited from both fairy tales and medieval romance, is deeply troubling. Thus, the representation of female characters in high fantasy will be discussed in the following chapters.

4. The Light Fantastic

The fantastic in literature and storytelling has existed for thousands of years, either as myths, legends, folk and fairy tales, or, in its more modern incarnation as a specific genre of literature, fantasy. In order to better understand the structures and archetypes present in fantasy, and, specific to this work, the ways in which women are presented, it is first necessary to understand how the genre was influenced, how it was codified and normalised. Indeed, "genre and genre study are crucial to the meaning and interpretation of any work of art – literary or otherwise – without first understanding its generic features" (Whetter, 2016, p. 1). With regards to fantasy, one must first understand what the nature of fantasy writing is (and is not), and how these norms and expectations came about. Perhaps the most obvious genre aspect of fantasy writing is that it is removed from what many would consider the normal world – fantasy invokes the 'other'. This inclusion of the 'other' in our narratives, of something outside of the normal rules and expectations of the real world, comes from the historic need to make sense of the inexplicable, to explain *why* and *how*. As Mellmann (2012, p. 42) states when talking about the evolutionary importance of narrative:

> The explanation of the "unknown" might be a particularly productive incentive of storytelling – especially in the sense of fiction, because we can hardly tell "historically true" stories about what we do not know; and in the sense of stories about the "unusual" because the "usual" is what we already know.

To write the fantastic is to harness mythic, otherworldly unknowns and recreate these into narratives, populated by characters which readers, listeners and, latterly, viewers, can anthropomorphise (Gardener & Knowles, 2008; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007), all of whom exist in narrative worlds we can lose ourselves in. Jackson (1981, p. 4) argues that fantasy "opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems" and that "since this excursion into disorder can only begin from a base within the dominant cultural order, literary fantasy is a telling index of the limits of

that order. Its introduction of the 'unreal' is set against the category of 'real' – a category which the fantastic interrogates by its difference."

Essentially, the argument Jackson makes is that fantasy, while inescapably a product of the culture in which its authors and readers inhabit, can also, through its creation of different worlds, shine a light on those aspects of our own world that are 'hidden' or 'silenced'. It has the potential to offer a site of contrast and thus also of comparison and, perhaps, reflection. It is in this sense that fantasy holds significant potential as a narrative form. By being both 'of this world' and separate from it, authors and readers are given an opportunity to explore the structures and beliefs that are both implicit and explicit in this, 'real' world. We have seen in the previous chapters the power that literature can have over a person's information gathering, identity formation and belief systems, but this influence does not, of course, have to end negatively, as so far the dangers have implied. As Jackson (1981, p. 3) states, "a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context […] it cannot be understood in isolation from it", but literature can also be used to show what society *can* be, and perhaps *should* be. In this sense, I am following both Moretti's (1983/2005) and Dundes' (1968) advice that both the (syntagmatic) structure and the (paradigmatic) function of the text (that is, how it is organised, the characters and events within it, and also the function it plays in society) can position a narrative to highlight issues within the culture it originates from, and also to show alternative ways of being – to provide the reader, as Mellmann (2012) and Sugiyama (2001) argue[23] with experience for free, from which to learn. Fantasy, being set in worlds other than our own, and being already primed to do so as a result of its mythic roots, is in an enviable position to do so. Fantasy provides a space of safety from which to explore oftentimes very unsafe worlds, to venture forth into the unknown, to meet people and cultures different from one's own, and gain experiential learning. It is also worth recalling the findings of Djikic et al. (2009), that the more removed a reader is from the 'realities' of the narrative world, as is the case with fantasy fiction, the more likely it is that the reader will be transported into and influenced by that world (as discussed in the previous chapter).

However, J. R. R. Tolkien, the author most widely associated with fantasy (as I will come to), warns against the study of 'literature'. Or, more specifically, he warns against students contriving to turn literature into sociology or anthropology (in contrast with Moretti's

[23] See chapter two

(1983/2005), Dundes' (1968) and Casanova's (2005) views on the relationship between literature and socio-politics, as detailed in chapter one). Tolkien cautions that, while researchers may well draw parallels between *Beowulf* and *Dat Erdmänneken*, for example, such parallels can work to negate the very thing under study – that is, the story. For Tolkien, like Gerrig (1993), it is the story itself that is of importance and, therefore, it must be remembered that stories are meant to be told, in whole and in context. Tolkien exemplifies this statement with two examples of the fairy story *Red Riding Hood*, in which in the first example the titular character is eaten by the wolf, while in the second she survives. It is the fact that the later version has a happy ending that is of importance, Tolkien argues: it is, he says, "a very profound difference" (1939/1983, p. 120). It is, perhaps, to the narrative world which Tolkien refers, and the relationships between characters in the first articulation, and the relationships between reader and character(s) in the second articulation (Bednarek, 2012) (chapter one). With fairy stories, Tolkien writes, it is more interesting to "consider what they *are*, what they have *become to us*, and what *values* the long alchemic processes of time has produced in them" (1939/1983, pp. 120, my emphasis); the focus is on the narratives themselves and a reader's relationship with them, rather than the use of these narratives as exemplars of wider sociology or anthropology. Thus, in order to better understand the nature of the narrative worlds in which women in fantasy find themselves, it serves to consider 'the lay of the land' within the stories. For the *reader*, the world represents both an escape and a learning ground, as has been established; but for a *character*, this world is real, and their role is both agent and object to the actions of that world. Equally, it is the authenticity of a character's life within the narrative world that helps to anthropomorphise that character, as previously discussed.

Therefore, while Tolkien's focus on the value of stories is of central importance to this thesis, it is also necessary to delve into the processes that helped to create the genre that is known, now, as 'high fantasy'. Consequently, I will focus on the genre that is presented to the reader, where that genre originates from and the cultural and political influences it works under, as outlined by Moretti (1983/2005), Dundes (1968), Jackson (1981), and Casanova (2005); the characters and the world(s) they inhabit will be considered in the next chapter, as Tolkien (1939/1983), Bednerek (2012), and Gerrig (1993) do. However, as will be seen, ascertaining exactly what fantasy and high fantasy actually are, what differentiates the general term from the specific, and where and how high fantasy began, is a complex issue.

4.1 Magic and the Fantastic: Faery Tales and Literary Fantasy

Fantasy is populated by monsters, magic, deities, and species humanoid and not; in some stories, these creatures and settings remain closely tied to the concept of other worlds and realms, while in others, fairies, monsters and wizards populate the 'real' world. Fantasy is a broad church, combining what some term 'traditional' or 'high fantasy' (medieval romance/swords and sorcery stories, usually set in another world, or at some point in the distant past of this one), along with an ever-growing number of sub-genres (such as urban fantasy, low fantasy, grimdark, and magical realism). Schubert also offers a definition of fantasy in terms of multiple genres, including science fiction, horror, fantasy, the gothic, and the fairy tale: "Fantastic genres embrace what is unreal according to what an audience's perception of reality is" (Schubart, 2016, p. 107), acknowledging that the boundaries between these specific genres can be blurred. Mendlesohn (2008) offers five overarching categories within which various types of fantasy (or fantastic) texts might be placed: the Portal-Quest Fantasy, Immersive Fantasy, Intrusion Fantasy, and Liminal Fantasy, while also allowing for an 'Other' category for those examples of fantasy that do not quite conform to her previous mapping. Of these, the Portal-Quest Fantasy category includes the type of high fantasy I am discussing, but I will return to this specific definition later. Jackson (1981), meanwhile, argues that the essential nature of fantasy is the very fact that it is hard to define, and that this fluidity is one of its strengths. What Jackson terms 'literary fantasy' is "free from many of the conventions and constraints of more realistic texts: they [authors] have refused to observe unities of time, space and character" (Jackson, 1981, p. 1), all of which, she posits, makes fantasy an inherently resistive, subversive form of literature.

Interestingly, Tolkien did not class his work as fantasy – indeed, the literary definition 'fantasy' (let alone 'high fantasy') did not exist at the time Tolkien and his contemporaries were writing. Instead, Tolkien thought of himself as an author of *fairy tales* (an influence which remains with the high fantasy genre, discussed below). Tolkien states then when authors are writing fairy stories they are not writing stories about elves or fairies or dragons, they are writing about the adventures of people (usually men) within the other realm: "A 'fairy story' is one which touches on or uses Faërie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy" (Tolkien, 1939/1983, p. 114). Within this definition, he is allowing a wide

understanding of what can be considered a fairy story: all it needs to do is to follow the path of a human protagonist who experiences something *other* than the normal, human world. Tolkien goes on to say that perhaps the best way to differentiate the fairy world from the human is in the use of magic, which must, within the confines of the story, be taken seriously and not satirised.

What fantasy is, and its purposes, are complex. According to Jackson (1981, pp. 20-21), fantasy "takes the real and breaks it", creating situations in which "contradictions surface and are held anti-normically [sic] in the fantastic text, as reason is made to confront all that it traditionally refuses to encounter." In this, Jackson is underscoring fantasy's potential to create something new, something which contradicts our understanding of the world and how it works. Tolkien (1939/1983), on the other hand, maintains that fantasy is a link to the past and to tradition, to the social structures, values and motifs that he saw as disappearing from the modern world. He connects the reduction of the fairy world in English culture to the works of Shakespeare and Drayton, stating that with the expansion of humanity – what we would now term globalisation – the space for fairy has diminished, and thus so too have fairies themselves. "It seems to become fashionable soon after the great voyages had begun to make the world seem too narrow to hold both men and elves" (Tolkien, 1939/1983, p. 111). In response to this, Jackson suggests that Tolkien and his contemporaries were aiming, in their writing, to recreate a "lost moral and social hierarchy which their fantasies attempt to recapture and revivify" (Jackson, 1981, p. 3).

These 'lost moral and social hierarchies' no doubt refer to the mythical and medieval romance commonly associated with fantasy – of feudalistic, non-technologically evolved societies, where the inexplicable is explained not through scientific or societal study, but is instead the result of magic and/or monsters (codifying the moral good or bad), or creatures of higher or lower intelligence and social capital (codifying social hierarchy[24]). Indeed, it is a common 'shortcut' within fantasy[25] that any questions regarding the legitimacy of the 'good' or the wickedness of the 'bad' is verified by ancient lore, prophecy, received wisdom, or, simply, birth-right (Mendlesohn, 2008). There is no 'anti-normalcy' as regards the feudalism and credulity of the kind experienced by human beings in pre-scientific, pre-enlightenment societies.

[24] For example, Partridge (1983) provides an illuminating discussion of the social hierarchies represented by the hobbits Frodo and Sam within *The Lord of the Rings*. In this, she outlines how the relationships between the two closely mirrors class relations common in British culture both historically and within Tolkien's own life, and examines how Tolkien's social/class-related beliefs may have influenced the relationship between these characters.

[25] Or, at least, within high fantasy – a distinction that will be explored in more detail below.

Tolkien's work is set within these structured hierarchies, which themselves are based on the social strata of the (European) past, of the clear-cut roles and boundaries codified in Arthurian romance and fairy tales (Mendlesohn, 2008; Partridge, 1983). In the present, Gorge R. R. Martin, author of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series and the "reigning laureate of fantasy" (Mullan, 2015), acknowledges the fact that he derives inspiration from the historical past of the real world, the English War of the Roses, and the associated feudalism and social structures (Flood, 2015a; Gilmore, 2014). Fantasy may well exist in other worlds, but its habitus is drawn from the histories (and often the European histories) of this one.

Interestingly, when writing on the subject of the creation of fairy tales, Tolkien uses the metaphor of a 'cooking pot' or 'cauldron'. He states that fairy stories come from this cauldron; they are the 'soup', the final product of a variety of ingredients. Tolkien here is discussing the (im)possibility of untangling fairy stories from their mythic and cultural roots, that they are blended from such a variety of different ingredients that such a deconstruction would be almost impossible. However, in the same space, Tolkien *does* acknowledge the existence of the 'cook', an interesting acknowledgement when one considers his own influence on the genre, and how he himself was inspired by fairy tales: "There are many things in the Cauldron, but the Cooks do not dip in the ladle quite blindly. Their selection is important" (Tolkien, 1939/1983, p. 128). However, whether Tolkien was consciously and deliberately attempting to recreate a lost morality, I am unable to say. Still, by drawing on fairy tales and myth, Tolkien was certainly dipping his ladle into the cauldron and serving his readers ideas and representations that come from a historic, *human* perspective, regardless of the addition of faery[26] and magic in his tales. Tolkien's fantasy, drawing on fairy tales, also draws on the social codifications enacted within them, and by incorporating the feudalistic structures of medieval romance, he leaves little room within the narrative for conflict against these codifications.

This is the point that Jackson argues with regards to Tolkien and Tolkienesque fantasy; that the author writes in a way coded by historical norms and capitals. Yet, despite Jackson's acknowledgement that "modern fantasy is rooted in ancient myths, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance" (1981, p. 4), she begins her analysis not from medieval literature and fairy tale but from the industrial revolution, and includes in her examples Kafka, Dostoevsky, Poe, Lovecraft,

[26] I am defining *faery* as the world of fairies, elves, trolls, dwarves, and other such creatures; *fairies* are the creatures themselves, and *fairy tales* are the narrative genre. In this way, faery speaks to both the narrative world, but also the principle or understanding of that world. It a superordinate, meant to cover that which is not the creatures of the genre of fairy tale stories.

and Pynchon, whose novels are not 'fantasy', at least in the same sense as the works of Tolkien or the current *maestro* George R. R. Martin. It is here that Jackson's phraseology of '*literary* fantasy' becomes significant: Jackson, while critiquing Tolkienesque fantasy, does not offer similar fantasy works in rebuttal. Williamson (2015) weighs up Tolkien and Jackson's differing expectations of the fantasy genre, concluding that the distinction between the two can be found in the way in which magic is treated within the narrative. Within the fantasy analysed by Jackson, magic is presented in contradiction to our 'normal' world. Jackson, for example, draws on the work of Kafka, who famously wrote about a man who wakes one morning to find he has transformed into a bug (*'Metamorphosis'*). In this narrative, the story follows the horror of this transformation, the social and psychological separation it creates, and the nature of the other. Jackson also cites the works of Poe, a writer and poet who explored the gothic, that is, the intrusion of the mysterious and occult into the normal, 'mundane' human word. Magic, in Jackson's cited works, intrudes on the normal world. In these books, "the narrative tension," Williamson explains (2015, pp. 10-11), emerges "from that character being confronted with some phenomenon that contradicts the basic tenants of what he or she considers to be 'reality'." On the other hand, magic in the Tolkienesque canon is not impossible or notable in its own right, due to the fact that the characters exist in a wholly new world in which magic is natural, not intrusive. Here, the reader "must simply accept that magic is a part of the fictional reality" (Williamson, 2015, p. 11). Jackson herself also appears to accept this difference, though she uses alternative terminology. For Jackson, fairy tales (and science fiction) are part of the "marvellous", while Kafka, Poe, Lovecraft and others write "'fantastic' literature" (1981, p. 7). Thus, while Jackson offers a critique of the structures and motifs of fantasy given by Tolkien, she undermines this by referring to works which are not, by Tolkien's definition, considered 'fantasy' – a definition that is widely accepted as the 'source' definition of fantasy literature, as will be explained later.

Looking beyond how each treats the use of magic within their narrative worlds, there is another schism between Tolkien's definition of fantasy and Jackson's[27]. For Tolkien, fantasy is about the story whole unto itself, the lives of men within an imaginary world; it is about magic and adventure, about stepping into another world – the land of faërie – and the call to greater

[27] Indeed, the definition of *what* fantasy is, is confusing. Williamson (2015) offers a very thorough review of the literature in this area, which there is not space to delve into here, but is a valuable source of background reading.

actions. These are the monomyths or archetypes described by Joseph Campbell's (1949/2004) hero's journey, and on which many fantasy stories rely as a result of Tolkien's influence on the genre; indeed, arguably fantasy is the codification of the hero's journey in modern written fiction. Take for example one of the earliest fantasy texts, *Beowulf*, in which the eponymous hero rises through trial and combat to become king, or the legend of Arthur Pendragon and the Knights of the Round Table, in which a seemingly unimportant boy is also destined to become king. In Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, meek and seemingly unimportant hobbits rise to the occasion, saving the world despite their lowly status among a cast of warriors, monsters and mages. More recently, George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series also follows this monomythical structure in the characters Daenerys Targaryen and Jon Snow, as does Ursula K. Le Guin's Ged in the *Earthsea* cycle.

Indeed, even in alternative imaginings of fantasy, this hero's journey remains extant. In urban fantasy stories, set in the 'real world', this rags-to-riches hero's tale is often central: for example, Harry Dresden, of Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* series, is a down on his luck wizard who finds himself mixed up in a series of escalating problems, but he always wins out, and as the series progresses so does Harry's status in both the magical and mortal worlds. J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels, too, follow this formula, as does Phillip Pullman's *North Lights* series, and Seanan McGuire's *October Daye* novels, to offer a few examples. Fairy tales especially, the stories Tolkien references as his own inspiration, maintain and repeat this narrative almost to the point of exhaustion – Aladdin, Jack of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, Dick Whittington, Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty, to name a few, all have lowly origins, facing trials and difficulties, but eventually triumph (and often become, or marry into, royalty). In the vein of the monomyth, Tolkien, like Gerrig (1993), is focused on the journey the reader embarks on, their escape from this world and immersion into another, narrative world. Jackson (1981), on the other hand, sees fantasy as a way of exploring the psyche, of reflecting the self and the other. In this sense, Jackson's analysis is more firmly rooted in what might be recognised as an academic analysis. She explores the same issues raised in the earlier chapters of this work, such as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2000; Bourdieu, 1993), narrative influence (eg Appel, 2008; Appel & Richter, 2007; Appelbaum, et al., 2003; Bruner, 1991) and the psychological and cultural impact of the text (eg Bruner, 1997; Djikic, et al., 2009; Mellmann, 2012; Guajardo & Watson, 2002). As such, it can be hard to pin down exactly what fantasy is, and what its aims are – though both

Tolkien and Jackson very clearly come from a position in which they both believe that fantasy does, indeed, have aims.

As Williamson (2015) states, this discrepancy may be the result of the conflict between popular culture and academic culture, with Tolkien camped within the former and Jackson within the latter. This is a point Hills (2002) picks up in his own studies of fan culture (in which, naturally, fantasy plays a substantial role). There is a tension between the academic study of fan-based cultures and the fans' own self-analysis of their cultures, Hills argues. Crucially, regarding this current paper, this rift between the two worlds is one of 'legitimacy'. Hills, who positions himself as an *acafan*[28], explores the issue of *hidden subjectivity*, that is, the ways in which one's own sense of cultural or social capital (Bourdieu, 2000) may cause one to diminish the products of another group – in Hill's argument, this could be aligned to the academy's dismissal of the fannish, narrative world of fantasy, as advocated by Tolkien but rather summarily dismissed by Jackson. To Hills, this hidden subjectivity is responsible for the historical dismissal within academic circles of fan-based analysis and enquiry into fannish artefacts, or, where such cultures have been analysed by the academy, the analysis has to disassociate the artefact from its source, instead aligning it within an academic subject of enquiry, such as the conceptual contrast between 'film studies' and 'television studies' – or, as will be explored later in this work, the supposed separation between fantasy texts disseminated via traditional publication and self-publication as legitimate narratives.

However, there are points that must be noted with regards to this critique. Firstly, Hills himself acknowledges that these differences are "less a matter of what fans and academics actually *do* as subjects, and more a matter of the imagined subjectivities – the different guiding discourses and ideas of subjectivity which are adopted by fans and academics – which are linked to cultural systems of value and community" (2002, p. 8). In this, Hills is acknowledging that these differences are, perhaps, less true in reality than they at first appear. Both fans and academics analyse, discuss, evaluate, critique and innovate in their chosen fields of fandom/research; they simply use different language to do so, and have different value ascribed to their output by the dominant forces of cultural capital. Secondly, it should also be noted that for both Tolkien and Jackson, these debates around the 'conflict' between the academic view of fannish artefacts and the fandom's own, did not exist. 'Fandom' as a distinct site for analysis and

[28] See introduction for a definition of this term.

exploration had not yet been founded – indeed, as regards Tolkien, the term *fantasy*, let alone high fantasy, had not yet been attributed to the genre of work he is now so famous for. Thus, taking into account Hills' (2002) critique of hidden subjectivity and the resulting disenfranchisement of certain voices from the debate as a result of cultural capital, it can be argued that both Jackson and Tolkien do agree that stories of other worlds are themselves important, even if their definitions of what types of story make up the fantasy genre, and what the aims of such stories are, differ.

Of additional importance to this study is also the way in which fantasy interacts with the reader to create meaning. In chapter one, I discussed the concept of double articulation (Bednarek, 2012), which is the principle that within fiction two conversations occur, one between the characters within the text and one between the text and the reader. In this sense, the reader is assumed to be an eavesdropper, with the author (but not the characters) aware that they are being listened to. As such, certain aspects of the reader's relationship with the text are attended to in a 'metaconscious' manner by the author: identification and affinity to the characters themselves, and the stereotypes and schemata the reader uses to transport themselves into the narrative (Bednarek, 2012). With this in mind, it is significant that Mendlesohn (2008, p. xiii), who has studied the rhetoric and language of fantasy, argues that the "fantastic is an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialect between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fictional consensual conversation of belief." The relationship between literature and belief is one that has already been outlined in chapters two and three, both in terms of our evolutionary pre-disposition to attend to fiction as a means of experiential learning and also in the manner in which fiction can transform our real-world beliefs. Equally, Tolkien's fantasy is reliant on the authorial voice; on the narrator, in the second articulation, to guide the reader through the unknown world (Mendlesohn, 2008), a fact that has significant ramifications for the characters, as will be shown in the next chapter. Another aspect of importance in this debate regarding the aims and nature of fantasy is the fact that the fantasy genre in both England and America was and has been irrevocably shaped by Tolkien[29]; it is his "critical theories and literary practices" that have come to be the measuring stick of the genre (Kuznets, 1985, p. 19; see also Williamson, 2015).

[29] And also, to a lesser extent regarding fantasy but perhaps more so regarding children's fantasy, C. S. Lewis.

At this point in the text, the reader may be wondering about the seemingly forgotten term, 'high fantasy'. Thus far in this chapter, I have spoken only of fantasy, while in the introduction to this work I stated I would be looking at *high* fantasy and its representations of women in various forms of publishing. So where has the term 'high fantasy' gone, and why has this section spoken only of fantasy? This is because, up to this point, the discussion has been focused mainly on 'fantasy' in general – that is, on the aims of fantasy as debated between various scholars, on the social and political aims of the same, and the inclusion of magic or the 'unworldly' and 'impossible'. These elements, as outlined above, are, of course, integral to an understanding of the genre as a whole. The various definitions of fantasy are themselves muddied somewhat by the fact that for Tolkien different sub-genres of fantasy did not exist, while for Jackson they are rooted in texts which would not, by many, be considered fantasy but rather 'magical realism', and finally by the discrepancies between academic and fan-based analysis of fantasy. Thus, in the discussion above, when Jackson talks of fantasy, she is speaking not of what many fans of fantasy would consider high fantasy, nor, in truth, what many academics have come to define as this specific genre. However, the creation of the high fantasy genre, a specific type of fantasy in and of itself, was, to an extent, an artificial endeavour, and may also account for some of the vagaries employed in this section of this chapter. The definition of high fantasy is also, somewhat ironically given Tolkien's own understanding of what fantasy is – that is, fairy tales with real men included – based in large part of the financial success of his own seminal work, *The Lord of the Rings*. Thus, it is to the creation of the genre of high fantasy that I now turn.

4.2 Building a Genre: The Codification of 'High Fantasy'

Modern fantasy is often seen as beginning with the works of Tolkien and in particular *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Williamson (2015) explains that it was with the republication in paperback of the *Lord of the Rings* and its huge success in America in the 1970s that the contemporary understanding of the (high) fantasy genre began. It should be noted that when Williams speaks of a literary category, he is talking specifically of publishing. He states that, "In the pulps between World War Two and the early 1960s, fantasy […] hovered between science fiction, horror, and action adventure fiction" (Williamson, 2015, p. 1), and where fantasy did not fall into these genres, it was categorised as 'children's literature'. Perhaps the only truly

successful novels published during the period prior to the 1960s that would be recognised as (high) fantasy today were the sword and sorcery pulp novels published at the time. However, by the 1980s, high fantasy as a publishing genre in its own right was established as a result of the popularity of Tolkien's work.

The influence of the commercial publishing world on high fantasy is not insignificant. Before the 1960s, fantasy was coded haphazardly; however, the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series (BAFS) would come to change the terrain. An unauthorised paperback edition of the *Lord of the Rings* was published to great popularity in 1965, and following this, an authorised paperback print run was released by Ballantine Books, with resounding commercial success, causing what Williams terms "the literary equivalent of the then-contemporary Beatlemania" (2015, p. 3). However, while *The Lord of the Rings* was selling well, other fantasy novels were not. It was at this point that Ballantine Books, sensing a market to be tapped into, employed Lin Carter to edit the BAFS. Under Carter's stewardship, the BAFS ran from 1969 to 1974 and essentially defined the genre, having an "indelible impact" (Williamson, 2015, p. 4) on what is now understood to be high fantasy: "A fantasy is a book or a story […] in which magic really works" (Carter 1973, in Williamson, 2015, p. 4). Tolkien's account of fairy stories can be seen to inform the working definition of fantasy used by Carter in the BAFs, thus codifying what has now become known as high fantasy (the Tolkien-inspired specific fantasy genre). As a result, by 1974 the newly formed fantasy genre had a canon of work defined and created by one publishing house, Ballantine Books, based on narratives and novels that followed the structures and motifs of *The Lord of the Rings*. While the BAFS series gave way in the mid-1970s to other publications/publishers, it had very much set the scene for the high fantasy genre. High fantasy was heroic, dealing in magical stories of quests, adventures and war, and was built on the ideas and underlying structures of myths and fairy tales, indirectly as a result of Tolkien's own work.

As mentioned above, for Tolkien, the term 'fantasy' as a literary genre did not exist. Instead, his work drew closely on that of fairy tales and medieval romance (Williamson, 2015; Tolkien, 1939/1983). Medieval romance is not meant to suggest what might now be understood to be 'romance', however. These are not, at least solely, stories about love. Rather, the medieval romance that inspire Tolkien and thus the BAFS, "comes from heroic struggle" and refers to "the medieval pot of castles, kings and queens, myths such as Saint George slaying the dragon, and the Arthurian legends of knights" (Schubart, 2016, p. 107/108), or, as Whetter (2016) notes, tales

which refer to life, suffering and redemption; love and courtesy; knights and conquest; war, woe, joy and – crucially for high fantasy – faery. The structure of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949/2004) can be seen in both Tolkien's work and in medieval romance (Schubart, 2016), as well as the principle of a 'just' or 'happy' ending for the heroes. A range of stylistic choices found in medieval romance are also apparent in Tolkien's work, including the use of poetic language, songs, and stanzas (Whetter, 2016). These narrative devices are, again, also often found in the complex, highly linguistic styles associated with high fantasy more generally (Mendlesohn, 2008). Equally, as Mendlesohn (2008) points out when discussing Port Quest Fantasy, of which high fantasy would be included, there is a strong connection between the king and the land: if the right king – the true king – finds the throne, the land is healed. Another common factor of high fantasy, again drawing on medieval romance, is the inclusion of a strong narrational voice – either (or often both) the author and a mentor character guiding the hero through the unknown and new world, and by proxy also guiding the reader (Mendlesohn, 2008). Equally, in terms of fairy tales, Tolkien (1954/1981a) did not see these as merely children's stories to be kept in the nursery, but rather as tales of adventure and the fantastic, of magical creatures and other worlds. Fairy tales also follow the archetype of the hero's journey and result in a happy ending (Schubart, 2016) though they are frequently much shorter texts than high fantasy novels, perhaps due in part to the fact that unlike high fantasy, fairy tales commonly take place within this world and so there is less 'world-building' required.

Kuznets (1985, pp. 19-20) defines high fantasy as needing to contain three elements. Firstly, it must be set in a place where magic is possible, in a world that is both "sustained" and "delineated" enough that it is believable in itself and can function as a fitting setting for battles between good and evil. Kuznets here also connects high fantasy with classic mythologies. Secondly, the high fantasy protagonist must be "ordinary in ways which most readers can identify, but he must perform heroic acts in the course of the story, which usually has a romance-quest structure", while the protagonist's comrades are extraordinary (wizards, elves, dwarves and the like), which the reader cannot relate to. The tale ends with the protagonist achieving the status of 'hero', similar to the sense of journeying/learning found in bildungsroman type tales, though the age of the protagonist is less significant in high fantasy. Finally, the fantasy world must be well-built to be believable within its own logic and lore, thus excluding, Kuznets argues, such tales as *Alice in Wonderland*, which occur in a dream state and thus cannot, by their own

token, be real. This definition would also exclude those examples of fantasy explored by Jackson (1981).

As a result, mirroring Tolkien, the fantasy genre is thus codified to be set in worlds wholly created by the author, worlds which commonly mirror a medieval or feudalistic setting, and feature a quest or a journey for the hero to embark on, with a strong narrational voice, and specific character types and roles. Thus, as Williams (2015, p. 6) points out, the modern fantasy genre "is not simply a timeless, changing entity, but was constructed, quite deliberately, to meet a new demand" by a publishing house. Essentially, the BAFS series drew on the success of Tolkien's motifs and style of writing to capitalise financially. So it is that Tolkien and the BAFS codified what is now generally known as 'high fantasy'. For many, the term high fantasy brings to mind the adventure/quests of exactly the kind made famous by Tolkien in *The Lord of The Rings*, and this can be seen in academic definitions of the genre. Given Tolkien's influence on high fantasy, it is perhaps unsurprising how closely this definition matches those of fairy tale and myth. Again, each of these three elements reflects both the hero's journey structure as laid out by Campbell (1949/2004), a structure that itself was based on mythic and fairy tale (European/Western) commonalities and archetypes, and also reflects Propp's (1968) universal themes of folk (fairy) tales. A magical world exists, in which creatures other than human live alongside human beings: Gods and Goddess, elves and dwarfs; mythical creatures such as dragons, giant spiders, and fiery monsters who live deep below ground; and gross, violent trolls, giants, orcs and goblins. The humans themselves often live in a feudalistic and medieval proxy world, in which the King and Land are inexorably linked, one ensuring the survival of the other. In to this world a protagonist, often of lowly position, receives their 'call to action' and embarks on a quest, meeting allies and fighting foes along the way, until ultimately receiving their reward; finally, they either gain status (usually becoming king themselves) or return home, forever changed by this experience. This common high fantasy structure is essentially a beat-for-beat mirror of Campbell's (1949/2004) hero's journey, as outlined in chapter two.

Nonetheless, the canon of works curated by Carter for BAFS nor the hero's journey structure have not been universally accepted within the traditional publishing world. Within high fantasy, there are traditionally published authors who subvert "that realm of fantasy which is more properly defined as faery, or romance literature" (Jackson, 1981, p. 9). For example, *The Colour of Magic* and *The Light Fantastic*, both written by Terry Pratchett, fulfil some of the

expectations of high fantasy, having as they do an 'ordinary' protagonist in the form of the tourist Twoflower, and a wizard mentor, Rincewind, along with dragon fights, barbarian heroes and otherworldly, ancient monsters for the hero to fight and overcome; and yet, Pratchett's work is a deliberate attempt to satirise. Twoflower is innocent of the dangers of the fantastic world to the point of recklessness, and Rincewind, while ostensibly in the role of wise mentor, is both a coward and an incompetent, desperately trying to dissuade Twoflower from journeying further. In the first two Discworld novels, Twoflower remains unchanged by his adventures – he has failed to 'come of age' – and it is Rincewind who is, I would argue, both more relatable and who achieves the end result of becoming a 'hero' (of sorts). In another example of Pratchett working against the structures common in high fantasy, the Watch novels in the *Discworld* series include the hero's journey structure both explicitly in the character of Carrot Ironfoundersson and implicitly in the form of Sam Vimes. Carrot is a human Prince who is lost at birth but raised in a relatively lofty position as the adopted son of a dwarf of rank. He travels to the human city of Ankh-Morpork to take a seemingly menial role in the much-maligned night watch. However, his charisma and princely charm soon shine through, causing many people to correctly guess that he is the returned King. Carrot, however, chooses not to acknowledge this, believing he can do more good for the city as a captain in the watch, and never takes his place as King ('seizing the reward', in Campbell's (1949/2004) structure). Vimes, on the other hand, has no rank, grew up in the slums of the city, and is a staunch republican and socialist. Ironically, Vimes rises to the heights of feudal society, becoming both commander of the watch and a Duke, but does not lose his original ideology; he does not willingly undergo a metamorphosis (Campbell, 1949/2004). Another example of resistance to the hero's journey might be J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Harry Potter receives his call to action, has an elderly and wise mentor, and sets about on a quest to fulfil his destiny by vanquishing the dark lord Voldemort. And yet, *Harry Potter* is also a subversion of the hero's journey in that, ultimately, it is not Harry alone who defeats Voldemort. Instead, he is able to triumph due to the help of his friends, most notably the unassuming Neville Longbottom, who for much of the series of novels was thought to be a 'squib', a pure-blood wizard with no affinity for magic, thus lacking the element of mythic destiny central to a hero of the medieval romance type.

Nevertheless, despite such subversions, the original story framework is clear. After all, how can something be subverted if it is not generally recognised as the norm? As much as these

books (and, certainly, others) 'buck the trend', they can still be considered high fantasy – the structure and the motifs remain the same, despite subversion or an unexpected ending. This is a point Mendlesohn (2008) picks up when exemplifying the types of works which could be included in her categorisations, that is, that there will always be variations and outliers around a central theme. Indeed, George R. R. Martin, the author of the *Song of Ice and Fire* series, has stated explicitly that he set out to subvert Tolkien in terms of the idea of a 'happy ever after', and the King who rules justly because he is the rightful heir to the throne, bringing peace to the land (Gilmore, 2014) – but I will discuss Martin's work in more detail later. For now, the point is simply that even works that set out, intentionally or otherwise, to subvert the genre norms of fantasy are, invariably, connected to Tolkien, so great is his influence on the genre of high fantasy. Looking at this history, we can begin to understand the line of influence that has been instrumental in the codification of character types and motifs common to the genre. Thus, high fantasy, as we come to understand the term, remains inextricably tied to these mythological and symbolic roots – and to Tolkien's work.

4.3 Tolkien's Legacy

Tolkien's canon of work is of seminal importance with regards to understanding the modern genre of high fantasy; he has exerted "a prime influence, establishing contemporary standards for what is known in Great Britain and the United States as high fantasy" (Kuznets, 1985, p. 19). It is worth noting at this point the issue of having a genre of writing so closely codified and associated with one author's voice. While it is not my intention in this thesis to analyse Tolkien as 'the man' (a number of detailed biographies exist for this purpose), I do feel it prudent, in light of his inestimable influence on the high fantasy genre and this thesis' focus on the representation of women within it, to make the point here that Tolkien himself may not have been hugely favourable to women, ideologically. Partridge (1983) gives an account of Tolkien's life at Oxford (during the period of writing *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*), in which he was couched within an overtly male environment, one which he shared with his peer and close friend, and also one of the pillars of the fantasy genre, C. S. Lewis. Both Tolkien and Lewis felt that women were incapable of high levels of thought (although Lewis, Partridge suggests, felt

this more strongly – or at least spoke out about it more vehemently – than Tolkien). Partridge quotes a letter written by Tolkien (1983, p. 180):

> How quickly an intelligent woman can be taught, grasp the teacher's ideas, see his point – and how (with some exceptions) they can go no further, when they leave his hand, or when they cease to take a personal interest in him. It is their gift to be receptive, stimulated, fertilized (in many other matters other than the physical) by the male.

Here, Partridge makes the point very clearly that Tolkien's preference for male friendships, and his views on women's capacity, were influential in the writing of *The Lord of the Rings.* While in the next chapter I will look in detail at the manner in which women are represented in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's personal views on the agency and capacity for independent thought on behalf of women, like his narrative structure and the motifs he codified, has been influential on the genre (Alexander, 1971):

> In his work, the [fantasy] author may be very heavily disguised, or altogether anonymous. I do not think he is ever totally absent. On the contrary, his presence is required; not as a stage manager who can be seen busily shifting the cardboard scenery, but as the primary source of tonality and viewpoint. Without this viewpoint, the work becomes more and more abstract, a play of the intellect that can move us only intellectually.

This authorial/narrational framing in high fantasy is usually exercised through what Mendlesohn (2008) terms a *club story* framing device, which again reflects Tolkien's personal life influencing his work, which in turn has influenced the genre of high fantasy as a whole. A club story is one which has the sense of occurring within a closed-off space – a gentleman's club – in which the narrator holds court, and within which the outside world cannot interfere. The doors to the club are closed to dissenting voices and interpretations. Such club stories,

Mendlesohn (2008, p. 6) points out, have gendered origins: "The club narrative is diegetic, a denial of discourse, an assertion of a particular type of Victorian masculinity […] combined with a stature signalled by the single-voiced and impervious authority." Perhaps tellingly, at least in terms of Tolkien, Partridge also picks up on this sense of the 'club' when writing about the social environment of which Tolkien was part of during his tenure at Oxford, a writing group called 'The Inklings': "Characteristically of the British male of a particular socio-economic class, marked forever by a school life in an exclusively male school (often a boarding school), the group tried to carry into adult life the club clannishness its members had enjoyed at school" (Partridge, 1983, p. 179). Equally, medieval romance and fairy tales tropes are pivotal regarding high fantasy, given their influence on Tolkien. "Epic, heroic legend, saga, then localised these stories in real places, and humanised them by attributing them to ancestral heroes, mightier than men but yet already men. And finally these legends, dwindling down, became folk tales, *Märchen*, fairy tales – nursery tales" (Tolkien, 1939/1983, p. 123); (fairy) tales which Tolkien then sought to rescue from the nursery and reclaim and recodify for adults, employing the stylistic choices and themes of medieval romance to aid him in this reclamation. These personal influences, as they pertain to characterisation and actions of women within high fantasy, will be explored in more detail in the next chapter; for now, it is enough to note their existence – the cook, as Tolkien himself stated, making his selections from the cauldron.

4.4 Conclusion

High fantasy remains, for better or for worse, within the shadow of Tolkien's opus. The genre codification that resulted from Tolkien, via the BAFS, is now part of the 'cultural code' of high fantasy, both in its syntagmatic structures and paradigmatic functions. Or, to look at it another way, the habitus of the genre: "The habitus refuses the traditional distinction between the social and the individual, and it reformulates the relationship between domination and subjectivity" (Fiske, 1992, p. 33). In this sense, Tolkien's understanding of high fantasy, and the fact he drew extensively on fairy tales and medieval romance, have become the overarching dominant form of the genre, under which, currently and in the majority, most fantasy exists and is subject to, even when it subverts it.

