
This content analysis of six fantasy novels for children aged approximately 8 to 12 discusses the archetypal Hero’s Journey and its relation to the gender of the protagonist. These novels were read and analyzed for adherence to or departure from the traditional 17 stages of Joseph Campbell’s monomyth, described in The Hero with a Thousand Faces. The focus of the content analysis is whether female protagonists on quests face modified quests and employ stereotypically feminine techniques to overcome obstacles as opposed to their swashbuckling male counterparts. The modifications found in the six novels suggest that heroines rely on empathy rather than strength to complete quests.

Headings:

Fantasy

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HEROINE’S JOURNEY:
GENDER AND THE MONOMYTH IN MIDDLE-GRADE FANTASY

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I. Introduction

Joseph Campbell’s monomyth describes a universal hero myth structure found in the mythology, stories, and religion of many cultures (Leeming, 2010). This archetypal story structure features a young person, typically male, who undertakes a journey with a dual purpose: to learn about himself and to do good in some way. The heroic protagonist undertakes a quest, journeying from his home to another setting, facing several challenges, and returning to his home master of both worlds, with an increased knowledge of the real and magical worlds as well as a strong sense of belonging and identity. Campbell identified and defined seventeen steps of this Hero’s Journey by “bring[ing] together a host of myths and folktales from every corner of the world,” and using parallels between these stories to “develop a vast and amazingly constant statement of the basic truths by which man has lived throughout the millennia,” (Campbell, 2008, p. xiii).

Due to the universality of the stages he identified, many authors intentionally use the Monomyth as a warp upon which to weave the weft of unique otherworlds, creating the tapestries of their own tales. George Lucas’s Star Wars series is perhaps the most widely known modern intentional retelling of the monomyth (Gordon, 1978, p. 320-321). Others are so familiar with the stories used to create this framework--the creation myths, religious parables, and epic poetry that are part of a global collective consciousness--that the stories they create are easily identified as following the monomyth pattern even if not intentionally created to do so. Intentionally or not, many authors of fantasy write books
that adhere to the Hero’s Journey pattern. High fantasy, in particular, often involves quests, due to the genre’s direct descent from the heroic myths and legends the monomyth describes (Lynn, 2005, p. xvi).

The Hero’s Journey is a typically male archetype (Pearson and Pope, 1981, p. 4; Altmann, 1992, p. 145); however, the appearance of women protagonists in fantasy is slowly increasing. As female readership increases, female protagonists are becoming more common in high fantasy novels for young people. These women are filling traditionally male roles with greater frequency, being promoted from the hero’s prize, to companion, to heroines in their own right. Despite the increasing frequency of female protagonists, many of these heroines remain limited to the feminine qualities traditionally valued in their predecessors, the damsel in distress and “nurturing healer” (Disque, 2005). When these books feature a hero’s quest and follow the monomyth, an examination of gender can be performed while to some extent “controlling for plot”; that is, we are presented with two versions of the same (similar) sets of events, with the gender of the protagonist being a driving force in the characterization of the hero or heroine and the completion of the quest’s stages. This paper aims to compare the typical Heroine’s Journey to that of the Hero’s, as seen in middle grade fantasy fiction. I examine the challenges faced by male and female questing protagonists and how the challenges are resolved. Additionally, I assess the differences in the quests’ primary object, overall scope, and resolution.
II. Literature Review

Fantasy literature as a genre

The Encyclopedia of Fantasy (1997) says that a “fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms,” before going on to define “text,” “self-coherent,” “story,” “perceive as impossible,” and “otherworld” at length. The fact that fantasy as a genre is hard to define is more commonly agreed upon than any definition, and “many attempts at defining the genre have failed” (Miller, 2008, p. 1). Fantasy is perhaps best understood as “a set of expectations” (Miller, 2008, p. 35). Natalie Babbitt identifies some of these expectations: a setting in a world of “impossible, and often wondrous” magic (be it our own world or another entirely) and a plot featuring a quest or a struggle between good and evil (Lynn, 2005, p. xvi). The characters are often recognizable archetypes from the folktales from which fantasy is evolved (Lynn, 2005, p. xvi).