Such creation of a genre, and the influence of one person's work on it, is interesting. While it is, of course, incorrect to say that other genres have not been curated, nor that similar stories have not be bound together into compendiums, nor even that stories have not been grouped together in genres for the purpose of analysis, it is hard to think of one such genre that was so resoundingly defined by the wish of a publishing house to create profit. Indeed, it is "Small wonder that *spell* means both a story told, and a formula of power over living men" (Tolkien, 1939/1983, p. 128) – in this case, perhaps, the 'spell' of appealing to mass markets via culturally codified, accepted and thus unchallenging narrative models, in order to make money. Still, as already noted, fantasy as a whole also has divergence, of course – not all traditionally published high fantasy slavishly follows the structure and motifs Tolkien laid down, and not all fantasy is the high fantasy of Tolkien. Certainly, in the last twenty to thirty years, other sub-genres of fantasy have grown in popularity. To name a few examples: magical realism of the kind written by Charlie Jane Anders and Susanna Clarke, in which a world very similar to our own is imagined but with the addition of magic and, occasionally, monsters; urban fantasy, for example Seanan McGuire and Jim Butcher, which is set entirely in our world but where magic, monsters and the land of fairy exist, usually hidden from 'regular' people; and, as a final example, grimdark, a sub-genre of fantasy which tells tales that are particularly dark, bleak and dystopian, such as those written by Joe Abercrombie. Each of these sub-genres of fantasy is distanced from the original model described by Tolkien, in which the stories focus on tales of men within a fantastic realm, journeying towards a clear-cut moral victory over an unarguably evil foe.

However, this is a paper looking at high fantasy, a genre chosen due to its popularity and its influence on general culture outside of fantasy fandom (as explained in chapter one). However, the fact that the above-listed novels are, in the majority, seen as sub-genres of 'fantasy' – and that 'fantasy' as a general term is commonly elided with what is specifically high fantasy – is telling. They exist as resistive or oppositional to the Tolkien model, and as such that codification of what fantasy 'is' remains extant, paradoxically highlighted by its absence. Modern fantasy as a genre remains inextricably linked to the framework set out by Tolkien, in a way, arguably, that other genres are not. This may also be an issue of 'longevity'. The genre of fantasy is relatively new; Williamson (2015), for example, argues that fantasy as we understand it today only began in earnest in the late 20th century. But is this correct? As mentioned in the

introduction to this chapter and, indeed, this whole paper, fantasy is one of the oldest forms of fiction known, and yet, for many, fantasy, high or otherwise, did not exist before the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*. There were children's stories, fairy stories, myths, legends… but not fantasy. This is, in fact, the very point that Tolkien himself made in his lecture on fairy stories (1939/1983). Faëry and the fantastic have a long pedigree and should not be relegated to the world of children, sanitised and codified only for the young; they belong outside of the playroom – and this is what Tolkien achieved when *The Lord of The Rings*, however unintentionally on his part, became the foundational text for high fantasy via the BAFS. Fantasy in its own right was created. High Fantasy was no longer children's fairy stories or myths or medieval romance, but a genre with its own rules and expectations, and it was thus brought into mass consumption.

Generally, one might wonder if there is an issue with this. However, in terms of the treatment of women within the high fantasy genre, these origins are problematic. Neither the medieval period nor fairy tales were/are generally kind to women, in the most part denying them agency and forcing them into narrowly defined roles. Luis (2016, p. 165) puts it succinctly: "the fairy tale is shaped by its history, present social mores, literary, and political discourses, and the intentions of the writer." These mores and discourses exist now in the modern world as much as they existed in the historic, and as such, they draw on the heritage and representations of the times in which they were written down, for all that we may see sanitised versions of them in children's books and in movies. High fantasy, as we have seen, is closely related to fairy tale structures and functions. As Somoff (2002) explains, myth and folk tales (fairy tales) have a complicated and interrelated heritage, both borrowing syntagmatic and paradigmatic influences from the other. Lévi-Strauss argued that these differences were qualitative in nature, rather than distinct or quantitative: "Tales are miniature myths, in which the same oppositions are transposed to a smaller scale" (1976, in Somoff, 2002, p.277). Tolkien used fairy tales as a source of inspiration for his works, drawing on both the syntagmatic structures and paradigmatic functions therein to shape his world. However, such a basis draws on cultural codes and characterisations that were not empowering or, necessarily, kind to women. We have seen already in the previous chapters that representations in fiction matter, both socially and individually, in terms of the power of fiction to shape belief and behaviour in its readers.

However, again it should be noted here that there are fantasy writers who subvert and reimagine the roles of women within high fantasy, such as Terry Pratchett, Philip Pullman, and

Marianne Bradley Keyes, to name a few, all of whom prominently feature women in their tales, women who do not conform to the common tropes of their sex within the genre (tropes that will be outlined in the next chapter). Equally, one might also consider here the concept of the *implied author*. The implied author denotes a separation from the author of the work and the meaning they intended to ascribe to it, and the meaning of text as it is received by the reader – the implied author is, in a sense, the novel itself. Indeed, the term is used in literary criticism to denote the separation of author, narrator, and the meaning of the text that the reader receives. This concept overlaps but is not necessarily synonymous with the second articulation (Bednarek, 2012), in that is refers to the way the text communicates with the reader. The idea of the implied author is problematic (Shepherd, 2013), but I mention it here to underscore the fact that it is possible to critique the meaning within a text without necessarily inferring that the text's author intended that meaning. Rather, it is that "to the extent that everything done by any of the individuals involved in it is done in spontaneous response to the others or othernesses around them, we cannot hold any of them individually responsible for its outcome" (Shotter, 1999, p. 77). What this means is that influences are subtle and complex – as we have seen in terms of narrative persuasion (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013) and the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007) – and that it makes it very difficult, with any level of accuracy or fairness, to assign malicious intent to those people who are simply existing within the confines of their genre and/or just trying to tell a story. Or, more simply, literature "is never more political than when the politics are invisible, expected, and excused" (Luis, 2016, p. 166).

Having now explored the genesis of the genre, the question that remains is, how does high fantasy treat women? This will be the focus of the next chapter.

5. Fairy Tales, High Fantasy, and Female Characters: *The Lord of the Rings*

Selecting works to examine is always a subjective process (Mendlesohn, 2008; Moretti, 1983/2005), and consequently will leave room for counter argument and alternative examples. Thus, it must be stated here that I acknowledge that other works within the high fantasy genre would provide different examples – indeed, I have already acknowledged at multiple points authors who 'buck the trend' of representations I am examining. In the case of this work, I have selected J. R. R. Tolkien's fantasy novel(s), *The Lord of the Rings,* and George R. R. Martin's first novel, *A Game of Thrones,* from the ongoing series, *A Song of Ice and Fire.* These novels are, I suggest, worthy of specific examination due to the position they both hold in the wider popular culture, outside of specific high fantasy fandom, and thus the influence they can be considered to bring to bear on the same. I am viewing the *Lord of the Rings* as one complete novel, as Tolkien intended – indeed, it was a publishing house which decided to divide the novel in to three separate books, a decision which "unfortunately has led many of its readers to speak of it as three separate but interconnected works, a "trilogy", though it is no such thing" (Hammond & Scully, 2008, p. xxxii), a point also picked up by J.R.R. Tolkien in the postscript of a letter to Houghten Miffin Co., 1955, reproduced in Carpenter & Tolkien (1981, p. 221), in which the author notes that *The Lord of the Rings* is "not of course 'a trilogy'." Moreover, there is a practical reason to take the three instalments of *The Lord of the Rings* as a whole text, as to look only at the first part, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, would not provide enough examples of female characters/characterisation for comparative analysis with *A Game of Thrones*.

The Lord of the Rings, as already discussed, in the foundational text for the codification of the high fantasy genre. Not only that, but it has consistently topped lists in the UK as the most popular book ever written (Mendlesohn & James, 2012; BBC, 2003), and, with the film adaptation, is perhaps one of the most well-recognised examples of the genre even among non-fantasy fans. This means that *The Lord of the Rings* enjoys a uniquely pivotal position regarding high fantasy's cultural impact, well beyond explicit fantasy fandom. *A Song of Ice and Fire* series – and its first novel, *A Game of Thrones* – is equally seminal regarding cultural reach. Currently one of the most popular high fantasy series, the novels have sold more than 60 million

copies worldwide (Alter, 2015) and been translated into 45 languages (Flood, 2015a). Additionally, the recent television adaptation by HBO (2011 - present), *Game of Thrones*, is internationally popular, creating at the time of writing a significant moment regarding fantasy's importance in the zeitgeist. For the purpose of this study – to look at representations of women in high fantasy and to discuss the effect these representations might have on audience and culture – this level of popularity and dissemination in the wider culture, as opposed to the specific fandom, make these appropriate choices for exploration.

Another factor in my choice is the position within the chronology of high fantasy that these narratives enjoy. When authors write, they are writing with the cultural understanding available to them, even if they aim to subvert dominant ideologies (Casanova, 2009; Barthes, 1975) (a point that will be returned to). *The Lord of the Rings* was written at a time when, culturally in the West, women were less emancipated than today (an emancipation which remains a 'work in progress'), and the dominant cultural coding of a woman's place being 'in the home' still pervaded. As such, this cultural bias could have influenced Tolkien's work, along with his drawing on fairy tales and medieval romance. *A Game of Thrones*, however, was published in the mid-1990s, at a time when women's rights were more prevalent within Western culture (although, again, the cultural, gendered coding of and for women was, and remains, problematic). As such, the changing acceptance of women's agency within the cultures that both Tolkien and Martin were writing within might also suggest that the roles and actions of the female characters in the first articulation and the way they are written about in the second articulation (Bednarek, 2012) could be expected to have progressed in the interim.

In this chapter, I will look at the archetypal representations of women as found in fairy tales, and then show how these representations of women can also be found in *The Lord of the Rings* series. I made the choice to focus on fairy tales in relation to Tolkien's work (as opposed to medieval romance) as it is the fairy tale character archetypes and structures that are most clearly influential in terms of his treatment of his female characters. In this sense, I hope to highlight the links between fairy tales and Tolkien's own writing, as noted in the previous chapter of this work. As regards medieval romance and its influence, via Tolkien, on the high fantasy genre, I will return to this in the next chapter, including medieval romantic genre norms, and potential issues with these. In the next chapter, I will look at *A Game of Thrones*, highlighting examples of how fairy tale and medieval romance tropes have filtered down and

been integrated into Martin's novel, and what effect these genre norms have had on the female characters. I have chosen this structure in an attempt to convey the literary heritage present in high fantasy, from its origins in fairy tales and medieval romance, via Tolkien, to its most recent, culturally significant iteration, written by Martin.

Finally, in the analysis that follows for both the traditionally published and self-published high fantasy examples, and for the genre norms outlined, I will make reference to both syntagmatic structure (Propp, 1968) and paradigmatic content (Levi-Strauss, in Dundes 1968), in order to achieve, hopefully, a more nuanced reading, as outlined by Moretti (1983/2005) and Dundes (1968). I will use as my syntagmatic framework the monomyth of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949/2004) as this is most clearly prominent across the various (and yet amalgamated) genre focuses, along with reference to other syntagmatic structural frameworks when specifically applicable. In terms of the paradigmatic structure, I will use as my core analytical tool the effect(s) of the first and second articulations (Bednarek, 2012) on the characters and the reader, as well as making reference to transportation and narrative worlds (Gerrig, 1993), habitus and social capital (Bourdieu, 2000), just world belief and narrative persuasion (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013), anthropomorphism (Gardener & Knowles, 2008; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007), and the narrative sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007).

5.1 Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are stories that are "repeated, expected, and comforting: readers know what will happen next" (Luis, 2016, p. 166), and thus they exert powerful influence. Fairy tales disseminate the dominant hegemony (the habitus, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 2000)) of the times in which they were first codified, and remain, largely, unchanged in current retellings (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). It is the repetition of these clichés that make the narrative worlds of fairy stories so easy to fall into, and so easy to absorb. As Luis (2016, p. 166) makes plain: "these 'canonic' tales are comforting *because* they repeat clichéd forms of gender to us in ways that make moral, cultural, and social sense", and for women in fairy tales, these norms are that of passivity and beauty, "gendered scripts which serve to legitimize and support the dominant gender system" (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 711). Accordingly, the gender

roles of women in the main canon of fairy tales are now almost exactly what they were hundreds of years ago, and indeed this predictability brings with it a certain comfort for the reader/listener.

Building on this point, Appel (2008) discusses the concept of *cultivation theory* in regards to narrative. Cultivation theory is the principle that the more time people spend immersed in the world of narratives, the more likely they are to believe in the world presented in those narratives, and thus it is closely aligned with both narrative persuasion (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013) and the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007) (see chapter three). Cultivation theory has long been interested in the representation of gender roles in television, and in particular *metastories*, or master narratives (Lyotard, 1984/1993). As already discussed, master narratives speak to the concept of, for want of a better term, 'factual relativism'; that is, rather than focusing on an objective, empirical truth, master narratives focus on what is *believed* to be true in a given culture at a given point in its history. As Appel (2008, p. 63) explains, cultivation theory explores the effects of "recurrent images of and messages about certain parts of our society, politics, and values […] among the heavy viewers." In regards to fairy tales, it would be a difficult task to find many people, particularly those exposed to European culture[30], who have not been, and most likely are not now, heavy 'viewers'; and, as Luis (2016, p. 173) states, the gender roles, setups and "assumptions of the plots themselves" represented in fairy tales are "problematic."

These problematic structures and norms are so pervasive in fairy tales that it has been possible to create an index of them: the *Arne-Thompson-Uther* (ATU) classification system. The ATU is based on the syntagmatic structures of fairy tales, and is so comprehensive it has been described as one of the "most valuable tools in the professional folklorist's arsenal of aids for analysis" (Dundes, 1997, p. 195). Originally devised by Antii Arne and Stith Thompson, and then later built upon Hans Jörg Uther, the ATU represents an exhaustive classification of the plots found in fairy tales and other folklore. The ATU uses as its foundation the concept of the *motif*, that is, "the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition (Thompson 1946, in Dundes 1997, p. 195), and in this sense seems similar to the concept of the mytheme, as explored by Levi-Strauss (Barthes, 1975) (see chapter 2). Nevertheless, while there have been

[30] Some debate exists here as regards whether all fairy tales or simply those from the western European canon describe female characters ways that limit their agency and goals. Dundes (1997) for example argues that the ATU and the stories codified there are indeed universal, drawing on, for example, African folk traditions. Lundell (1987) on the other hand, argues that tales outside of the western European tradition contain significantly more empowered female representations.

criticisms regarding the definition of the term 'motif' (see Dundes 1997 for a review), it remains the case that the ATU has provided a valuable index from which to draw analysis as regards fairy tales and folk tales specifically.

Looking specifically at these motifs, one of the most common goals of the female character is to be rewarded with marriage (Dundes, 1997). As Schubert (2016, p. 109) states, in fairy tales "the [male] hero gains a kingdom, a princess, and the power to rule, and the [female] heroine gains a husband, but loses her freedom." Indeed, a large swathe of the ATU (ATU 300-749) is given over to magical tales that commonly end in marriage (Dundes, 1997), including such classic fairy tales as '*Cinderella and the Cap o' Rushes'* (ATU 510), *'Snow White and Rose Red'* (ATU 426) / *'Snow White'* (ATU 709), and *'Sleeping Beauty'* (ATU 410) (Multilingual Folk Database, 2017). Marriage, in many fairy tales, was seen as the ideal – indeed the only – happy ending for the female protagonist, serving also as a paradigm for the goals and behaviours of female reader/listeners (Helms, 1987). This link between fairy tales and normative cultural control is made clear by Dundes (1968, p. xiii), who tells us that:

> Is the fairy tale a model, a model of fantasy to be sure, in which one begins with the nuclear family […] and ends finally with the formation of a new one? […] Whether this is so or not, there is certainly some no reason why the syntagmatic structure of folk tales cannot be meaningfully related to other aspects of culture (such as social structure).

This structure of the 'Happily Ever After' being synonymous with marriage is one of the stages laid out by Propp in his seminal work on the inherent structures of fairy tales: function 1, in which a family member is absent from the home, and then function 31, when the hero is rewarded with marriage and ascends to the throne (Propp, 1968). It could be argued at this point that Propp's syntagmatic structure applies only to fairy tales found in the Russian culture. However, as Dundes (1968) notes, many of Propp's examples can also be found in the Arne-Thompson directory (later the ATU, discussed above), if not, indeed, all of them[31].

[31] While this current work focuses on European fairy tales, it is also interesting to note that a number of studies have found the Propp's syntagmatic analysis of Russian folklore/fairy tales can also be applied to African and American Indian tales. This could be, perhaps, a result of the need for stories to teach culture and skills, as discussed in chapters one and two. Why though the

Another essential goal for the female within fairy tales, in addition to her position as prize for the hero and/or to marry, is to be beautiful. Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) explore the concept of the *feminine beauty ideal*, an idea which they argue is foundational to fairy tale representations of women. The feminine beauty ideal is complex. While on the one hand it can be seen as a result of an oppressive, patriarchal ideal forced on to women, who are in turn rewarded with increased social capital if they are seen to embody it, or punished with decreased social capital if they do not, it is also noted that some women find either adhering to or flouting this concept empowering. However, in this case, the focus is on *how* this ideal is cultivated and disseminated via cultivation theory (Appel, 2008) through the long history of fairy tales, thus helping to create the habitus that beauty equates to value for women.

While representations of female beauty ideals can be found in a number of cultural artefacts, Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) argue that fairy tales enjoy a significant space to explore these principles for two reasons. Firstly, fairy tales are, despite Tolkien's dissatisfaction, most often aimed at children. Children assimilate culture and then grow up to reproduce it – again part of the cycle of habitus and doxa explored by Bourdieu (2000) – and as such are "one of the most useful products for investigating cultural motifs and values" (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 713), reflective of the power of narratives (chapters one and two). Secondly, fairy tales from the 18th and 19th centuries, most famously those recorded and adapted by the Grimm Brothers, were designed to teach girls and young women how to behave in order to fit into society; how to be demure, respectable, domesticated and to become a suitable partner in marriage; lessons designed to encode such gendered stereotypes in both male and female children (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). This is a point that is built on by Hamilton, et al. (2006, p. 757), who state that "stereotyped portrayals of the sexes and underrepresentation of female characters contribute negatively to children's development, limit their career aspirations, frame their attitudes about their future roles as parents, and even influence their personality characteristics."

Focusing only on fairy stories which contained human characters, Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) analysed 168 stories from '*The Complete Fairy Tales of The Brothers Grimm'* translated into English from the original 1857 '*Children and Household Tales*'. The basis of their

structures are so similar across such different cultures is beyond the scope of this study. Palume (1963) and Dundes (1964) consider this question in more detail.

analysis was to codify each time a character, male or female, was referred to as 'pretty', 'fairest', 'beautiful' or 'handsome'. In addition, while not specifically focusing on age, Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz nevertheless expected the age of the character to play a part in how s/he conformed to ideals of beauty, and thus they also coded 'beauty' references relating to both younger and older characters. Finally, due to the linguistically gendered nuance of words such as 'beautiful', other indicators were also sought, such as physical descriptors of the body (attractiveness, body type, strength), clothing, and eye colour. Next, they analysed the texts in two ways. Firstly through quantitative, 'yes/no' questions (for example, "Is there a clear link between 'beauty and goodness") and secondly through discourse analysis to identify themes, patterns and variations.

Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz's (2003) results are interesting. They not only found patterns which linked beauty with economic privilege, race, goodness, and danger, but also that mentions of a character's physical traits were frequent for male and female characters – one's physical appearance, therefore, is important for both men and women in fairy tales. However, for female characters, beauty is highlighted both more frequently and also plays a more significant role in the story for younger female characters than for older ones. Indeed, "there are approximately five times more references to women's beauty per tale than men's handsomeness" (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 717). Their discourse analysis also showed a link between youth, beauty and goodness, and age, ugliness and evil for female characters. Building on this, they also found patterns where female characters who were described as beautiful were rewarded and those described as ugly were punished, and that this beautiful/reward ugly/punishment paradigm also extended to race, in which characters associated with Caucasian beauty ideals were better treated by the story than those associated with women of colour.

Beauty is also dangerous for women in fairy tales. Of the stories Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) analysed, 28% included motifs of harm associated with physical beauty, and of that number, 89% involved harm to the female characters, with many of the female characters (40%) experiencing victimisation as a direct result of their beauty. The final theme they note is that of jealousy, an issue that they state almost exclusively affects and effects female characters. The story of '*Snow White*' is given to exemplify these points, in which Snow White's beauty puts her in danger from the jealous rage of her older and, consequently, less attractive step-mother. These fairy tale feminine beauty ideals – and the actions that occur to women as a result of them – pervade mass media due to the way they are ingrained in our childhood social

development and perpetuated through pop-culture (most notably Disney, but in other films, books and artefacts as well), as well as forming the foundation of the fantasy genre. Indeed, of the sample of 168 fairy tales used in Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz's (2003) study, 25% have been reproduced as books or movies, with *Cinderella* being the most reproduced, closely followed by '*Snow White', 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Little Red Riding Hood'* and '*Hansel and Gretel'*[32].

'Cinderella', 'Snow White' and '*Sleeping Beauty'* are all notable as they conform explicitly to the issues raised in this section. In each story, the female protagonist is without agency, confined to domestic servitude, hiding from potential death, and, in the cases of '*Sleeping Beauty'* and '*Snow White'*, asleep and waiting to be saved, thus negating their physical as well as symbolic voice. Not only that, but all three women's main reward is marriage, and in two of these cases it is a man's desire, based on their beauty, that rescues them from a curse placed on them by an older, 'uglier' woman. Finally, in two of the three stories it is beauty, the thing that gives the heroines value in a patriarchal system, which puts them in danger from other women. Cinderella is the victim of her step-mother's and step-sisters' jealousy, as is Snow White the victim of her step-mother's jealousy. In addition to this, Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) also found that stories which focus on female beauty are more likely to be reproduced – that is, they are more sustainable in the Euro-American culture. Conversely, for men, references to their handsomeness had no significant impact on the fairy stories' reproduction. Additionally, stories in which women were victimised had a moderate correlation regarding reproduction numbers, but this result becomes nonsignificant when compared with reproductions based on representations of the feminine beauty ideal. Essentially, while stories which featured the mistreated of women were reproduced, this reproduction was not to the same quantity as stories which featured the feminine beauty ideal. Interestingly, violence towards men or male victimisation, like male handsomeness, had no link to reproduction quantity.

Finally, another gendered factor of fairy tales is the aspect of the 'trial'. Echoing the structure of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949/2004), characters in fairy tales are expected to undergo trials and/or tests to prove that they are deserving of the 'happy ending' the story promises. As Schubert (2016) explains, in fairy tales the protagonist is often expected to undergo

[32] Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) note that *'Little Red Riding Hood'* and *'Hansel and Gretel'* are exceptions to their findings on beauty across the study as a whole. There are much fewer references to beauty generally, and indeed where it is referenced in *'Hansel and Gretel'* it is more likely to apply to the male character. No reason or speculation is given for this in their analysis, but one might initially wonder if it is because these protagonists are children, and therefore are not being considered in terms of their value or space within society in the same manner as the women in the other top three fairy tales.

three trials, each of which is designed to move him or her towards their happy ending but also, crucially, to ensure that they are deserving of it, learning humility and compassion. However, the manner in which these trials unfold for the male hero and the female heroine are markedly different. Male heroes' trials afford them chances to be brave, to undergo moments of self-discovery, and to make friends along the way (in fairy tales, usually magical creatures or animal companions). These trials are again reminiscent of the steps along the hero's journey, specifically steps 7 (approaching the innermost cave), 8 (Ordeal), and 9 (Seizing the sword). The trials facing fairy tale heroines, however, are quite different, and ultimately serve a different social process. "[T]he heroines of these [fairy] tales are initiated into marital submission, and their tests, in contrast to their hero counterpart, require abasement, not courage to slay dragons" (Schubart, 2016, p. 109). In fairy tales, women may:

- Have their voices taken from them (for example, *The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers,* ATU 451; *The Little Mermaid,* no ATU)
- Be locked away in towers or otherwise imprisoned (for example, *Rapunzel,* ATU 310*; Sleeping Beauty,* ATU 410*; Cinderella and the Cap o' Rushes*, ATU 510*; ATU510a, Cinderella*)
- Be maimed in some way (for example, *The Girls without Hands,* ATU 706*; The Princess and the Shroud,* ATU 307)
- Be required to fall in love with/tame a monstrous creature (for example, *Beauty and the Beast,* ATU 425c), itself a codification for pure masculinity (Schubart, 2016) which the woman must learn to love
- Be punished/threatened with punishment for her curiosity (usually by her husband or intended) (for example, *Blue Beard,* ATU 312; *Fitcher's Bird,* ATU311*)*

All these trials aim to highlight that heroine is 'pious', 'pure' or 'worthy' (Tatar, 1985), along with the value the heroine inherently has due to her beauty (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003), a beauty that can also put them in danger in the first place. Like in the hero's journey, in fairy tales these trials are in place to make sure that protagonist is indeed deserving of his/her happy ending which, one might have already surmised, is congruent with the issues associated with a just world belief (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby &

Johnston, 2013). Such issues – for example, the tendency to alter or adapt real-world events and facts to ensure they are congruent with a 'just world' – are therefore problematic, based on these representations of women. Women do not learn compassion but are saved from terrible fates only if they are *already compassionate*; women are not humble, but rather they are *humbled*. "In fact, humbled is perhaps too mild a term to use for the many humiliations to which female protagonists must submit", as Tarter (1985, p. 37) states. It is perhaps not difficult, I suggest, to draw a connection between how such trials for women in fairy tales could help create a just world belief that in turn may lead to the issues of rape culture (Ferreday, 2015) and victim blaming (Strömwall, et al., 2013) which were discussed in chapter three. On a final note of comparison, it is worth highlighting that the male heroes of fairy tales are given more allowances than the female heroines when undergoing their quests or completing their trials. The male hero may be ambiguous, a knave or a trickster, naïve or even unintelligent, and still progress through his story to his happy ending. As Tarter (1985, p. 32) explains, "In an almost perverse fashion, fairy tales featuring male protagonists chart the success story of adolescents who do not even have the good sense to heed the instructions of the many helpers and donors who rush to their aid in an effort to avert minor catastrophes and disasters"; nevertheless, he is successful.

These problematic character representations and story structures can also be tied to the principles of the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007) and of narrative persuasion (Appel, 2008; Djikic, et al., 2009; Green, et al., 2004; Prentice, et al. 1997). Such ideas slip by, unnoticed and unchallenged, to form part of the everyday understanding of our world – and, as explained (chapter four), have formed the basis for much of the fantasy genre. Interestingly, fairy tales are now the subject of many feminist critiques and explorations (Campbell, 2014). Feminist authors have sought to reframe the fairy tale tropes, casting women in more prominent roles, exploring lesbian relationships, and/or diminishing the importance of 'marriage' as the end goal for female protagonists or of the princess fulfilling the 'reward' function for male protagonists. However, this reframing began in earnest in the 1970s (Campbell, 2014), at the same time the genre of fantasy was being created and codified by Carter (Williamson, 2015), and thus, one can presume, had little effect on this codification. Additionally, while the new, feminist fairy tale reimaginings were being explored, increasingly 'mainstream' versions were being published which more explicitly emphasised the importance of the feminine beauty ideal. Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) found that fairy tales reproduced during this period *emphasised* the importance of female

beauty in terms of female value, ostensibly at odds with the rising feminist movement of the time, a fact they argue is no coincidence.

Essentially, the issue here is that of *normative control*. During the 1970s in the UK and the USA as well as other Western countries, the feminist movement was gaining traction and laws that sought to oppress women were being relaxed or repealed. However, while in the explicit social environment women's rights were gaining ground, in the *implicit* domain of social control – in this case children's stories – a counter move was occurring. As Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003, p. 713) state, "Reliance on normative means of social control is likely to vary depending on how contested the gender terrain is." That is, while laws and overt social conditioning existed to maintain women's reliance on (Caucasian) beauty standards, passivity, youth and value as a (cis-gender, heterosexual) wife, there was less need to rely on normative controls, like those found in fiction. However, as women gained more agency and control externally (via, for example, laws) the dominant habitus sought to reassert itself through other means: "as women's status in society is enhanced, there is likely to be a greater reliance on normative controls via constructs such as the beauty ideal" (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 713). Principally, as laws controlling women relaxed, the (re)publication of fairy tales in which women were controlled increased. In numbers, Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz found that the majority of fairy tales were reproduced in the latter half of the 20th century, jumping from 4.07 in the early 1900s to 24.79 from 1981-2000. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this increase was particularly noticeable with regards to the three most popular fairy stories already mentioned, '*Cinderella*', *'Snow White*' and *'Sleeping Beauty*'. *'Cinderella*', the most popular fairy story, rose from 45 reproductions in the early 1900s to 227 between 1981-2000. Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz found that not only were stories which relied on and emphasised the feminine beauty ideal more likely to be reproduced, but that this reproduction increased at a time when such ideas and their repercussions on women were being challenged. This occurred, they argue, in order to maintain normative control over women via the subtle dissemination of habitus and social control via stories designed for children; such attention to beauty for beauty's sake being "consistent with a social control perspective" (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 723).

Naturally, a number of fantasy authors have sought to either explicitly or implicitly challenge these ideals (Angela Carter, Emma Donoghue, Marian Bradley Taylor, Terry Pratchett, Neil Gaiman, and Philip Pullman, for example). Nevertheless, while feminism was intersecting

and exploring the tropes and capital represented in fairy tales, fairy tales themselves were becoming increasingly focused on female beauty, passivity, and silence, and with the goal of a suitable marriage being the main reward for the female protagonists. Equally, while feminist counters to the character archetypes and syntagmatic structures were being written, these came long after Tolkien's work was first published (1955). Building on this point, at the time when feminist authors were subverting these fairy tale tropes, the BAFS were in the process of codifying the high fantasy genre around *The Lord of the Rings* (Williamson, 2015). In the next section, therefore, I will look at the representation of women in *The Lord of the Rings*, drawing parallels between these representations and the ones lain out, above.

5.2 The Lord of the Rings

The *Lord of the Rings'* female characters often fall neatly into character archetypes commonly found fairy tales. Partridge (1983, p. 183), for example, notes that the women of *The Lord of the Rings* are "conceived along very traditional lines either as the idealized goddess figure or as the romantic heroine." Tolkien has also been criticised for the lack of prominent females within his main canon of work, Middle Earth being a "very exclusive male world" (Partridge, 1983, p. 183). Nevertheless, four humanoid female characters do stand out: Galadriel and Arwen, both high elves, Éowyn, a human of royal birth, and finally Goldberry, a water Goddess. Still, despite such lofty titles and status, all four women ultimately succumb to the fairy tale trappings of their gender: a reliance on their beauty to provide or add to their value, and marriage and domesticity as their goal or place. Additionally, for Éowyn, the only human female, her trials seem designed to make her ready and willing to marry, rather than to pursue her 'non-feminine' goal of becoming a warrior. I will now look at these four characters' story arcs and representations, beginning with Galadriel and Arwen, moving on to Éowyn, and ending with Goldberry.

5.2.1 Galadriel and Arwen

As elves, Galadriel and Arwen enjoy a higher status within the mythology of Middle Earth, being codified as wise and mystical. Nevertheless, both are bound by fairy tale

codifications of feminine value, and both give up their heritage and/or status for love, Arwen to the extent that she relinquishes immortality for Aragorn, her human lover. Moreover, Galadriel performs a 'mother' archetype within the novels, offering healing, comfort and gifts to the protagonists at their moments of crisis. Galadriel is thus strongly codified within the narrative as "an idealized female deity […] remote and passive" (Partridge, 1983, p. 194) and retains her beauty and her youth; who gives gifts to aid the male characters to accomplish their quest while remaining an inspirational figure rather than an active one.

Arwen, Galadriel's granddaughter, is highly prized for her beauty. Though she does not feature as prominently in the novels as Galadriel, she too holds position mainly as inspiration/motivation (mother/Goddess), though this time more specifically for Aragorn than for the whole fellowship, making her more of a maiden/reward. While Arwen is of noble blood and thus, theoretically at least, as able as any of the male characters to perform 'the duties of her birth', that is, to take charge and to lead others, her actions within the novel are centred on ideals of feminine sacrifice. She gives up immortality to be with Aragorn, and, as a result of her refusal to accompany the elves leaving Middle Earth, provides Frodo with a means to escape his own mortality. Arwen's story, in fact, could be read as highlighting the inherent tragedy of such a sacrifice for the sake of marriage, of being the 'reward' for the hero, Aragorn. For despite doing everything required of a fairy tale princess, including being beautiful, she ultimately dies alone, long after Aragorn's passing. Either way, Arwen's beauty (and the value it holds) and her choice to wait for Aragorn to marry her are strongly couched within the fairy tale values of femininity lain out by Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003).

5.2.2 Éowyn

In contrast to both Galadriel[33] and Arwen, the human Éowyn is written initially as an 'Amazon' or female warrior. Or, at least, this is what she wishes to be; for much of her story, she is, in fact, living out the fairy tale of the princess trapped in the tower, or, in another light, the medieval courtly romance. During both the War of the Ring and the Battle of Hornburg (Helmsdeep), Éowyn is forced to stay behind in what has been termed by Shippey (in White, 2002) as a "striking and early sensitivity to the theme of female passivity." During the War of the

[33] Although in the Silmarillion we discover that Galadriel was once a warrior, she soon regrets her actions and when we meet her in *The Lord of the Rings*, she is couched as the 'Mother/Goddess'.

Ring, Éowyn finds herself trapped, left behind with her ageing and bewitched uncle, King Théoden, and his manipulative adviser, Wormtongue. Consequently, despite Éowyn's desire to fight alongside the men, she is positioned as a 'damsel in distress', a fairy tale princess trapped in a castle. Equally, Éowyn has been promised to Wormtongue by the evil wizard Saruman, making her not only the damsel in distress in one narrative (Aragorn's) but also the reward in another (Wormtongue's). Clear references are made in *The Two Towers* to Wormtongue's obsession with her. The wizard Gandalf, written as a mentor and thus arbiter of morality (see chapter 6), denounces Wormtongue when he is finally brought to justice (Tolkien, 1954/1981b, p. 153):

> "How long is it since Saruman bought you? What was the promised price? When all the men were dead, you were to pick your share of the treasures, and take the woman you desire [Éowyn]? Too long have you watched her under your eyelids and haunted her steps."

The language Gandalf uses here is noteworthy. He speaks of treasures, of which Éowyn is one, strengthening the notion in both the first and second articulations that her role is to be a reward. However, as fairy tales tell us, only heroes can claim the prize of the princess. Wormtongue is no hero, and thus Gandalf's tone is scathing. This, however, does not mitigate the fact that Éowyn is a prize, it simply underscores the fairy tale[34] trope that deserving men will receive a beautiful woman as reward for their valour. In the end, Éowyn is rescued from this threatening situation, resulting from her beauty and her sex, by men – including the King-in-waiting, Aragorn, with whom she quickly falls in love. She follows Aragorn into battle, more than proving her mettle, fighting bravely and eventually killing the Witch King, Lord of the Nazgûl. A truly malevolent creature, prophecy had decreed that no man would ever be able to slay the Witch King, to which Éowyn responds with the now famous line "No living man I! You look upon a woman!" (Tolkien, 1955/1981, pp. 136-7).

At this point, having uttered such a rallying cry to the potential of her sex, one might begin to see Éowyn fulfil her ambition. Aragorn does not love her, so she is no longer obliged to be the reward for his endeavours (an interesting subversion of the trope by Tolkien, who does not complete the fairy tale by having Éowyn marry her rescuer and thus become a reward for his

[34] And medieval romance trope, but I will come to that in the next chapter.

efforts). Furthermore, she has fought and has shown herself to be just as capable as any man of such an undertaking. In both the first and second articulations, Éowyn has the potential to step out of the gendered constraints of medieval romance and fairy tale. However, this does not come to pass. Éowyn is forced to disguise her sex in order to fight, having to dress as a man to keep her identity secret from those around her. Despite her obvious drive, her prowess and her dedication – in a battle that is clearly described to be uneven regarding numbers – she is not, due to being a woman, allowed to volunteer. This conclusion and Éowyn's need to hide her womanhood are frustrating, but ultimately 'appropriate' within the high fantasy/fairy tale coda for women. Additionally, despite her triumph in killing the Nazgûl, Éowyn is seriously wounded and has to be rescued from the battle by Aragorn. She is therefore once again placed in a position where, as a woman, she is in need of (male) saving, just as when she was the victim of Wormtongue's sexually predatory behaviour. Moreover, while it is true that at numerous times within the whole narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* many of the male characters are endangered, wounded, and in need of rescue, they are able to continue being heroes once healed/saved. Éowyn, however, does not fight again. Instead, she remains ensconced in another palace, returned to the traditional female goal of domesticity. She marries Faramir, a Prince, and her brief dalliance outside the norms of her gender are, within the scope of her story, an aberration. Thus, when Éowyn asks (Tolkien, 1955/1981, p. 62) "Shall I always be left behind when the Riders depart, to mind the house while they win renown, and find food and beds when they return?" the answer is a resounding *yes*.

Thus, in the second articulation, there is an insinuation that only men are allowed to lead lives of adventure, action, and agency. The fact that Éowyn's choices are to play the 'boy' and lead the life she wishes or to play the 'girl' and marry (an action which she has in the first articulation codified as dull) present a worrying message to the reader via the second articulation, one which chimes with traditional gender normative roles (a point I will pick up in more detail in the next chapter, but wish to highlight now). Moreover, in the first articulation, Éowyn's trials – Wormtongue, fighting in the War of the Ring, and injury – lead her to the acceptance of marriage as her proper place within her society, rather than legitimising her desire to fight and justifying her place amongst the men. Regarding just world beliefs, Éowyn's narrative journey is additionally problematic due to the manner in which it both aligns with and negates the classic steps of the hero's journey. The hero's journey requires, loosely, that the hero is taken from

his/her normal world, that they meet a mentor and friends along the way, that they face challenges both external and internal, that they face death (literal and/or metaphorical), and finally seize their reward – in the case of the male hero, gaining of a kingdom and a wife but not, crucially, *becoming a husband*. In many ways, Éowyn undergoes exactly this journey. Various steps are encountered and overcome by her: she meets her mentor, in the form of, I suggest, Aragorn, and she is confronted with tests, meets allies and enemies. However, she is not 'called to action' or has a moment of 'passing the threshold', of reaching a point in the narrative where it is impossible[35] for her to return to her normal world. Instead, she has to make these choices for herself. This could arguably be a feminist reinterpretation of the hero's journey, as Éowyn's moment of no return is defined by herself, her wants and aspirations. However, the continuation of her journey does not support this reading. She follows the next stages of the hero's journey faithfully until the 'seizing the reward', 'the road back', 'resurrection' and finally the 'return with the elixir' stages, which are negated by her injury in battle, rescue by Aragorn and recuperation in the castle in which she then remains, eventually marrying Faramir.

As such, one might wonder at the decision to follow, subvert, and then alter Éowyn's narrative arc. However, there may perhaps be an answer in another syntagmatic structure, one which Jones (2011) argues is in place for narratives which deal with bildungsroman stories for women. The stages of *this* structure state that a female protagonist's arc must have her "learning to be submissive, accepting pain as a female condition, equating sexuality with danger, marrying after the inevitable failure of a rebellious autonomy, and regressing from full societal participation in order to actualize the inconsequential status of the female self" (Jones, 2011, p. 440). Viewed in this way, it is possible to see an amalgamation regarding Éowyn's narrative arc, beginning with the classic hero's journey, but then falling into the more traditional, gender-normative expectations of a woman's bildungsroman arc. Éowyn's rebellion – to join the fight – ultimately fails, with her near mortally wounded, and she indeed 'submits' to marriage and the fulfilment of her role: domesticity. As Partridge states, "any understanding of a woman's dissatisfaction with an unfulfilling career is cast aside by Tolkien, who ultimately lays the blame not on poor career choices but on unrequited love. Éowyn's desire for action stems from her

[35] Éowyn chooses to go into battle dressed as man, rather than having than having this choice forced upon her, as is the tradition in the hero's journey. Indeed, the point here is that it is not only possible for her to return to her gender-normative role, but inevitable and desirable.

despair that Aragorn cannot return her love. Tolkien's solution is marriage, to Faramir, and this marriage is Tolkien's own invention" (1983, p. 192).

5.2.3 Goldberry

Finally, the fourth humanoid female character, Goldberry, manages to combine both 'Mother/Goddess' role and feminine domesticity/marital happiness, though she does not feature as prominently in the novels as Éowyn, Galadriel or Arwen. Goldberry welcomes the hobbits into her home early in the first book, feeding and comforting them. This mother role – that of the nurturer and provider of a comfortable and safe domesticity – is once again a culturally normative behaviour assigned to women. Goldberry is strongly associated with this role; we see her in the home, she cooks and provides for the hobbits, smiling and being an object of beauty for their gaze. In this way, Goldberry achieves the rather dubious honour of combining "the courtly ideal of the woman on a pedestal, a rare beauty to be worshipped from afar, with a rather more down-to-earth ideal of woman as domestic servant" (Partridge, 1983, p. 192). Goldberry is often, despite her Goddess status, relegated to the role of a waitress and cook, and is absent from many of the (now by default) male discussions regarding the politics and social structures of Middle Earth and the impending war with Sauron.

Still, in truth, perhaps, there is nothing inherently problematic with a female character being portrayed in a domestic setting. If a female character chooses this role, it could be stated that she is acting out her own choices and agency. However, Goldberry's godliness infringes on any possibility of her behaving or being treated as a 'normal' woman. The hobbits, when they meet her, are dazzled by her beauty to the point where they can barely function around her, and her magical nature sustains her beauty (defined by her skin and slender, youthful figure) despite the rigours of age and domestic life. Moreover, her magical powers are not employed to aid in the upcoming struggle but instead to keep house; as Partridge rather sarcastically points out: "[a]s a spirit of the River she is able to turn rainy weather to advantage to do the washing up and autumn cleaning" (1983, p. 193). One can only speculate on the tremendous effect Goldberry's powers might have had in the forthcoming battles, the aid she could have provided to the side of good, had she been included in them.

Interestingly, while Tolkien has been criticised for not having many female characters, he has been praised for how he writes those who do appear. Caldecott describes the women of Middle Earth as embodying such qualities as "delicacy, creativity, musicality, beauty, unfailing memory, profound wisdom, [and] lasting fidelity" (2005, p. 118). However, while such qualities are certainly virtuous, they are also extremely binding. They leave little room for actual humanity (or the elven/Goddess equivalent); to maintain such lofty standards is to negate the realities of being. Indeed, like the 'Goddess' archetype, both Goldberry and Galadriel are spoken about in the first articulation as being in some sense deified or holy (Tolkien, 1954/1981a, p. 171):

> The hobbits looked at her in wonder; and she looked at each of them and smiled. "Fair lady Goldberry!" said Frodo at last, feeling his heart moved with a joy he did not understand. He stood as he had at times stood enchanted by fair elven-voices; but the spell that was now laid upon him was different: less keen and lofty was the delight, but deeper and nearer to mortal heart; marvellous and yet not strange.

This passage is interesting in a number of ways. In the first articulation, we see how Goldberry is perceived by the male gaze of Frodo and the hobbits. She is 'mortal', unlike the elves, and yet 'lofty' and 'marvellous', a creature of distance and wonder. Readers, therefore, are taught in the first and second articulations that beautiful women (Goldberry and the elves) can enchant men, causing in them a kind of bedazzlement, stripping them of clear thought. This embedded supposition that women create in men a 'foggy' mental state does little to combat any real-world suggestion that, for example, men and women can work together, or that women can be effective in positions of authority over men. Equally, in the second articulation, such idealised qualities of womanhood place the female characters, particularly Goldberry and Galadriel, on a pedestal which in reality would be, firstly, almost impossible for any real woman to maintain and, secondly, embeds a very unreal expectation of the 'right and proper' behaviour of women. Expectations such as this could lead to very serious negative effects regarding the treatment of women who fall short of this impossible ideal, like those accounts of people with a high just

world belief blaming victims for the events which befell them (Strömwall, et al., 2013; Hafer, 2000; Scott, 2008; Appelbaum, et al., 2003). Nevertheless, this is the world that Goldberry moves through, and the reaction she can expect to elicit from the opposite sex (bearing in mind the heteronormative qualities of fairy tale and high fantasy). To be cast in such a role, where one is made divine and thus separate, cannot be an easy life to live. Perhaps this is why, rather than spending her time being gawked at and spoken to with thick tongues, Goldberry instead decides to hide away in the kitchen rather than contribute her own ideas, knowledge and experience to the conversation.

5.3 Conclusion

Women in fairy tales have been strongly codified along gender normative lines, these presentations designed to disseminative social normative control (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). While male fairy tale protagonists can be dim-witted and naïve or cunning and clever, the female protagonist must instead be domesticated and beautiful (Tatar, 1985). Equally, for a male fairy tale hero, the 'happy ending' at the end of his hero's journey involves some form of gained power (usually in terms of an ascent to the throne and the winning of a (trophy) wife); for the female heroine, her 'happy ending' is to *become* that reward (Schubart, 2016; Jones, 2011). Moreover, the women in fairy tales are often tested in terms of their *ability* to be a wife (Schubart, 2016), often following an arc in which any attempt to avoid this ending results in failure, with the woman ultimately becoming humbled and subservient (the female bildungsroman arc) (Jones, 2011). These motifs are problematic, firstly when considered in light of just world beliefs, especially, given the focus of this thesis, those which can lead people to blame the victims of rape for their victimhood (Strömwall, et al., 2013), and secondly in terms of the propagation of rape culture congruent storylines in fiction (Ferreday, 2015). Adding to these issues, female-led fairy tales are the most well-recognised (Tatar, 1985), and it is these stories that are repeated over time with few adaptions or modernisations of these representations reaching mass production (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003).

Regarding Tolkien, my aim in this chapter was to show how fairy tale structures and character archetypes have carried through into his seminal high fantasy texts, as he himself acknowledged (Tolkien, 1939/1983). Of course, I cannot say that it was his intention to tie the

women in his work to such tropes and thus, potentially, cause harm to real-world women; rather, I draw once again on the concept of the implied author (as discussed in chapter four). Both Arwen's and Éowyn's narratives end with their marriages, and this is presented within the narrative world as an apt conclusion to their stories, despite any potential they may have outside of domesticity. Furthermore, both Arwen and, especially, Éowyn's narratives follow a gender normative structure coded specifically for women 'coming of age', resulting in their submission to marriage (Jones, 2011), unlike the hero's journey structure, which ends not with the hero submitting, but instead *receiving* his just reward. This is, I suggest, especially apparent with Éowyn, who could have continued her journey to become a warrior, fulfilling her potential and thus becoming a rebuttal to the concept that a woman's place is within the marital unit, as Partridge (1983) argues. Equally, *The Lord of the Rings* paints an idealised picture of femininity, with both Galadriel and Goldberry being framed as the height of female beauty, to the extent that they dazzle and addle the men in their presence. While Caldecott (2005) recognises the ostensive virtue of these presentations – the positive light in which they place women – they create, through the narrative, an extremely high bar for real-world women and, through the principles of narrative persuasion (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013) an impossible standard, which real-world cultures, nonetheless, hold women to.

There is, however, one notable way in which Tolkien's work differs from the fairy tales which influenced him. Tolkien is apt to minimise women's appearances, having only four women with any significant page time within the entire narrative. This may be a result of the additional influence of medieval romance, the Arthurian myths which tended to spotlight the adventures of men, or, perhaps, because Tolkien wrote in the early 20th century, at a time when, socially and politically, women were more absent, or their absence generally less remarked upon as a cause for concern. In the next chapter, I will look at the more recent, and currently most widely known in popular culture, high fantasy series, George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*'s first novel, *A Game of Thrones*. *A Game of Thrones* features a host of female characters, but, as we will see, the influences of fairy tale and medieval romance still remain. I will, additionally, focus specifically on the latter's influence on high fantasy.

6. Medieval Romance, High Fantasy, and Female Characters: *A Game of Thrones*

Narrative, as we have seen, can have an extremely strong persuasive effect, and the fact that certain fairy tale roles, archetypes, and characterisations of women still feature in high fantasy, whether explicitly or implicitly, could cause harm in the real world. In fantasy, a reader's ability to relate to the central character(s) is given additional weight, perhaps due to the fantastic nature of the narrative's setting (Djikic, et al., 2009; Prentice, et al., 1997). Timmerman (1983, p. 29), for example, argues that fantasy characters have to exist as a proxy for the reader, that they must "be like us" and that this commonality is "precisely the point." For female characters in the high fantasy genre, however, one wonders whether this commonality between reader and character is one that many real-world women would wish to share. Fantasy has been described by Le Guin (1979, p. 84) as places in which "those who go there should not feel too safe", and the high fantasy of George R. R. Martin is an especially dangerous place for women, as will be shown.

I have outlined in the previous chapter the line of inheritance between fairy tale representations of women and *The Lord of the Rings*, examining traditional character tropes such as the maiden/reward, and the mother/goddesses, as well as the tension between the (male's) hero's journey and female bildungsroman arc. However, *The Lord of the Rings* was first published in 1955, while the current high fantasy favourite, *A Game of Thrones*, was first published in 1996, approximately forty years later. Nevertheless, it is still possible to see Tolkien's fingerprints on the genre in, not only in terms of fairy tales but also regarding medieval romance. For example, the use of a strong narrational voice, the inclusion of mentors, the adherence to the hero's journey structure, and the creation of wholly new, quasi-medieval worlds with a strong feudalistic social hierarchy are all reminiscent of medieval romance tropes. Still, while Martin's series *A Song of Ice and Fire* is firmly couched within the high fantasy genre, it has also developed it. Martin has been critical of Tolkien's work, in particular the medieval romantic propensity to have the land healed by the rise of the 'one true king' to the throne, the staple of the (male-characters') happy ending, and the lack of focus on the effects of a feudalistic

social system on the poor and common people, termed ‘small folk’ by Martin. In an interview with Rolling Stone magazine, Martin (Gilmore, 2014) notes:

> Ruling is hard. This was maybe my answer to Tolkien, whom, as much as I admire him, I do quibble with. Lord of the Rings had a very medieval philosophy: that if the king was a good man, the land would prosper. We look at real history and it’s not that simple. Tolkien can say that Aragorn became king and reigned for a hundred years, and he was wise and good. But Tolkien doesn’t ask the question: What was Aragorn’s tax policy? Did he maintain a standing army? What did he do in times of flood and famine? And what about all these orcs? By the end of the war, Sauron is gone but all of the orcs aren’t gone – they’re in the mountains. Did Aragorn pursue a policy of systematic genocide and kill them? Even the little baby orcs, in their little orc cradles?

…adding:

> The war that Tolkien wrote about was a war for the fate of civilization and the future of humanity, and that’s become the template. I’m not sure that it’s a good template, though. The Tolkien model led generations of fantasy writers to produce these endless series of dark lords and their evil minions who are all very ugly and wear black clothes. But the vast majority of wars throughout history are not like that.

One of the most notable diversions from *The Lord of the Rings*, in terms of this thesis, is that *A Game of Thrones*, the first novel in the ongoing series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, features substantially more women in its cast, and that these women are, ostensibly, playing more varied roles than those traditionally offered to women by fairy tale and medieval romance. Indeed, there are scholars who praise Martin’s novels for their depictions of women. Schubert (2016) draws a

parallel between Martin's character Daenerys and Beauty from *Beauty and the Beast*, arguing that Martin both updates and subverts the trope of a woman coming into her own power through the taming of a monstrous, masculine-coded creature. Schröter (2016), meanwhile, notes the social realism and "multi-faceted female protagonists" which have helped garner critical recognition for both the novels and the television series, while Jones (2012) argues that Martin's use of female fairy tale/medieval romance character archetypes (for example, the 'maiden', 'witch', and 'mother') are progressive and empowering.

For my own part, I am inclined to accept that Martin's novels provide some advancement regarding the representation of women in high fantasy – certainly in terms of headcount – and that in a number of ways his female characters have significantly more depth and characterisation than Tolkien offered Arwen, Galadrial, Golderberry and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Éowyn. Speaking in terms of anthropomorphisation, the fact that Martin's female characters are given more page time, are shown to have multiple motivations for their actions and to be able to navigate a place within their own world, are positive advancements. However, there are elements in Martin's work, hidden for the most part in the syntagmatic structures (Propp, 1968) and tropes of high fantasy, which undermine any conclusion that *A Game of Thrones* has completely shed all harmful fairy tale/medieval romance-based representations of women. In order to explore this proposition further, I will first highlight the genre norms of high fantasy as currently understood, including their connection to Tolkien, medieval romance and the hero's journey, building on the links already outlined between Tolkien and fairy tales. I will then look specifically at Martin's work and the ways in which these high fantasy structures and norms present themselves regarding his female characters.

6.1 Medieval Romance

As outlined in chapter four, high fantasy's archetypes, characters and motifs are influenced significantly by Tolkien (Williamson, 2015). Whereas in the previous chapter I highlighted fairy tales' influence on high fantasy female characters, here I would like to look at the influence of medieval romance and the hero's journey. As outlined in chapter one, the hero's journey is a monomyth (Campbell, 1949/2004), a syntagmatic structure (Propp, 1968) which has been utilised for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. It is particularly noticeable in European

mythic tales, such as those found in medieval romance, for example St. George and the dragon or the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Similarly, in high fantasy, one of the most enduring structures is the quest/journey, drawing on motifs commonly found in medieval romance, and seen in both the hobbits' and Aragorn's arcs in *The Lord of the Rings*. As Mendlesohn (2008) and Kuznet (1985) further elaborate, the high fantasy plot must include a journey, usually one in which the protagonist is forced to leave the safety or normalcy of home to pursue an adventure (the 'call to action'). The protagonist meets others, learns more about the fantastic world, and ultimately fulfils their destiny (usually prophetic), echoing steps 3-12 of the hero's journey. Moreover, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, the hero's journey also bears a resemblance to the 'trials' found in fairy tales (Schubart, 2016; Tatar, 1985). Thus, the structural heritage of high fantasy can be linked with fairy tales and medieval romance, as well as with Tolkien's work – unsurprisingly, given the influence these two genres had on him, and that he in turn had on high fantasy.

High fantasy is usually framed as having already occurred. The high fantasy story is being recounted by another, and in so doing this allows the vast, descriptive style and tone that is synonymous with these tale types. This is reminiscent of medieval romance, in which narratives were frequently orally recounted, societies at the time not being universally literate (Dinshaw, 2007), as well as Tolkien, who is retelling a history in *The Lord of the Rings.* As a result of this oral/narrational tradition, it is the voice of the narrator which commonly dictates the morality within the high fantasy world (Mendlesohn, 2008). Accordingly, in high fantasy, the protagonist is often naïve, reliant on found or received knowledge of the fantastic world (Mendlesohn, 2008)[36]. In order to account for this naivety, the high fantasy protagonist is often given a mentor figure, as shown in step 4, 'Meeting the mentor', of the hero's journey. In fact, it is through this naivety and the meeting of the mentor figure that readers recognise who the hero is, which character is it they should be identifying with and rooting for, who they are travelling with and over whose shoulder they are peering. As Timmerman (1983, p. 35) explains:

> Naïveté in fantasy is always a good thing which suggests that the character has retained a willingness to wonder, has not been despoiled by the world's affairs, has not been made hard-bitten and

[36] This is also reminiscent of the naïve protagonists of fairy tales, who must rely on helpers to complete their trials (Tatar, 1985).

> cynical of life. And these latter characters, the pragmatists, the despoiled, the hard-bitten and cynical are often the villains of fantasy.

As a result of the naivety of the protagonist, high fantasy is made functional by the acceptance on the behalf of the protagonist and the reader of received truth (Mendlesohn, 2008). Knowledge is given to the protagonist/reader and must be accepted as truthful in order for the universe to maintain itself. If the protagonist was knowledgeable about the world and their place within it, the very function of these stories – that of a journey of discovery, a bildungsroman – could not occur. Accordingly, the protagonist's naivety and the subsequent reliance on a mentor is a foundational part of the syntagmatic structure (Propp, 1968) of high fantasy. As Mendlesohn (2008, p. 5) reports, "in modern fantasy this element [naïve protagonist and wise mentor] is maintained even where […] we are dealing with an anti-quest [a subversion of the structure]." In addition, high fantasy stories are often long narratives, covering both many years and many hundreds of pages (Mendlesohn, 2008). Within this long form, it is important that characters are given depth in order to maintain the reader's interest in them. Thus, presenting a character who has weaknesses, or is fearful, or lacks experience, may also help the reader to connect to them, and to believe that they too could achieve what the protagonist achieves (Caywood, 1995). This sense of connection is important, as without it anthropomorphisation and immersion into the narrative world may not occur. Building on this, it is the core of medieval romance (and thus high fantasy) that the journey results in a 'healing' action to the land as a whole and/or to the players central to the story, as discussed by Martin, above (Gilmore, 2014). All ends well, with each character and indeed the land itself receiving its 'happy ending'. The structure is such that the protagonist (and the reader by proxy) is working towards a just conclusion, towards the creation of a just world.

Looking again at the principle of double articulation, we can begin to understand why such authorial authority is problematic[37]. In the first articulation the protagonist receives knowledge unquestioningly from the mentor character/narrator; in the second articulation, the text and characters communicate the unquestioned infallibility of the same to the reader. The

[37] Consider as well that the authorial voice is aligned with the implied author. While it is not within the scope of this current study to investigate the influence an author's own beliefs may on a text, it worth being aware of this aspect, especially when considered in light of Tolkien's own beliefs and ideological position regarding women, as was mentioned in chapter four.

reader, along with the protagonist, is, therefore, forced into a position of reliance on what is commonly not only a male viewpoint, but a male viewpoint couched within a set of inherited cultural values that prize white, heterosexual masculinity (Partridge, 1983; Mendlesohn, 2008). This inherited male world-view draws on structures and tropes found in "the epic, in the Bible, in the Arthurian romances, and in fairy tales" (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 3). As a result, high fantasy tends to assume a morality that is absolute (Mendlesohn, 2008), and a protagonist who is accepting of this. Thus, in order to be fully transported in the narrative world, high fantasy readers are expected to align themselves with the morality of the narrator due to the fact that they are positioned with the ill-informed protagonist. Additionally, given the fact that high fantasy must occur in an unknown, other world, which in terms of narrative persuasion results in readers being paradoxically more suggestible as the narrative is far removed from the realities of everyday life (Prentice, et al., 1997), the strength of the authorial voice is compounded. In terms of anthropomorphism (Gardener & Knowles, 2008; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Epley, et al., 2007) and the persuasive power of narrative (Appel, 2008; Djikic, et al., 2009; Green, et al., 2004; Prentice, et al. 1997), to have a female protagonist be so uncritical is problematic. Specifically, in terms of high fantasy's narrative worlds' cultural coding, this lack of critical engagement with, and/or resistance to, troubling norms on behalf of the protagonists is even more worrying. Significantly, where this naivety applies to female protagonists, living in a world that is set up to disenfranchise them, to lack experience or knowledge can be extremely dangerous as it may result in them having very few means to empower themselves.

Furthermore, there is a tendency within high fantasy to prohibit women from grouping together. Kuznets (1985) highlight this issue, looking at *The Tombs of Atuan*, from Le Guin's *Earthsea Cycle*. Tenar, a female character, is left to be rescued by Ged, the hero of the novels. More crucially though, Kuznets states, is the situation from which Tenar is rescued. She is part of an all-female cult which within the novel is codified negatively: "The all-female community (except for eunuchs) in The Tombs of Atuan is endowed with a menace not at all evident in the all male school for wizards that Ged attends" (Kuznets, 1985, p. 32). This lack of female companionship places the female protagonist is a position where she has no access to others (including mentors) who might share her experience of the narrative world and the effects of its habitus on her. This can result in women being excluded from the central journey of discovery or in their journey being shaped by the views and experiences of men. "This failure to deal with

female development is, of course, not particularly surprising: patriarchal myth becomes patriarchal romance which in turn becomes patriarchal fantasy," Kuznets states (1985, pp. 31-32). This lack of a journey of discovery for women is also codified by Campbell's structural analysis of myth: "When the child outgrows the popular idyl of the mother's breast and turns to face the world of specialized adult action, it passes, spiritually, into the sphere of the father—who becomes, for his son, the sign of the future task, and for his daughter, of the future husband," and, later in the same section, "the son against the father for the mastery of the universe, and the daughter against the mother to *be* the mastered world" (Campbell, 1949/2004, pp. 125, original emphasis). Murdock, a student of Campbell's, highlights this issue when she recounts a conversation she had with him in which he stated, "Women don't need to make the journey. In the whole mythological tradition the woman is there. All she has to do is realize that she's the place people are trying to get to" (Murdock, 1990, p. 1)[38].

Like Guinevere and Morgan le Fey from the Legend of King Arthur (to be discussed), the female character in high fantasy often performs the roles assigned to her by fairy tales and medieval romance – that of maiden/reward, mother/Goddess, or witch/evil queen. In such cases where female heroic development does occur, there is always a sense of 'pushing back' against what has gone before. For example, in her analysis of the female in modern fantasy, Lori M. Campbell (2014) is quick to position the *female hero* as something distinct from a 'heroine'. For Campbell, the 'female hero' is a term that highlights the specific challenges faced by a female character within the genre, in a manner that the label 'heroine' does not. Specifically, Campbell is repositioning the female hero away from the value of her beauty. The fact that such an argument still exists and needs to be made is telling in terms in terms of the norms of the genre, as within this context, female characters are often still confined to the archetypal roles provided to them by medieval romance and fairy tales. This is also explored by Schubert (2016), who parallels the character arc of Daenerys, a lead female character in *A Game of Thrones/A Song of Ice and Fire*, with that of the 'trials' often presented in fairy tales, arguing that Daenerys is a subversion of these trials whilst still undergoing them. There is a suggestion in both Schubert's and Campbell's analysis that while women can be present in high fantasy novels, terminology

[38] Murdock (1990) offers a rebuttal to the hero's journey, which she argues is inherently male-centric, in *the heroine's journey*. However, as this structure is not codified into high fantasy, I am not focusing on it here. The stages of the heroine's journey follow a more reflective path and deal with the integration of both the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' aspects of the protagonists. It is an extremely interesting narrative model and I recommend anyone who is interested to explore it.

and structures must be reclaimed or subverted to allow them freedom from problematic archetypes; that without this additional effort, women in high fantasy will suffer. Instead, I suggest, it is because of fairy tales' and medieval romance's influence on the genre that women suffer: "the broad and unremitting traditional of medieval anti-feminist writing performs, as it were, feminine subordination in the literary as well as in every other realm" (Dinshaw, 2007, p. 14).

Finally, in terms of the representation of female sexuality, this framing presents a number of difficulties. Kuznets (1985, p. 20) picks up this point, highlighting the "Arthurian myth of male development" as a central aspect of the high fantasy genre. Consider two well-known female protagonists in the legend of King Arthur, Guinevere and Morgan le Fey. Both women embody troubling representations of women and their role in a male-dominated world. In particular, both are known for the negative effects of their sexuality on the hero of the tale, Arthur Pendragon. Guinevere betrayed him by sleeping with Galahad, enticing Arthur's best friend and ally into her bed, while Morgan le Fey enjoys a particularly complex role in the narrative, being representative of pagan witchcraft (itself an antithesis to the dominant, male-centric Christianity of the medieval period). Sexually confident, independent and clever, Morgan le Fey is ultimately Arthur's enemy, coded as a philosophical counter to the medieval habitus and capital surrounding women and their behaviour. Dinshaw (2007), a feminist scholar of medieval texts, notes how in medieval writing the 'woman' was often a conflicted site, rarely used to express actual female characters but rather to explore philosophical issues relevant at the time. Dinshaw goes on to explain that the medieval period was "without a concept of civil rights as understood today, a period in which the victim's consent in rape law was 'irrelevant', a period in which sexual activity was seen in terms less of reciprocal relations than of acts done by one person to another" (2007, p. 12). Medieval romances were thus written during a period of history where women were legally and socially disenfranchised, and consequentially one cannot be surprised if such habitus and (lack of) capital is reflected in the stories told.

Building on this, I would like to highlight another character within *The Lord of the Rings*, Shelob the giant spider. I did not include Shelob in the previous chapter's analysis as the character, I felt, was too removed from the fairy tale focus. However, it is worth drawing the reader's attention to her now, as the principles that Shelob underscores are extremely relevant when discussing female sexuality in high fantasy, especially in light of medieval romance's

treatment of the same. Shelob appears in a scene which is, argues Partridge (1983), imbued with sexual metaphor, and is not favourable towards the concept of the sexualised woman. In contrast to the ethereal, otherworldly serenity of Galadriel and Golberry, Shelob is a magical being which Tolkien uses to follow "a tradition [of] portraying women as a threat, with implied sexual overtones" (Partridge, 1983, p. 187). Shelob attacks Frodo and Sam, encasing Frodo, the hero, in her webbing. Sam defeats her, thrusting his sword into her exposed belly. While in summation this scene may not appear to highlight any the threat regarding female sexuality, when one observes the imagery and language Tolkien uses, Partridge's critique gains validity. Shelob's lair is womb-like, and the battle between her and Sam is rife with sexual metaphor, argues Partridge (1983, p. 190):

> The description of Sam's battle with Shelob is not only a life and death struggle of man and monster, good against evil but also represents a violent struggle between man and woman. Shelob's 'soft squelching body' is a metaphor for the female genitals swollen and moist in sexual arousal. […] Her impenetrable skin hangs in folds like the layers of the labia.

Both Sam and Frodo find at times their weapons, a sword and a phial, are ineffective, drooping in their hands as they attempt to slay the monster. Additionally, the language used to describe Sam's eventual success in the battle is full of male agency and sexual synonyms: the sword is *hard* and *solid* in his hands, he *thrusts* his blade into her, and Shelob *yields to the stroke*[39]. Partridge (1983, p. 191) concludes, "Once again, Tolkien interprets myth as to reveal his inner fear or abhorrence of female sexuality." Sex is not uncommon in fairy tales either, of course, though it is often coded, hidden in metaphor and abstraction. Tater (1985) notes the fairy tale story *The Fairy Tale of One Who Went Forth to Learn Fear*, in which the male protagonist wishes to learn how to be afraid, or, specifically, how to 'shudder'. He undergoes the various trials, each designed to teach him to shudder, but it is only in the marital bed, when his wife tricks him, that he indeed shudders – a metaphor, Tatar suggests, for the goal of achieving male

[39] See specifically book four, chapter ten, 'The Choices of Master Samwise', *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Tolkien, 1954/1981b).

orgasm. I have not, in my reading, come across a fairy tale that sets female sexual satisfaction as its goal, however metaphorical. The representation of women, seen through the lens of medieval romance and the cultural ideas embedded within those archetypes and structures, presents troubling realities for the women of high fantasy, especially as regards their agency, sexuality, and the ways they are viewed and treated by others within their narrative worlds.

In sum, there are three themes which I suggest are significant regarding the characterisation and representation of women in high fantasy, resulting from its roots in medieval romance. These are, firstly, the nature of the main protagonist to be naïve and the resulting importance of the mentor/narrator to help the protagonist make sense of their world; secondly, the tendency to avoid women forming groups/relationships in order to help them on their journeys; thirdly, the manner in which female sexuality is often treated as dangerous, grotesque, or disruptive to the male hero's journey. These points are given in addition to those character archetypes inherited from fairy tales/Tolkien; specifically the role of the woman as reward for the male hero's endeavours and an emphasis on the feminine beauty ideal (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). I would like now to look in more depth at *A Game of Thrones*, the first novel in the ongoing *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, in order to exemplify how these genre norms are realised.

6.2 A Game of Thrones

I have chosen to focus solely on the first novel in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series by George R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones*. While this naturally creates an immediate analytical limitation – there are currently (2017) five published novels in the series – I have chosen this focus for a number of reasons. Firstly, while the series remains incomplete, the first novel sets up the narrative world that the characters reside in, a setting which, while certainly deepened in later novels, does not undergo significant cultural change. Another consideration when discussing *A Game of Thrones* is the impact of the television serialisation the novels, *Game of Thrones* (notice the absent indefinite article). A number of academic analyses exist that either focus solely on the representation of women within the television series, or serve as a comparison between the book and the series (eg: Gjelsviv, 2016; Jones, 2012; Wells-Lassagne, 2016); therefore, the choice to focus on the first book is also partly due to the fact that the television series follows it faithfully,

allowing a deeper pool of academic analysis to draw from. Indeed, *Game of Thrones* is generally praised for how closely it remains true to its source material (Gjelsviv, 2016). Nevertheless, later seasons of *Game of Thrones* amend, adapt or cut/add sections and characters from their novel counterparts, whereas series one and book one remain largely very similar[40].

As discussed, in fairy tales women's relationships are often either non-existent or codified to be rivalries (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003), and women are kept separate from each other. Additionally, women's roles are strongly policed. Galadriel and Goldberry portray idealised versions of the feminine, Shelob represents the feminine horror, and Arwen and Éowyn both adhere to the developmental path (bildungsroman arc) for women that leads, ultimately, to marriage and submission (Jones, 2011). While *A Game of Thrones* presents a narrative world of more social complexity than that of *The Lord of the Rings*, the novel still maintains, implicitly and explicitly, the core structures and female character archetypes found in the fairy tales and medieval romances Tolkien based is work on. Equally, in keeping with the development of the high fantasy genre and its motifs, Martin makes some interesting choices regarding his female characters, especially as regards mentorship and naivety (Mendlesohn, 2008). In sum, the main issues I would like to explore – each tied to the above factors - are the lack of female mentorship/companionship and resulting naivety of the female protagonists and the emphasis placed on women's sexual value.

Firstly, the general lack of stable, positive relationships with other women places these female characters at a distinct disadvantage to their male counterparts, experientially and

[40] Although it should be noted that the first season of the television series is by no means an exact copy of the first novel. Of particular note in terms of this thesis, certain events involving both Catelyn and Cersei's sexual encounters are adapted to mixed effect. Jones (2012) explores the different representations, highlighting the fact that in the novels, Cersei's characterisation is defined by the fact that she aborted her first born child, the only son she had with her husband the King (her later children being born of an incestuous relationships with her brother, Jaime); whereas in the television series the child is said to have been stillborn. As Jones states, within the novels this event is presented to cement in the reader's mind Cersei's role as 'evil queen' and/or 'jealous wife', whereas the adaption for the television series "redefines her character and in the show's storyline gives her a different attitude and motivation than that of the poisonous, bitter Queen of the novel" (Jones, 2012, p. 15). However, other elements remain the same: Robert, her husband, is still shown hitting Cersei, she is still presented as manipulative, particularly as regards her desire for power, and to be a poor mother, spoiling her children and encouraging her eldest son's wickedness (for all that she is also shown to love her children – arguably making her both a bad mother and an ineffective one). Moving on, another adaption explored by Jones is that of Caitlyn Stark. Caitlyn, Jones argues, is presented in both the televisions series and the novel as the counter-point to Cersei – each is the other's shadow, in Jungian terms. However, both are problematic due to their behaviours as mothers. In Caitlyn's case, this is shown in her behaviour towards Jon Snow, her husband's bastard son who she has had to raise. Caitlyn sees Jon Snow as a representation of her failure as a women to maintain her husband's sexual interest in her. This again strengthens the habitus within the narrative world that women's value is directly tied to their sexual value to men, in that Caitlyn is aware of and harmed by the negative effect on her social capital caused by her husband seeking sexual relief elsewhere. Ned Stark, her husband, never faces the same censure for his actions, despite the fact he was the one who was unfaithful. However, Caitlyn's relationship with Jon Snow is softened in the television series, making her a more sympathetic character (Jones, 2012). Nevertheless, in both these examples, albeit adapted for the screen, each woman's identity is shaped by her position within a world which values her sexuality-as-mother and femininity above her other attributes.

socially, as they have no one of similar experience to help them navigate the world – a world in which the genre has already primed them to be naïve to (Mendlesohn, 2008). Secondly, a lack of positive female relationships codifies in the second articulation the premise that women are in a state of rivalry with each other, most often due to their competing for social value, via their attractiveness to men and the feminine beauty ideal. Again, this speaks to the assumption that for a woman, the only happy ending is one which involves a financially/socially advantageous, heterosexual marriage – bringing me to my second point, the emphasis on women's sexual value. Within the narrative world of *A Game of Thrones*, marriage is strongly codified as the central means for women to gain power or fulfil their purpose, a result of the novel adhering to the codified syntagmatic structure of high fantasy taking place in a hierarchical and patriarchal medieval proxy world. As Larsson (2016) states, while modern understandings of marriage view the union to be based on ideals of romantic love and mutual respect, historically – and in the fictional world of *A Game of Thrones* – marriage was a means to cement financial and reproductive security, to maintain alliances between houses, and lastly to "provide protection for women and children in a world in which they had extremely few rights" (Larsson, 2016, p. 19). As a result of this, women in *A Game of Thrones* find themselves, in the first articulation, having to negotiate their world using the social tools afforded to them by medieval values, culture and habitus: "Caught in a field on contradictory political forces, women [in *A Game of Thrones*] specifically are subjected to relentless abuse and violence, their principal resources tied to their fertility and sexuality" (Genz, 2016, p. 244).

This is shown in the treatment of a number of the prominent female characters, and yet while their sexuality and beauty does at times keep them safe, it is also likely to place them in dangerous situations in the first place. Rape and other instances of sexual or sexualised violence against women are frequent within the novel, either shown explicitly or implied via the behaviours and conversations of the characters. Herman (1984, p. 52) tells us that rape is "an indication of how widely held are traditional views of appropriate male and female behaviour, and of how strongly enforced those views are." Considering the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007), and the combined facts that, firstly, beliefs are more like to change when reading fiction (Djikic, et al., 2009) and, secondly, that beliefs are more influenced when the narrative is removed from the reader's immediate reality (Prentice, et al., 1997), and, finally, the effects of a just world belief on the tendency of some to blame victims for their sexual assault (Strömwall, et

al., 2013), these medieval ideological representations in *A Game of Thrones* of women as sexual objects is deeply problematic. Furthermore, despite the prominence of women within the narrative, the lack of functional female relationships means that the central female characters tend not to have the benefit of other women's experiences to help them navigate this world, nor the opportunity to form in numbers to resist the patriarchal dominance of their society. Within *A Game of Thrones*, when female characters do meet, they often perpetuate the rules of their narrative world, policing each other's behaviour, engaging in rivalries, or casting judgement. Within the first articulation, this behaviour serves to strengthen the habitus of that narrative world's culture, embedding and legitimising the various forms of cultural and social capital that can cement or destroy a woman's value, and with that, her safety. This capital is often conferred on or denied women based on what they can offer men, either sexually *for* them or sexually to be *used by* them. Therefore, I will explore in more detail the issues of the lack of female friendship/support and the value women hold as sexual objects, looking specifically at the sisters Sansa and Arya Stark, and the 'dragon queen' Daenerys Targaryen.

6.2.1 Sansa and Arya Stark

Looking firstly at the Stark sisters, the trope of women being unable to form friendships – or, to think of it another way, the Tolkienesque tradition of not allowing females to share space together – is present. The relationship between Sansa and Arya is fraught from their introduction. Unlike the Stark brothers, Jon and Robb, who get on well (and indeed even the relationship between Theon Greyjoy and Robb Stark is one of close friendship, despite Theon's status as a hostage), the two sisters share very little love for each other. This enmity is explained as a result of their opposing worldviews, their ambitions, and (I would argue) the pressure that the narrative world places on them. Arya is introduced as a 'tom-boy' type character, shown to have no interest in, nor talent for, 'womanly' pursuits. Indeed, in the first presentation of Ayra from her point of view, the difference between her and her sister and how these are coded in their society is made clear (Martin, 1996, p. 64):

> Arya's stitches were crooked again.

> She frowned down at them with dismay and glanced over to where her sister Sansa sat among the other girls. Sansa's needlework was exquisite. Everyone said so. "Sansa's work is as pretty as she is," Septa Mordane told their lady mother once. "She has such fine, delicate hands." When Lady Catelyn had asked about Arya, the septa had sniffed. "Arya has the hands of a blacksmith."

In this first view-point moment[41], Arya is shown in both the first and second articulations to be non-feminine, lacking the appropriate womanly skills and having a physicality not only associated with a man, but a man of low status compared to her own. Arya is not 'beautiful' and indeed is nick-named 'horse-face' in response to her dark colouring and non-feminine bone structure (I will return to these points regarding Arya). Sansa, on the other hand, is codified as both beautiful and feminine, and it is this difference that is the impetus for the hostility between the two sisters – they are simply 'too different' to be friends. Sansa is already being primed by her family and the narrative world to be a maiden/reward. The language used to describe Sansa to the reader underscores this reading of her place within the world. She is 'beautiful', with pale skin and red hair, colouring that emphasises the Caucasian-centric beauty standards often found in fairy tales (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003), and, to ram the point home, is in stark contrast to her 'ugly' sister, Arya. Sansa's beauty is also aligned with other women introduced around the same time in the novel and also coded as beautiful: her mother, Caitlyn (red-headed and pale), Queen Cersei (blonde and pale), and Daenerys (white-blonde and pale). Moreover, Sansa (unlike Arya) is devoted to the principles of chivalry and the romantic notion of a brave and gallant knight.

This portrayal of Sansa achieves two interesting effects. In both the first and second articulations, it is apparent that Sansa has absorbed the habitus of her culture – she is, and wants to be, a 'perfect woman' as defined in her world. This is made clear to the reader, familiar with the fairy tale and medieval romance tropes of the maiden/reward, through her actions and the way people behave around her, and the emphasis on her beauty. The reader, however, primed to

[41] An earlier scene in the novel, but told from Caitlyn's point of view, also highlights Sansa's femininity and the ensuing success she can expect to achieve in society, whilst also having Caitlyn worry about Arya's wildness. Thus, while this reflection does not form part of Arya's understanding of her narrative world in the first articulation, it does communicate to the reader these gender-normative differences between the sisters in the second articulation.

be more aware than the characters through the traditional high fantasy use of the narrational voice (Mendlesohn, 2008), is aware of what Sansa is not: that the world of *A Game of Thrones* is a brutal one, with which her world-view is at distinct odds. In this way, within the second articulation, the reader is placed in a state of flux, either feeling sorry for Sansa and her pitiable naivety or viewing her as childish and possibly even unintelligent. This framing of a young woman as naïve (to be kind to Sansa) to the ways of the world, and this naivety thus placing her in potential (and later realised) danger, is a worrying message for readers to absorb. I have spoken already of the issues surrounding rape culture and how this can be strengthened by narratives that perpetuate a just world belief (Strömwall, et al., 2013), including reference to a troubling scene in the television adaption, *Game of Thrones*, in which Jaime Lannister rapes Cersei, and the reaction this caused amongst fans (Ferreday, 2015; Gjelsviv, 2016). Regarding Sansa, the framing of her as beautiful and naïve, a maiden archetype looking for marriage in a world as obviously brutal as that of *A Game of Thrones*, is very worrying in terms of just world beliefs.