Children’s fantasy literature

Even if a definition of fantasy can be agreed upon, the line between fantasy literature for adults and children is blurry at best, and that, in fact, “fantasy written for children is far superior to that written for adults” (Lynn, 2005, p. xx). “Fantasy literature has become during the past decade the most popular genre of children’s and young adult literature,” and “in the last 12 years, the fantasy genre has dominated the middle grade
market” (Lynn, 2005, p. xlii; Ford, 2013). Susan Cooper, author of Newbery Award-winning fantasy novel “The Grey King,” says that “[v]ery young children, their conscious minds not yet developed, are all feeling and instinct. Closer to the unconscious than they will ever be again, they respond naturally to the archetypes and the deep echoes of fairy story, ritual, and myth... Some children... go on seeking out fantasy all their lives, instinctively aware that far from being babyish, it is probably the most complex form of fiction they will ever find,” (quoted in Lynn’s *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults*, p. xxi-xxii)

**Female protagonists in children’s fantasy**

Fantasy has long been a genre dominated by male writers, readers, and characters; however, with an increase in female author- and reader-ship, “more female characters are breaking out of the stereotypes and being portrayed as successful in areas that used to be the exclusive domain of men” (Disque, 2005, p. 8). Still, Diekman & Murnen found in their 2004 study of children’s books that even books praised as nonsexist portrayed at best a narrow vision of gender equality, in which women adopt male-stereotypic attributes and roles. [...] Nonsexist books succeeded in portraying female characters as adopting the characteristics and roles identified with the masculine gender role, but they did not portray male characters as adopting aspects of the feminine gender role or female characters as shedding the feminine gender role. (p. 381)

This manifestation of female characters, presented as diametrically opposite the damsel in distress, does not “validate women's lives as we live them, [or] recognize that what women actually are and do is worthwhile and central,” but presents instead a “hero in drag”—a male character given a female body (Altman, 1992, p. 144). In much the same way that “[t]he simple reversal of gender roles does not result in a feminist fairy tale, but
rather a fractured fairy tale,” (Kuykendal and Sturm, 2007), the replacement of a damsel in distress with a hero in drag does not break down the gender binary, but enforces it: if a female character wants to succeed as a hero, she must take on the aspect of a man.

Campbell’s monomyth

The monomyth, as described in Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, is a universal pattern that can be found in global mythology, religion, ritual, and folklore. The journey of the monomythic hero has two components: the physical adventure in the form of a quest and the spiritual or psychological awakening of self. The hero’s journey has three “essential elements:” the Departure, the Adventure and the Return, also known as the Separation, Initiation, and Return (Leeming, 2010, p. 578-80; Campbell, 2008, p. 23). The simplest expression of this formula is “a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder (x): fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won (y): the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (z)” (Campbell, 2008, p. 23). Within these three realms (the status quo (x), the supernatural realm (y), and the return (z)), the hero passes through 17 stages, identified by Campbell and briefly described here. (See Appendix B for a visualization of the monomyth cycle.)

During the hero’s departure, he recognized five stages. The first is the Call to Adventure, in which the hero is summoned to the quest: “destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of society to a zone unknown” (Campbell, 2008, p. 48). In the Refusal of the Call, the hero denies the quest, “refus[ing] to give up what one takes to be one’s own interest” (Campbell, 2008, p. 48). Supernatural Aid appears in the form of a protective figure, representing the hero’s
destiny and aiding them as the hero encounters a “threshold guardian” at the Crossing of the First Threshold, where they leave the realm of the quotidian and enter the realm of the unknown (Campbell, 2008, p. 59, 64). Not only does the hero cross into the unknown, he is swallowed wholly by it, entering the stage Campbell terms “The Belly of the Whale.” This “worldwide womb” image reaffirms the hero’s journey as spiritual, emotional, or psychological “rebirth” as well as physical journey (Campbell, 2008, p. 74).

The hero’s initiation consists of six stages. During the Road of Trials, the hero must overcome obstacles. Campbell notes that “[t]his is a favorite phase of the myth-adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals,” and this is the stage many readers think of as the “quest” (Campbell, 2008, p. 81). The following two stages focus on the hero’s interactions with women and what they represent in Campbell’s monomyth: in the Meeting with the Goddess, the hero marries “the Queen Goddess of the World” and through this marriage, attains “total mastery of life” (Campbell, 2008, p. 91, 101). Having lain with the Queen Goddess, the hero experiences the “Oedipal-Hamlet revulsion” that transforms his bride into the Woman as Temptress, “the symbol no longer of victory but of defeat” who provides “a dangerous alternative to the true goal” (Campbell, 2008, p. 102). Just as the goddess wife is recognized as the hero’s mother, the hero recognizes himself as the father in Atonement with the Father, reconciling with or superseding his father to become the “representative of an impersonal cosmic force” (Campbell, 2008, p. 116). Apotheosis is achieved when the hero transcends the physical quest and comes to a great realization regarding his position in the world and his purpose in life. Campbell describes this as similar to attaining Nirvana or becoming a god, but apotheosis typically manifests in fantasy as the hero realizing his
place in the world (Campbell, 2008, p. 127-30). The final stage before the hero begins his return is the acceptance of the Ultimate Boon, a great gift of knowledge and “a symbol of life energy” which will allow him to return (Campbell, 2008, p. 163).

Having attained the Ultimate Boon, the hero must begin his return. In the first stage, the Refusal of the Return, the hero considers remaining in the magical realm rather than bringing his new found knowledge or power back to the mundane world (Campbell, 2008, p. 167). The Magic Flight happens in one of two ways depending on the circumstances of the quest: “[i]f the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god” then “the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron” (Campbell, 2008, p. 170). If the acquisition of the Ultimate Boon has been contrary to the gods’ desires, the flight will “become a lively, often comical pursuit” of the hero by the gods or other protectors of the boon (Campbell, 2008, p. 170).

Occasionally, such as in the case of a hero’s refusing the return, he must rely on a Rescue from Without, in which “the world may have to come and get him,” Campbell quips (2008, p. 178). The hero returns to the world of men in the Crossing of the Return Threshold, and becomes Master of the Two Worlds, with the ability to cross between the realm of man and that of the unknown and an understanding of the workings and interrelatedness of the two (Campbell, 2008, p. 188, 196). Finally, the hero gains the Freedom to Live, having come to better understand himself as a person and acknowledge his place in the world (Campbell, 2008, p. 206-7). (For more information about the monomyth, see Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.)

*The monomyth in fantasy and folklore*
The monomyth, summarized briefly in the introduction above, can often be found woven into contemporary high fantasy novels, “the fastest growing category of fantasy literature,” (Lynn, 2005, p. xxxix). “High fantasy novels have been variously called epic fantasy, heroic fantasy, myth fantasy, other-world fantasy, and alternate world fantasy. In such works, the fate of the world hangs in the balance, while the forces of good and evil, or light and darkness, battle for control of humanity,” (Lynn, 2005, p. 289). Although adhering to the monomyth structure can be an intentional choice on the part of the author, these stories are often prone to following the Hero’s Journey pattern simply due to their common ancestry—legends and folktales. In *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Ruth Nadelman Lynn divides high fantasy into three sub-subgenres: “Alternate Worlds or Histories,” “Travel to Other Worlds,” and “Myth or Legend Fantasy,” the last defined as “retelling of myth or legend, as well as stories in which contemporary protagonists are drawn into the mythic struggle of good versus evil. Many of these works are retellings or expansions of the Arthurian legends, of Andersen and Grimm fairy tales, and of Celtic or Norse mythology,” (Lynn, 2005, p. 424). In short, the monomyth describes the legends from which most high fantasy is descended, and therefore, these new high fantasy novels are often loyal to the original pattern and overall feel of the monomyth itself. “[T]he conventions based on medieval romance, Welsh legend or Northern European mythology [...] still operate in works of ‘high’ fantasy, such as C. S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia*, Susan Cooper’s *The Dark Is Rising* or Lloyd Alexander’s *Chronicles of Prydain*” because “the heroic romance, which is a form of high fantasy [...] draws most directly from the fountainhead of mythology” (Immel, 2009; Alexander, 1971). For example, Campbell examined Arthurian legend when creating his archetype: it
follows that many authors inspired by the tales of Arthur will create tales that fit the monomyth archetype, intentionally or not.