Frequently, female development in fiction is portrayed along strictly coded societal lines, and in *A Game of Thrones* certain developmental steps are set up for Sansa. As already mentioned, the coming of age structure for women in fiction often follows these steps: "learning to be submissive, accepting pain as a female condition, equating sexuality with danger, marrying after the inevitable failure of a rebellious autonomy, and regressing from full societal participation in order to actualize the inconsequential status of the female self" (Jones, 2011, p. 440)[42]. Sansa is travelling this path, her identity implicitly linked to that of the good/beautiful maiden of medieval romance and fairy tale. In terms of the failed rebellious autonomy step, Sansa falls to pieces when placed in a position to confront the lies of her betrothed and rebel against a system that is unjust. Following on from a scene in which Prince Joffrey (Sansa's betrothed) attacks Arya and is attacked in return by Arya's direwolf, Sansa is asked to present evidence to her father, Ned, and Joffrey's parents, King Robert and Queen Cersei. In the scene, told from Ned's point of view, we see Sansa crumble under the pressure of telling the truth, and

[42] Indeed, although I am only looking at the first novel in the series, one might also look ahead at later events to befall Sansa, from her slow realisation regarding Joffrey's psychopathy to her unsuccessful marriage to Tyrion, to see that these female literary developmental steps appear to still be in play. While the novels are currently unfinished, the television series *Game of Thrones* is now nearly at its end (season seven of eight total sessions, in 2017). At the moment, in the television series, Sansa has just been placed by her brother Jon in a position of agency and power – whether this will ultimately translate in a subversion of the steps given by Jones (2011) remains to be seen.

claim that she does not remember what happened. This moment results, somewhat complexly, in Sansa's own direwolf being killed[43] as punishment for Arya's direwolf's attack on Joffrey, and in a friend of Arya's being murdered.

From this moment on, the enmity between Sansa and Arya is cemented in the first articulation, due to Sansa being either not strong enough to stand up to Joffrey and the King and the Queen or unwilling to jeopardise her chance to marry Joffrey, or both. As this part of the narrative is not told from Sansa's point of view, it is up to the reader, via the narrator and the viewpoint character (Ned), and the reader's own opinion of Sansa to decide her motivation. Given that both the narrator and Ned are invested in a representation of women congruent with the narrative world, one might assume that most readers would interpret Sansa's refusal to tell the truth as a weakness of her feminity, resulting from her naivety and desire to marry well, rather than a more complex, character-driven moment. Either way, Sansa does not rebel against the system which is causing her censure, nor that is clearly shown in the narrative to be unjust. This reinforces a framing, in the second articulation, of Sansa as either helplessly naïve or almost comically unaware of the world she lives in, in particular of the wickedness of Joffrey, her future husband.

Yet it seems unfair to judge Sansa as naïve, even with a reader's additional knowledge. Sansa is behaving, in the first articulation, in the way that her culture says she should. Within the world she inhabits, given her status as the oldest daughter of a noble family, she can rightly expect to be 'rewarded' with marriage to a handsome prince for her adherence to ladylike ideals. Thus, when she is betrothed to Joffrey, she is naturally delighted (being also unaware of Joffrey's true, wicked nature). She is performing her identity in a manner that is compliant with the world as it has been presented to her. Furthermore, when she is confronted with a situation for which she has no experience of, or training for, she is unable to cope with the pressure – an action she is punished for with the loss of her beloved direwolf and the contempt of her sister (who, in contrast, is comforted by their father, Ned, in a later chapter). Equally, Sansa's mother, Caitlyn, who could have been a valuable mentor to her, does not offer any guidance regarding leaving the safety of the family home to travel to the capital city and, later, be married. In this scene, told from Caitlyn's point of view and in which Sansa is absent, Caitlyn discusses with

[43] A death that could be read as a metaphor for Sansa's increased vulnerability, the direwolves being shown at numerous moments to be protectors of the Stark children.

Ned the fact their daughters are soon to leave their home and travel to the capital city, King's Landing, where Sansa is to marry Joffrey (Martin, 1996, p. 61):

> "I could not bear it," Caitlyn said, trembling.
> "You must," he [Ned] said. "Sansa must wed Joffrey, that is clear now, we must give them no grounds to suspect our devotion. And it is past time that Arya learned the ways of the southern court. In a few years, she will be of an age to marry as well."
> Sansa would shine in the south, Caitlyn thought to herself, and the gods knew that Arya needs refinement. Reluctantly, she let them go in her heart. But not Bran. Never Bran.

A number of things are made clear to the reader, via the second articulation, in this exchange. Firstly, that both Ned and Caitlyn believe Sansa must marry Joffrey. It is important to note that within the world of *A Game of Thrones*, Sansa marrying well would benefit not just her but her entire family. *A Game of Thrones*, like most high fantasy, is rooted in medieval romance, and thus incorporates the feudal importance of family. Within all the novels of the series, family allegiances are constantly highlighted: house names, house words ('Winter is Coming' being the Stark's words, for example), and strategic marriages are all underscored. This emphasis adds to the understanding in the first articulation between characters, and the second articulation between novel and reader, that family stability and strength matters. This leads Haastrup (2016, p. 136) to note that "in a story that initially concerns families seeking to become as powerful as they can by having their head of the family on the Iron Throne in the city of King's Landing, the logic is that you do not count as individual unless you are considered an important member of your family." Thus, the fact that Sansa is seen, in the first articulation, as somewhat 'frivolous' by her family members for her feminine pursuits and desires seems particularly unfair considering that her ability to marry well is of supreme benefit to the family as a whole. Moreover, the resulting message via the second articulation that young women are only focused on one goal (marriage), and that this focus in less significant than male goals, is equally unfair given this consideration of de-individualisation for the sake of the family as a unit.

Secondly, while it is clear to the reader that Caitlyn is anxious about sending her daughters away, it is simultaneously apparent that she accepts this as part of the role women must play in the world, and that she is more concerned over the welfare of her younger son, Bran. This echoes the fact that women are utilised in *A Game of Thrones* (and the series *A Song of Ice and Fire*) as political bargaining chips (Larsson, 2016; Genz, 2016; Jones, 2012), in this case offering Sansa in exchange for the veneer of loyalty to the crown. It could be argued, however, that Sansa *does* want to marry Joffery, thus negating any censure regarding Caitlyn and Ned's attitudes. Indeed, Sansa's desire to marry a handsome prince and 'live happily ever after' may be a nod to the reader that these expectations/traditional outcomes for women are outmoded and harmful. Martin's work has been praised for the complexity with which it deals with the lives of its female characters (eg, Schröter, 2016; Jones, 2012), and it is certainly true that the women of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series are given more agency, power, and overall development than those of Tolkien. However, when viewed with the principles of the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007) and narrative persuasion (Appel, 2008; Djikic, et al., 2009; Green, et al., 2004; Prentice, et al., 1997) in mind, both the expectation that Sansa will marry for the good of the family and the representation of her naivety are problematic, especially when the latter so closely follows the detrimental stages of a female protagonist's development, as outlined by Jones (2011).

It is particularly disappointing, therefore, that Sansa is isolated from other women. That she, as a main protagonist within A Game of Thrones, is not provided with the high fantasy staple which heroes can usually expect: a mentor[44]. Neither Caitlyn nor Ned are prepared to offer Sansa any guidance or warning about the world that awaits her (warnings which, at various points, are offered to Arya). While it is a common trope in high fantasy to have a protagonist be naïve, one might question the fact Sansa lacks instruction from any trustworthy, knowledgeable (ideally) female source to disabuse her of her naivety, and may even be encouraged in it – certainly by her septa (a ladies' teacher). While arguments may be made that providing Sansa with some insight into the world in which she lives might have negatively affected the progress of her character arc, of course, we will never know the answer. However, I would suggest that other male characters progress along the traditional hero's journey route within the novel, which

[44] It is worth noting that in later novels in the series, a character named Margaery is shown to be much more politically savvy than Sansa in navigating the feudal marriage systems, and does take on a form of mentor role to Sansa, although this is ultimately self-serving, as opposed to the traditional role of a mentor to selflessly guide the protagonist through their hero's journey.

includes beginning in a state of 'unknowing' within their 'normal world'. One such character is Jon Snow, who is given not one mentor, but three: Lord Mormont of the Night's Watch could be classified as such, and possibly also Tyrion Lannister and his uncle, Benjen Stark. Additionally, Jon is shown to have numerous beneficial male friendships, most notably with Samwell Tarley. However, by refusing Sansa a mentor figure (to which another woman, wise in the realities of the world, would have been well-suited), she is placed both in peril and a state of enforced naivety in the first articulation; meanwhile, the reader is placed, in the second articulation, in the position of either pitying her or feeling frustrated by her. At no point is Sansa encouraged or given the means to *learn* about her world or how to act within it to save herself from victimisation – at least until tragedy begins to befall her, a bitter outcome for any person. Sansa, ultimately, is damned by behaving as a woman should, as taught to her by her culture and the lack of a mentor figure and/or friend.

Arya, on the other hand, is presented as more worldly wise within both the first and second articulations due to her refusal to behave in the expected manner of a woman within her narrative world. Arya is a 'tom-boy', a female who does not align with the feminine ideals/norms of her society and instead takes on (or wishes to take on) those behaviours more commonly associated with boys/men. Thus, while Arya is by no means spared brutality – indeed, no character of note within *A Song of Ice and Fire* is spared brutality, something Martin deliberately set out to achieve in his subversion of Tolkienesque high fantasy (Gilmore, 2014) – she is still seen to be less of a 'victim' than Sansa, in the sense of victimhood being self-inflicted. In particular, aside from isolating Arya from her sister, the aforementioned conflict between the two young women creates a space in which readers "may very well find it easier to like and sympathize with Arya, since she adheres to more modern ideals of 'strong girls' who want to climb trees, fight, and get dirty, just like the boys" (Larsson, 2016, p. 31). This echoes what Larsson (ibid) goes on to call the "the contemptuous view in society of girlishness and girlhood" which Sansa is shown to embody with her naivety and, to the reader with greater knowledge of her world, almost ridiculous lack of awareness or even common sense. The fact Arya refuses the codified femininity of her world, and censures Sansa for being a teenage girl in love with the idea of romance, arguably chimes with the negative stereotypes already held in Western culture regarding young women that Larsson speaks of, and also with the fairy tale aim of beautiful

heroines to marry, and marry well (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). All the while, via the second articulation, the reader is (made) complicit in this reading of both Arya and Sansa.

As mentioned, Arya is not codified within feminine lines in *A Game of Thrones*, lacking both beauty and a desire to marry. While in fairy tales her lack of beauty would mark her as witch/evil queen, she is known to the reader to be a heroic character, both through her family name, Stark, and also through her actions; for example, when Arya defends an innocent, lowborn boy from Joffrey's murderous rage. Additionally, unlike Sansa, Arya is provided with mentor figures (all male, however). Her brother, Jon, and her father, Ned, talk to her in a more adult manner than they do with Sansa, and to varying degrees support her wish to learn to fight like a man. When Arya is finally allowed fencing lessons, her fencing instructor, Syrio Forel, becomes a close mentor to her. He not only teaches her sword fighting but also engages her in questions of philosophy and society, challenging her current worldview. It is noteworthy, however, that Syrio only ever refers to Arya as 'boy', denying both her female name and her gender. Moreover, towards the end of *A Game of Thrones*, when Arya and Sansa's father, Ned, is executed by Joffrey, Arya is prevented from being taken hostage due to her 'horse face'. She is able to pass as a boy, renamed Arry, and is given refuge with a group of men and boys travelling to join the Night's Watch, which will (hopefully) see her safely returned to her family, while Sansa is left in the viper's nest that is King's Landing.

Arya is therefore rewarded by rebelling against the feminine ideals which Sansa conforms to. Lacking the "principal resource" of being sexually attractive/fertile[45] (Genz, 2016, p. 244), Arya is given a way to navigate her world that is refused to Sansa. Again, despite its ostensibly feminist imagining of Arya's hero's journey (a young woman who is an independent, capable fighter) I suggest that this narrative is also problematic. It seems that in both the first and second articulations, Arya is being rewarded for *not being female.* The literary developmental steps for a woman that Jones (2011) speaks to, troubling as they are, do not appear to apply to Arya because Arya is not coded as a 'women' within the gender normative lines of *A Game of Thrones* and its traditional, high fantasy-medieval setting. Instead of subverting those stereotypical norms for female development by allowing Arya to break them while maintaining her (albeit coded) femininity, Arya escapes through being 'un-female' – a tomboy.

[45] Arya is too young, during *A Game of Thrones*, to bear children.

6.2.2 Daenerys Targaryen

Finally, I would like to discuss Daenerys Targaryen, who embodies a middle or hybrid space between Sansa and Arya's journeys/representations. Daenerys is an exiled princess and second in line by blood to the Iron Throne of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. She and her brother, Viserys, were rescued as children from the assassinations that befell the other members of their family, thus losing the Targaryens the throne. Daenerys is introduced as a young woman[46] who is to be given away by her brother in a marriage to cement a treaty between Viserys and Drogo, a Khal (a warlord or King) of a tribe of people known as the Dothraki. The marriage will see Viserys given the army he needs to retake the throne and claim his birthright, as the surviving male child. As highlighted above, trading of women as commodities is common practice within the novel (Jones, 2012; Larsson, 2016; Genz, 2016), removing their agency as human beings in both the first and second articulations. Moreover, mirroring of the dangers being beautiful presents to women in fairy tales, Daenerys is also subjected to a relationship with her brother that borders on the non-consensually incestuous and is presented as highly abusive. Viserys views Daenerys as a bargaining tool, leverage to achieve his 'heroic' journey to reclaim his throne, and resents any attempt on her part to emancipate herself from him. He threatens her frequently, warning her that she does not want to 'wake the dragon' (code for physical violence), and subjects her to near continuous verbal and psychological abuse. Equally, the initial stages of Daenerys' marriage to Khal Drogo are shown to be unhappy, as she is disenfranchised from her husband by both a language barrier and a sex life which fails to induce any intimacy between them. She does not understand him and is frightened of him in the early stages of her marriage. Thus, much of the world that Daenerys initially inhabits in the first articulation is couched in the value her sexuality and beauty offers to the two men who dominate her life. On the night of her wedding, her brother approaches her on her horse, threatening her, reminding her to play her (sexual) role (Martin, 1996, p. 101):

[46] In the novels, Daenerys is thirteen years old. Indeed, many of the characters in the novels are what would be considered children today and would certainly be below the age of consent in many countries (the age of consent in the UK, for example, is sixteen). However, in line with Martin's aim to maintain the realisms of a quasi-medieval world (Gilmore, 2014), within the first articulation all these characters are expected to behave in ways that would be considered adult by most modern standards, including marriage and sexual viability, the main concerns regarding women in this world.

> Viserys slid close to Dany on her silver, dug his fingers into her leg, and said, "Please him, sweet sister, or I swear, you will wake the dragon as it has never woken before."
> The fear came back to her then, with her brother's words. She felt like a child once more, only thirteen years old and all alone, not ready for what was about to happen to her.

Daenerys' sexual value is paramount to her brother, as can be seen in this exchange, and she is afraid. Indeed, even allowing for the fact that her first encounter with Drogo is tender and consensual[47], Daenerys' sexuality continues to play a central part in her eventual emancipation (Larsson, 2016). It is only by learning how to have positive sexual relations with Drogo that she gains an equal footing with him. By taking a dominant sexual position, rather than being taken from behind, lacking eye contact, Daenerys rises to the status of Khaleesi, Queen, in Drogo's eyes. Furthermore, only once she becomes pregnant, affording her yet more respect from Drogo, is she permitted to make rulings to the khalasar. Finally, she settles into her new life and role, finding the happiness and security that she so sorely lacked when she was reliant on Viserys for her survival.

That Daenerys finds life better with the Dothraki could be read in two ways. Firstly, it is evidence of the motif that marriage makes women happier. However, given the numerous examples of unhappy marriages in *A Game of Thrones*, this is perhaps unlikely (although I will restate here, it is still the case that women need to marry in order to have any semblance of safety, status or power). Rather, I suggest, this is an example of Daenerys' relief to no longer be under the control of her brother. Indeed, within the novel, Daenerys' stands up to Viserys before she achieves sexual equality with her husband, and it is this act of bravery which seemingly gives her the confidence to initiate the more equal sexual relationship with Drogo (Larsson, 2016). Thus, with the Dothraki, Daenerys "loses the fear she held for her abusive brother and sees the folly in his dreams of taking back the kingdom, knowing that he could never be an effective leader" (Jones, 2012, p. 19). This is an interesting moment in the novel and requires

[47] In one of the instances in which the television show deviates from the novel, Daenerys in *Game of Thrones* is raped by Drogo, whereas in the novel she is seen to consent. However, the novel nevertheless presents her as being unhappy during the early stages of her marriage. See Jones (2012), Larsson (2016) and Wells-Lassange (2016) for comparisons of the differences between the novel(s) and the television series, including this adaption.

some unpacking. On the one hand, Martin presents a woman achieving her potential, exploring her sexuality and finding her place as Khaleesi, wife of the Khal and thus an important figure[48]. Moreover, she successfully breaks away from her cruel, violent and predatory brother, who has been for her entire life up to this point the dominant figure, making choices for her and providing her with explanations of the world and the way it works. As such, Viserys performed the traditional high fantasy mentor role for Daenerys, but unlike most high fantasy mentors, he was proven fallible[49]. This analysis presents a positive reading of Daenerys' agency within the world she inhabits, and is one which Jones (2012) and Schubert (2016) subscribe to, amongst others.

However, it is equally possible to read this chain of events as evidence of women within *A Game of Thrones* having to use sex, their beauty and fertility to help them survive their world, and/or as a device to avoid exploitation and/or rape, as Genz (2016) argues. Mirroring Sansa, Daenerys begins and largely remains naïve throughout the first novel. However, unlike Sansa, Daenerys does have mentor figures, but these are all male and as such, due to her social capital as a result of her beauty, their utility, at best, is dubious. Daenerys must shift her reliance for her understanding of the world she inhabits between Viserys, her brother, Drogo, her husband, and finally Jorah, her bodyguard/advisor. All three men view Daenerys sexually, and their treatment of her is coloured by this sexual framing, a frame which Daenerys herself is ill-equipped to navigate, due to her inexperience. In this, Daenerys is aligned with the fairy tale/medieval romance motif of the 'maiden', a good and innocent girl/woman, beautiful, young, and in need of (invariably male) guidance to understand the world.

This is not to say that Daenerys is ineffectual in *A Game of Thrones*. Indeed, she does exercise authority regarding the application of her moral interpretation of her world, for example by stating that she wants no one raped when the Dothraki attack villages[50]. However, the

[48] Although the majority of 'her' khalasar are less keen to follow her in her own right, upon the later deaths of both her son and of Drogo.

[49] Indeed, in the second articulation, Viserys' perception that he is on the traditional hero's journey to reclaim his crown is written as ridiculous, given the many serious flaws in his character.

[50] Later in the books/tv series, Daenerys maintains her moral position in terms of such violent acts, although this often is at odds with the world, resulting in her becoming harder and more willing to sacrifice people. Still, she aims for liberation and a form of social equality appropriate to the medieval setting, and has largely to date been successful – although both the TV series and *A song of Ice and Fire* are incomplete, so it is impossible to say whether, ultimately, it will be Daenerys' morality that 'wins out'. There are numerous fan theories that Danerys is, in fact, on an arc to become a villain, the power she holds corrupting her, a theory that has gained traction outside of the fandom (see for example this piece in Esquire magazine (2017): https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/news/a56835/daenerys-villain-game-of-thrones-season-7/). If this is indeed what occurs, the potential reading of a powerful female unable to be a good ruler is inextricably damaging to women, especially given the fact that only other main female character who (at the time of writing) holds power is Cersei Lannister, already coded as a villain.

fingerprints of the syntagmatic (Propp, 1968) and paradigmatic structures (Levi-Strauss in Dundes, 1968) of medieval romance and fairy tale representations of women's sexual value equating to their overall value (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003; Partridge, 1983; Genz, 2016), and the lack of female friends or role models, are clear in Daenerys' position in her world. Like the Guinevere character in Arthurian romances, she is married off/given away for political capital or male advantage (consider as well how many fairy tale structures feature a young girl bargained away by her father). Daenerys is also reliant on older men, seemingly wiser 'in the ways of the world' to provide her with the knowledge required to comprehend the events happening to her; she is the internal victim of the 'club story' (Mendlesohn, 2008), reliant on a didactic, male reading of the world for her understanding of it. Thus, in the first articulation, Daenerys is placed in situations in which, being female, she has very few skills or experiences to draw on to provide her with agency. She is made 'dumb' by her sexual appeal, the maiden archetype trapping her in a tower like Rapunzel, or, alternatively, keeping her 'asleep' like Sleeping Beauty, for much of her life. Moreover, the female relationships she *is* presented with are sharply coded along feudal lines: she has serfs, attendants, handmaidens… but they are not friends. The Dothraki women who serve her must also, within their first articulations, be wary of stepping beyond their roles, of causing offence, or of undermining Drogo if they comment too critically on Daenerys' situation. Thus, they guide her in the only way they can, by making her more proficient sexually in order to please her husband and gain better standing with him, thus further cementing her value in terms of her sexuality. Equally, the one female relationship based on a fairly equal social footing that Daenerys is able to form ends up being toxic:

Mirri Maz Duur is an older woman whom Daenerys rescues from rape during one of the khalasar's raids on a village. Daenerys and Mirri Maz Duur strike up a friendship of sorts, with Mirri Maz Duur providing her guidance, advice and knowledge of the world, including her pregnancy and, later, of an illness which befalls Drogo as a result of an infected wound. That Daenerys is so ready to trust Mirri Maz Duur again speaks to both her naivety and also to the lack of female role models and companionship she has suffered. However, it transpires that Mirri Maz Duur was acting in bad faith, using Daenerys' trust in her to manipulate her into a magical ritual that sees Daenerys' son being born grossly deformed and dying almost immediately, Daenerys becoming infertile, and Drogo suffering some form of mental vegetative state, resulting in his being euthanised by Daenerys (rather than being killed by the khalasar in order to

choose a replacement Khal). When confronted by Daenerys as to why she would betray her, Mirri Maz Duur informs her that she was never her saviour – that she, Mirri Maz Duur, had been raped repeatedly before Daenerys found her, as well as having to watch the people of her village being murdered, raped, and/or taken as slaves by the khalasar. This betrayal serves to preclude, unsurprisingly, any possibility of a further relationship between the two women, and also suggests in the second articulation that female friendships are fraught with anger, jealousy and the need to enact revenge. While this is not as simplistically framed as, for example, the relationships between step-mothers and step-daughters in fairy tales, nor the jealousy that pervades female relationships in Arthurian romances, it still nevertheless highlights Daenerys' isolation from peers of her own sex, as well as her naïveté regarding the realities of colonisation. Mirri Maz Duur's revenge also strips Daenerys of much of her social capital: her fertility and her husband. Daenerys' infertility means that within the value systems of the narrative world (Gerrig, 1993), she is worthless to any other man as she can no longer bear children, and her status with the Dothraki is diminished. As Sandqvist (2012, p. 24) states, "From being fertile, pregnant and sexually active, Dany [Daenerys] received respect and power from the ones that surrounded her. As soon as she lost her husband and her child, and became barren, her function as a woman got extinguished."

In *A Game of Thrones,* the sexual coding that accompanies women – ostensibly emancipated but nevertheless implicitly or explicitly reliant on their sexual value to heterosexual male characters – is what Genz terms "sexist liberalism" (2016, p. 244). Building on second-wave feminism's call to expose sexism in all forms, two different types of sexism were defined: 'hostile' and 'benevolent' (Genz, 2016). Benevolent sexism was the rewarding of women for behaving in gender-normative fashions and submitting to gendered roles, actions, and effects; hostile sexism was the punishment of women for going against these frames. However, sexism itself has 'evolved', making it no longer as easy to define as 'benevolent' or 'hostile', and it is this evolution which leads Genz to argue the point of sexist liberation, as presented in *Game of Thrones* (the television series, though the same holds true for the novel, I argue). Sexist liberation is the masking of sexist norms under a guise of personal choice or control; something which is feminist in its outward appearance, but which nevertheless serves to reinforce harmful, gendered, sexist norms or messages. Thus, looking at Daenerys' experiences in *A Game of Thrones* in the first articulation, morality is tied to her sexist liberation, and is compounded by

her reliance on male interpretations of the world and her place within it, due to the fact she has no positive female relationships to help her make sense of her experiences. Daenerys is able to escape her brother via marriage and only achieves her own agency as a result of the marriage and her fertility. Moreover, the ways that cultures and behaviours are learned and thus propagated are closely tied to the norms and codes seeded within the family. Collins (1998, p. 64) explains that the social codifications of "race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation and social class", such as those Daenerys experiences in the first articulation, are learned via family hierarchies. These hierarchies are thus normalised, which in turn supports hierarchical structures outside of the family unit. In the following exchange between Daenerys and Viserys (Martin, 1996, pp. 34-35), the complementary structures which are created in the home and mirrored in the wider culture are apparent in Daenerys' naïveté and vulnerability, her value as a sexual commodity, and Viserys' control over her physiologically and socially:

> "Please, *please*, Viserys, I don't want to, I want to go home." […]
> "*How are we to go home?*" he repeated, meaning King's Landing, and Dragonstone, and all the realm they had lost. […]
> "I don't know …" she said at last, her voice breaking. Tears welled in her eyes.
> "I do," he said sharply. "We go home with an army, sweet sister. With Khal Drogo's army, that is how we go home. And if you must wed him and bed him for that, you will." He smiled at her. "I'd let his whole *khalasar* fuck you if need be, sweet sister, all forty thousand men, and their horses too if that was what it took to get my army. Be grateful it is only Drogo. In time you may even learn to like him. Now dry your eyes. Illyrio is bringing him over, and he will *not* see you crying."

Like the feudal systems that operate politically in *A Game of Thrones*, so too can these systems be seen within the family unit. Unlike the domesticity represented in *The Lord of the Rings*, in *A Game of Thrones* the home and the family, while still very much the domain of women, are more clearly representative of the hierarchies Collins (1998) speaks of – both within

the novel itself, and as these structures are communicated to the reader[51]. Building on this embedded morality which characters experience in the first articulation, Mendlesohn tells us that high fantasy[52] is a 'moral universe', that the "epic and the traveller's tale are closed narratives [the club story]. Each demands that we [readers] accept the interpretation of the narrator, and the interpretive position of the hero" (2008, p. 5). Thus, in both the first and second articulations, *A Game of Thrones* presents a world in which Daenerys is reliant on her sexual value to heterosexual men for her protection and her status, and she is also reliant on these same men to interpret the world for her, due to a lack of female companionship or role models. Men, in this world, are shown to be central agents and sources of information, interpreters of morality, and codifiers (and code-readers) of the social hierarchy.

6.3 Conclusion

A number of points have been raised in this and the previous chapter, and it is worth reminding the reader of the purpose of this study. Firstly, to consider the effects fiction can have on one's belief systems and on wider societal values (and vice-versa), and secondly, to examine the ways women are represented within traditionally published and self-published high fantasy, in order to explore whether new publishing methods are subverting the dominant high fantasy tropes of female representation. I offer this reminder here to clarify the arguments made above regarding the women of *Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones*, as well as fairy tales and high fantasy more generally. In terms of the women of high fantasy, my interest regards the first articulation, the ways in which female characters relate to each other and the world they inhabit. Additionally, in terms of the readers of high fantasy, my focus is the second articulation, how these presentations of women within their world might cause harmful stereotypes or beliefs to be propagated within the real world. This is in light of the numerous studies demonstrating that via the experiential process of being transported into a narrative world (Gerrig, 1993), we are seemingly particularly vulnerable to belief change as a result of the representations provided to

[51] Indeed, while I am currently focusing on Daenerys, three other women of note are traded in marriage for political alignment/gain: Sansa, Caitlyn, and Cersei. Of these three, only Caitlyn is shown to be happy in her marriage, and it should be noted that her eventual husband, Ned, was not the man she was initially promised to. Indeed, even in this portrayal of happy marriage, Catelyn is still concerned about her fertility; after having sex with Ned, she hopes to become pregnant, consoling herself that only three years have passed since her last child and that she is not yet too old to produce another son. This would be her sixth child, and her fourth son.

[52] Or, rather, Portal-Quest Fantasy, the terms she employs which includes high fantasy.

us through fiction (Appel, 2008; Appel & Richter, 2007; Djikic, et al., 2009; Green & Brock, 2000; Green, et al., 2004; Prentice, et al., 1997), no doubt aided by our cognitive evolutionarily predisposition to narrative-based learning (Sugiyama, 2001; Gottschall, 2013; Mellmann, 2012). Simply put, the way characters are written, and the structures and codes of the worlds they inhabit, can have very real effects in the real world. High fantasy, a genre that is already deeply rooted in many cultural codes and representations, is also widely popular. As already mentioned, Tolkien's work tops charts of reader's favourites (BBC, 2003; Mendlesohn & James, 2012), and *A Game of Thrones* is now an international cultural phenomenon (Alter, 2015; Flood, 2015a).

Thus, the way that women are written in these works, and in high fantasy more generally, matters. Yet we have seen in this chapter and the last that there are character archetypes and syntagmatic structures which are embedded in the genre of high fantasy as regards women, resulting in the dissemination of extremely problematic, sexist, and gendered social norms. Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) conclude their study with a reflection on the nature of the dissemination of beauty standards in fairy tales. Drawing on previous research, they question the traditional publishing industry's normative control and responsibility. "Surely individuals making decisions about which books to publish are unaware or unconcerned that books based on Grimm's fairy tales highlight and perpetuate a feminine beauty ideal" (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 724), a question Zipes (1994, p. 41) also considers, stating that "fairy tales do not become mythic unless they are in almost perfect accord with the underlying principles of how the male members of society seek to arrange object relations to satisfy their wants and needs."

Nevertheless, it should be noted that neither Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) nor I intend to imply a conscious 'conspiracy' on behalf of the traditional publishing industry in terms of propagating oppressive messages, nor indeed of authors who write high fantasy works. George R. R. Martin has stated that he views his series *A Song of Ice and Fire* to be inherently subversive to the original Tolkien model, in that his works aim to recreate the realism and horror of both the historical feudal systems of power and of warfare (Gilmore, 2014). In this, Martin echoes some of the criticisms already lain against Tolkien (eg, Jackson, 1981; Partridge, 1983), as well as Mendlesohn's (2008) observations that in high fantasy, the land and the king are inevitably tied together, adding weight to the common high fantasy/fairy tale trope of the prophetic king, the 'one, true ruler'. Equally, Martin works to break with the general high fantasy

and fairy trope that a single character can embody all that is good or, conversely, all that is wicked. Haastrup (2016, p. 135) argues that Martin's "use of character makes possible a more diversified and ambiguous moral fantasy in which there is no one hero saving the day, but rather many unlikely heroes, as well as villains." Thus, it can be seen that Martin is consciously working to redefine the tropes of the high fantasy genre – and with this, one should also acknowledge his publishing house in their support of his aims. Finally, it must also be acknowledged that the success of both *A Song of Ice and Fire* series and the accompanying television adaption, *Game of Thrones*, speaks to an audience that is ready to be challenged. Nevertheless, while one might applaud this redefinition, one cannot at the same time ignore the fact that representations of women and their place within the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* remain problematic, couched within the same fairy tale and medieval romance structures that inspired Tolkien. By working to add realism to his quasi-medieval fantasy world, Martin has, wittingly or unwittingly, created a narrative world in which women suffer due to the simple fact of their being women, and in which women are generally isolated from one another.

This ties back to the concept of the implied author, that is, the meaning of the text rather than the intention of the author. Rather than lay blame at the feet of the authors or the publishers of high fantasy for making a *conscious* decision to produce harmful worlds for women and harmful representations of women, my intention here is to highlight those occurrences of hegemonic values in high fantasy novels that are (unconsciously?) adhered to within traditional publishing. These values result, no doubt, from the culture from which the genre of high fantasy arose, and the attending habitus and social capital that the authors themselves have been acculturated in, along with schematic expectation of readers, and, finally, the drives of market forces of what is, at its heart, an industry. Essentially, I suggest, as with the wider principles of habitus and doxa, a microcosm is created within traditional publishing: what is popular sells, and what sells is popular. Thus, a feedback loop is created in which such messages are seemingly allowed to continue to varying degrees within the high fantasy genre. This coupled with the nature of the genesis of high fantasy genre norms, curated by Lin Carter for Ballentine (Williamson, 2015), creates a situation which satisfies readers' schemata (Sebby & Johnston, 2013); they know what to expect in terms of the representation of women in fantasy novels, and as such are more likely to invest time and money reading. So while Zipes (1988) argues that subversion of such norms should be included to challenge readers, readers themselves may not

wish to be so challenged, and as such publishing houses risk significant financial and reputation losses if they do decide to publish a novel that 'goes against the grain' and is unsuccessful, financially or critically. Indeed, as Shepherd (2013) notes, by analysing the tropes within a narrative, one can glean a sense of what the narrative world (or worlds, in the case of genre norms) takes for granted; or, as using the frame I set out in the first chapter of this work, the habitus, capitals and doxa of the narrative field.

These codifications are powerful. Indeed, fairy tales and medieval myths and legends – the monomyths, archetypes or master narratives described by Propp (1968), Campbell (1949/2004), and Levi-Strauss (Barthes, 1975) – have provided a blueprint for the structure of high fantasy; a blueprint based on cultural norms that are oppressive to women, certainly, but a blueprint nevertheless. Moreover, as Casanova (2009) notes when discussing the creation of literary fields internationally, even when one might try to strike out from the norm, one cannot help but take some of that normalising culture with them. "[W]hen a national space emerges and demands the right to political existence and independence, it proclaims at the same time that it possesses – that is 'nationalizes' – a cultural, linguistic, historical and *literary heritage*" (Casanova, 2009, p. 122; my emphasis). The point being made is that even when one might wish to shake off the habitus of one's culture, or to break with the norms codified within it, one is still, perhaps subconsciously, working within that framework, referencing it and using the toolkit provided by it to dismantle it, rather like trying to repair a broken tool by using that same broken tool on itself.

Building on this, it is worth noting that the manner in which Martin works to subvert the Tolkien model of high fantasy is itself still couched within current cultural values and habitus. Larsson (2016) discusses the manner in which sex is represented within both *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels and the television series *Game of Thrones*, making the point that readers/viewers interpret these acts through the lens of their modernity (or, alternatively, their culture's habitus). In this, she is drawing on the fact that we have only our current understanding with which to unpack historical cultures, the inspiration for both Martin and Tolkien's work (Larsson, 2016, p. 21):

> Since *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the TV series *Game of Thrones* are products of our modern times, the various paradigms featured

> in the fictional universe of Ice and Fire are constructed from ideas about how sexual relationships were organized in a long gone, pre-modern world. […] Simultaneously, the paradigms are understood from a modern, realist perspective of sexuality and intimate relations.

Thus, while the subversion of norms in order to challenge readers, which Zipes (1988) argues for, can indeed result in financially and critically successful high fantasy novels, it must still be born in mind the readers interpret these subversions via the lens of their own cultural norms[53]. This, perhaps unsurprisingly, leads me to question why it is the case, given the rise of the feminist movement and the general (albeit far from universal) acceptance of women's rights, it still appears difficult for high fantasy writers to reform and rewrite the role of women in quasi-historical, fictitious worlds. If, as Larsson (2016, p. 19) states, "[*A Game of Thrones]* still needs to connect with our concepts of history in order to provide that 'suspension of disbelief' necessary to appreciate any story", then the reason for such harmful narrative worlds for women is the need for historical 'believability'. However, Larsson (2016) also reminds us that readers will apply their current social paradigms as tools of interpretation, seeming to negate the 'believability' argument (to say nothing of high fantasy readers' ability to suspend disbelief as regards dragons, magic and other such fantastical elements). Equally, the suggestion that readers will fail to be transported into the narrative world of *A Game of Thrones* if it does not mimic certain aspects of real-world history runs counter to the very principles of transportation into narrative worlds (Gerrig, 1993). It is more likely, I suggest, that the "heritage" which Casanova (2009, p. 122) speaks to is at work, by its nature hidden in the unconscious acceptance of the genre's norms.

Nevertheless, does acknowledging this implicit 'hidden heritage' necessarily mean following and sanctifying its results? Genz argues that the pervading themes of 'sexist liberalism' that the female characters in *A Game of Thrones* endure "might in themselves be an impetus for action and combat against the very structures that repress them" (2016, p. 244). In

[53] For example, in the modern Western world, it is generally understood that war and war crimes are abhorrent, that rulers should be elected and do not owe their right to rule to their 'destiny', nor that the powerful are entitled to subjugate the powerless. (Although, of course, the realities of current national and global politics would seek to show that these values are yet to be fully translated into action.)

terms of self-publication, this is the crux of what this thesis is interested in investigating. I have spoken now in detail not only about the importance of narrative as a personal and social developmental tool, but also to the ways in narratives can alter or augment our real-world beliefs. I have also discussed how certain tropes are maintained within genres, exemplified in high fantasy's representations of women. While there have been advancements, adaptations and subversions regarding women's representation in high fantasy, their original heritage of fairy tales and medieval romance, codified into a writing genre by Tolkien (Williamson, 2015), can still be seen in George R. R. Martin's novel, *A Game of Thrones*. Thus, I would now like to turn to self-publication in order to explore whether there is in this new form of publication new representations, ones which challenge the reader's expectations and help to combat the structures and norms which have created them - as Genz (2016) and Zipes (1988), writing almost thirty years apart, argue for.

7. Self-Published High Fantasy: *A Warrior's Path*, *Thread Slivers* and Female Characters

While I have already discussed the difficulty in selecting novels for analysis (chapter five), it has proven more challenging to select self-published novels that are appropriate for the methods of this study. When selecting *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones*, my methodology was based on popularity. With both works achieving international success and mainstream popularity outside of specific high fantasy fandom, they served as good exemplars of the field and also demonstrated cultural reach. However, finding high fantasy self-published novels that fulfil the same criteria as *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones* has not been straightforward. Amazon, the largest online bookseller and distributor of self-published novels (Author Earnings, 2017) does not release information on the publishing status of its books (communication with the author, 2017). This means that while it is possible to find the bestselling high fantasy novels, it is not possible to differentiate which of those are self-published and which are traditionally published, beyond personal recognition of leading genre names or publication houses. Amazon has also begun its own imprint, 47North, which selects popular self-published fantasy, science fiction, and horror novels already for sale through its market[54], and then republishes them under its own banner (Amazon Publishing, 2017). However, as these novels are then edited by Amazon's publishing team, it would be difficult to ascertain how much of the original self-published work remains. Moreover, Amazon is not the only avenue for authors to distribute their work absent traditional publication. Online reading sites, such as Wattpad, provide a medium for independent authors to distribute their work to readers. However, such websites provide content for free[55], and, while also adding to the intrigue of this model, books distributed for free is a variable which is outside of the scope of this piece. I wish to look at how self-publication can offer an alternative to genre normative representations of female characters, as they are maintained in popular, traditionally published high fantasy novels.