**Female protagonists in the monomyth**

Joseph Campbell describes the hero of the monomyth as “the *man or woman* who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms,” (emphasis added, Campbell, 2008, p. 14). Robin Altmann, in her examination of Robin McKinley’s young adult fantasy *The Hero and the Crown*, notes that “the hero tale is not fundamentally ‘about’ men” and that “the ‘he’ of the mythographers, it has been argued, stands in for a gender-neutral pronoun that English lacks,” (Altmann, 1992, p. 145). However, she argues that the gender of hero portrayed is “almost ineluctably male” due to “the sheer number of male images and masculine pronouns,” present in Hero’s Journey stories (Altmann, 1992, p. 145). Campbell himself, while maintaining that the hero is a “man or woman,” goes on to differentiate between male and female roles in the monomyth, for example, “woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known” and “the hero is the one who comes to know,” (2008, p. 97). During the Meeting with the Goddess, the “final test of the talent of the hero is to win the boon of love,” but “when the adventurer [...] is not a youth but a maid, she is the one who, by her qualities, her beauty, or her yearning, is fit to become the consort of an immortal [...] whether she will or no” (Campbell, 1998, p. 99). Again, during the Atonement with the Father: “there is a new element of rivalry in the picture: the son against the father for the mastery of the universe, and the daughter against the mother to be the mastered world” (emphasis original, Campbell, 1998, p. 115; Pearson and Pope, 1981, p. 4). Clearly this is a conceptualization
of men as hero/subject and women as prize/object, despite all of Campbell’s insistence that women can be heroes—or rather, as he says, “adventurers” (1998, p. 99). Pearson and Pope, in *The Female Hero in American and British Literature*, put it bluntly when they say “if one conceives of women as being heroic, or even human, Campbell’s statement makes no sense,” (Pearson and Pope, 1981, p. 4). In truth, Campbell’s monomyth, while not necessarily limited to protagonists of the male sex, is focused on a hero who, regardless of physical sex, overwhelmingly exhibits traditionally masculine traits. Pearson and Pope call this the “macho heroic ideal,” in which “the hero ‘masters’ other people as well as the natural world” and “demonstrates his heroic power by killing or dominating others,” (1981, p. 4). What, then, of the heroine? Between the damsel as quest object and the macho hero in drag exists a third way—a feminized monomyth—the Heroine’s Journey. In order to reconcile the increased prevalence of female protagonists with the masculine exclusivity of the traditional monomyth, heroines complete quests by embodying stereotypically feminine roles, distinct from the roles played by male protagonists, to overcome challenges faced on their monomyth journeys. This paper attempts to provide an overview of the ways in which the monomyth is adapted based on the gender of the protagonist.
III. Methodology

I analyzed six fantasy novels using latent content analysis to determine the messages sent regarding young women who undertake quests. Content analysis is defined by Babbie as “the study of recorded human communication,” and latent content as “the underlying meaning of communications,” rather than the manifest content, or “the concrete terms contained in a communication,” (2007, p. 325). Although my interest was sparked by the striking adherence to, yet feminization of, the monomyth in *A Wizard Named Nell*, and I did suspect that traits exhibited in that book would be present in others, I employed iterative content analysis to determine the themes seen across works; that is, I did not predetermine the themes for which I would search, instead taking note of them as I read and re-read the works.

Utilizing the catalogs of several local public libraries, recommended book lists, personal experience, and the extensive knowledge of several youth services librarians, I selected a list of six titles which feature a female protagonist and follow the monomyth archetype, especially the road of trials, my primary interest. My first challenge was in locating fantasy novels written for the correct age group and featuring a female protagonist undertaking a Campbell-style quest. While there are many middle grade fantasy novels with women (i.e. Tamora Pierce’s many cycles), and many with clearly-defined quests (i.e. Lloyd Alexander’s Prydain Chronicles), the overlap of these two descriptors appears to be slight. Many more of the female protagonists are attending schools (*Princess Academy*, by Shannon Hale; *Ella Enchanted*, by Gail Carson Levine;
Alanna: The First Adventure, by Tamora Pierce) or fulfilling courtly or other duties (The Tombs of Atuan, by Ursula K. LeGuin, which does have a quest, but one which remains contained within the walls of a monastery). In contrast, it seems the majority of middle-grade fantasy novels with male protagonists feature quests.