[54] Amazon Imprints will also work on new material from their selected authors.

[55] In 2016, Watpadd launched 'Watpadd Futures' a system designed to allow authors to make money from their publications on the site. Watpadd Futures works via an advertising model, in which authors agree to have adverts inserted between chapters in their novel(s). This is designed to help writers "a way that increases the writer's income, without having to pay out of pocket" (Watpadd, 2016). However, the program is only available to authors Watpadd selects, usually because they have reached a set number of readers (these authors are termed 'Watpadd Stars').

This study must, therefore, also include the element of readers being required to purchase such novels, traditional publication being, as discussed, a commercial enterprise. Equally, the nature of these communities is markedly different from that of traditional publishing. I am looking at self-publishing as a distribution method to mirror traditional publication, while Wattpadd and other online reading websites are based around a community model, in which authors usually publish work chapter by chapter, receiving feedback and commentary from followers. This model is fascinating, allowing for much closer community engagement and shaping of narratives; however, it also means that, from the point of view of this study, it would be difficult to distinguish those narrative choices the author made independently from those resulting from immediate reader feedback. As my focus is to examine how self-publishing allows authors to subvert genre norms independently, this type of feedback is counter-productive.

This is not to say that reader reaction is unimportant to this study. As mentioned, I wish to look at examples of works that have been popular among readers, seeing these as representative of the high fantasy market. Therefore, to select self-published examples, I have chosen to draw on positive reader reception, rather than using commercial success as a guide (something which, as mentioned above, is harder to quantify in terms of self-publication). As such, I have taken as my guide the website Goodreads. Goodreads is a social network, a 'bookshelf', and a recommendations site, and in 2016 it had more than 50 million user reviews (Hoffelder, 2016), and in 2014 had more than 25 million members (Narula, 2014). Members of the Goodreads community are able to share books with each other, manage and maintain their reading lists, rate and review books, and find works by new authors through online reading groups, recommendations from friends, searches, or recommendation lists. This participation marks Goodreads as one of the, if not *the*, leading online sources to find and recommend novels from multiple distribution sites. Thus, using Goodreads, I have been able to select purchasable, self-published novels which have received critical acclaim from readers. Furthermore, I am not bound to any single publishing distributor. This selection method, therefore, goes some way towards recreating, albeit on a smaller scale, the selection criteria for *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones*.

I have also applied a secondary level of selection criteria, using Mendlesohn's (2008) definition of a Portal-Quest Fantasy. As stated previously (see Kuznets, 1985; chapter four), high fantasy novels must occur within their own realized world, a place in which magic exists; the

high fantasy protagonist must be relatable, though their friends and comrades may be more extraordinary, and they must perform heroic acts; finally, the protagonist must complete the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949/2004), ending the narrative wiser than when s/he began. This criteria applies to both the Portal Quest and the Immersion Fantasy descriptors given by Mendlesohn (2008). However, in an Immersion Fantasy, the club story element is not apparent, nor the reliance on a mentor due to the protagonist's naivety, both staples of the Tolkienesque high fantasy tradition (Mendlesohn, 2008). Indeed, it is these differences which in part prompted Mendlesohn (2008) to classify the two separately. Thus, novels on Goodreads which do not take place in secondary worlds in which magic is real and treated seriously, which did not include the third person authorial voice, and did not maintain the naïve protagonist trope (or maintain through subversion, as discussed), were excluded. I have also excluded any novels aimed at younger readers ('middle grade') or Young Adult (YA) fantasy novels. This is because, firstly, neither *The Lord of the Rings* nor *A Song of Ice and Fire* are aimed at younger readers, thus making a comparison of themes and representations less valid. Secondly, I have discounted YA fantasy as this genre is, to a large extent, defining its own rules and norms, separate from the high fantasy tradition under study here. For example, female characters are often the main protagonists, portrayed in a heroic light, while male characters play second fiddle to the women around them without diminishing their masculinity, and traditionally masculine behaviours associated with the Arthurian and medieval hero are often critiqued or subverted (Spivack, 1987). YA fantasy, therefore, while arguably beneficially progressive, does not resemble the high fantasy model defined by Tolkien that is the focus of this study (though some may nevertheless still be considered Portal-Quest Fantasy, such as *Harry Potter*).

Using these criteria, I have selected two self-published novels. Firstly, *A Warrior's Path* by David Ashura (2014), which has a Goodreads aggregate score of 4.06 (999 ratings and 79 reviews). Secondly, *Thread Slivers* by Leeland Artra (2013), which has a Goodreads aggregate score of 3.99 (628 ratings and 64 reviews). Both feature on a number of reader recommended lists on Goodreads, and both are high fantasies set in another world[56], are written in the third

[56] Interesting, but sadly outside of the scope of this study, both *A Warrior's Path* and *Thread Slivers* also appear to eschew the common high fantasy use of medieval European history as its narrative base. *A Warrior's Path* instead drawing on Indian culture, while *Thread Slivers* hints at a foundation based on both American and Japanese (specifically Samurai) warfare traditions. This influence is more strongly felt in *A Warrior's Path*, and, while this does not ostensibly negate those factors that are traditionally problematic for women (such as a male-dominated, hierarchical social structure), this rooting does give the narrative world a unique setting and texture, with certain linguistic items, food stuffs, architecture and other elements being drawn from an Indian perspective.

person with a narrational voice, and feature naïve characters. Equally, both *A Warrior's Path* and *Thread Slivers* follow multiple male and female viewpoint characters, and both are the first novels in a series (a common factor in high fantasy novels), as is *A Game of Thrones*. Both books are, at the time of writing, for sale on Amazon's listings. *A Warrior's Path* is listed as published by DuSum Publishing, which is co-owned by the author and only publishes books/audiobooks by Ashura[57], while *Thread Slivers* is listed as being published by the author, Leeland Artra.

I will now analyse these novels, looking at the various problematic themes/representations of women that I have highlighted in terms of fairy tales and high fantasy, and which have been seen to be present in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*. Thus, the themes I am framing my analysis on are:

- **Beauty, femininity and female sexuality** – the use of beauty and femininity to both codify women as 'good' (the maiden/reward/mother/Goddess), or the lack of it to codify women as 'bad' (the witch/evil Queen), and/or how it can place women in danger. Female sexuality refers to its absence or, when present, its use to appease male characters, as well as an expression of normal, self-agented desire (in line with Shepherd (2013, p. 28), who uses the term 'sexuality' to denote "erotic activities, proclivities, desires, and relationships.")
- **Syntagmatic structures and character archetypes** – how the repetition of these structures perpetuate harmful representations and codify female characters' goals, agency and motivations.
- **The Naïve Protagonist: Female friendships/mentorships** – the protagonist as naïve and/or reliant on a male source of information about their world. Also, the lack of representations of positive, functioning female relationships, and the subsequent problems this causes female characters.

Finally, please note that all page numbers cited regarding the self-published novels analysed in this work, including my own, are taken from the e-book publications, and while accurate at the time of writing, they may be liable to change at the original author's discretion.

[57] It is not uncommon for self-published authors to create a publishing house for the sole use of their own books, as certain distributors (such as Amazon) will only offer specific advertising tools to publishers, not to authors.

7.1 A Warrior's Path

7.1.1. Beauty, Femininity and Female Sexuality

A Warrior's Path represents sexuality in a manner that is interesting in that it both retains the sexual codes already highlighted in high fantasy and undermines them. For example, *The Lord of the Rings* largely eschews sexuality on behalf of both its male and female characters, relying instead on the concepts of marriage and/or romantic love, while *A Game of Thrones* largely portrays sex and sexuality as a tool for social advancement or censure, especially for women. Sitting somewhere between these two extremes, Ashura creates a world in which sex and romantic love for both sexes are policed by the rules of its society. Thus, in *A Warrior's Path* sex outside of one's social and racial group – Caste, as it is termed – in forbidden for both male and female characters. If a person has romantic feelings for someone outside of their Caste and acts on those feelings, they are exiled from the city, a fate that is tantamount to a death sentence. This reimagining of the feudal high fantasy trope creates an interesting parity between the sexual experiences of both the male and female characters[58]. Indeed, in *A Warrior's Path* it is two of the leading male characters who are censured for their sexual feelings, to the extent where one, a warrior named Rukh, is banished from his homeland for (seeming to) let his virtue slip. As the weight of sexual 'decorum' is not placed solely on the female characters, this creates a narrative world in which women are in a sexual position equal to men – albeit one which is constraining for both. Moreover, making the male characters, Rukh and Jaresh, the viewpoint characters struggling with the effects such policing has on their wants and goals encourages the reader, in the second articulation, to see these constraints as not being tied solely to the lives of women.

[58] Although outside the scope of this study, it is worth noting that one of the strongest themes of *A Warrior's Path* is a critique of the Caste system. Almost all viewpoint characters are seen to suffer or witness suffering as a result of the rigidity of the Castes, with only Rector, coded as a villain, seeming to seek to preserve the system. This is a subversion of the medieval romance notion of feudal society (see Partridge, 1983). Indeed, Dar'El, Rukh, Bree and Jaresh's (adoptive) father, laments what the caste system has denied his children: "The boy [Rukh] had always loved music, and Dar'El would have been just as proud if his son somehow ended up earning his living through the mandolin instead of the sword. He felt the same way about Bree and her fascination with medicine, or Jaresh and his love of history. Of his children, it seemed Jaresh would be the only one who would have a chance to follow his dream [due to his being adopted]. For Bree and Rukh, those choices could never be, not so long as the Castes existed" (Ashura, 2014, p. 429). While this subversion of strict social boundaries definitely has feminist themes, it is unfortunately too detailed to cover here with any level of genuinely useful analysis.

Thus, in *A Warrior's Path,* the reader is presented with a society in which both men and women's sexual activities are equally regulated, which may help to dissuade any belief that restricting or controlling a woman's romantic or sexual feelings represents a just world. In this sense, the novel reframes sexuality and gender from being distinct categories with differing expectations and allowances to "a continuous personal activity that can either subvert or reproduce dominant ideologies" (Spicer, 2003). Moreover, two female characters, Jessira and Mira, are shown to be more sexually confident than their male counterparts but are never painted as 'villainous', going against the common fairy tale and medieval romantic trope that women who are confident or knowledgeable about their sexuality are wicked (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). This creates a narrative in which, in the second articulation, readers' expectations of gender normative 'good' or 'bad' behaviour is challenged. Thus, in order to engage with the novel (an acceptance Gibson (1980) argues is necessary for full immersion), the reader is asked, in both the first and second articulations, to accept a narrative world in which sexual politics/policing is equally attributed to men and women. This, therefore, serves to level the gendered scripts which Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) and Zipes (1994) criticise as supporting harmful social norms as both sexes are equally policed in terms of their sexual behaviour.

Finally, while the feminine beauty ideal (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003) is apparent in *A Warrior's Path*, it is different from both *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones*. Whereas in *A Game of Thrones* being beautiful puts women in dangerous situations, or in *The Lord of the Rings* renders the men around them mentally ineffectual, in *A Warrior's Path* beauty is considered in a more complex and nuanced manner, seen through various different character's viewpoints. For example, Bree, one of the main female protagonists, is coded as being exceptionally beautiful within the norms of this narrative world, and yet this beauty does not cause enmity between herself and her female friend, Mira (more on this, below), as is often the case in fairy tales and medieval romance, as well as being seen between Sansa and Arya in *A Game of Thrones*. This is not to say, though, that Bree is without jealous onlookers. However, this jealousy comes not from another woman but from a man, Jaresh, her adopted brother. Jaresh is of a lower Caste than Bree and Rukh, and while he is shown numerous times to love his siblings, his relationship with them is complicated by the difference in their status outside of the family, the fact that his Caste are not often perceived as being beautiful within their society's

norms and his need, at the beginning of his arc, to prove himself as worthy of being in his adoptive family. This creates a complex ground for character development and interaction, and the fact that it is a male character and not a female character experiencing this jealousy is significant, as it subverts the common archetype of female relationships whilst still exploring issues of beauty and value. Equally, the fact that Jaresh is able to express and engage in a complex relationship with Bree negates the trope that beautiful women leave heterosexual men dumbfounded and addle-brained. This complexity is introduced in the first on-page meeting between Jaresh and Bree (Ashura, 2014, pp. 80-81):

> He [Jaresh] glanced at his sister with bemused envy. Bree wasn't having any trouble. There she was, walking alongside him without a care in the world. He rolled his eyes. Of course not. She didn't have to worry herself with such mundane concerns as moving to avoid others or mumbling apologies as one tried to slip through the crowd. Her beauty and Kumma heritage allowed her to live without need for such simple courtesies. […] True, her appearance often granted her unwanted attention, but it had also never stopped her using her attractiveness to its full advantage. [...] Bree didn't always like the unsolicited interest, but Jaresh knew she wouldn't have it any other way. Better to be beautiful than ugly.

Here we can see the conflict in Jaresh, and how his self-image colours his interpretation of the world and others. This is not meant to be a universal truth, nor is it written as such. Rather, it is a subjective reading; a subjectivity the reader is privy to, as they are given the opportunity to view the world through eyes of multiple characters. This subjectivity is a topic that is returned to within the narrative as an expression of the complexities of the narrative world. This explicit commentary helps to highlight the problematic and complex effects of the feminine beauty ideal. Additionally, anthropomorphised empathy with each character encourages the reader to recognise and reflect on the impact such social coding may have. Thus, while the main female characters, Bree, Mira, and Jessira, are described as being beautiful, this beauty is not presented as equivalent to (or representative of) their value. Instead, it is an aspect of the way in which the

world they inhabit responds to them, and this response is given space to be beneficial and detrimental, complex and rooted in the experiences and viewpoints of the individual characters, thus breaking the sense of the club story, of there being only one interpretation of the world and its morality (Mendlesohn, 2008). While I might suggest that 'beauty' as a concept could have been explored via a male character's attractiveness to others, rather than a female's, it is nevertheless a departure from the high fantasy representation of female beauty previously outlined.

Moving on, perhaps the only instance of beauty 'saving' a woman is in regards to Jessira, an 'Out-caste' – someone coded as being of mixed racial heritage – who finds herself in the strictly racially-policed city of Ashoka. Here, her physical appearance is seen as a site of equal fascination and horror by the citizens of the city, and it is noted with surprise that she is attractive. However, while her beauty is seen to go some way towards countering the horror her Out-caste heritage invokes, it is her words and actions that are seen to humanise her in the eyes of the majority of characters, providing Jessira with a sense of agency and strength in a situation that is overtly harmful, even dangerous. Equally, a male antagonist, Rector, cannot see Jessira as a person but rather is wholly fixated on the 'abomination' or her mixed-Caste heritage, and often focuses on her physical appearance, especially her good looks, to highlight this. Rector sees Jessira's attractiveness as a weapon to muddle the minds of those around her, especially the men. This attitude is starkly reminiscent of misogynistic narrative worlds presented in *A Game of Thrones*, especially as regards the difficulties Daenerys and Sansa encounter as a result of their beauty, and, more subtly, the experiences of Éowyn and Goldberry in *The Lord of the Rings*. All these women are treated problematically by men as a result of the way their beauty is socially coded, as well as tapping into rape culture beliefs that women who are sexually abused or attacked in some way 'ask for it' via their appearance. That Rector is painted as the villain of the narrative and is the only character to think in such a way is a clear indication in both the first and second articulations that within *this* narrative world such ideologies are unacceptable.

7.1.2. Syntagmatic Structures and Character Archetypes

Building on the above approach to beauty and sexuality, gendered character archetypes are both maintained and subverted within *A Warrior's Path*. In terms of how these are

maintained within the city of Ashoka, women are not permitted to join men in military activities (an archetypally 'male' sphere in high fantasy). However, this refusal to allow women to participate in the military is undermined by the introduction of Jessira, the Out-caste. Jessira is from a society in which women *are* allowed to fight, and she is shown in the first and second articulations to be a capable warrior. Thus, the reader is invited to question why the women of Ashoka are not also permitted to join the military, especially given their equal physical strength and skill to the male characters (physical expertise being determined by Caste, not by gender). As a result, Jessira's femininity is not sacrificed to her warrior status, as is the case of Arya Stark (*A Game of Thrones*) or Éowyn (*The Lord of the Rings*). Larsson (2016) discusses how the representation of Arya as being both more masculine in her ambitions and less feminine (ergo less socially valuable) in terms of her looks encourages the reader to sympathise with Arya over her more archetypally 'girly' sister. This in turn, Larsson argues, creates a view in which girlish behaviour or values are coded to be contemptible. Jessira, however, is not presented as averse to femininity nor sees it in any way disabling, unlike Arya or Éowyn. Rather, she represents the choice of the individual to perform their identity in a manner that is truthful to them, absent gender normative coding or censure. Moreover, when Jessira and Bree meet, Bree speaks openly of her disdain for the rules of her city-state regarding female warriors (Ashura, 2014, pp. 385-6):

> "There isn't much to tell," Jessira said. "I'm a scout. I got caught. I was injured. Your brother saved my life. The end."
> "That's plenty more than I could say about myself," Bree replied. "In Ashoka, women aren't allowed to fight. We're considered too important for Humanity's survival." She snorted in derision. "We're animate wombs if you ask me."

Note that there is no mention of either women sacrificing their femininity to become a fighter. Jessira is coded throughout as feminine; it is the fact that she is not from Ashoka that allows her to be a fighter, not in any renouncing of her womanhood, and nor is Bree's critique focused on her sex *per se*, but rather on the supposed role of women within her society. Using the high fantasy setting to create a world in which gendered views of male/female roles are shown to be socially bound is, I suggest, one of the great strengths of writing speculative fiction

– the world is created anew, and thus allows authors and readers space to reimagine social conventions (see Jackson, 1981).

Equally, the high fantasy and fairy tale trope that women must marry (either for their happy ending or their safety) (Schubart, 2016) is also undermined as a result of the social structure of *A Warrior's Path*'s narrative world. Again building on the Caste system and the medieval romantic tradition of arranged marriages, in *A Warrior's Path* we see both male and female characters negatively affected by the conditions placed upon them by their society's rules. Women are not presented as helpless or ineffectual, and thus they do not need marriage to either garner their safety or provide their goal. Instead, as marriage is a necessity for child-rearing, both the male and female characters are 'bartered' by their families into certain partnerships or allegiances, and both sexes are seen to struggle with this. While this again ties into the high fantasy trope of politicking through marriage (see Larsson's (2016) Genz's (2016) or Jones' (2012) discussion on this aspect in *A Game of Thrones*), the fact that these arrangements are shown to involve discomfort or aversion in both genders creates a sense of equality in the novels, albeit the equality of suffering. In another subversion to the trope, one arranged marriage is dissolved when it becomes clear that the two people involved have no good feeling towards each other. This implies that while the Caste system is absolute, families may still recognise their children's – daughters' and sons' – agency and choice. This is something that goes against the codifications of the high fantasy genre, especially as regards female characters (see Daenerys and Sansa's arranged marriages in *A Game of Thrones*).

Moving on, two prominent female characters, Mira and Bree, are outside of typical female archetypical representations. Both are shown to be intellectually competent, and are trusted to undertake vital and risky tasks; both are confident and witty, and are loved and respected by their peers, rather than being seen as 'wicked' or 'sinister', as is often the case for competent and confident women within fairy tales. Unlike Éowyn in *The Lord of the Rings*, who must hide her femininity in order to be effective, or, in *A Game of Thrones*, Arya who must renounce it, Daenerys who must navigate the effect her femininity has on the men around her, or Sansa who is punished for it, Mira and Bree are seen as individuals with agency and talents which neither compete with nor are harmed by their womanhood. Moreover, Mira, Bree and Jessira are not subject to the bildungsroman archetype of female narrative development highlighted by Jones (2011, p. 440), in which female characters must learn "to be submissive,

accepting pain as a female condition, equating sexuality with danger, marrying after the inevitable failure of a rebellious autonomy, and regressing from full societal participation in order to actualize the inconsequential status of the female self." Instead, their narrative development occurs as a combination of the interplay between their personalities and the situations they find themselves in. Thus, within the first articulation, the reader is placed in a world that presents multiple female characters who behave in ways which are truthful to their personalities and abilities, rather than in ways which are aligned with fairy tale or medieval romance depictions of women. Additionally, the one female character who most obviously performs the traditional role of antagonist is not represented along normative female codifications for such a character. While Varesea is older and is shown to be sexually active, neither of these aspects are treated as abhorrent or devalue her. Varesea has also eschewed the female developmental arc Jones (2011) describes, and while she is undoubtedly villainous, she is not punished for her age, her sexual desire, nor her refusal to submit to an unhappy marriage – it is her political beliefs which Ashura uses to mark her as the antagonist. Once again, this portrayal subverts the traditional representations of women and their roles in high fantasy, but in such a way as to be meaningful and pertinent to the narrative world, thus potentially offering a space for readers to be challenged, as Zipes (1988) argues they should be.

7.1.3 The Naïve Protagonist: Female Friendships/Mentorships

In *A Warrior's Path*, female friendships are common, and women are not shown to engage in the kind of romantic rivalries common in fairy tales and medieval romances, often reproduced in high fantasy texts. This is in part due to the lack of emphasis placed on the value of women's beauty in *A Warrior's Path*, which allows women to display abilities, talents and thus value in areas of physical and/or mental expertise. By adding character depth to his women, Ashura is able to provide more complex and genuine reasons for either female friendship or rivalry in both the first and second articulations. The most prominent female friendship is between Bree and Mira, both of whom are shown to be supportive of each other, and to recognise the talents the other possesses. Equally, while Mira, in the first articulation, acknowledges on multiple occasions that Bree is more beautiful than she is, this is presented without jealousy but rather with something akin to affection, unlike the enmity Sansa's

femininity and beauty creates between herself and her sister in *A Game of Thrones*. For example, when the reader is introduced to Bree as Mira regards her, we see that there is no jealousy, only affection and amusement, something which is built on as the novel progresses (Ashura, 2014, p. 59):

> She [Bree] has achieved the highest scores of any graduate in the past ten years from the Fan and Reed, one of Ashoka's all-female Kumma academies. Of course, Davesh [God] must not have been satisfied to grant her a keen intellect. From her mother, He had also graced Bree with a languid beauty. A slow smile from Bree was guaranteed to get a man's pulse racing be he young or old. Mira grinned as the young woman caused men's heads to swivel on their necks simply by crossing the street.

Representations like this, in which the reader is encouraged to ally with a likeable character and to understand the world from their perspective, can help to create a social bond between the reader and the character, in much the same way that real-world friendships do (Gardener & Knowles, 2008). In a novel like *A Warrior's Path*, where the friendship and empathy between Bree and Mira is underscored, this is arguably more likely to have a positive effect on the reader's perception of female relationships. On the other hand, in novels where women are either not shown together, as in *The Lord of the Rings*¸ or are placed in positions of rivalry, as in *A Game of Thrones*, it is more likely that readers will assume such representations are accurate in the real world (see chapter three).

Staying with Bree and Mira, unlike the classic hero's journey structure, neither woman begins their journeys in a position of lowly status. Again, this contrasts with Daenerys (*A Game of Thrones*) but is similar to Éowyn (*The Lord of the Rings*) and Sansa and Arya Stark (*A Game of Thrones*). Moreover, neither Bree nor Mira are placed in the classic 'naïve protagonist' position as codified by Mendlesohn (2008), in which the protagonist is reliant on information received from a mentor to make sense of their world. As already discussed, this trope can result in a protagonist who is uncritical of the world they inhabit, potentially helping to strength or leave unchallenged any harmful norms, something which via transportation (Gerrig, 1993) and

anthropomorphism (Epley, et al., 2007; Gardener & Knowles, 2008), the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007), and just world beliefs (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013) can negatively impact the real world beliefs of readers. However, instead of presenting Bree and Mira as uncritical or unaware of the world they inhabit, the reader is shown that both women are aware of the structures they live within. I have already touched on this when discussing the sexual politics and the character archetypes in *A Warrior's Path*. Bree and Mira consider the effects of these influences internally and in conversation together, demonstrating that they are primed to be critically aware of their culture. When the narrative introduces a mystery – a series of murders – Mira and Bree are asked to investigate. During their investigations, they are each confronted with new information which challenges some of their deeply held beliefs. Ashura thus sets up a context in which his female characters must use their intellect and their reflexive capabilities to navigate potentially psychologically damaging new information. They must, through their investigation and their negotiation of new information, reform their worldviews. This stands separate from the closed-in club story that is another common trope of high fantasy (Mendlesohn, 2008). Ideology and sense-making is not something that is given to Mira or Bree, but is something which must be constantly, actively nurtured, and they must be responsive to new information.

Moreover, this open-mindedness affects the relationships Bree and Mira engage in. Bree, for example, begins the narrative with a strong sense of self-identity and worth based on her membership of a high-status family and Caste. This confidence in her heritage places her, initially, in a friendship with Rector, who seemingly mirrors her values. However, as her friendship with Rector deepens, she begins to view his rigid, hierarchal ideology as detrimental. Later, when she learns more about her family history and, crucially, interacts with Jessira, the Out-caste, Bree undergoes an ideological crisis in which she challenges her deep-rooted ideology. This leads her to become critical of Rector's bigoted beliefs and his hostile reaction to Jessira, ultimately ending her friendship with him. This is not an easy journey for Bree and the reader is asked, through both the first and second articulations, to recognise this. Thus, by challenging Bree, the reader is also challenged to undergo the same experiential journey, examining their beliefs and ideologies. Moreover, by placing the female characters in positions where they must intellectually and spiritually engage in their worlds, Ashura presents a high fantasy narrative world in which women have physical and intellectual agency, are capable of

making personal choices and changes absent male guidance, and are, finally, self-supportive and supportive or each other.

7.2 Thread Slivers

7.2.1. Beauty, Femininity and Female Sexuality

Thread Slivers largely does not feature sex, and there are no romantic sub-plots, but sexuality is often highlighted. The main female protagonist, Ticca, is not interested in a romantic/sexual relationship, though she does note other characters' (both male and female) attractiveness, and she is shown early on to be aware of her own attractiveness. However, this is not to say that Ticca is not sexualised, most notably by the male protagonist, Lebuin, who at various times in the first articulation is explicitly aware of her beauty, to the extent where in one scene he becomes sexually aroused as a result of spying her naked. Indeed, a number of female characters' sexual qualities are expressly commented on in the novel, though this is not always seen through the lens of desire so much as straightforward description. Take for example Ticca's internal monologue when meeting her mentor, a character she does not view sexually[59] (Artra, 2013, p. 12):

> Her cream colored blouse was loose cut, but not so loose as to hide her obviously large, well-proportioned breasts, as she leaned in closer to say softly, "You might consider a bath and a change of clothes first." Her green skirt matched her eyes and swept all the way to the floor. It showed off both her fine female figure, as well as her graceful moves, as she glided into the crowd around the bard.

Describing female characters in such a way may strengthen readings of women as primarily sexual objects, and as such ties in with traditional views of women's corresponding sexual value within high fantasy. One might argue that the fact that Ticca, a woman, engages in

[59]Or, at least, this is not explicitly stated, and I fail to read it in the text.

such readings without, seemingly, any sexual intent helps to negate any sexist charge the description might have. However, given the subtle and pervasive nature of belief change and the sleeper effect (see chapter three), this argument is flimsy. Perhaps more concrete is the fact that while such descriptions are common (and, I feel, unnecessary), they do not equate with women's worth and agency, nor condone any sexualised social expectations placed on them, unlike the experiences of women in *A Game of Thrones* and *The Lord of the Rings*, or more widely in medieval romance or fairy tales. For example, while Lebuin's desire for Ticca is manifest within the story, he spends much more time noting her prowess and accomplishments as a fighter and tracker, as well as consciously understanding that Ticca is more knowledgeable than he is in the ways of the world. Indeed, Lebuin comes to consciously redefine his sexualised view of Ticca (Artra, 2013, p. 214):

> His eyes rested on Ticca. He admired her stamina, courage, and intelligence. This is a woman who will make a blazing trail wherever she chooses to go. I have been foolish, being more concerned with the outside of people than what was inside.

Thus, in the first articulation, Ticca exists in a narrative world in which a woman's sexual attractiveness is acknowledged – *highlighted* – but is not taken to be her most important attribute. Indeed, a context is created in the second articulation in which the reader is encouraged to look beyond the cliché of Ticca's beauty and to recognise her as an agented individual. Moreover, at no point does Lebuin display any inclination to act on his desire or that Ticca should be grateful for it or wanting of it, as is often the case in terms of medieval romantic representations of men's attitudes to women, an ideology that perpetuates rape culture (Ferreday, 2015). As such, this highlights that in this narrative world such assumptions are not considered and thus are not condoned – an advantageous message when considered in light of both the sleeper effect and rape culture.

Only one female character's arc is related to her romantic/sexual life, the high elf Kliasa. While only a minor character, Kliasa represents a complex drawing of female sexuality, in that her motivation in the narrative is based on her love for her partner, a traditional drive for women in high fantasy and fairy tales, as exemplified by both Éowyn and Arwen in *The Lord of the*

Rings, as well as numerous fairy tales heroines. Indeed, Klaiasa bears a strong resemblance to Arwen, Galadriel and Goldberry (*The Lord of the Rings*), in that she is non-human and framed as being extraordinarily beautiful. She has also gained the almost sycophantic love of the various men in her life, though this love is shown to be awe-like rather than sexual – though still a dubious 'honour', as discussed in chapter five. Moreover, Klaiasa also represents the infamous 'girl in the fridge' trope, a concept coined from an instance in a *Green Lantern* (#54) comic book in which the male character's story arc was initiated by finding his girlfriend's dead body in his refrigerator, an event that sent "a clear message about both the role of women in comics and in comic book culture" (Scott, 2013). The trope of motivating male characters with the (often gruesome) death of women was first recorded by Gail Simone in 1999, when she circulated a list online of such occurrences in comic books (Simone, 1999; Scott, 2013), and it has since been applied to other pop culture mediums. In *Thread Slivers*, we learn that Klaiasa's rape and murder resulted in motivating the novel's antagonist, seemingly propagating this harmful representation. In terms of the effect this might have on readers' just world beliefs (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013) and the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007), there is no denying that to include a female character's abuse and death as a catalyst for either the hero or the villain plays into stereotypical representations of women, especially in terms of their role being to motivate the male character.

However, Artra works to subvert this. Klaiasa, though dead, is an active and agented character in the novel, communicating with Ticca and Lebuin through magical objects from the 'Between', a space between life and death. Klaiasa serves as a mentor to both characters, though she works more closely with Ticca, to bring about the defeat of her now evil lover, and redress the wrongs he has committed in the name of avenging her. This is an interesting approach to this trope. While I suggest it is still harmful to have included it, it worth noting that rather than being presented as an agentless body, Klaiasa is shown to be active in overcoming the harm done to her and to others in her name, as well being extremely magically talented and a wise mentor (more on this later). While 'refrigerated' women are often "of inconsequence, of afterthought, to these [male hero's] stories" (Simone, 1999, in Scott, 2013), this is not the representation given in *Thread Slivers*. Instead, in the first articulation, Ticca, and to a lesser extent Lebuin, spend time with Klaiasa in the Between, learning from her and befriending her, to the point where, when Klaiasa finally shares her history with Ticca, the latter is as distraught as only a close friend

could be. As such, Klaiasa is not simply the 'perfect/beautiful' female typically presented in high fantasy and fairy tale, nor the brutalised motivation for the male hero, though she does embody, superficially, these traits. Instead, Artra has developed Klaiasa beyond this, to present to the reader a female character with depth, agency and motivation beyond surface expectation. In terms of both just world beliefs and the sleeper effect, this development offers an interesting and challenging subversion of genre expectation.

7.2.2. Syntagmatic Structures and Character Archetypes

As already mentioned, Ticca subverts the traditional female archetype found in fairy tales and high fantasy, in that she is both career-driven and undesiring of a romantic conclusion. Indeed, Ticca's focus throughout the novel is her career, and, resultantly, how to protect Lebuin from harm. In terms of the coding of women as being desirous of marriage as their end goal (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003), and the bildungsroman structure that tends to accompany female character development leading towards this goal (Jones, 2011), *Thread Slivers* creates a narrative world in which this is not subverted via showcasing different attitudes of women towards romance, but rather is subverted through omission. This is a narrative world in which the majority of women simply do not consider romance. In terms of the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007), the fact that marriage and/or romance are not goals for the characters (even in terms of refusing that goal), creates a situation where the reader, in the second articulation, is not required to consider this, either. In turn, this presents the reader with other factors to contemplate regarding Ticca's goals and aspirations, and the potential for a just ending is one in which Ticca's career is paramount. Therefore, the reader is offered the opportunity to spend time with a woman who eschews the high fantasy and fairy tale stereotype of being marriage/romance orientated. Moreover, Ticca is shown to be an adept fighter, tracker, hunter and problem solver. Unlike *A Warrior's Path, A Game of Thrones* or *The Lord of the Rings,* in *Thread Slivers* there is no explicit or implicit prohibition regarding women following certain career paths, including being a fighter. Thus, Ticca is a Dagger, a respected group of swords-for-hire. Within the first articulation, the fact that Ticca is a woman in what is within the genre traditionally a male role is unremarkable. The resulting message to the reader via the second articulation is thus one of normality: women perform roles outside of the home/marriage institution. Accordingly, *Thread*

Slivers has in Ticca a woman who is codified as being an adept fighter, often demonstrating advanced physical prowess, while simultaneously being demonstrably feminine. This is, like *A Warrior's Path*, a subversion of the common medieval romantic representation of female fighters as lacking in femininity (Larsson, 2016), either through their lack of physical beauty (in the eyes of heterosexual men) or through deliberately eschewing it. Thus, any consequent criticism of femininity (overtly or otherwise) is nullified, along with any possible codification of 'appropriate' behaviour for women.

In terms of other principal female characters in *Thread Slivers*, these women are presented as being high status, holding positions of rank within various institutions. Indeed, many female characters are Daggers, as well as performing other, often male-dominated roles, such as city guards, assassins, or soldiers, as well as non-violent, high-status jobs, such as a city accountant, priestesses, or politicians. Most notable are the female priestesses, one of whom is Ticca's first mentor, Sula. In the first articulation, they are shown to work together as a unit of strength and power, knowledgeable and adept in their roles – a sharp contrast to the usual medieval romance/fairy tale grouping of wise women often codified as 'witches' (see also Kuznets' (1985) critique of the treatment of the all-female religious group in *The Tombs of Atuan*, discussed in chapter six). All of the prominent women in *Thread Slivers* disrupt the archetypal role for women in high fantasy and fairy tale, in that they are, firstly, not beholden to men for 'gifting' them their status, nor is their status or power reliant on their beauty. Equally, the agency displayed by Klaiasa, the high elf mentioned above, also works to undo the syntagmatic structure of a woman's role – in life or death – being a motivator for the male hero to begin his quest (Simone, 1999).

No female in character is *Thread Slivers* is presented as a reward for the male hero. Indeed, as already discussed, the concept of marriage as an end goal is notably absent from the novel, with the female characters instead being motivated by their own internal wants and desires, such as ambition, loyalty or a wish to improve the narrative world (or all three). As a result, the harmful female bildungsroman arc outlined by Jones (2011), in which women must first be punished by the world before they are suitably submissive for marriage, is forfeited in favour of character growth in other respects, such as Ticca's changing motivation with regards to her involvement with Lebuin. Initially, Ticca takes on the role of protecting Lebuin to further her reputation as a Dagger and to earn more money. However, as the narrative progresses and she

uncovers the political conflict central to the novel, Ticca's sense of justice takes precedence. In this, Artra mirrors the medieval romantic chivalric code, one which Ticca holds dear: the Daggers' code of "honor, courage, and commitment" (Artra, 2013, p. 137). This offers the reader, in both the first and second articulations, a leading female protagonist who embodies the traditional high fantasy values and virtues of a medieval knight, without having to sacrifice her femininity to do so.

Moreover, the main male protagonist, Lebuin, is shown to embody traditionally female traits, such as a desire to avoid danger or adventure, and a preoccupation with appearance. This latter trait, especially, is often denigrated in men in high fantasy (and, arguably, the real world), and is often applied to female characters as a deleterious quality – again, as Larsson (2016) discusses when analysing the contrasting representations of femininity between Sansa and Arya in *A Game of Thrones*. Equally, I would argue that given the general disdain for femininity found in medieval romance and often repeated in high fantasy, to be a 'feminised' male character is to be placed in a position of lower status, at worse leading to homophobic representations and/or interpretations of the same. In *Thread Slivers*, however, Lebuin's preoccupation with his appearance is neither a source of censure for his character nor is it aligned negatively with femininity or homosexuality. There is no suggestion given that this desire to look his best or his interest in fashion makes him less masculine, which would itself imply criticism of being either feminine or being aligned with social normative behaviour associated with women, a simplistic and homophobic view of men taking an interest in so-called female pastimes (regardless of those men's sexuality). This subversion of gender normative stereotypes, both in terms of feminine and masculine abilities and interests, creates in both the first and second articulations an implicit acceptance of characters that flout traditional archetypes. Such acceptance of individual choice aligns with third wave feminist goals of complex (rather than binary) alignments and self-choice (Snyder, 2008), or the principle aim of post-feminism to be a site of "openness to new ideas" (Schubart, 2016, p. 113). Thus, the reader is presented with a narrative world in which behaviour and interests are not aligned with gender/sexuality, but rather are a result of individual taste and choice, offering a just world where each individual is free to follow their own interests, absent gender-based, and often in the case of 'effeminate' men, homophobic, censure.

7.2.3 The Naïve Protagonist: Female Friendships/Mentorships

The principal female relationship is *Thread Slivers* is between Ticca and Klaiasa. Unfortunately, a lot of the relationship is developed off-page in summary, and thus the reader is denied the opportunity to see this friendship/mentorship grow. However, from what is seen, a number of the traditional high fantasy tropes are present: Ticca, while wise in her profession as Dagger, is naïve in terms of the wider history of her world, and the significance and origins of the antagonist. It is Klaiasa who teaches Ticca this history – the story of her rape and murder – and also tutors Ticca more generally in fighting styles, hunting, tracking and other useful skills. Earlier in the novel, Ticca is also shown to have another important female mentor, Sula, who is her initial Dagger patron, and who provides her with the experience and funds to set herself up as an independent worker. However, again, this relationship is largely reported in summary, thus denying the reader the experience that Ticca herself benefitted from. This is a shame, as it is through experiencing the narrative world with the character that the reader is offered the chance to transport themselves and to gain knowledge and experience (Gerrig, 1993; Gottschall, 2013). Equally, although the reader is presented with other female friendships in *Thread Slivers* in which it is made apparent that both a close relationship and mentorship has occurred, these women are only very briefly on the page. As a consequence, a great deal is left to the reader to surmise regarding the nature of these relationships, beyond the fact that they are obviously positive, as made clear from the characters interactions and internal thoughts in the first articulation.

There are two ways of viewing this. On the one hand, it is disappointing that a novel that, in so many other ways, is both progressive and subversive of problematic tropes and representations of women seemingly misses the opportunity to showcase more prominently female companionship and mentorship. However, it is encouraging that these relationships, though briefly seen, are all overwhelmingly positive and supportive, absent the jealousy that is common in fairy tales (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003), and often carried over into high fantasy. Equally, while minimal, these relationships do allow Artra to communicate to the reader, via the second articulation, that women are capable of being in supportive, positive relationships with each other, which in turn offers the potential to challenge the high fantasy concept that

women cannot be friends/mentors to each other. Nevertheless, it remains an opportunity missed, especially given the creative freedom self-publication provides.

However, what is interesting is the relationship that develops between Ticca and Lebuin. Lebuin quickly realises Ticca's more advanced skill and knowledge and accepts that she is *his* mentor. Rather than baulking at the idea of a woman being more knowledgeable, as might be the case in medieval romance, Lebuin accepts it as so. This shows in the first articulation that men can, and moreover *do*, learn from women, and that the realisation and acceptance of such is rewarding. Indeed, this can be read as a sign of maturity, as evidenced by the excerpt given above of Lebuin's self-realisation. Moreover, as already discussed, Lebuin views Ticca as a sexual being, something which can in high fantasy, fairy tale, and medieval romance result in the sexualised women being held on a pedestal of near-impossible virtue. However, while Lebuin is conscious that he desires Ticca, he is able to function around her, unlike, for example, the male characters around Goldberry in *The Lord of the Rings*. Nor does Lebuin view Ticca 'igniting' these feelings within him as a reason to vilify or control her, as is the case with Viserys and Daenerys in *A Game of Thrones.* In short, Ticca's beauty is not dangerous or harmful to her, as Genz (2016) argues beauty and sexuality so often are for women in high fantasy, and it does not stop her from fulfilling her role as mentor to Lebuin, who is the quintessential naïve protagonist of this narrative. In terms of anthropomorphised empathy, this relationship offers the reader a valuable alternative to harmful representations of male and female relationships, showing that while a man may find a woman attractive, he is able to function around her and to treat her as a person deserving of respect. This is a concept that via just world beliefs (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013) and the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007) could help to counter the spread of rape culture ideologies (Ferreday, 2015) in which sex, desire, and a man's entitlement to a woman's body are constructed into narratives that legitimises rape or sexual abuse.

7.4 Conclusion

As has been shown, a reader's connection with the characters in fiction is an inalienable aspect of their connection with narrative and their transportation and belief in the narrative world (Gerrig, 1993). Moreover, human beings are capable of regarding fictional characters as 'real'

(Gardener & Knowles, 2008; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). People having the ability, via anthropomorphism, to imbue non-human or unreal characters with distinct motivations, thoughts and processes, to the extent where people can attribute behaviours and beliefs onto characters that are not present in the given text because they 'know them so well' (Barret & Keil, 1996). When a character is presented to us, we are capable of seeing that entity as being real – we invest in them. This occurs even if we do not necessarily like the character, nor agree with them (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007), in much the same way that we acknowledge that people we disagree with or dislike are, nevertheless, real. Fictional characters are our primary source for understanding and exploring the narrative world – we ride on their shoulders, viewing the new world through their eyes. This is especially true of high fantasy, where readers travel to a wholly new world, with new rules and, often, new creatures and species. We thus gain experiential learning from fiction and the events that befall characters (Gottschall, 2013; Mellmann, 2012; Sugiyama, 2001), and what we read in fiction can influence our real world beliefs (Appel, 2008; Appel & Richter, 2007; Djikic, et al., 2009; Green & Brock, 2000; Green, et al., 2004; Prentice, et al., 1997). In the same vein, in the case of omniscient third-person narratives (a standard writing style in high fantasy), readers are also guided by the narrator; that is, the author (Mendlesohn, 2008). In chapter one, I spoke about the principle of double articulation, that a text is designed with two 'listeners' in mind, one being the characters within the story and the other being the reader (Bednarek, 2012). Within the concept of double articulation, the reader is a known eavesdropper; and, as is often the case when one knows someone is 'listening in', information is shaped with that person in mind. Thus, it is that writers, while they may focus on the characters and plots, also have one eye on the invisible reader, and choose their words with the reader in mind. Characters speak to each other both for their benefit and for the reader's, and knowledge is imparted to characters to influence and inform them and to influence and inform the reader (Mendlesohn, 2008; Bednarek, 2012). When one is looking at the worlds characters inhabit and how those worlds function, one must also bear in mind that such functioning is also devised for the stowaway, the eavesdropper, the transported reader.

In high fantasy, the world and the characters are based on ideas of medieval feudalism/romance and of fairy tales – periods of (narrative) history that were not traditionally kind to women. This leads Tasker & Steenberg (2016, p. 171) to comment that "within fantasy narratives female characters are shaped in contradictory ways by both the gender norms of

contemporary culture and ideas about the past." In sum, high fantasy exists in a pre-feminist space whilst being written (at least in terms of *A Game of Thrones* and most Western markets) in a postfeminist time. This leads to confusion over how the past is read and written (Larsson, 2016), coupled with either a subconscious or conscious decision on behalf of the authors and the publication houses to produce a story that will fulfil the genre expectations of its readers, satisfying their schemata. In some cases, this conflict between the past and the present (Larsson, 2016; Tasker & Steenberg, 2016) and the first and the second articulation leads to representations of female characters that are at best complicated and at worst deeply problematic. Self-published high fantasy novels may offer an alternative. By choosing to self-publish high fantasy novels, authors may be better able to subvert the norms and structures of the genre without needing to worry about the various commercial concerns that traditionally published authors/publishing houses need to be mindful of. This can be seen in the above self-published novels, in which the authors offer various oppositional interpretations of the genre, some explicit and some implicit. Once again, while it is certainly not the case that *all* traditionally published high fantasy novels perpetuate harmful representations of women as a result of the genre's norms, it can be seen that the two current pillars of high fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones*, have questionable representations of women, their agency and their roles, and that these representations can be traced back to high fantasy's basis in medieval romance and fairy tale, aspects of the genre that have been codified within it.

In this chapter, I have shown how self-published novels can work as resistive artefacts, helping to re-enfranchise female characters within the high fantasy genre. However, I cannot say there was a conscious effort to subvert on behalf of these authors, or if they knowingly chose self-publication as a mean to challenge the dominant genre norms. I am, as mentioned, in a position where I am interrogating the implied author, the text itself. What may be possible to suggest is that self-published authors are aware of the freedom their context allows them. For example, one may look at self-publication forums online, such as *The Self-Publication Formula* Facebook group 'SPF Community' and see at numerous times indie authors comment to each other that they have the freedom to do as they please in terms of book length, cover design, or content. Although, it should be noted as well that sometimes such comments can be read as slightly loaded; for example, when an author has posted on the site asking for critique and then rejects outright the advice given, it is not uncommon for indie authors to remind the original

poster that, ultimately, they do not need to heed anyone's advice as they are self-publishing. Still, in the majority, it is possible to see from these communities that self-published authors are aware of the freedom that they have as a result of their publication method and take great pleasure in 'writing their own stories in their own way'. This is a point that is picked up by Baverstock & Steinitz (2013b) in their research into the motivations and satisfaction of self-published authors, and will be returned to and discussed in detail in chapter 9.

Authors may thus be writing with a wider awareness of the social and psychological impact of the work than has been described in this thesis. Within my own circle, I am aware of self-published authors who take representation very seriously and consciously consider the way they write about groups. For example, Kit Mallory is a friend and author of Sci-Fi YA Dystopian novels which feature female/female leads (that is, female leads in a lesbian relationship) and a male character with severe Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Kit is a trained mental health worker and also identifies as gay, and as such making sure that these characters are truthfully and complexly represented is of supreme important to her, as she herself has acknowledged to me privately. She also used her platform publicly to comment on these factors (see for example her series of posts on writing mental illness: https://kitmallory.wordpress.com/blog/). Further research into the extent to which self-published authors, more widely, are aware of the social and psychological importance of their representations of characters would be beneficial. For the present purpose, what I *am* able to do in order to consider the question of 'intention' is to reflect on my own writing, and with reference to these novels, consider the actual author (as opposed to the implied author) as well as the text, in addition to the analytical frames already in place (as detailed in chapter one and throughout). In the next chapter, therefore, I will offer an analysis of my self-published work and how I intentionally sought to subvert the representations of women which I, as a fan of high fantasy, nevertheless found to be problematic.

8. Self-Published High Fantasy: *The Fairy's Tale*, *The Academy*, and Female Characters

As explained, my aim as a self-published author was to challenge and subvert the representations of women in fairy tales and high fantasy that I had noted as a critical, life-long fan to be problematic. In this, I hope to engage with the principle of action and the importance of multiple voices, central to the tenets of third-wave feminism (Snyder, 2008). To date, I have published two novels, *The Fairy's Tale* (Lee, 2015) and *The Academy* (Lee, 2016), under the pseudonym F. D. Lee, via Amazon's self-publishing mechanisms, Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) and CreateSpace. KDP is the method used to publish an e-book for Kindle (Amazon's own brand e-reader) and CreateSpace allows self-published authors to sell paperback novels without any financial outlay, via a print-on-demand mechanism (in which hard copies are only printed and bound when an order is placed for them, rather than being printed and bound in anticipation of future orders). Both my novels are, therefore, available via Amazon electronically and in paperback in a number of international markets, though to date the UK has proven to be the most profitable, with the USA second. I will discuss the specific nature of self-publication in chapter nine.

My novels are a hybrid of both high fantasy and fairy tales. In terms of high fantasy, they are set in two alternate worlds, in which in both magic is real and is treated seriously (Kuznets, 1985; Mendlesohn, 2008; Williamson, 2015). The first world is a faery world, inhabited by non-human creatures. These creatures are ones commonly found in fairy tales and high fantasy, such as trolls, goblins, fairies, elves, and dwarves. Within this non-human world, one final city remains, Ænathlin, encircled by a forest. In the high fantasy tradition, a war occurred in the distant past, resulting in the current socio-political issues of the story; in this case, the land beyond the forest is now uninhabitable for the fae (the collective name given to the non-humans). As a result, Ænathlin cannot sustain its population, having no access to materials or arable land. In order to survive, the fae must travel by (magic) Mirrors into the second world, the human world, from which they steal resources. For hundreds of years, the Mirrors have been powered via 'belief', which the fae farm and harvest via the telling of stories, using humans, often without their consent, as 'characters'. In this sense, then, the telling of stories ('Plots') is for the fae a

survival issue, as the belief generated by the stories powers the Mirrors. They are, therefore, given to thinking of the humans as no better than livestock or pawns, things to be utilised. However, at the point my narrative begins, the Mirrors are beginning to break, and, accordingly, tensions are rising in Ænathlin as access to resources is becoming harder. In the human world, Thaiana, I follow the high fantasy trope of a quasi-medieval, European feudal society. Magic exists in Thaiana, though many human cultures have begun stepping out of the medieval 'darkness', into more scientific and technologically based systems. Thus, the humans are collectively moving towards a society in which they no longer require myths and 'old wives' tales' to help them make sense of their world. It is this burgeoning enlightenment, and the resulting lack of belief in their stories, that the fae believe is causing the Mirrors to break.

This is, therefore, the central conflict of the novels. I set out to explicitly create a contrast between Gerrig's (1993) concept of the narrative world, represented by the fae, and the real world, as represented by the humans. In this, my aim was to draw to the forefront the various issues that have been discussed when considering fiction as both a cultural artefact and an experiential tool (see chapters two and three), as well as to subvert high fantasy and fairy tale tropes regarding female characterisation and representation. It was my intention to explore these issues through world-setting and character in the first articulation, and specific commentary (via the authorial voice) in the second articulation. Self-publication provided me with the freedom to do so, as I was not limited by concerns regarding genre expectation or loss of income should the books prove unpopular. I will now offer a critical reflection on my own novels, following the same analytical criteria based on the themes uncovered in *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones*.

8.1 Beauty, Femininity and Female Sexuality

Looking at the value of beauty that high fantasy tends to bestow on female characters, I work to offer an alternative reading within my novels. As discussed by Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) regarding fairy tales, Partridge (1983) with regards to *The Lord of the Rings*, and Genz (2016) regarding *A Game of Thrones/A Song of Ice and Fire*, certain ideals of feminine beauty are codified as being signifiers of virtue and status, most commonly a Caucasian, slim, young woman. To contest this, I have women of varying ages and body types within my work

and make it plain to the reader that their physical appearance is not synonymous with their value. The reader is therefore presented in the second articulation with an array of female characters whose actions and interactions with other characters, along with the manner in which their societies treat them, is not explicitly tied to their conformity to Westernised beauty standards. In terms of anthropomorphism, the reader is thus encouraged to build relationships with female characters that are not based on the notion that their appearance has a causal effect on their social value. In order to highlight this, I include explicit moments where this perception of the feminine beauty ideal is explored via the first and second articulation, making use of the traditional high fantasy authorial voice. For example, in *The Fairy's Tale*, the main protagonist, Bea, is trying to run a Plot in order to advance her career. A human, Sindy (a stand-in for Cinderella), is accordingly chosen to be the heroine of this Plot because of her beauty; she is the archetype 'maiden' or 'reward'. Naturally (as coded by the genre), it is always the beautiful women who are selected by the fae to be heroines in their Plots, underscoring a sexist reading of women's value being related to their beauty. At the beginning of her arc, it has never occurred to Bea that this is a role the woman may not *wish* to fulfil (Lee, 2015, p. 148):

> "Will you just shut up!" Bea cried. "Every beautiful girl dreams of marrying a King! It's what they're there for!"
> "Still you persist in this ridiculous fallacy? What is it you believe will happen – that your girl will kiss John [the king] and instantly fall in love with him?"
> "True Love – yes," Bea said, "that's what happens. That's why the Plots use it. Everyone knows that."

Bea must confront the reality of Sindy as an agented human being, rather than a beautiful, un-agented playing piece, in order to complete her hero's journey (to be discussed in the next section). Within the first articulation, Bea is the reader's proxy – as is common in high fantasy – and must (along with the reader) navigate her mental scripts away from the expectation that Sindy lacks her own goals and desires, separate from those Bea's Plot demands of her. Bea is accordingly forced to confront not only her implicit acceptance of the feminine beauty ideal (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003), but also her confusion over how such a beauty-value system

works when applied to female characters with goals beyond the codification of her Plot. The reader is therefore asked, in the second articulation, to question the legitimacy of Bea's assumptions and to criticise her for her closed-minded and stereotypical assumptions. As the authorial voice, I provide a critique of these codifications via Bea's own reflective journey, hopefully encouraging the reader to take that journey with her.

In terms of beauty ideals, often in high fantasy and fairy tales a female character who does not conform to Western beauty standards is codified as being either evil or ineffectual. In terms of ineffectualness, the female character's weight may be used to legitimise this: a woman who is plus-size holds no value as sexual object for the heterosexual, male hero, and thus cannot hold value within the wider structure of the genre – sex being, in high fantasy, a representative of woman's value (Genz, 2016). In my novels, two female characters are plus-size, Chokey and Bea. In the first articulation, when a character comments or considers Bea's weight negatively, that character does so out of a need to oppress Bea, and it is made plain via the second articulation that this is what is happening (as with Ashura's writing of Rector, discussed in the previous chapter). Criticism of Bea's weight in thus not condoned within my narrative world's morality, and the reader is challenged to consider why such criticism might be normalised within other (high fantasy) stories. Equally, Bea's weight is not seen as an inhibitor of her sexuality or her sexual appeal. While she herself does not seek romance as her goal, she is nevertheless not denied the prospect of being a romantic or sexual entity due to her size. Instead, where Bea is found to be attractive, this is based both on her physical appearance (she is not desired in spite of it or fetishised) and her personality (she is not valuable solely because of her attractiveness). This subverts the principle of the heterosexual male gaze confining women's value based on notions of sexual attractiveness (Genz, 2016; Partridge, 1983), and it does not refuse plus-size women the ability to be sexual. Equally, my hope is that by making my main protagonist plus-size in a narrative that does not involve her weight as a driver, I may offer a space where plus-size female characters can exist outside of the strict confines placed on female physical appearance. This is, to an extent, the same principle of subversion employed in *Thread Slivers* by having Ticca be a Dagger without a loss to her femininity or sexuality – however, where Artra deals with female physicality/sexuality in terms of fighting prowess, I examine it in terms of weight.

Remaining in the first articulation, another aspect of non-conformity to Western beauty standards by female characters is that they may be codified as evil. This trope is, I suspect, a

direct result of the way women have been presented within fairy tales, with the 'witch' or 'ugly sister' motif as a stand-out example. In *The Fairy's Tale*, Ana was written to subvert this. Ana is the ugly sister to Sindy's Cinderella character archetype. However, as the story progresses, I make it clear that while Ana may not be beautiful in the traditional sense, she is by no means an evil character. Instead, Ana is shown to be self-determined, extremely moral, and to have a high functioning sense of her value, traits that enhance her sexuality and appeal. This is shown to the reader through Ana's interactions with other characters in both of my novels, and is explicitly dealt with early on in her introduction to the reader in *The Fairy's Tale* (Lee, 2015, p. 125):

> He couldn't fathom what it was about Ana that had gained her such a fearsome reputation. Certainly, she was vocal and not afraid of disagreement, but neither was he. Her nose was big and she had a boy's figure, all height and straight lines. Was that all it took? Or was it her self-assurance? She wasn't shy in expressing her wants, but that didn't make her an intrinsically wicked person.

When writing this scene, I made the conscious choice to have Ana viewed via the male gaze of Seven (who himself is positioned within the novel as the hyper-masculine, attractive 'hero'[60]). This is not to say that this is the only scene that deals with the issue of unattractive women being wicked, nor that I feel that it is the male gaze that gives value to Ana. Rather, I felt that by breaking this down from the point of view of Seven, I would be better able to underscore the subversion. Female beauty in high fantasy is designed for the male protagonist – it is there to create a suitable reward for his labours or a good candidate for marriage (arranged or otherwise). Thus, by showing Seven reject the codification that an 'unattractive' women must be wicked, and to have him draw attention to fact that her 'fearsome reputation' might, in fact, be based on her refusal to conform to the idea that women should be humbled (Jones, 2011), I aimed to underscore the sexist codification of women within the genre (Genz, 2016). However, it could be argued that placing this explicit critique in the mind of a male character undermines a feminist

[60] Again, I intentionally subvert and criticize this representation of 'maleness', and others, in both my novels. However, this thesis is focused solely on the representations of women in high fantasy. Suffice it to say here, I am equally aware of the problematic representations of masculinity within both fairy tales and high fantasy, and use both the first and second articulations to challenge these.

reading, especially when he compares her attitude in light of his own (a statement that I included due to the self-referential nature of his character, but which could also be read as 'condoning' Ana's personality as it aligns to a man's positive view of himself). This is a risk I was aware of when I wrote the scene, and I accept that this is a potential outcome of my choice. However, the majority of my characters are female, and thus I am offered multiple opportunities to subvert and critique through their viewpoints and experiences. To not provide the same opportunities through the male characters' viewpoints and experiences would, I feel, have missed the opportunity to highlight the role that male characters (and men) play in this codification.

Regarding female sexuality, I felt it important to show representations of healthy, consensual sexual activity, absent both the biological function of fertility and also any censure of the woman for enjoying sex outside of the 'safety' of marriage. Female sexuality in high fantasy has a tendency to fall into three categories (when it is dealt with outside of its value to men). Firstly, particularly reminiscent of medieval romance and fairy tale, female sexuality is often brushed over. Women fall in love, certainly, and then, if they have earned their happy ending, they marry (Jones, 2011; Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). Secondly, a woman may use her sexuality as a means to gain safety or protection due to the medieval settings common in high fantasy (Genz, 2016), as exemplified in Daenerys' rising status amongst the khalasar once she falls pregnant. Finally, where women are shown to have sexual desires or agency, it is usually coded to denigrate the woman's social capital. In *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, representation of women's sexual appetites are coded within the narrative in rather alarming ways, as with Shelob, the giant spider (Partridge, 1983), for example. I aimed to subvert these limited and limiting representations of female sexuality. In *A Fairy's Tale,* Sindy is the instigator of sexual acts with her paramour, Will. As Sindy is coded as the traditional 'maiden' and 'reward', the fact that she is seen not only to have sexual desires but to act on them is in direct conflict to the representation of 'good' women being chaste. At no point in the novel is she chastised either within the first articulation by other characters for this or in the second articulation via the authorial voice. Equally, Ana has sex with Seven and is shown to be as sexually confident and in control of the situation as he is. Theirs is a coupling that is entirely equal in terms of experience and desire, unlike Daenerys' (*A Game of Thrones*) initial sexual experiences, nor her emancipation as a result (Larsson, 2016). In this way, I hoped to again follow Jackson's (1981) advice that a reader should be challenged by a fantasy text to evaluate

social norms. Ana's attitude and sexual confidence, combined with her knowledge that she will face no censure for her actions in the first articulation, help to promote within the second articulation the principle that women can engage in sexual activities without suffering any social or psychological harm.

In the same vein, I also wished to show women enjoying both sex and intimacy within a relationship built on equality and mutual respect – the modern understanding of marriage, as Larsson (2016) describes. Thus, I include a scene between Joan and Delphine in which the two women have just finished having sex and are shown hugging while discussing their love for each other and the current issues at play within the larger plot of the novel. While Delphine and Joan are not married, it is made clear that they care for each other deeply, and that in the second novel (in which this scene occurs) they are in a committed relationship. Additionally, Bea is shown in both *The Fairy's Tale* and *The Academy* to have a sexual past, choosing, however, to prioritise her career over serious romantic entanglements. This sexual experience is highlighted in her interactions with Mistasinon, her possible love interest. Bea is much more 'worldly wise' than he is, having experienced more sexual partners. However, again as a subversion to concepts that a woman who has had multiple sexual partners forfeits her social capital, at no point is Bea censured for her experience, communicating the same to the reader via both the first and second articulations. Finally, it was important to me to show the women could be in positive relationships with men that are not sexual, nor based on the (heterosexual) man's desire for them. The expectation that men and women who share a space must end up in a sexual and/or romantic relationship with each other is one I set out to subvert, through the evolving relationship between Bea and Seven, and Bea and Luca's friendship.

Thus, in multiple ways, I aimed to show that sex within a high fantasy world does not need to be used as a marker of a woman's capital, but instead can be embarked upon for a number of reasons, including romantic and/or pleasurable. Equally, I wished to show that women who have sex can do so casually, without censure from others, nor with the assumption that casual sex for women risks loss of capital. Sex is, therefore, a personal and not a social act, and the way that the women in my novels choose to explore their sexuality is simply one aspect of their character, not the definition of it.

8.2 Syntagmatic Structures and Character Archetypes

In terms of structures and character archetypes, there are two frameworks which I have brought to the fore: the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949/2004) and the female bildungsroman structure highlighted by Jones (2011). Both of these structures see the protagonist undergoing various trials before reaching their finishing point, but differ significantly in detail. In the hero's journey, the protagonist begins from a place of safety and comfort, before being drawn into the narrative conflict. They meet a mentor who guides them through unfolding events, along with allies and enemies. The hero undergoes various trials, both externally and internally, before finally seizing the reward and returning home (either literally or metaphorically) wiser. The female bildungsroman arc which Jones (2011) notes, however, sees the female protagonist go through a series of ultimately failed experiences before reaching their final state of submission, ready for marriage. I intentionally drew explicit and critical attention to these structures, my hope being that by confronting these representations I could present an alternative to these "gendered scripts" (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 711) in which the often male protagonist enjoys the hero's journey, while the female protagonist is left with Jones' (2011) female bildungsroman arc. This builds on the principle that taking a critical stance towards master-narratives encourages scepticism regarding the certainty or reliability of those narratives and of the sense of a 'universal truth', something which Lyotard (1984/1993) and Shepherd (2013) argue for.

I attempt this confrontation in two ways, utilising both the first and second articulation. Regarding the first articulation, I created a world in which it is both appropriate and expected to have the non-human characters (the fae) discuss the natures of stories. This allows the opportunity to raise and discuss structural tropes without displacing the logic of the narrative world, nor, hopefully, negating the reader's transportation. Thus, Bea's hero's journey is in part her overcoming the harmful power of the female bildungsroman arc she is responsible for perpetuating. This provides me with the opportunity, in the second articulation, to have Bea's test (step 6 of the hero's journey) be to challenge the control such rigid and implicit structures hold. When Bea enters the cave to later emerge changed (step 7), she does so by risking her life to rescue Sindy from the step in the bildungsroman arc in which the female character fails her "rebellious autonomy" and thus regresses "from full societal participation in order to actualize the inconsequential status of the female self" (Jones, 2011, p. 440). This is both a literal entering

of the cave (as I set the scene in a cave) and a psychological one. Bea has realised, through her trials, that the female bildungsroman arc she has tried to force onto Sindy is not only extremely harmful but also not what Sindy herself wishes. Thus, this also encompasses Bea's ordeal (step 8) of the hero's journey, as she must face not only the damage she has done to others but also the manner in which she herself has been manipulated by such structures.

Thus, the mirroring of structures in my novels is intentional. By having Bea follow the stages of the traditional hero's journey and by having her hero's journey be an explicit interrogation of the female bildungsroman arc (Jones, 2011), the reader is asked to consider how such a structure can result in harmful representations of women's just endings. For example, the need for Sindy to marry speaks to the codification that for women there is only one 'happy ending', marriage, or that women can be used as bargaining chips via marriage to cement allegiances (or, in this case, gain Bea her promotion). Accordingly, I was able to overtly explore the effects of having the bildungsroman arc forced upon female characters. In this scene from *The Fairy's Tale*, Sindy is reflecting on the fact she is now expected to submit and marry the hero (Lee, 2015, p. 180):

> It would be a lot easier if she would just fall in love with the King. Wasn't that what happened – love at first sight? But, Sindy reflected, scrubbing the plate so hard it squeaked, I have met him. And I'm not in love with him. I don't really think anything about him.

In the first articulation, Sindy is caught between what she genuinely wants, what her social and cultural 'training' has taught her she should desire, and what Bea is trying to force her into; she is feeling the effects of the female bildungsroman arc. External to Sindy's own thought process, this is not a dramatic moment. Sindy is washing the dishes, trying to make sense of her conflicted emotions. Thus, in the first articulation, Sindy is in a position of cognitive distress, but it is a quiet moment, and a safe one. By setting it this way, I hoped to create a moment that reflects an 'every day' experience of dealing with internal conflict, something which would position Sindy as a real person within her world, helping to anthropomorphise her (Gardener & Knowles, 2008; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). Equally, I wanted to convert the syntagmatic

structure that part of the heroine's trials is that she must be humbled (Tatar, 1985; Jones, 2011). Instead, Sindy is considering whether or not she wishes to marry at all, in an environment in which she is both in control of and secure within. Therefore, instead of the narrative structure humbling Sindy, she is investigating the principle of marriage; indeed, *she* is humbling the proposition. Thus, in the second articulation, by showing Sindy's attempt to navigate the conflict between her desires and the pressure from both Bea and her narrative world's cultural expectation for her to submit and 'marry well', I set out to prompt the same reflection in the reader. This hopefully draws attention to both the master narrative (Lyotard, 1984/1993) represented in this idea of marriage being a woman's reward (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003; Schubart, 2016; Dundes, 1997), but also prompts questions regarding the reader's own cultivation (Appel, 2008) or possible habitus/ cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2000).

As already stated, these structures help cultivate the spread of just world beliefs, which in turn strengthen narrative persuasion in the reader and can alter real-world beliefs (Appel, 2008; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013). Indeed, looked at logically, such 'happy endings' are as harmful for the male protagonist as they are the female. This is a point picked up by Tater (1985, p. 37), who remarks:

> In "Cinderella," for instance, even the bridegroom – for all the dashing chivalry attributed to him by Walt Disney and others – remains a colorless figure. The tale tells us nothing more about him than that he is the son of a king. Lacking a history, a story, and even a name, he is reduced to the mere function of prince-rescuer waiting in the wings for his cue.

Taking advantage of the fantasy setting to have the fae impose such stories on the humans as the central conflict of the novels allows me to explore these issues, as shown in this speech from *The Fairy's Tale*. Bea is confronted by another character with the inherent injustice of her 'just' narrative (a confrontation that mirrors her internal struggle, but which she has not yet had the courage to face head-on) (Lee, 2015, p. 180):

> "Kings, Princes and their ilk must marry girls whose only asset is their beauty. Not clever girls, not worthy girls, not girls who could rule. Powerful women, older women – like one day you will become – are nought but wicked creatures, consumed with jealousy and unfit to hold position. No," he said as Bea began to speak, "I am not finished. Let us turn our attention to the men. As long as the woman is something to be won, it follows only the worthy will prevail. It matters not if they truly love the girl, nor if the man is cruel or arrogant or unfit to tie his own doublet. As long as he has wealth and completes whatever trials are decided fit, he is suitable. For what is stupidity or arrogance when compared against a crown? The good will win, and the wicked perish, and you and your stories decide what makes a person good or wicked. Not life. Not choice. Not even common sense. You."

I aimed, therefore, to make the point via both the first and second articulation that it is the story and the social norms and expectations codified within it that dictate these 'happy endings', perpetuated (largely) uncritically across generations via contagious transmission (Cheverud & Cavalli-Sforza, 1986) (see chapter two). Building on this, I deal explicitly with the repetition of structures and character archetypes in *The Academy.* In this second novel, I examine the dangers of repetition of structures and the resulting normative control such repetition exhorts, as explained by cultivation theory (Appel, 2008) and the habitus/doxa dynamic (Bourdieu, 2000). Equally, I set out to explore how these concepts can become codified via the monomyth (Campbell, 1949/2004), syntagmatic structures like those highlighted by Propp's (1968) morphology (or indeed Mendlesohn's (2008) categories of high fantasy), and mythemes (Levi-Strauss, in Barthes, 1975). *The Academy* picks up immediately after the ending of *The Fairy's Tale*, in which Bea's hero's journey was completed with her rescuing Sindy from the female bildungsroman arc, and Bea returned home wiser, with the knowledge that such structures are potentially harmful (step 12 of the hero's journey). In *The Academy,* the fae have found a way to deal with the humans (the 'characters') no longer wanting to participate in their stories. To

counter the humans' refusal to participate, the fae have begun to brainwash them, removing their ability to choose whether to be in the stories or not.

Again, I utilise a hybrid structural approach of fairy tale and high fantasy to continue to ask readers, within the context of the narrative world, to re-examine these syntagmatic structures. However, in *The Academy* I do not draw on one specific fairy tale (as I did in *The Fairy's Tale - Cinderella*), but rather I draw on a motif in which the female protagonists willingly gives up her voice (ATU 451). This is a concept again tied to the female bildungsroman arc, in which the dominant ideal of the past (and, perhaps, still the present) is a woman's silence, representing decorum and passivity. In *The Academy,* I highlight this motif by exploring the inherent horror of stripping a character of one of their most basic and fundamental methods of personal agency: communication. In *The Academy,* the fae have begun mentally altering human women to make them more compliant, so that they will participate in their stories willingly. This plot point was necessary as, within the internal logic set up in my novels, I was unable to remove characters' voices magically, as often occurs in fairy tales. Therefore, I instead had the fae 'mute' the human women's personalities, a process called 'Redaction', leaving them compliant and unquestioning. My intention was that while these women can still speak, they do not, in fact, have any agency with which to charge their voices. An example of this is shown here, when Bea meets a Redacted protagonist about to begin her role as heroine[61] (Lee, 2016, pp. 232-3):

> "Are you quite sure you understand?" she [Bea] said to the girl. "You're agreeing to seven years of servitude, to having your mouth sewn shut… it's a bit-" *insane, barbaric, stupid* "-extreme, don't you think?"
>
> "that sounds fine [sic[62]]," Dionne said again, still smiling.
>
> Bea felt her patience flicker, like a candle on the last of its wax.
>
> "How about… how about instead of sewing your lips shut and basically selling yourself into slavery, you go and work for the troll

[61] Jorgensen (2014) offers an interpretation of this tale type (ATU 451) in which the female protagonists' silence could be read as an act agency – that by refusing to speak, the various women in this tale type are exercising their power within the narrative confines of the story. While this is an interesting interpretation and offers good points of discussion, ultimately, I find myself of the position that the silencing of women is counter to a feminist reading. Equally, this interpretation does not account for tales in which the woman's voice is forcibly removed, such as *The Little Mermaid*.

[62] In order to show the absence of personality in the Redacted women's speech, I refrained from capitalisation.

> for a set number of hours every day, but promise not to speak unless spoken to?"
>
> Bea wasn't entirely happy with this suggestion either, but it had to be better than what the Plot demanded.
>
> Dionne's smile faltered. "but that isn't what i am supposed to do."
>
> […] "it is a noble sacrifice to save my brothers," Dionne said, rallying. Her smiled returned, full strength.

In the first articulation, Bea has grown as a result of her hero's journey in the first novel. She is now critical of the Plots the fae use, and is actively seeking to change them (her new quest). However, Bea is still a product of the culture she seeks to change, and so she is seeking ways to affect this change using the tools her cultural framework provides her – as might we all (Bourdieu, 2000; Casanova, 2010). This is, I hope, therefore an experience that the reader, the invisible eavesdropper, will be able to empathise with. Breaking out of one's own habitus is hard to do, something which Bourdieu (2000) recognises, advising that in order to learn one's habitus and its influences, one should engage in deep reflection into the self, as well as travel and/or engage in higher education, in order to learn about one's own culture's habitus 'from the outside', as it were. This is also why the main setting for *The Academy* is a school[63]. In the second articulation, my aim was to bring to the foreground the reality of removing from female heroines their 'voice' and their agency. I attempt this by contrasting docile, Redacted Dionne's compliance with Bea's incomprehension and horror at the expectation the story has for her. By exploring this issue through the eyes on someone 'inside' the system (Bea), I hope to place the reader in the same position. Through transportation, the reader is asked to empathise with Bea's reaction rather than to view the story from the point of view of Dionne, in which the original narrative emphasises the girl's silence as a sign of virtue and for which she is ultimately rewarded with marriage. In this way, my hope was to highlight tropes that may have been unwittingly accepted by the reader via cultivation theory and habitus, and also to draw attention to the master narratives that such motifs or syntagmatic structures represent. For example, Bea explains the implications of Redaction to her friend, Joan (Lee, 2016, p. 258):

[63] It is also my aim in later novels is to have Bea embark on a journey, in which she will be offered opportunities to experience her culture from the outside, looking in.

> "It's a war, in a way. A war fought in the mind. Ha. A war fought with thoughts. And with Redacted protagonists, we have the ultimate weapon. They don't complain. They don't ask questions. They just follow the Plot. The GenAm could probably even *reuse* them. Marry one hero and then on to the next, no waiting! The Redacted characters wouldn't know any different, I'll bet. They're empty – empty protagonists, just moving through the story."

My intention in this scene is to draw the reader's attention via the second articulation to both the structural expectation of docility as regards female fairy tale/high fantasy characters, but also the habitual and repetitive nature of the such motifs. Bea's realisation that it is her culture, her world, that is perpetuating such harm to the human 'characters' is intended to signify to the reader, via anthropomorphism and transportation, that they too should be critical of such constructs. In this scene, subtext is made text, as Bea talks explicitly about the habitual and often repeated nature of such narratives, absent critical rebuttal. As Zipes (1988) notes, by including unexpected elements in the narrative, the reader is asked to re-examine and reconsider the meaning and function of the 'original' message. I am able to engage in this type of re-examination of archetypal structures for female characters due to the nature of the narrative world I have created, one in which the telling of stories serves as a meta-device to explore the nature of storytelling itself. Without the use of the high fantasy, otherworld setting, and the freedom granted to me by self-publication, this type of exploration may not have been possible.

As stated, my aim is to engage Bea with her experiential journey within the narrative, through the stages of the hero's journey. As she is faced with evidence that undermines the syntagmatic structures she engages with, she comes to re-evaluate the same. She is pushed out of her habitus, and in so doing is forced to re-evaluate the master narratives (Lyotard, 1984/1993) of her culture, which she has become unreflective or even unaware of. Bea is aided in this re-evaluation by reflecting on her own life experiences, which provide her with a counter-narrative to that which she has previously believed: that the stories are harmless. In this way, Bea is also engaging critically with her own life and, rather than continuing to manipulate real-life events to fit into her just world belief as some people might (Appel, 2008; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby

& Johnston, 2013), she begins to take stock. In the first articulation, therefore, Bea is forced via her experiences and growing knowledge of her world to critically analyse concepts and ideologies which she has always, passively, taken to be true. In this, I hope to mirror the fact that readers are not, by default at least, critically aware or evaluative when reading, as shown by Djikic et al. (2009), but rather, that engaging in this criticality takes conscious effort and can be personally challenging.

The reader is undertaking this journey with Bea, seeing and experiencing the world through Bea's understanding, as is common in high fantasy due to the other-world setting (Mendlesohn, 2008). This will, I hope, via transportation, also encourage my reader to partake in the same journey themselves – or, at least, make them aware in the second articulation of the problematic nature of the bildungsroman arc for female characters in narratives. Equally, by highlighting these issues to the reader via the stages of the hero's journey, schematically known due to its status as a master narrative (Lyotard, 1984/1993), I aim to make plain issues of narrative persuasion, such as just world beliefs (Appel, 2008; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013) and the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007), resulting from the subtle, habitual thought processes that are propagated via the repeated retelling of harmful structures and character archetypes. Finally, by placing Bea on the traditional hero's journey, I am able to showcase a female character in a high fantasy setting not subjugated to the female bildungsroman arc (Jones, 2011), enhancing this with the inclusion of a cast of multiple female characters.

8.3 The Naïve Protagonist: Female Friendships/Mentorships

Bea begins her journey in the state of uncritical dependence described by Mendlesohn (2008) expected of the high fantasy protagonist, believing in the received wisdom provided by the rules of her society. However, where this system is represented in the form of sexual oppression for Daenerys or social conformity to female behaviour for Arya (and Sansa), for Bea it is a result of the prevailing social structure which oppresses fairies, including Bea herself. However, while it is true that Bea initially lacks the insight or the tools to critique her society, she is nevertheless aware that something is wrong, and is openly critical of her culture insofar as

it affects *her*[64]. Thus, in the high fantasy tradition (Mendlesohn, 2008), there are negative or problematic aspects to her world that Bea does not (as yet) have the tools to challenge effectively. This conflict places Bea, in the first articulation, in a position of flux, jointly accepting and denying the overall cultural narrative of her world. Likewise, due to Bea's initial, rather selfish outlook, the reader is asked in the second articulation to be on their guard, to be aware that all is not as clear-cut as it appears, and to maintain a 'healthy suspicion' in terms of any received 'facts' regarding the narrative world they have been transported to. As Bea is exposed to counter-narratives, she comes to consciously and deliberately question the reliability of her world and those authority figures within it, as well as her own biases, and the reader is, vicariously, also asked to question such. Essentially, I wished to create a narrative in which the naïve protagonist (and potentially the reader) becomes shrewd.