Assessment of male and female traits

In order to make explicit the traits described below as “traditionally masculine” or “traditionally feminine,” I turned to the Bem Sex-Role Indicator’s list of traits. The Bem Sex-Role Indicator Test is a standardized survey that uses a Likert Scale rating self-descriptiveness of 60 adjectives to determine relative masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. 20 adjectives are feminine, 20 are masculine, and 20 are gender neutral (Malloy, 2010). This scale is widely used in sex-role studies and has a high level of reliability even after almost 40 years (Holt, 1998).

In designing the test, Bem asked participants to “How desirable is it in American society for a man (woman) to possess each of these characteristics?” essentially crowdsourcing her definition of appropriate male and female behavior, (Holt & Ellis, 1998, p. 932). Although the scale has been critiqued for its traditionalism, in fact, the traits described as feminine and masculine when the test was designed are consistently recognized as feminine and masculine today (Holt, 1998).

Key’s major finding in his 1971 study of children’s books was that girls are portrayed as “being” and boys as “doing,” (quoted in Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993, 221). This is visible in Bem’s list of feminine and masculine traits, where masculine traits include the verb phrases “acts as a leader,” “defends own beliefs,” “willing to take a stand,” and “has leadership abilities” along with adjectives. The female traits include only
two verb phrases: “does not use harsh language” and “loves children.” Although many of the female protagonists are certainly “doing”--questing, completing challenges--many of them “do by being,” as discussed below. Overall, the feminine traits emphasize empathy (for example, affectionate, gentle, tender, understanding, compassionate, loyal), while the masculine traits encourage dominance (assertive, individualistic, self-sufficient, aggressive, ambitious, competitive) (See Appendix C for a complete list of terms from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory). Although I do not explicitly rate the protagonists using this scale, the traits listed operationalize the concepts of femininity and masculinity; by referring to these traits one can ascertain whether trends deviating from the traditional monomyth are related to the feminization of the quest or something unrelated.

A note on terminology: Several authors choose to use the phrase “female hero” rather than “heroine” in their texts, (Pearson & Pope, 1981). I have chosen to use the term heroine in most cases, because I feel that it is more neutral. Female hero, to me, suggests those protagonists of the female sex, but masculine traits (“heroes in drag”), while heroine allows for a fuller range of possibilities without implying the female protagonist is a damsel in distress.
IV. Analysis

Introducing our heroines

Of the seven girls in this study, six are princesses--Arinelle, sisters Addie and Meryl, Margaret, Matilda, and Elissa, who is introduced as an orphan before learning her heritage. The last, Igraine, is the daughter of a powerful sorcerer and sorceress, and also lives in a castle. All of them are described or depicted as Caucasian, typical for high fantasy, which is often set in recognizably European, Anglo-Saxon alternate history. These questing girls are born in privilege and are allowed, compelled even, to quest due in part to this privilege, as discussed below.

Princess Arinelle, the titular character in *A Wizard Named Nell*, lives in Eldearth, where the Imperial Wizard, who keeps evil and literal darkness away by channeling good magic, is growing old and weak. She determines that an ancient prophecy names her as the next Imperial Wizard, and sets out on a quest to save her kingdom.

*Igraine the Brave*, twelve, desires to become a knight, breaking with tradition in her family of sorcerers. When her parents accidentally transfigure themselves into pigs, Igraine must defend her castle home from an evil wizard.

Lame Princess Matilda of *Handbook for Dragon Slayers* desires nothing more than a reclusive life as a scribe and philosopher, but when she is kidnapped by a cousin intent on the throne, she is swept on an adventure with her handmaid and a failed squire, both intent on careers as dragon-slayers.
Princesses Addie and Meryl, of *The Two Princesses of Bamarre*, couldn’t be more opposite: Meryl longs for adventure and fame, but when she falls victim to the Grey Death, it is her sister Addie, shy and afraid, who must quest for the cure.