In this, I hope to mirror the progression that Tater observes can occur for the naïve, male (but *not* female) protagonist, namely that "in fairy tales, naiveté can translate into cunning" (1985, p. 40). This also serves as a challenge to the medieval romance and its representation of women as inactive agents in their narratives, as well as the high fantasy standard that they be responsive to male interpretations or patriarchal social norms regarding their behaviour. Bea is shown to the reader to be both psychologically and intellectually situated in her world, to interact with it and to effect change and be changed. The reader is encouraged through anthropomorphic empathy to gain a similar experience, to practice and learn from Bea's emotional and intellectual journey, and to recognise that women can traverse such complex domains. Thus, in the second articulation, the reader is aware that Bea continually develops critical awareness of the habitus and social capital of her world. Moreover, in a deviation from the 'club story', in which a naïve protagonist and thus the reader are reliant on outside information to explain the world and to provide a moral coding of it (Mendlesohn, 2008), Bea must re-evaluate for herself the information she receives. She must question the 'club' if she is to progress her quest to its conclusion. In this, I hoped to challenge the concept that a protagonist must be naïve to their world in order to be the hero of the text. Rather, Bea is in part awarded the status of hero because

[64] She is not, crucially, critical outside of her own domain at the beginning of her arc. She must learn to recognise the oppression felt by others.

she has chosen to disabuse herself of her naivety; she has challenged herself to pay attention to her world and to evaluate what she sees in order to diminish her credulity[65].

However, while Bea is able to think independently, this does not mean that she is without mentor figures, a common necessity in high fantasy as a result of the naïve protagonist trope (Mendlesohn, 2008). However, for female characters this mentorship tends to come with gender-related conditions: "Fairy tale heroes receive gifts and assistance once they actively prove their compassion and humility; heroines, in contrast, become the beneficiaries of helpers and rescuers only after they have been abased and forced to learn humility" (Tatar, 1985, p. 38). So, while in my novels I wished to avoid placing Bea (and the reader) in a permanently uncritical state (Mendlesohn, 2008), I did wish to include mentor figures who are able to teach Bea without repressing her. Thus, Bea has multiple mentors, male and female: her friends Melly and Joan (both female) in both novels, and, in *A Fairy's Tale*, her antagonist, Seven (male), and in *The Academy*, Chokey (female) and Hemmings (male). This inclusion of multiple mentors is a deliberate choice and subversion of the club story (Mendlesohn, 2008), in which the protagonist is reliant on one source of information to provide them with their understanding of the world. By giving Bea numerous sources of information (including information from an antagonist) about the world, its morality and its dangers, Bea is, in the first articulation, once again asked to critically evaluate the information she receives. This information is not always reliable, and thus Bea's ability to critique it is paramount to her success in the completion of her quest(s). Bea's female mentors are also her friends, and thus there is complexity as regards their motives regarding the information they pass on or withhold (are they trying to protect her?)

Therefore, while Bea is on an equal interpersonal footing with Melly, Joan, and Chokey, and as such another aspect of the naïve protagonist/club story is adapted and subverted, she must

[65] In this sense, it might be more accurate to argue that the story I have written is what Mendlesohn (2008) would class as an Immersive Fantasy. The distinction Mendlesohn gives between a Portal-Quest Fantasy (high fantasy) and an Immersive Fantasy is not one of structure, per se, but rather of the protagonist's interaction with their world. In the Immersive Fantasy, the protagonist is questioning and does not accept the received wisdom of their mentor figure, nor the infallibility of prophecy or mystic scroll to provide solutions to problems. However, as an author, I was consciously engaging within the tropes of high fantasy: Bea may well be a character from what Mendlesohn classes as Immersive Fantasy, but she inhabits a Portal-Quest Fantasy world, in which those characters who surround her are 'playing by' those rules. Thus, while Bea is, possibly, an antagonist in her world despite being the protagonist of her story, many of the other characters follow the normal set of rules laid out in the Portal-Quest's definition of character: they are working on received wisdom, and the sense that the 'Kingdom' (*their* Kingdom) must be preserved and/or saved. Equally, working under definitions of high fantasy given by others (for example Williamson, (2015) or Kuznets (1985)), my novels fall within the scope of high fantasy: it is set in other, medieval proxy worlds, and in which magic is normal and treated seriously. Nevertheless, while I do not hold this position myself, I accept that for some my own attempt to subvert the high fantasy's traditional protagonist-is-naïve trope might in fact have negated my own work as a high fantasy piece, moving it into either Mendlesohn's Immersive Fantasy (2008) or, perhaps, satire.

still carefully consider their motives. For example, despite their friendship, Bea does not automatically agree with Melly, and her relationship with her and the advice and information she provides must also navigated. This presents a complex picture of female relationships, absent the harmful and simplistic assumption in fairy tale and medieval romance, carried over in *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones*, that women's natural state is one of rivalry, one which is more often built on their sexual value to men (for example Larsson, 2016). In sum, these mentor roles are designed to place both Bea and the reader in a more critical state, whilst maintaining the reader's transportation in the narrative world. It is not the reader explicitly who is being asked to be cautious and evaluative of information, but rather they are watching Bea, their proxy, be so. In this way, Bea's final happy ending is tied explicitly to her ability to judge the world around her and to use multiple sources of evidence to form that judgement. In regards to just world beliefs (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013), I hope to have set up a structure (repeated across both novels) that implies that criticality, rather than naivety, is one of the indicators that a just ending has occurred. Accordingly, it is possible that via transportation (Gerrig, 1993), and anthropomorphism (Epley, et al., 2007; Gardener & Knowles, 2008), I can encourage my readers to value critical, analytical female protagonists over naïve ones, whilst at the same time displacing naivety as distinct issue related to 'girlishness', as evidenced by Tatar's (1985) analysis of mentor/female character relationships.

Finally, my aim was to showcase positive female relationships within my novels. As mentioned in the section above regarding female sexuality, two of my characters are lesbians in a healthy and mutually respectful relationship. However, while I wanted to represent this aspect of female sexuality, I did not wish to suggest, nor to frame, female companionship as being possible only in terms of contented, same-sex romantic partnerships. As such, I am conscious of showing friendship amongst my female characters, both as they relate to Bea as the protagonist, but also independently of her, for example in scenes between Melly and Joan or Sindy and Ana. Having female characters be friends with each other does not negate any possibility for narrative tension, either. While conflict is certainly a key aspect of fiction, this conflict does not need to be couched in enmity. Friends disagree. Bea and Melly hold very different worldviews regarding culture and politics, and these differences create tension and risk for them both. Neither wishes to lose the friendship and yet there are strong ideological difference between them which they must navigate. Thus, with regards to the second articulation, I aimed for greater variety of female

representation, in a world in which women interact with each other in nuanced and complex ways. While *The Lord of the Rings* has four women of note within the cast, which numbers in the hundreds, in my own works the weighting between male and female characters is more equal; if anything, it leans more in favour of the female characters. By including more women, it is easier to include different personalities and relationships, and to show women working at and negotiating their friendships, absent a male centre. By allowing greater space for women, I am also able to show women with varied objectives, personalities and flaws. In this, I hoped to move away from the dichotomy of femininity/masculinity presented in the relationship between women coded by medieval romance into high fantasy, such as we see regarding Arya and Sansa Stark in *A Game of Thrones* (Larsson, 2016). Moreover, by increasing the number of women present in my work, I can reduce the chances of any one woman being considered a representative or 'proxy' for the entire sex. When fewer characters are presented, there is a greater burden on them to 'speak for' their cohort, rather than be seen as individuals (reminiscent of Haarstrup's (2016) point about individuality versus the importance of family in medieval/high fantasy literature). By offering more numerous examples of female characters and their relationships, they are no longer placed in a position in which they are unique within the narrative and thus their actions becoming coda for the actions and interactions of women more widely.

8.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made reference to my own self-published high fantasy novels to highlight how, as an individual author and self-identifying feminist, I have sought to challenge and critique high fantasy norms (based on fairy tale and medieval romance) as regards women's representation. Not being subject to concerns over marketability or costs of production that can hamper traditional publishing houses, I was granted the freedom via self-publication to explore these issues with only my own financial outlay and reputation at risk. This is, I suggest, one of the strengths of self-publishing, as it makes it easier to tell stories which critique or subvert. For example, an archetype commonly found in both fairy tales and high fantasy, present in both *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones*, is that of the feminine beauty ideal. In my novels, *A Warrior's Path*, and *Thread Slivers*, this trope is subverted in numerous ways, presenting the

reader with an alternative interpretation of the genre in both the first and second articulations, diverting from the codification of female characters that has become embedded in high fantasy (see chapters four-six). Equally, female friendships, something which in the medieval romance tradition of high fantasy are largely absent, are showcased in all four self-published novels, though admittedly less explicitly in *Thread Slivers*. By presenting women as supportive of each other, as opposed to being rivals (often a result of sexist perceptions of their value to men), readers are given an example of positive relationships between women which are not dictated by the male gaze. Moreover, all four self-published novels discussed, above, subvert both the bildungsroman arc for women (Jones, 2011) and the principle of female mentorship (Tatar, 1985) which seek to oppress women characters. Of course, it is not possible to say that high fantasy stories are responsible for *all* the negative effects felt by women as a result of beauty standards and the rivalries such standards may produce. Nor is it the case that traditionally published high fantasy novels cannot, and do not, subvert the issues discussed, something which has been highlighted throughout. However, in light of the understandings gained regarding narrative persuasion (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Djikic, et al., 2009; Prentice, et al., 1997) and the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007), it is equally important that the potential self-publishing offers to counter these narratives without the risks posed to traditional publishing houses is not dismissed outright.

Still, at this juncture I feel it prudent to acknowledge where, on reflection, I have failed to subvert effectively some of the issues laid out thus far. Whetter (2016, p. 11) candidly notes that "most of the theorists who claim that all literary genres are ideologically determined also claim, implicitly or explicitly, to be themselves exempt from the dominant ideology", and I include myself within this censure. Most notably, I recognise that my cast is overwhelmingly white, following the Euro-centric portrayals of characters in both fairy tales and high fantasy. While writing *The Fairy's Tale*, I was very much focused on opposing those tropes of female characterisation that result in high fantasy as a result of its influence by Tolkien, and Tolkien's own roots in fairy tale and medieval romance. However, in much the same way Casanova (2009) discusses, I too am tangled in those cultural knots I seek to unpick. As a white, European woman and a life-long fan of fantasy, I initially only noted those issues within the genre that impacted on and shaped my own experience. As a result, I failed to observe the Caucasian-normative ideology that exists in these works, reproducing them, uncritically, in my own. This resulted in

only one principal character of colour in both my novels, and only one character of colour *at all* in my first novel. Thus, while I am arguing that self-publication allowed me the freedom to challenge the status quo, it did not automatically remove my ingrained perception of fantasy worlds, principally in terms of racial demographics. This is an issue, however, that I have begun to address. While I feel I cannot now change the ethnicity of characters already created, I am introducing more people of colour into the narrative world, both as principal and peripheral characters, in the hope of redressing my initial, habitual biases and frames, unexamined when starting out. As Barthes (1975, p. 238) states, echoing Casanova (2009), "no one can produce a narrative without referring himself to an implicit set of systems and rules." In my own case, I would say that those rules are present in my failure to create a multiracial cast straight off the bat.

Nevertheless, I have aspired to address a number of problematic representational tropes as regards women in high fantasy, and I have the freedom of my publication methods to address those areas where I have been lacking. The decision to self-publish was, for me, a relatively easy one. I enjoy the freedom that the process provides, and my goal in self-publication was not, perhaps prudently, to make money or to see my novels on bookshelves. Rather, I simply wish to participate in a genre that I love, in a way that I find to be ideologically compatible with my own politics and values. In not being subjected to the concerns of the market and being, therefore, able to write 'off-piste' as regards the traditional codifications of women in high fantasy and fairy tales, I have, hopefully, gone some way towards reframing women within the genre and thus, as Zipes (1988) and Jackson (1981) recommend, challenging my readers' expectations of the same. However, it is also important to note that my novels have not achieved the high volumes of readership, and thus cultural reach, that they may have done had they had the benefit of the publishing industry behind them. Equally, they may not carry with them the same perception of quality or legitimacy that a traditionally published novel enjoys. As Baverstock & Steinitz (2013a, p. 1) note, "Self-publishing has continued to attract simplistic coverage and sweeping generalizations – perceptions perhaps based an [sic] experience of badly self-published material and a consequent deduction about the value or merit of other material produced in the same way; an instinctive prejudice or fear of the process; or personal success in achieving a publishing arrangement through a conventional publisher." Despite this, however, self-publication is a growing industry (Author Earnings, 2017; Baverstock, 2012), with an increasing

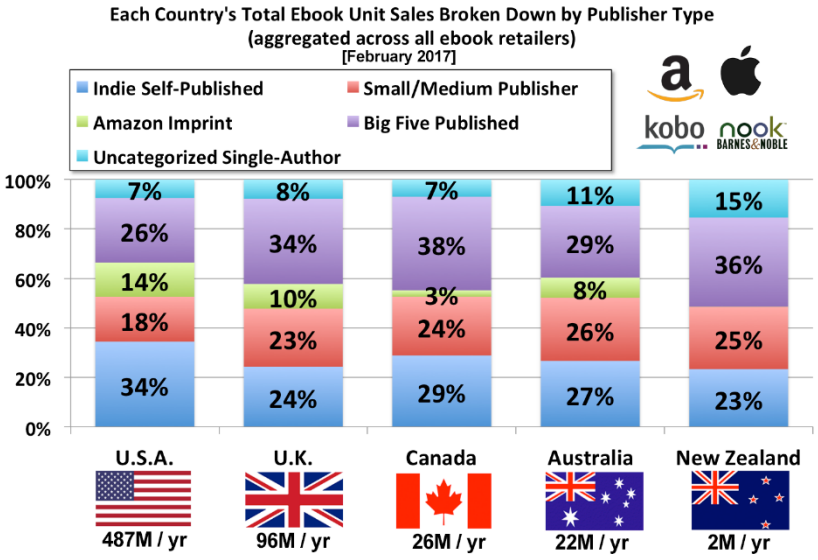
market share. In the next chapter, therefore, I will look more closely at self-publication as an industry, and the shifts in power it represents by allowing widening participation in the literary field.

9. Some Considerations Regarding Self-publishing

Once thought of as 'vanity publication', self-publication has, in fact, a number of renowned authors who have chosen it as an option to reach readers during their careers. Charles Dickens self-published *A Christmas Carol* as a result of being displeased with the sales of his previous, traditionally published novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*; poet Walt Whitman self-published (and self-typeset) *Leaves of Grass* (Wirestone, 2013). Frank L. Baum, author of the *Wizard of Oz* books, self-published earlier works, practical guidebooks on subjects from keeping chickens to interior decoration (Winkler, 2014). Beatrix Potters self-published *The Tailor of Gloucester* and *Peter Rabbit*, deciding "to take control of her own future after getting fed up of receiving rejection letters from publishers" (Armistead, 2013). Indeed, in an article for the Independent, Patterson (2012) lists the following authors as self-publishing novels at some point in the careers: Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust, Laurence Stern, Martin Luthor and Emily Dickenson.

One might wonder why, then, with such illustrious names attached to it, self-publishing has been considered 'vanity' work; books published by people with the money and/or will to do it themselves but without, necessarily, the talent to attract a traditional publishing house. The terrane is complex due, in the most part to the context of self-publication prior to the advent of the internet. For example, while Dickens did self-publish *A Christmas Carol* in response to what he felt was poor management of his previous novel, he ended up making only a very marginal profit himself (Wirestone, 2013). Frank Baum's self-published guidebooks were not the works that would catapult him to literary fame, and, Winkler (2014) states, it is unlikely that any but the most dedicated of fans will have read them. Beatrix Potter was able to initially self-publish only 250 copies of *Peter Rabbit;* however, such was the success of this book that she was picked up by one of the publishing houses that originally turned her down, bringing Peter and his adventures into the mainstream (Armistead, 2013). Thus, while historically one might have been able to self-publish (technically, at least; the financial outlay was not inconsiderable), reaching readers was an entirely different proposition. As Winkler (2014) comments when discussing the literary greats who chose to self-publish, "the efforts of those who did self-publish were usually peripheral to their careers and eventual success."

However, the advent of the internet and advances in the creation of 'hard copy' novels (print on demand) has allowed self-publication to undergo something of a revolution and, possibly, enfranchisement – both regarding the financial outlay required by authors and in terms of easier distribution and the resulting gaining of readers and fans (and, in some cases, recognition from the aforementioned literary field – traditional publishing houses – to be discussed below). Self-publication is becoming a common, even preferred, method for writers to produce and share their work, absent the various processes prescribed in the traditional publication model (chapter one). As Kular notes (in Carolan & Evain, 2013, p. 286), "[t]he low costs and low risks associated with self-publishing makes it easier for authors to publish their own documents. Compared to the user-friendly self-publishing workflow, the traditional publishing marketplace exists as a highly structured environment with strict requirements for publishing protocol". Indeed, self-publishing is a growing field in North America, Europe and Asia (Hinke, 2001) with both the UK and the USA accounting for the largest markets (Author Earnings, 2017)[66] (the advent of affordable e-readers no doubt fuelling this rise). Self-published novels account for a significant portion of the market share as regards e-publishing in 2017, especially in the USA and the UK (Author Earnings, 2017), building on the same trend from 2016 (Author Earnings, 2016):



[66] Author Earnings is an independent website that tracks books sales globally across both e-publishing and traditional publishing, gathering data on self-published, independently published and traditionally published works.

(Fig 1., Author Earnings, 2017)

However, there appears to be some conflict regarding the overall legitimacy of self-published novels, including issues of perceived quality. "Self-publishing often suffers from a simplistic, and usually over-dramatic, response. Journalists announce too frequently that it heralds the death of publishing. Academics meanwhile assume that, in the words of Sellar and Yeatman, it is a 'bad thing'" (Baverstock, 2012, p. 42). As Hinke said in 2001, e-books will only be successful if there is acceptance of them, from both the publishing industry and readers. Judging by sales generally, this acceptance seems to be growing from a public perspective, though with regards to the publishing field (e.g., critics, commentators, opinion formers, awards, and book reviewers), this acceptance is still not universal.

For example, the website Best Fantasy Books dedicates a page of its content to the best self-published fantasy novels, but with the caveat that "If you start reading enough self published [sic] fantasy, you'll see why not everyone who has a novel in them should share that novel with the public […] For every hidden jewel, you'll have to dig through a lot of dirt" (Best Fantasy Books, 2017). Traditionally published author Ros Barber (2016) laments the fact that she makes little money, but also states she would never self-publish, despite the higher royalties offered. Her reasons for this relate to the time taken away from writing due to the need to personally market a self-published novel, while also noting that self-published authors may suffer from the lack of gatekeeping provided by traditional publication, echoing the comments made by Best Fantasy Books. Additionally, Barber notes that self-published authors are generally excluded from a number of well-recognised literary awards, such as the Costa Awards, the Man Booker, or the Baileys. The fact that self-published novels are excluded from a number of 'serious' awards is a major handicap to the field, but reflects the complex dynamic between capital and habitus: "the belief in the value of the work […] is part of the full reality of the work of art" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 36). This is part of the issue around field maintenance, as discussed in chapter one. Awards exist in order to validate certain works, but in so doing they also validate the *type* of work and the *production* that creates it. Not only that, but the very nature of critical acclaim infers on the critic not only the power to elevate a work, but also the right to do so (Bourdieu, 1993). Capital is afforded to the critic, to the novel, and also to the system that bestows that capital. Thus, considering the fact that self-publication still carries a stigma – "assumptions of

negativity" as Baverstock & Steinitz (2013b, p. 1) describe it – the fact that the industry is growing may appear to be counter-intuitive.

This is a rather complex issue to attempt to untangle, not least due to a lack of research regarding self-publication. Taking the term self-publishing and self-publication to refer to e-publication via distribution channels such as Amazon, iBooks and Kobo, self-publishing is a relatively new phenomenon in terms of DIY publication. Accordingly, there is little academic research available in this area, and what there is tends to focus on the technology and processes of self-publishing, rather than the socio-political landscape that surrounds the endeavour, or the stories themselves. However, the process of self-publishing in and of itself is not without its relevance to this work. Of specific interest is the reason why authors might choose to self-publish, rather than opt for traditional publication.

Another point to consider is the *hybrid publishing*, another form of self-publishing. Hybrid publishing is when an author opts to employ a publisher to print and distribute their work. The benefit of this model, as some see it, is that the independent author is able to publish their work themselves, retaining their rights, but gaining some of the benefits of a publishing house through gaining access to relevant publishing services. However, the costs for these services can be high and results are not always guaranteed. Authors do not receive a financial advance for their work – indeed, they pay for the publishing services – and are often required to do much of the promotional 'legwork' themselves. Equally, hybrid publication does not guarantee access to the aforementioned benefits of the literary field. More worryingly, there a number of so-called hybrid publishers who take an author's money and then never publishing the work (disappearing overnight), or who fulfil their contract but do not produce a book of quality, or who market it at such a cost as to discourage readers from purchasing from an unknown author. In order to combat this, The Alliance of Independent Authors produces a 'watchdog' list of irreputable hybrid publishers (ALLI, 2018). Nevertheless, the benefits of hybrid publication are seen to be access to editors, cover designers and proof-readers, as well as taking away the need to learn how to publish and distribute a book oneself via, for example, Amazon or Kobo, as well as, finally, the sense that one has been 'published'. Indeed, on a number of writing forums, members discuss the question of 'stigma' in regards to self-publishing, and the debate tends to around if the individual feels this stigma exists or how much value they place on it. For some authors, the cost – and the gamble – of hybrid publishing is an acceptable risk.

In short, one might wonder why authors simply do not opt for traditional publication, since their work is wholly new (unlike, for example, fanfiction) and are thus viable. After all, opting for traditional publication would give the author access to awards and the other benefits of the literary field and remove them from self-publication's 'assumptions of negativity', as well as removing any risk of being taken advantage of by any unscrupulous hybrid publishers. However, demand for traditional publication is high: many authors are rejected by agents, sometimes because it is felt the writing quality is not good enough for publication, certainly, but also sometimes because the book being submitted does not fit the market, and the gamble (and long wait) for the agent and the traditional publishing house, as already outlined, is too high. Such rejection, for whatever reasons, no doubt helps fuel the hybrid-publishing market, offering as it does a way for authors to self-publish their own work without having to manage the whole process independently, whilst still "taking responsibility for the management and production of [their] content" (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013a, p. 10) . Further complicated the issue, with the growth of self-publication as a model of financial gain for large-scale distributors, new enterprises are emerging. Amazon, for example, is moving into the arena of traditional publication, cherry-picking the most popular self-published works on its site. And yet, self-publication remains a growing industry, with increasing numbers of authors opting for this route (Carolan & Evain, 2013; Author Earnings, 2017).

This chapter, therefore, is focused on the self-publishing market and process, why authors choose to self-publish, and the potential threats to self-publishing as an industry.

9.1 Self-Publication: Markets, Marketing, and Market Forces

As a result of the internet and the ease with which it is now possible to self-publish, new and existing authors can circumnavigate the various processes that are in place when trying to reach readers through traditional publishing models. In traditional publishing, new authors are encouraged to send samples of their work to literary agents, usually unsolicited. These 'query' packs are then placed in what is termed in the industry the 'slush pile', where they are sorted through and read. If a writer catches an agent's eye, they are contacted and asked to submit their complete manuscript. If this manuscript is accepted, the agent will showcase it to various publishers, who will then decide if they wish to option (buy) the book. As a result, publication

has "traditionally been seen as a standardized process, relying on established intermediaries fulfilling specific roles such as agent/encourager, publisher, printer, distributor, retailer" (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013a, p. 1). This is a process designed to gate-keep the industry and protect the market, allowing both the agent and the publishing house to 'let through' a product that is most likely to sell. It is a consumerist model, and in that sense it works very effectively. Both agents and publishers invest time and money in bringing a manuscript to publication, and that investment naturally needs to 'pay off' for the business to remain functional.

For publishing houses, once a manuscript has been presented by an agent and accepted, they must then assume a series of risks. As Hinke (2001) explains, the life cycle of a book is a bell curve, with each step presenting a publishing house with an opportunity to make the wrong decision and ultimately lose money. At the early stages of the bell curve, book sales are slow while the marketing grows and reviews come in; this will, ideally, build to the high point of the curve, when the book is selling well; finally, sales tail off, and the book is retired. Publishing houses must estimate how many books to publish at each stage. If they underestimate demand, they lose potential sales. If they overestimate demand, they are left with physical, printed copies of a book which they have no option but to write-off, either selling it in bulk to discount book distributors or pulping the excess novels. Equally, books may go out of print, not due to lack of demand but because the associated printing costs are too high. This is not limited to 'unsuccessful' novels, where success is quantified in terms of readership. As Vinjamuri (2012) notes, many mid-range authors may still struggle to turn a profit: "The economics of traditional publishing makes it very hard for either publisher or author to profit from a pool of only 10,000 to 30,000 readers, no matter how devoted."

Thus, at every stage of the traditional publishing process, publishing houses must make astute predictions regarding how many books to print and how long to keep them in print, all the while trying to avoid wastage and the costs associated with it. As a result, the traditional publishing model understandably leans towards stories and characters that follow the norms and expectations that will sell to the widest audience. Furthermore, supermarkets and other large-scale buyers tend towards purchasing books by established authors in popular genres, which then has a washback effect on the novels that publishing houses and agents are willing to invest in. A feedback loop is therefore created, in which what is sold on the shelves of, for example, Tesco is popular because Tesco sells it. While there is commercial merit in such a model, it leaves scant

wriggle room for alternative writing. Indeed, this is how certain fields are maintained – a number of retail outlets, especially large-scale outlets such as supermarkets, look to specific suppliers who themselves seek out works from larger scale publishing houses. It is, in a sense, a monopoly of distribution.

Despite this, self-publishing has grown exponentially (Author Earnings, 2017; Author Earnings, 2016; Author Earnings, 2015) as authors have elected to try to reach readers directly. For (majority) English language writers, the UK and USA both now account for the largest e-book market on Amazon (Author Earnings, 2017). In the USA in 2016, 34% of book sales were self-published, compared to 26% published by the big five traditional publishers (Hachette, Harper Collins, Penguin Random House, Macmillan, and Simon & Schuster); in the UK, 24% of book sales were self-published, 34% traditionally published by the big five; Canada, 29% self-published, 38% big five; Australia, 27%, 29%; lastly, New Zealand, 23%, 36% (Author Earnings, 2017). As can be seen, in the majority English-speaking book markets, self-publication is offering serious competition to the dominance of the big five publishing houses. Small and medium publishers (those outside of the big five) are also noticing competition from the self-published market, with sales statistics reflecting those above (USA in 2017, 34% self-published vs 18% small- and medium-publishing house; UK: 24% vs 23%) (Author Earnings, 2017). Moreover, the e-book platform also allows independent authors to set their own pricing scales, market their own books, design their own covers, receive an ISBN (tracking) number, and retain control of the rights to their work (Amazon Create Space, 2016), aspects that are not always the case in the traditional publishing model. Thus, self-publication via platforms such as Kindle (Amazon), iBooks (Apple), Kobo (Rakuten) and Nook (Barnes & Noble) have helped to nurture a space in which authors can write narratives which are not necessarily bound by the same market forces that have, traditionally, been the concern of the publishing industry.

Hinke (2001) stated that the availability of e-books on mobile telephones would determine whether e-publication, and with that self-publication, would ever be successful. In 2017, this certainly appears to have come to pass. Amazon, iBooks and Google Books all offer free e-reading apps for multiple electronic devices, while specific e-readers, such as the Kindle or the Kobo, have reduced in price to such an extent that for most Western audiences they are affordable treats rather than expensive luxuries. Equally, many self-published authors set prices for their works that are largely competitive, often undercutting traditionally published books.

Indeed, in numerous self-publishing forums, the question of pricing is perennial, the most common advice being to keep the figure low; indeed, for self-published authors with multiple books, the advice is often to offer one novel for free (creating what is termed a 'reader magnet'). The logic behind this pricing strategy is that readers will be more likely to 'take a chance' on an unknown author if the price is attractive, while the self-published author, having no printing or associated costs, can hope to earn a decent amount of revenue for their effort and, ideally, gain dedicated readers. Regarding the financial possibilities surrounding self-publication, Rossiter-Modeland (in Hinke, 2001, pg. 176) states succinctly that "[n]ow that it is physically and financially possible for a writer to publish his or her own work and reap ALL the profits, more are doing so" (original emphasis). Essentially, the old economy, defined by the traditional publishing process, has been challenged by the new, as defined by the World Wide Web and developments in accessibility. In sum, "[t]he author-server-user model has legitimised self-publishing or vanity publishing and now makes it feasible to make a profit on a few hundred copies, which empowers a single author to publish their book, even if they only need to reach a very small or targeted audience" (Hinke, 2001, p. 175).

Indeed, the internet made access to texts and books possible without the need to engage in the old publishing models (Hinke, 2001), as can be seen in the growth of online fan fiction communities or websites like Watpadd, where authors write and distribute stories, usually for free. Another function that the internet has provided for authors is that of fan sponsorship. Websites such as Kickstarter or Patreon allow fans to directly contribute to an author's specific projects or general finances, allowing those authors greater ability/freedom to produce their work. Interestingly, this is a model that has been adopted not only by self-published authors but also by traditionally published authors. For example, New York Times best-seller Seanan McGuire, author of award-winning urban fantasy novels, has a Pateron page in which she offers fan various levels of subscription, starting at $1, in return for which they receive early access to works, discussion boards, insights and various other perks (see https://www.patreon.com/seananmcguire). This model itself has a long history tied to self-publication, that of the subscription publishing. Subscription publishing began in the 17th century when subscription was an agreement between author, publishing house and subscribers that a specific book would be published, financed by the subscribers, who would, in turn, receive a copy of the book (Clapp, 1931). Modern subscription services exist in much the same way. For

example, a recent collection of Science Fiction short stories, *2001: An Odyssey in Words*, was published in conjunction with NewCon Press and a Kickstarter campaign in which supporters pledged what they could afford and, at a certain threshold, received a copy of the work and had their names included in a 'thank-you' page[67]. However, unlike the above, modern subscription publishing does not need to have an intermediary publisher involved – as mentioned, even traditionally published authors, such as Seanan McGuire, tend to offer 'perks' to subscribers that are produced independently of their publishing house. Self-published authors, naturally, do not have a publishing house to consider. Internet-based subscription services, particularly Patreon, therefore, allow both traditionally- and self-published authors another avenue to connect with fans, allowing them (fans) to support their work, and authors to produce new projects.

Moreover, there have been some notable self-publishing success stories. Probably the most famous originally self-published[68] novelist is E. L. James, whose *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy topped international sales and led to her being included in TIME magazine's list of the 100 Most Influential People in 2012 (TIME, 2012). Amanda Hocking wrote a series of vampire novels, leading to her receiving a $2m traditional publishing deal with St. Martin's Press; John Locke sold over two million self-published novels before also being signed to a traditional publisher; Andy Weir self-published *The Martian*, since adapted into a major motion picture directed by Ridley Scott (Vinjamuri, 2012). One of the earliest self-publishing success stories is that of fantasy novel *Eragon*, published by Christopher Paolini in 2001, when Paolini was in his teens. However, *Eragon* only achieved true success[69] when it was picked up by a traditional publisher (Spring, 2004). This mirrors the examples given above, where each author has, ultimately, found traditional publication for their self-published novels, their works having already achieved market impact prior to being optioned. However, while self-publishing is relatively straightforward in terms of releasing a novel, and financial and critical success is possible, it is not a zero-sum game regarding effort and reward. Paolini comments on the marketing of his novel: "I would stand behind a table in my costume talking all day without a break – and would sell maybe 40 books in eight hours if I did really well. […] It was a very

[67] See https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/tomhunter/2001-an-odyssey-in-words

[68] Interestingly, E. L. James' novel was originally self-published on a fanfiction website; she later adapted it so that it was more original. After this adaption gained popularity, *Fifty Shades of Grey* was then picked up by a traditional publishing house.

[69] Or rather, 'true success' as it is often understood within the capital structures of traditional publishing.

stressful experience. […] I was fried. I couldn't have gone on for very much longer" (Spring, 2004).

As such, self-publishing can be a complex field, and empirical data on self-publishing is vague, at best. Blog posts and newspaper articles can be readily found that highlight self-publishing success stories, similar to those given above, but it is hard to find numerical information which details exactly how many novels in the Amazon best-selling lists are self-published, for example. Ultimately, while the data gathered by Author Earnings (2017) shows that self-publishing as a whole is competitive to traditional publication, it fails to detail how much an individual author may earn from the work. This makes it difficult to estimate, a priori, the likelihood of a self-published novel ever achieving financial (or critical) success – although, this concern could be levelled at any kind of publishing. Moreover, a 2012 Guardian article (Flood, 2012) explains that self-publishing financial data can be skewed by the minority of authors who achieve large-scale success, arguing that "with less than 10% of self-publishing authors earning about 75% of the reported revenue and half of writers earning less than $500" the success rates of self-published authors is by no means as high as it is sometimes reported. These statistics are based on a survey conducted on 1,007 self-published authors; however, the survey itself was published on an online blog, itself no longer available. This makes it hard to judge the validity of the data, although it is certainly compelling, and the sense that high earning self-published authors would affect the reporting of average sales seems likely. With no data available from Amazon, the largest online bookseller and market for self-published authors (Author Earnings, 2017), on how many of self-published novels actually reach the sought-after top-100 or top-10 listings, one is left only with speculation and anecdotal evidence.

Moreover, the sheer volume of information required to self-publish 'successfully', where this refers to high sales volumes, critical acclaim, film and/or television rights, can be daunting. Numerous organisations exist to help self-published authors navigate a terrain that can include copyright law, international sales law, and marketing and promotion. Examples of these are the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA) and the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLI), both of which ask for an annual subscription to access their support. Additionally, with the growth of the self-publishing market, the expectation for quality, 'professional' looking covers and well-edited and proofed work is increasing.

An economy has developed around self-publication for cover designers, type-setters, proof-readers and story editors, as well as the aforementioned hybrid publishers, all of whom may or may not offer legitimate services, and which come at a price. Therefore, one of the biggest draws to self-publishing – its accessibility – is potentially being compromised as a market develops which requires significant financial outlay from the self-published author to participate in. As Hinke (2001, p. 175) notes, "the three most important tasks of a publisher [are]: 1) print; 2) distribute; and 3) advertise", and this is arguably as true for self-published authors who wish to achieve an income from their work as it is for traditionally published authors. While printing costs are not incurred by the self-publisher, thanks to e-publication and print-on-demand services, advertising costs still need to be considered, unless one is prepared to rely on word-of-mouth promotion. Equally, distribution can be tricky, as it can be difficult to protect your work without the support of a large publishing company. For example, a recent change in Amazon's 'buy button' has left self-published authors vulnerable to loss of sales (Independent Book Publishers Association, 2017). The IBPA have warned that Amazon is no longer selling all paperback novels directly, instead leaving some sales to third-party vendors. These vendors can then sell copies of paperback novels seemingly without guaranteeing the quality of the product ('new', 'like new', 'second hand'), which in turn may lead to reputational damage for the author. There is also the question of where such vendors source their novels, and who receives the payment when these novels are purchased via third-party vendors, to contend with. A situation like this, requiring time to both investigate vendors and communicate with Amazon and the vendors, as well as possible legal costs, could be very difficult for a self-published author to contend with.

What can be seen here is that the self-publishing route is by no means without its perils. While self-published authors are potentially able to achieve higher profits for their work, retain creative control of their novel, and, ultimately, see their work in print, they must also shoulder the responsibility for the success of their novels, protect their legal rights, and manage the general administration of their brand. Indeed, Bounie et al. (2012, p. 52) term self-published authors "digital outsiders", a phrase used to describe authors who have achieved success only due to the fact that the Kindle e-reader is now so widely available. However, I find myself querying how many self-published authors are less digital outsiders and more *digital nomads.* While I do not think this was Bounie et al.'s intention, 'outsiders' implies that self-published

authors are removed from publishing, which is not the case – they have published a novel and are thus published authors. However, self-published authors are, arguably, removed from the *field* of publishing. Thus, they are, currently, without a 'fixed home', excluded from much of the capital of the field. Building on this, there is a sense, I suspect, that true success for a self-published author is to be picked up by a traditional publishing house, as in the examples given above. However, the likelihood of such an outcome is small, and, as mentioned already, such success stories are outliers, skewing the data as regards the general, everyday success of self-publishing. Moreover, once again twisting the tale, Hugh Howie (in Vinjamuri, 2012), author of the (still in 2017) self-published best-seller *Wool*, comments that:

> When people think of traditionally published successes, they think of The Hunger Games and Harry Potter. This is what they compare to the self-publishing route. But those are lottery winners, the extreme outliers. In order to level the playing field and have a true comparison, you need to look at everything that gets submitted to the traditional machine – that means all the work that never makes it out of the slush pile – and compare that to all the self-published e-books on Amazon and elsewhere. Counting the top 1% from the traditional route and everything from the self-published route creates a weighted argument and is disingenuous. And calling cases like mine the exception and forgetting that this is also true of every book in the center aisle of the bookstore is also facile.

What seems clear is that, while on the surface self-publication may appear to be a simple route to seeing your book in print (which it undoubtedly is), achieving critical and/or commercial success is an entirely different proposition. Thus, while perceptions of stigma around self-publication are lessening (Rossiter-Modeland, in Hinke, 2001), one might still wonder why authors choose this path, as opposed to traditional publication.

Equally, although the self-published novels previously analysed seem to show that the high fantasy fandom is open to more layered and progressive representations of female characters, it does not follow that all self-published (high fantasy) novels will avoid or seek to

avoid harmful representations of certain groups. Indeed, the very nature of self-publishing means that authors may produce and disseminate work absent any kind of gate-keeping process, something which, thus far, I have been arguing can have positive outcomes for traditionally marginalised voices and representations. Nevertheless, the opposite outcome is also possible, in which novels perpetuating harmful representations are released unchecked. Questions of freedom of speech and creativity must be acknowledged. Self-publishing has opened a path for anyone with access to the internet to disseminate their work, some of which may be considered offensive, or even dangerous, to certain groups. Thus, like traditional publication, self-publication is not without its problematic representations of women, representations that may result from the lack of gatekeeping within the industry, or a wish to align with the norms or expectations of the genre (such as harmful codifications of women in high fantasy, as discussed), or, ultimately, the author's own prejudice(s). However, both traditional publication and self-publication run this risk. While this does not excuse either, it seems unfair to potentially dismiss self-publication for the same issues the traditional publication industry suffers from, whilst not acknowledging the potential that self-publication offers to counter the same. Self-publishing, while a complex market that does not guarantee an author financial success, does offer a site in which writers can publish novels which in a traditional publication route, where sales *must be* guaranteed, would not necessarily be optioned.

In this sense, self-publication is both a site of interest within the feminist scope due to its potential to increase knowledge about the world and challenge harmful, dominant ideologies (Lather, 1992), and for its ability to challenge the genre norms that are often maintained through traditional publication. Moreover, from a feminist perspective, self-publication offers a shift in the power dynamic of the publication industry, bringing forward voices that otherwise may not be heard, offering these voices different rewards: for some, 'successful' publication is not defined under the paradigms given above, as will be discussed in the next section.

9.2 Shifts in Power

"Change in the space of literary or artistic possibles is the result of change in the power relation which constitutes the space of position," states Bourdieu (1993, p. 32). This change in power, and the subsequent changes in the various capitals that make up the fields of literature

and authorship can be seen in the field of self-publishing. Baverstock & Steinitz's (2013b) research explores the experiences of self-published authors, looking at both fiction/non-fiction content and the authors' experiences and outcomes regarding self-publication. What they discovered may shed some light on why authors choose this method of publication and poses interesting questions in terms of the empowering potential of self-publication. Interviewing 47 and surveying 120 self-published authors, Baverstock & Steinitz found that the over-riding sense these authors felt was one of satisfaction. The self-published authors in their sample reported they felt a sense of completion in the achievement of their project, enjoying the fact that they were discoverable to readers with similar interests to their own. Baverstock & Steinitz discuss the empowerment self-publishing provides, focusing on the sense of agency and ownership that their sample reported, stating that participants found self-publication "enables them to take responsibility for their projects; to commit time and other resources to something that matters to them" (2013b, p. 2). There suggests a reclamation of power, of taking something into one's own hands and creating, nurturing, one's own product. As Foucault (in Baxter, 2002, p. 829) notes, power is:

> [N]ever localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation.

This dynamic mirrors the responses given by the self-published authors to Baverstock & Steinitz. Power is shared amongst people; it is not the power of wealth or status, but rather an abstract 'sense' or 'feeling' coupled with concrete action/articulation. Self-published authors, like the individuals Foucault speaks of, are both experiencing the power of others, be it their readers or, more abstractly, the processes of publication, and they are exercising their own power, choosing to participate and to produce on their own terms, without the need to seek validation from outside sources (in this case in systems of traditional publication). This reflects

Bourdieu's (1993) criticism of the literary field (the field controlled by those who 'curate' literature, such as agents, publishers, advertisers, and awards panels). Specifically, in terms of the shift in power that self-publishing provides, the lack of reliance on the literary field is of significant importance. What constitutes capital in the literary field is not, necessary, capital in self-publication. As a result, this changes the doxa, the behaviour, of those in the self-published field, not only terms of the works self-published authors might produce, but also in the capital they may seek as a result of that production.

This principle is shown to be something that self-published authors are aware of. Again, while I mentioned previously that it is hard to know for certain the extent to which self-published authors are aware of the complex social and psychological importance of literary representations, they certainly appear to be aware that they are exercising their own power. For example, one of the larger specifically self-published communities is the SPF Community Facebook group (as opposed to groups which are open to all writers, self- or traditionally-published). Run by Mark Dawson, himself a very successful self-published author with novels that have been USA Today no. 1 best-sellers, the SPF Community is a group designed to talk about and share insight into the self-publishing process, rather than the craft of writing. Authors, therefore, can share their successes, discuss tactics and processes, and ask for assistance from each other. Indeed, it is worth mentioning here how extremely supportive the self-publishing community is. As Baverstock & Steinitz (2013b, p. 9) note, self-publishing is a largely supportive community, in which authors "tend to take pleasure in the success of other members as it boosts the genre as a whole, rather than seeing another author's achievements as necessarily impacting negatively on their own". Within the SPF Community Facebook group, amongst others, authors help authors, providing feedback, offers to critique, helping to write blurbs, giving insights into marketing techniques and more to each other, all for free and the interests of continual, communal development – very much in line with the power dynamic discussed above, in which power is "never appropriated as commodity or a piece of wealth" (Foucault, ibid). More importantly, such Facebook groups are free to access, unlike subscription groups such as ALLI, enhancing the open and democratic platform that self-publishing offers. In his group, Mark Dawson published a post discussing – in his own words – 'elitism' in publishing, having received a communication from an anonymised source stating their concerns over self-publication denigrating the literary field. Dawson (2016) comments that the original email "is inspired by everything that I consider

to be wrong about the old way of publishing. It's elitist, anti-democratic and - dare I say it - inspired by fear. Everyone should be able to publish. Can everyone write? No, of course not. But what is to say that this fellow - identity redacted - is a better judge than the market?"

Self-published authors no longer necessarily perceive themselves as playing second fiddle to their traditionally published counterparts; indeed, many *choose* self-publication as a preference. As Carolan & Evain (2013, p. 285) state, self-publishing has led to "the democratisation of the publishing and distribution processes", something which not only self-published authors are enjoying. Self-publishing is a collaborative process, in which authors increasingly work closely with freelance cover designers, copywriters and editors. This in turn boosts the demand for these services, it may be the case that traditional publishing houses will end up competing with self-published authors for these services, and thus having to pay more for them (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013b), something which would certainly be beneficial to those freelancers. Moreover, freelance editors may prefer to work with self-published authors rather than traditional publishing houses. According to research by Baverstock et al (2015), freelance editors find self-published authors value their expertise more highly, pay more promptly and are generally easier to negotiate with than traditional publishing houses, which tend to offer fixed budgets for work which does not equate to the time required to complete the task but which freelancers have little power to challenge: "I've left the 'traditional publishing industry' behind – they pay badly and treat you badly. Non-publishers pay more and are much more appreciative of what you can do for them" (Baverstock, et al., 2015, p. 129). This again echoes the shifts in power already mentioned. It is also worth noting that editors in their sample also commented on the speed at which traditional publication houses demand work be completed, with respondents commenting that "[m]any [traditional] publishers/writers want projects turned around post haste and don't seem to care about quality anymore. It's all about product" (Baverstock, et al., 2015, p. 129).

Looking in more detail at Baverstock & Steinitz's research into *why* self-published authors choose this route, their sample were not concerned necessarily with their finished product, but instead were focused on the *action* of production. The capital they sought was not, in all cases, financial or critical acclaim, but the sense of achievement granted as a result of creating a novel. Indeed, while "industry professionals have long assumed that only products that closely resemble their own professional standards could offer satisfaction" (Baverstock &

Steinitz, 2013b, p. 2), in fact, satisfaction was self-attained and self-codified. This leads Baverstock & Steinitz to conclude that the growing recognition of self-publication may have resulted in self-published authors viewing their work not as a "low prestige activity", but rather that self-publication is a "mark of individual proactivity and independence of thought" – particularly in genres which traditional publishers tend to dismiss, such as erotica and fantasy (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013b, p. 7).

In addition to mirroring Bourdieu's (1993) discussion regarding the maintenance of artistic fields, this dynamic reflects Jackson (1981), who highlights the potential fantasy fiction offers to reflect, critique and subvert social contexts and norms. "Fantasy", she states, "is an expression of human forces" (1981, p. 18). As already discussed, Jackson's definition of fantasy does not sit expressly in another world, but in an uncovered and mysterious reimagining of this one. She places fantasy as a response to secularisation, in which the desire for the mystical, for a heaven and a hell, is redirected into 'othering' the world as it is. Jackson does not, therefore, separate fantasy from the real world, but rather places it in conjunction with what is real, a process termed *praxis*. Praxis, in her words, "implies an inextricable link to the main body of the 'real' which it shades and threatens" (1981, p. 19). Luis, speaking of fairy tales, supports this analysis, stating "these stories are *recursive* and already known to the characters: the fairy-tale shape is a visible narrative force" (2016, pp. 171, original emphasis). Thus, this focus on the empowerment of the author to express their own narrative interpretation of the world and their experiences within it via the freedom of self-publication aligns with the principles of third wave feminism, in the call for a more complex, wide-ranging and inclusive hearing of voices which may have been, historically, silenced.

Ferreday (2015), when speaking of rape culture and its promotion via traditional media, notes that 'Do It Yourself media', which I take to include self-publication, offers opportunities to challenge dominant representations of sexual violence and the violation of women's bodies. She argues that this expansion of media culture provides possibilities for "telling stories about rape, constructing new spaces in which violent rape myths circulate," – a danger already mentioned – "but also offering new possibilities for challenging rape culture and producing new, more emancipatory feminist interventions" (Ferreday, 2015, p. 23). Linked to this, second wave feminists Dworkin & McKinnon (1988) argued that when repressive or discriminatory systems are in embedded in the culture but are not refuted or prohibited by law, action is required to

affect change. While I do not suggest – I cannot suggest – that self-published authors *en masse* consider such issues, it is notable that the overall response to Baverstock & Steinitz's (2013b) survey was that the authors chose to self-publish because they wanted to be the producers of something, to add their voices and experiences to the literary canon, and that there is an "emerging definition of self-publishing as the process of taking personal responsibility for the management and production of content" (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013b, p. 3), as opposed to, perhaps, producing content that would, or could, be easily slotted into existing ideas of quality or market demand.

Indeed, the traditional publishing industry is not "particularly diverse" (Baverstock, 2012, p. 41). Self-publishing, however, offers an opportunity for authors whose writing may be "too politically sensitive, or simply out of vogue, for mainstream reporting" (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013b, p. 9). Moreover, the model of self-publication not only provides authors with greater opportunities to use their voice, but also to listen. This occurs most notably through social media, and has opened up new areas of interest in works for which "market demand [has] not previously [been] either recognised or serviced by the publishing industry", and which authors may not wish to have jeopardised "by traditional publishers' less active appreciation of how their work should be presented and valued" (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013b, p. 9). It can be seen, therefore, that self-publication offers a resistive, progressive and self-empowering model – whether viewed through the lens of Foucaultian power dynamics, Bourdieu's commentary and critique of the fields of cultural production, feminist arguments for greater participation and disruption of dominant, harmful social-narrative constructions, or, finally, from the immensely personal site of the authors and their sense of achievement and satisfaction. However, the self-publishing model as it currently stands is under threat. This is the subject of the next section.

9.3 Potential Challenges to Self-publication

Self-publication faces two challenges. The first, which has been attended to throughout this chapter, is a lack of 'artistic' or 'critical' legitimacy. The second, paradoxically, may be an unwelcome side-effect of its financial success. As noted above, a number of successful self-published works have since been picked up and re-published by traditional publishing houses. Interestingly, authors who move from self-publishing to traditional publication are often in a

position of greater strength than their counterparts chosen from the slush pile. As Baverstock & Steinitz (2013b, p. 8; original emphasis) outline:

> Having proved there is a market for their work and *then* accepted investment from a traditional publisher or agent, their knowledge of systems and effective publishing will make them less dependent on their new investors, and probably less compliant than authors previously published by such houses, who knew little about publishing. They are likely to want more involvement and be less inclined to assume that traditional industry professionals know best.

This suggests that these authors are more likely to resist changes to their work, although to what extent this holds true is hard to gauge as, once again, there is little empirical evidence in this area. Looking at writer's forums on transitioning from self-publication to traditional publication, it seems that the advice is to remove the self-published book from circulation once it is accepted for traditional publication, or even before, thus making it difficult to compare and contrast the two versions. Moreover, as Chip McGregor of the McGregor Literary Agency notes, in order to make the transition from self-publication to traditional publication, one must first be able to demonstrate that one's work is marketable (McGregor, 2016). The possible risk of this process, in terms of the potential that self-publishing offers, is that authors will begin to align their work with the genre norms promoted via traditional publication. In terms of the literary field (encompassing the publishing field and the author field), this emphasis on alignment is, perhaps, unsurprising. Fields have a tendency to maintain themselves; habitus, capital and doxa are all systems which, ultimately, assist this.

In this sense, much like the concept of the implied author, I also suggest that there is an *implied publisher*. Following the same logic as that of the implied author, the implied publisher is not any one individual, but rather the sense of the system itself, its drivers and its priorities. The implied publisher, then, depends on the system for its continued success, as this is the system which, to date, has ensured its survival. The implied publisher, therefore, is one who has "entirely real interests in the different possibilities available to them as stakes and who deploy[s]

every sort of strategy to make one set or the other prevail" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 34). Thus, the implied publisher seeks to (re)define works produced within the field of self-publication, aligning those works to the habitus and doxa of the publishing field, in order to maintain the dominance of that field, either culturally or financially (or, perhaps, both). Moreover, the process of (re)definition helps to ensure the implied publisher's position within the literary field, as well as to keep the literary field as whole 'intact', in terms of maintaining or curating genre norms. This (re)definition of self-published work presents a difficulty regarding analysis, as it is hard to identify whether self-published novels which have later been traditionally published sell because they conform to genre norms, implying that this is what the market wants (or, perhaps, what the implied publisher seeks), or if they sell well because they have the might of the publishing field's machinery behind them, or both. Either way, it is likely that some authors who wish to use self-publication as a platform to traditional publication, and the 'legitimacy' such provides, may give into genre tropes to do so.

A second issue born of the success of self-publishing is distribution. Bourne et al. (2012, p. 52) argue that as a result of e-publication, "[t]he bargaining power between traditional retail stores and new online merchants is changing the way companies conduct business", and it appears that this true. Amazon is venturing into the publishing industry. While on the surface this may appear to offer no more of a challenge to self-publication than any of the existing big five publishers, one must recognise the position that Amazon holds regarding the distribution of texts. Amazon is the largest online retailer, accounting for over 80% of all English language e-books sold globally in 2016 (Author Earnings, 2017). In comparison, the next most significant retailer is iBooks, by Apple, which accounts for only 10% of global e-book sales (Author Earnings, 2017). Amazon's own publication arm, collectively known as Amazon Imprints[70], currently accounts for 14% of e-books sold in the USA, 10% in the UK, and 8% in Australia (Author Earnings, 2017). While these numbers are significantly lower than the figures cited above for self-published or traditionally published books, this was, nevertheless, the fastest growing field in the USA in 2016 (Author Earnings, 2017).

The growth of Amazon Imprints is not especially surprising given Amazon's access to readers, and their resultant ability to market directly to this customer base. Furthermore, unlike

[70] Each genre receives its own specific publication company, 47 North being, for example, Amazon's speculative fiction publication house.

traditional publication or self-publication, Amazon Imprints is not an open forum for submission or publication. Instead, Amazon cherry picks the novels that are selling well on its website. Once a book has been selected and a contract agreed with the author, it passes through the same processes as any traditionally published book, with a team of editors, designers and marketers working on it. The logical implication of this process is that only authors who can afford the time and money to strenuously market their book will achieve enough sales for their novel to be picked up by Amazon. This, therefore, negates the open playing field that self-publishing can provide, and hints at a biased and/or unbalance marketplace. This is due to the fact that Amazon now has a vested interested in more actively promoting its own published works over those of other publishers, whether self or traditional, leading to a potential monopolisation of the largest online book retailer. This is in addition to the concerns raised above that authors who wish to be traditionally published (or published by Amazon Imprint) will thus lean towards genre norms in order to make their work appear more marketable. There is also concern over the *process* which Amazon requires before they (re)publish the work. Will Amazon Imprints insist on, for example, extensive re-writes to the original, and if so, under what criteria might such rewrites be orientated, and with what kind of finished product in mind?

These problems ultimately return, I believe, to the overall issue of legitimacy. The danger is that while self-publication is not recognised as a legitimate form of literature and championed as such, those elements that make it so unique and potentially powerful are at risk of being eroded. While Baverstock & Steinitz's (2013b) study shows that self-published authors are less interested in financial remuneration for their work, one must assume that they are *writing to be read*. If a situation arises in which only those self-published authors with the financial resources to compete with industry giants are likely to attract readers, one must wonder how many authors will continue to see self-publication as a rewarding endeavour. Equally, the potential of self-publication to provide traditional publishers with insights into new trends and representations is in jeopardy. Self-published novels offer the possibility to highlight readerships with interests that traditional publication may have overlooked in favour of more genre-traditional works. Indeed, Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) suggest that the focus on beauty standards for both male and female characters in fairy tales reproduced in traditional publications between 1981-2000 may have been the result of a desire to increase consumerism, with publishing reverting to genre norms to reinvigorate the market. This is an area which self-publishing can challenge, from a

position of safety in terms of market risk, as self-published authors are not, currently, required to invest heavily in marketing. If, however, the self-published market is shaped in such a way that only certain self-published works are promoted or made available to readers, this may negate the opportunity for genres and representations to evolve in tandem. Thus, while the self-publishing market continues to grow, the unique strengths of the industry are at risk of being eroded.

9.4 Conclusion

The growth of the self-publication industry, along with the satisfaction felt by self-published authors, goes against previously accepted truths regarding self-publication. The traditional publishing industry has, argue Baverstock & Steinitz (2013b), misunderstood the reasons why people self-publish, taking the view that self-published works have been of too poor quality or lacking in readership to achieve what they would determine to be success; a success hinging on the assumption that "a primary motivation of self-publishing is financial" (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013b, p. 9). However, this does not appear to be the case, or at least not the primary spur, for self-published authors. Self-publication is a site both of personal satisfaction and self-agency. Moreover, as the data from Author Earnings (2017) shows, readers are more than willing to purchase a self-published book. This has lead Bournie et al. (2012, p. 52) to argue that the "book industry is facing a new revolution", with e-books posing the same level of industrial change as the printing press. One might have hoped that this revolution would be defined by the widening participation of authors, distributing their works directly to readers in a democratisation of the publishing process, as well as a subversion of, or challenge to, harmful, socially-outdated ideals and representations that have been maintained through genre codification. Essentially, a "widened participation within the industry" as Baverstock suggested in 2012 (p. 43) when she called for self-publication to be taken seriously by academia.

I argue, therefore, that self-publication is an important site of interest, especially when considered within a feminist frame. Taking into account the power of literary persuasion via transportation (Gerrig, 1993), just world beliefs (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013), and the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007), self-publishing as an industry and self-published novels as artefacts are deserving of further legitimisation and exploration. However, as long as self-published novels and self-published

authors remain cast as “digital outsiders” (Bounie, et al., 2012, p. 52), they are vulnerable. It seems that while self-publishing fails to be recognised for its potential to both challenge and democratise the publication industry, it is susceptible to a subtle and potentially devastating take-over bid by the very principles which it could, potentially, challenge. Importantly, self-publication does not need to be an enemy of traditional publication, nor vice-versa. Both industries can complement each other. Self-publication provides an avenue for authors to tell their stories in their own words, rewriting and playing with genre expectations and offering more varied and different representations, narrative archetypes, or writing in genres that are too marginal to be financially viable for traditional publishers. In tandem with this, the traditional publication industry can continue to promote literature as a whole, creating best sellers and driving interest in reading, and encouraging authors and readers of any type to participate in the literary field. It is with the hope that such a relationship between self-publication and traditional publication can be achieved that I will in the next, and final, chapter call for a new understanding of the literary field, one which recognises this emerging complexity and potential camaraderie.

10. A Call for ‘Multiliteraryism’

“The meaning does not lie at ‘the end’ of the narrative, but straddles it,” writes Barthes (1975, p. 243), a message that I feel is of particular relevance when considering the issues that have been raised thus far. I have outlined the importance of fiction to human beings – how we use narrative to help us to make sense of the world around us, to offer us experience and knowledge, and to provide us with means of developing our theory of mind in order to better understand and relate to others. Anthropomorphism, especially, make it possible for us to relate to fictional, unreal characters, their triumphs and failures, their personalities and their motivations, in much the same way we do with any real person (Gardener & Knowles, 2008; Epley, et al., 2007). Fiction developed as a result of evolutionary necessity (Sugiyama, 2001; Mellmann, 2012), and has been a driver of our social evolutionary success. We learn from the situations and people we encounter in fiction, just as we do the people and situations we encounter in real life (Gottschall, 2013); indeed, we can perform better when we are in the ‘presence’ of beloved fictional characters (Gardener & Knowles, 2008).

However, with such a predilection for fiction, human beings are also capable of being influenced through the medium of narrative. Transportation and our ability to lose ourselves in new narrative worlds leaves us vulnerable to various forms of narrative persuasion, most notably via the effect of fiction on our just world beliefs (Appel, 2008; Green, et al., 2004; Mendonça, et al., 2016; Sebby & Johnston, 2013), and the sleeper effect (Appel & Richter, 2007). We have seen how narrative communicates with readers via character interactions, in the first articulation, or via the authorial voice in the second articulation. As such, a complex dynamic exists between our real-world socialisation and expectations, and the worlds and characters we encounter in story. This dynamic can have very real effects on the capitals, habitus and doxa we are prepared to accept – or refuse – from other, real people. Fiction has been found to be especially affecting in terms of altering beliefs (Djikic, et al., 2009). This is exemplified in studies which show that people with a high just world belief are more likely to blame the victims of negative events (Hafer, 2000; Scott, 2008; Appelbaum, et al., 2003), including rape victims (Strömwall, et al., 2013). This is an effect that not only concerns individuals, but also perceptions of society (Strange & Leung, 1999).

Meaning, therefore, is not found simply in the 'happy ending' of a story, but in the characters and the narrative worlds they inhabit, in their choices regarding how they respond to the narrative world, and how the narrative world duly responds to them. It is therefore important to examine *what* narratives teach us, in terms of the worlds and the characters that are found within the pages, and *how* ideas and ideologies are communicated to the reader, via both the first and second articulations. Therefore, in chapter one, I argued that the narrative world also be considered a 'narrative field', encompassing the same aspects with which Bourdieu defines field: habitus, capital, and doxa (Bourdieu, 2000; 1993). By viewing the narrative world in this way, a lens is permitted through which to analyse and discuss the lives of the characters and the structures of the world(s) they inhabit, in both a literary and a socio-political sense. By this, I mean that one can understand the text as a literary artefact (a novel), an aspect of culture (created by and creating), and a world whole unto itself, in alignment with Moretti (1983/2005), Casanova (2005), Dundes (1968), and Bourdieu's (1993) call to place literature within the field(s) in which it was produced and in which it is (currently) understood, as well as a piece of literary art in and of itself.

Building on this, one must also take into account the analyst's subjective position – s/he is, after all, a member of a field (or, more likely, multiple fields) which will exert their own influence over the reading of the text. A critical reader of this thesis must, naturally, take into account that I am a self-published author, and thus am passionate about this field and, potentially, biased in its favour. The extent to which this has coloured my analysis and my positionality is something which you, the reader, must decide; for my own part, I have attempted to be honest in my evaluation of both the field and my own work within it. Equally, I am a fan of high fantasy, and while I see issues with the genre in terms of its representation of women (and the value its places on femininity), I nevertheless take from it all those positives outlined. It offers me a chance for escape, to experience new worlds, and to overcome trials and tribulations with the heroes. Additionally, like Jackson (1981), I see fantasy as a site of potential resistance to the norms of this world. However, as mentioned in the introduction, I do not see that being a fan of the genre incapacitates me from being critical of it, especially from a feminist standpoint. Indeed, I align myself, mainly, with third-wave feminism and believe that "our lives are mediated by systems of inequity such as classism, racism, and sexism" (Lather, 1992, p. 87). This mediation can be seen both in the character tropes embedded in the genre of high fantasy,

and also in the manner in which the literary field, as a whole, is managed and maintained. My hope is, ultimately, that the publishing field and the author field are extended to encompass voices not previously heard, telling stories that challenge, interrogate or reinvent dominant tropes. This does not necessarily need to result in the wholesale dismissal of the dominant form of production, in this case the systems that maintain the literary field via the (traditional) publishing field, but rather can exist alongside it. Indeed, when one reacts too strongly to one aspect of a diametric problem, one is very likely going to fall into the opposing aspect (Bourdieu, 1993).

As I will argue, it is not *my* solution to the issues raised to simply discard traditional publication – indeed, I see both self-publication and traditional publication not in binary terms, but as occupying different purposes within the literary field; different positions on the same scale. By refuting publication *or* self-publication, one creates the very dichotomy that has caused the issues outlined in the piece; invariably, one form will grow into the habitus already created by the other. This is a point picked up by Freire (1970/1996), when he states that the oppressed often take on the structures of their oppressor if/when they achieve power, lacking any other framework with which to *understand how power behaves*. Instead, I argue that both traditional publishing and self-publishing can exist alongside each other as equals, each receiving the credit (and, naturally, censure) that is appropriate to their strengths and weaknesses. This is, of course, reliant on self-publishing being allowed access to 'legitimacy' by the various systems of power enabled to offer such – without, crucially, those system transforming self-publication into their own image (as potentially exemplified regarding the issue of Amazon Imprints). In this sense, I am also aligned with Hills' (2002) call that academia take notice of fan studies, as well as the field of world literature. Both aca-fandom and world literature have sought to create a legitimate space within the academy for voices, arguments, and ideas that have been, historically, marginalised. I will return specifically to the field of world literature, below, when I make a case for *multiliteraryism.* I will now summarise the arguments I have made in this thesis before advocating for multiliteraryism, a potentially new way to frame publishing and literature which would encompass and offer due respect to both traditional publication and self-publication.

10.1 The Issue of Genre Codification

I have used the genre of high fantasy, its codification and its resulting norms, in an attempt to highlight how certain harmful representations can be propagated without, necessarily, any conscious or deliberate decision on the part of writer or publishing house (rather, I have spoken of the implied author and the implied publisher). Indeed, exactly as Whetter (2016, p. 10) states, "[c]ertainly genre is *capable of* reflecting the reigning ideology, but this is not its only purpose and it is certainly not the case that genre must always be ideologically determined." Genre norms are powerful because they are both obvious and subtle. In terms of high fantasy, obvious genre norms include the creation of new, quasi-medieval worlds in which magic and, often, monsters and strange creatures abound. However, together with these identifying factors, other, subtler genre norms are also encoded, not all of them beneficial to real world beliefs regarding certain communities, for example women. I will first offer a brief summary of these representations now, as categorised previously: *Beauty, femininity and female sexuality; syntagmatic structures and character archetypes*, and, finally, *the naïve protagonist: female friendships/mentorships*. I will then move on to discuss the issues that genre codification can present, and how self-publication can offer resistance to this.

10.1.1 A Brief Review of the Representation of Women in High Fantasy

The problematic representations of women in high fantasy show them as lacking agency and capital, having no active control in the political or social fields of their worlds, or when/if they do, such agency is frequently couched within their value as a 'maiden/reward', a prize intended for the (dominant) male characters. This frame, in turn, perpetuates the narrative 'happy ending' that to marry well is the only goal or reward that a woman can achieve (Schubart, 2016). In order to reach this outcome, female characters must undergo a series of trials similar to the male's hero's journey; except that for women they must be humbled (Tatar, 1985), undergoing a series of failed attempts at autonomy before, finally, being subservient enough for marriage – a structure named the female bildungsroman arc (Jones, 2011). When female characters show signs of sexuality, this often either places them in danger or, due to their position as 'reward', renders them reliant on male characters, via marriage, for their protection (Larsson, 2016). These frames exist even in high fantasy narratives with ostensibly agented female characters, resulting

in what Genz (2016, p. 244) terms "sexist liberalism." The dominant positionality in high fantasy is owned and policed by the cultural capital afforded to heterosexual masculinity, inherited from fairy tales and medieval romance (Partridge, 1983; Mendlesohn, 2008; Kuznets, 1985). Furthermore, women in high fantasy are often isolated from other women, or when they are permitted female company, it is usually couched in rivalry – often as a result of the internalised patriarchal, misogynistic structures of the narrative worlds the women inhabit. This isolation prevents women in high fantasy from learning about their world from a source who faces similar issues regarding capital and doxa, and thus could, potentially, offer them a means of navigating their world that is relevant to, and understanding of, their own struggles. Moreover, by isolating women from each other, negative tropes regarding female enmity or rivalry are strengthened. These tropes are often based around their perceived or actual competition for male attention, with the cultural capital needed to gain this male attention often being codified by the feminine beauty ideal (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). While isolating women from their peers is problematic in and of itself, in high fantasy, it presents an additional issue due to the propensity for the protagonist to be naïve (Mendlesohn, 2008). This creates a situation in which female protagonists are either reliant on male mentors to interpret the world for them (as is the case for Arya Stark and Daenerys Targaryen) or where they lack any guidance at all, encouraging the risk of them being seen as gullible or weak in the eyes of the reader (as with Sansa Stark).

Accordingly, these tropes open the doorway for various other problematic representations of women in high fantasy, such as the deification of femininity and fertility seen in *The Lord of the Rings* or the physical and social danger the same femininity and fertility (or lack of) places women in *A Game of Thrones*. These representations are largely codified within the genre as a result of its subtle yet strong syntagmatic and paradigmatic structural connection to J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, he, in turn, relying on fairy tale and medieval romance to inspire the structures and motifs he used (Tolkien, 1938/1983; see also Kuznets, 1985; Mendlesohn, 2008; Williamson, 2015). Of course, this is not to say that high fantasy authors are intentionally setting out to replicate harmful tropes. I have highlighted authors who have sought to subvert or challenge these norms, and I also acknowledge that "[o]ften, in fact, a writer simply chooses to write in a certain way, one free of ideological baggage" (Whetter, 2016, p. 10). Rather, my argument is that these ideas are habitually and largely unconsciously maintained through genre norms and tropes, and are contextualised in the text through the implied author

and the effect of double articulation. In terms of high fantasy, the genre is so strongly codified in popular culture that it may perhaps be that case that to attempt to write outside of those gender-normative medieval romance/fairy tale structures and archetypes would result in one writing something that is not considered to be high fantasy. This is a point Whetter (2016, p. 15) picks up, commenting that "genres can suffer from a limited view of their conventions or potential." It is this 'limited view' that has led me to argue that self-publication offers a space in which genre norms and tropes can be adapted and interrogated, due to the fact that it is not subject to the same considerations as traditional publishing.

10.1.2 Genre Resistance and Self-publication

Certainly, in terms of traditional publication, genre is a useful guide. Recognising, at least broadly, those genres that are popular – and, crucially, the syntagmatic and paradigmatic factors common within those genres – allows a publishing house to make commercially sensible choices in terms of their investments. However, the new frontier provided by self-publication offers readers the freedom to find new stories written by new voices, which otherwise might never have been published due to concerns over financial viability. Equally, self-publishing offers the chance for authors to divert from the standard norms of their genre, exploring and subverting the archetypes and structures commonly associated with the same. Self-publication provides the opportunity to reimagine and redefine genre norms. However, without some sense of genre we would not be able to differentiate texts types; we would not be able to recognise the types of stories we enjoy. Zillmann (1988, in Mar et al, 2011) argues that people will turn to fiction to improve their mood (the mood-management theory) and knowing what type of fiction one enjoys – or feels in the mood for – is an important part of enjoying a story.

What then are we to make of genre? On the one hand, it can be limiting and, as this thesis has argued, even harmful; on the other, it provides a useful shorthand to help us decide what type of narrative we need. This is an issue which genre analysts have spent years debating and continue to question (see Whetter, 2016). The question I propose in this thesis is in some sense linked to this issue and removed from it. The advent of self-publishing offers the potential for genres to become disturbed in ways that are positive in terms of shifts in power; feminist views on challenging dominant, problematic concepts and representations; and, finally, in terms of

individual ownership and achievement. However, this could also include re-enforcement of harmful ideas and representations, as the self-publication process necessarily allows all voices a platform. Nevertheless, while it is certainly true that new methods of reaching readers has the potential to create a 'wild west' of publication, in which the 'good' and the 'bad' are forced to mingle in the literary saloon, they also offer a chance for interesting growth and adaption. Mendlesohn (2008, p. xiii) states that:

> Understanding the broad brushstrokes of plot or the decorative device is less fundamental to comprehending the genre; all of these may be tweaked or subverted while still remaining firmly within the reader's expectation of the text.

This leads me to question whether the sole reason harmful representations of women survive in high fantasy is simply because they survive (a somewhat frustratingly simply tautology, I admit). Of course, as I have stated at numerous points throughout, there are traditionally published authors who subvert harmful high fantasy norms, but the fact remains that, at the time of writing, the two best-known high fantasy works, *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones* contain representations of women that, when considered in light of the various ways in which narrative can influence people's real-world beliefs, are potentially extremely harmful.

I return here to the tautology mentioned above. I can, personally, see no reason for these representations to exist, except that they do. High fantasy, especially, is a genre which invites the 'new', and yet these historic treatments of women, either syntagmatically or via the character archetypes and set-ups of the narrative world, persist because they are 'genre coded'. While I sympathise with and understand the need for the publishing industry to remain solvent, and indeed the wish of authors to sell their books, I have been forced to question whether the maintenance of certain genre norms has occurred due to the cyclical nature of the traditional publishing model. What is popular sells, but what is given the *chance to become popular* is that which is made available and which is privileged by the publishing field. As already outline, the very fact that Tolkien's work came to shape the high fantasy genre was a result of a financially-driven choice on behalf of the BAFS (Williamson, 2015). Self-published authors, however, do

not necessarily have the same motives for producing a narrative as those involved in the traditional publication industry (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013b). Could it be, then, that self-publication might offer a way for genres to grow, adapt, and be challenged? And if so, what threat does this potentially pose to the traditional publishing industry? And finally, is it necessary to see self-publication as a threat to either the publishing industry or the literary field?

10.2 'Multiliteraryism': A New Way to View Publication

Perhaps the most serious obstacle facing self-publication is a perceived lack of legitimacy within the literary field. Even allowing for the fact that self-publication is a growing field (Author Earnings, 2017), it remains largely removed from that which is considered 'real' literature. In the same way that certain world literature texts remain(ed) marginalised, so too does self-publication: "even in the political-economic universe the number of speakers of a language is not sufficient to establish its centrality" (Casanova, 2010, p. 3). Indeed, I see a strong link between the historical and, in some spaces still current, delegitimisation of world literature and that of self-publication, within both the literary and the academic fields. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that self-publication has been subjected to the racist and imperialistic stigmas that have oppressed authors from outside of the Anglo-Francophone literary centre. Rather, I refer to the issue of the cultural capital held by the literary field. The imbalanced power dynamic between self-publication and traditional publishing may cause barriers to self-publication ever reaching a point where its works are regarded seriously. Casanova discusses how international literature is endowed with greater capital than literature which is dependent on local systems. In this way, he points out the power and dominance one field exerts over another due to the cultural and social capital it enjoys – the fact that it is simply *seen* as having more prestige (Casanova, 2010, p. 2):

> The world literary universe can therefore be represented as a group of national literary fields, which are themselves bipolarized and situated differentially (and hierarchically) in the world structure according to the relative weight which the international pole and the national (and nationalistic) pole hold in each field.

In this way, Casanova frames the literary field into two domains, the 'dominant' and 'dominated'. This new way of viewing the distinctions in the field, Casanova argues, is not a "simple semantic change, since it transforms the perspective of the analysis and the type of theoretical tools employed" (2010, p. 2). This distinction may also be useful when considering the fields of traditional publication and self-publication. If one accepts that all forms of publication are equally legitimate and deserving of capital, it is, therefore, possible to argue that traditional publication has thus far dominated self-publishing, for all the concerns raised that self-publication might destabilise traditional publication (see Bounie, et al., 2012; Baverstock, 2012). However, once that has been acknowledged, it can be (or at least begin to be) reversed. If we continue Casanova's argument, it may be possible to reposition the poles of publishing, taking instead a view of '*multiliteraryism*', in which one recognises the individual benefits of different forms of publication. This concept is developed based on the term 'multilingualism', in that multilingualism recognises different languages and the various benefits of being multilingual, without erasing various sites of political and social struggle from the debate. This reflects, I hope, the way that the field of world literature has been championing works from outside the Anglo- and Francophile West, whilst also not ignoring issues of (post-)colonialism, racism and capital, and also the manner in which social linguistics has been arguing for a better understanding of language as a complex social, gendered, and political site. Building on this principle of shared ownership, Whetter (2016) argues that genre should not be seen as restrictive, but rather as a means of communication – sometimes open to misunderstanding or misreading, but ultimately a resource that can lead to understanding. This, I suggest, is much the same principle as that of the legitimisation within both the literary field and the academic field of world literature, and could therefore also be applied to the creation of multiliteraryism. Multiliteraryism, then, could be used as a means to incorporate self-publishing into the literary field, critically and academically, without loss of the complexities this new publishing field encompasses.

Sadly, there appears to be a reluctance, "particularly within academia" (Baverstock, 2012, p. 1), to acknowledge the significance of self-publication. As with the issues faced by world literature, this resistance to, or disregard of, self-publication in terms of academic study leaves it vulnerable to the forces outlined in chapter nine. Moreover, academia itself loses out.

As has been outlined in this thesis, self-publication offers an extremely interesting and complex site of exploration, both in terms of literature-as-resistance, but also in terms of the type of people and communities drawn to it, the ways those communities create and maintain their habitus, capitals, and doxa, as well as the way self-publication inter-relates to other aspects of the literary field. It also means that academia as a field is at risk of internalisation. As Bourdieu (1993, p. 32) notes:

> [W]hat circulates between contemporary philosophers, or those of different epochs, are not only canonical texts, but a whole philosophical doxa carried along by intellectual rumour – labels of schools, truncated quotations, functioning as slogans in celebration or polemics – by academic routine and perhaps above all by school manuals (an innumerable reference), which perhaps do more than anything else to constitute the 'common sense' of an intellectual generation.

This also reflects Hills' (2002) comments on the tendency of the academy to ignore or disregard fan inquiries or analysis, as well as producing works with are largely unintelligible to outsiders. Moreover, it was this lack of representation of ideas outside of the (male) academy which second wave feminists sought to redress. Looking again to the field of world literature, much has been done to open up the academic discourse, widening participation from those 'sanctified texts' of the Anglo-Francophone West to include works published by authors from different languages and cultures, recognising that such works have much to offer. By embracing the ever-growing changes that are occurring in the literary world as a result of technological advances allowing wider participation in the industry, such as self-publication, there is a chance to not only enhance our literary legacy but also to explore new representations and genre formations. Ideas about *what* literature should be, how it should be generated, or what it should say are nothing more than codifications of our habitual expectations. Indeed, "The whole of what we do is enacted behaviour; it consists of roles and poses meant to convince, played out before an audience (in our heads or outside of them) whom we are trying to persuade. That we fail to

note this fact in everyday life points only to the degree to which our poses have become habitual" (Day, 1993, p. 215).

10.3 Final Thoughts

The gate-keeping processes of traditional publication serve the larger markets of publication, ensuring that the industry as a whole continues. Many of the original criticisms levelled at self-publication were that it would signal the end of publication as an entire industry (Baverstock, 2012), something which has not come to pass. Indeed, the potential that self-publication offers is that it can supplement the market, offering readers greater choice and a variety of different representations of characters, situations and archetypes, as is being argued for here. This variety of representations helps to widen participation in the field and offers readers a richer field of narrative experiential growth, which in turn may provoke changes in harmful beliefs and assumptions as a result of narrative persuasion.

Ultimately, stories exist in order to help us make sense of the world around us. They are there for us to learn from, but we must always be critical. As our cultures and our world changes, so too must the lessons provided to us by stories, as too must the means by which these lessons are taught, and the voices which teach them. However, "[t]he work of art is an object which exists as such only by the virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 35). In short, art is valued because we bestow value upon it, and as such there is no reason not to include works of self-published fiction into the literary field, to treat them as texts worthy of analysis by critics and academics, and to explore what they offer to the wider fields of our culture(s). If we allow, through inattention, the loss of self-publication, by which I mean the access it provides authors to tell stories that may not be financially viable for traditional publishing houses, and with it the potentially huge variety of authors and stories it offers, we are not only losing access to narrative worlds we likely would never otherwise have the opportunity to explore, but also the opportunity to learn how to increase our experience and our empathy (Gottschall, 2013).

In conclusion, as Barthes (1975, p. 237) states, "narrative starts with the very history of mankind […] Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural." Publication, and the capitals that are traditionally associated with the field of publication, must mirror this.

Like fiction itself, these fields (literary, but also publishing and authorship) must be multiple, complex, and evolving. As such, self-publication, traditional publication, and whatever the next form of publication will be, should be embraced for what they can offer us, in the spirit of equality and multiliteraryism.

THE END

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