*Elissa’s Quest* begins as a diplomatic mission to aid a father she has never known, but quickly becomes more complicated as she learns she is not only a pawn in the hands of kings, but also one chosen by an ancient prophecy.

In *The Runaway Princess*, Princess Margaret’s father is determined to marry her off, but when he holds a tournament to determine the most worthy prince, Meg decides to win the tournament herself.

**Call to “Adventure” and scope of quest**

During the Call to Adventure, the hero, who inhabits a recognizably mundane or normal world, is forced to leave home and the safety of the status quo. In describing the essential quest element of fantasy, Diana Tixier Herald claims “the adventure may be undertaken for any number of reasons--boredom with one’s present situation, wanderlust, dissatisfaction with things as they are. The quest, however, is always a spiritual or religious undertaking. The quest hero is appointed or ordained to his or her mission, and its end often has spiritual significance” (2006, p. 375). Often these questing heroes are reluctant to leave their situations, and attempt a Refusal of the Call, but come to understand the necessity of their quest--consider Bilbo Baggins, or Luke Skywalker’s reluctance to leave his uncle’s farm. If we consider this distinction between adventure and quest to be true, very few of the female protagonists considered here could be considered as questing, as “boredom with one’s present situation, wanderlust, [and] dissatisfaction with things as they are” describe heroine’s catalysts for questing (or
“adventuring,” rather) in a majority of cases. April Dawn Disque noted in her study of ten female-protagonist fantasy novels for young adult readers that female protagonists “did not wait for adventure to find them; they actively sought danger and excitement,” (Disque, 2005, p. 16). In other words, they were not called to a quest, but chose to go on adventures. The male hero, destined for his quest, is plucked from the comfortable status quo; the heroine escapes the status quo, leaping at the chance to make her own way. Campbell’s characterization of “maids” as “adventurers” instead of as “heroes” may be in reference to this distinction (1998, p. 99). Similarly, Campbell describes the end result of the quest in two categories: “the hero of the fairy tale achieves a domestic microcosmic triumph, and the hero of the myth a world-historical, macrocosmic triumph” (Campbell, p. 30). Just as the heroine’s incentive to journey is affected by gender, so is the scope of the quest on which she departs. Both domestic and world-historical triumphs are found in the titles analyzed here, but the intent of the heroine’s quest is domestic: she aims to help people with whom she has personal relationships, not to save the world.

Igraine is the youngest child of a family of sorcerers, but finds magic “dreadfully boring” (Funke, 1998, p. 4). Instead, she aspires to be a knight like her great-grandfather, “who fought in tournaments and had adventures from morning till night--if the family stories were to be believed” (Funke, 1998, p. 4). Although her family would prefer her to be a magician, they tolerate her ambition, mostly worrying that she will endanger herself, not that it is unladylike. Her brother “laughed at her ambition,” saying “‘Go away and play knights in armor, little sister!’” but this is framed as brotherly teasing rather than patronization--“that’s big brothers for you,” Igraine sighs (Funke, 1998, p. 4, 8).
Bored by life in her quiet castle, Igraine dreams of a more exciting life: “‘Twelve! And I haven’t had a single real adventure. How will I ever get to be a famous knight? [...] ‘I’m going to die of boredom, you wait and see! Maybe not overnight, but definitely before my next birthday!’” (Funke, 1998, p. 12). When the opportunity arises--Igraine’s parents are turned into pigs just as an army advances on their castle, and they need giant’s hairs for their counter-potion--Igraine springs into action, “riding off this minute to find those giant’s hairs” (Funke, 1998, p. 52). Although the accidental transformation happens to take place just before a siege of the castle, Igraine’s quest is not to save her home, but to return her parents to their true human form from the pig bodies they temporarily inhabit.

The titular two princesses of Bamarre present the two opposing versions of female protagonists, and although they and the reader learn to appreciate their similarities, they are presented as opposing forces as the novel begins. Bold Princess Meryl constantly practices her swordplay in preparation for the adventure for which she longs. She dreams of saving the kingdom of Bamarre from the Grey Death, a plague-like disease from which no one recovers by “battling monsters, consulting with sorcerers, climbing mountains, [and] sailing stormy seas” (Levine, 2001, p. 3). Her sister, Princess Addie, is shy and afraid--especially of spiders--and dreads the day that her sister will depart on a quest. The two sisters make a pact that Meryl will not leave for any adventures until Addie is happily wed (Levine, 2001, p. 5). Rather than bestowing upon Meryl her longed-for quest, author Gail Carson Levine causes the brave sister to become touched by the Grey Death, leaving Princess Addie to conquer her fears and attempt to find a cure. Castle life, through the eyes of Princess Addie, is boring, but comfortable and safe,
besides the spiders. Although she, like the other female protagonists in this sample, is not “appointed or ordained to [...] her mission,” she feels compelled to quest for a cure in order to save her sister’s life (Herald, 2006, p. 375).

Had Levine chosen brave Meryl as the protagonist of The Two Princesses of Bamarre, readers may have been granted a very traditional monomyth type quest, with a protagonist adept at wielding a sword and willing to cut down beasts in order to save the kingdom. By pushing Addie into the spotlight, the scope of the novel’s quest is drastically changed, although the end result remains the same. Before falling victim to the Grey Death herself, Meryl declares “‘I’ll find the cure, and knights will flock to me. We’ll destroy the monsters and save Bamarre. Then I’ll return home,’” (Levine, 2001, p. 4). Addie, who is pushed reluctantly into her adventure by her sister’s illness, has no aspirations of greatness, and would rather remain at home; however, the plight of her sister inspires her to find a cure. While her quest results in the elimination of the Grey Death from her kingdom, her quest is not to “save Bamarre,” but to save her sister (Levine, 2001, p. 4).

Princess Arenelle’s mother died in childbirth, and Nell has often felt that she would be more useful to her country, which is threatened by dark magic, if she had been born a boy (Koller, 2003, p. 3). The prophecy, which foretells the savior of the kingdom and which she sneaks into the library to read, states the chosen one bears “the mark of the dove,” not her crescent moon shaped Charm Mark, and is a wizard, not a witch (Koller, 2003, p. 20-1). Nell is skilled in the magical arts, and so eager to save Eldearth from the Lord of Darkness that despite her gender and the prophecy’s seeming inapplicability to her, she sets off to become the next Imperial Wizard at once (Koller, 2003, p. 20-1).
Nell’s quest is undoubtedly to save her kingdom, but it also serves the purpose of proving her worth as a girl to her court, who is mentioned mourning that she was born female, that her father had no male heir to stabilize the kingdom during a difficult time (Koller, 2003, p. 3).

Princess Tilda provides a slightly different opening: although she too longs to escape the endless obligations and stifling protocol that defines her rank, adventure is the last thing on her mind. Instead, she seeks an escape from her public life as a scribe and philosopher in a scriptorium. She wants to run away, to be famous not for her deeds or her physicality, but for her thoughts: “wouldn’t it be nice for people to appreciate my words and not be thinking about the shape of my foot at the same time?” (Haskell, 2013, p. 22.). Tilda’s personal motivation to leave her royal duties behind--no longer having to compress her range of feelings into “behavior suitable for a princess,” no longer feeling obligated to subjects who she feels do not respect her, calling her the “Splayfooted Princess of Alder Brook”--is framed as almost selfish (Haskell, 2013, p. 1, 22).

Fortunately for Tilda, whose areas of expertise are “housing and clothing servants, vassals, and tenants; reading land contracts; flattering higher lords through fawning letters; and collecting rents”--topics unsuitable for great philosophical treatises--she is thrust into her best friends’ quests, gaining experience in the world outside castle walls along with self-confidence (Haskell, 2013, p. 23).

Elissa is a peasant girl, an orphan with eyes “the color of leaves when they first unfurl in the spring” (Verrillo, 2009, p. 8). She lives as an apprentice with the village healer, Nana, who she believes is the only person to know the story of her parents (Verrillo, 2009, p. 13-4). Although her mother is dead, she suspects her father may still
be alive, and promises to herself “[s]omeday I will find him, [...] I will go to the ends of
the earth if I have to,” (Verrillo, 2009, p. 16). She spends her days helping Nana,
wondering about her parentage, and talking to her best friend Gertrude, a donkey
(Verrillo, 2009, p. 27). Conversing with animals is a power that only Elissa has, a “Gift,”
that Nana tells her never to disclose to anyone (Verrillo, 2009, p. 29). When a mysterious
band of armed men arrives in town, Elissa is surprised when they summon her, and even
more surprised when the leader of the men introduces himself as “Lord Falk, High Lord
of the Eastern Reach, firstborn to the throne of Castlemar”—her father. Elissa’s call to
adventure is minimalistic and lacks agency:

“‘Can you ride?’
Elissa only nodded. [...] ‘Good,’ said Lord Falk. ‘We will be leaving tomorrow.’
Leaving? Elissa lost her ability to focus.” (p. 42)

She dreamt of finding her father, but never expected him to find her; when the time for
adventure arrives, she becomes overwhelmed, and when she recovers, she is not excited
to accompany her father, but frets over “what poor manners she’d shown” (Verrillo,
2009, p. 48). She quickly surmises what our other princesses have been taught over a
lifetime: the rules of being a noble lady, which include wearing shoes, “even indoors”
(Verrillo, 2009, p. 55).

Princess Meg’s motivation to go on a quest is interpersonal. She has three
interrelated goals: avoiding marriage by having an adventure, proving herself to her
parents, and rescuing the (somewhat) innocent dragon, witch, and bandits made targets of
the quest. She has lived a sheltered life: “The castle grounds had been her world” and she
considers having “entered an actual farmhouse” just as exciting and new as having
“shared tea with a witch, [and] escaped a dragon’s cave” (Coombs, 2006, p. 135-6).
When her father invites the princes to seek her hand, she gets upset: “It wasn’t that she minded princes [...] No, what she felt was envy--she wanted to be riding a horse herself. She would travel across the mountains and into the next kingdom, and the kingdom after that, her faithful squire Cam by her side” (Coombs, 2006, p. 24-5). When she decides to rescue the “baleful scourges,” it is clear that while she feels sorry for them--noting that the “innocent dragon” “hasn’t eaten a princess since my great-aunt was a girl”--her motivation is not entirely selfless: “‘I won’t marry some bread-for-brains who goes around killing innocent dragons! [...] We can rescue the baleful scourges together! And I’ll tell my father, ‘Ha ha! I have won the contest! You shall send this pack of foolish princes on their way!’” (Coombs, 2006, p. 28-29).

**Empathy and the healing nurturer on the Road of Trials**

While Campbell’s heroes reluctantly set off from cozy hobbit holes to do their duty, questing heroines are often thrilled to leave behind the staid palaces they call home. The spurning of a princess’s often tedious duties and rigid code of behavior leaves them free to go on adventures, but these adventures often call upon those same feminine behaviors and abilities in their progression. The traditional road of trials involves a number of challenges or obstacles that the hero must overcome, in order to reach his goal, for example, the tasks given to Hercules or Psyche (Campbell, 2008, p. 81-2). It seems that for heroines, the same qualities that stifled them in their castles are those that allow them to succeed on their quests--whether this subverts or reinforces what is traditionally expected is not explained or implied within the pages of these books, leaving it up to the reader to decide.
The trials faced by Nell along her journey are blatant in their femininity. Before she begins, her father protests that “The Imperial Wizard is called upon to make hard choices, painful choices, even cruel choices sometimes. Your heart is too soft, Nell,” but it appears that a “soft” heart is just what is required by the quest (Koller, 2003, p. 23). In her first trial, she converses with Old Mother, a magical tree. After listening to Old Mother’s qualms with the other would-be wizard’s apprentices and with human “Tallfolk” in general, Nell understands that her quest affects more than just her court and subjects:

‘You are different from the other questers,’ [Old Mother] remarked thoughtfully. Nell looked up. ‘You mean because I’m a girl?’ ‘No. I mean because you are humble and you listen,’ said Old Mother. ‘You are not full of your own importance.’ Nell sensed a glimmer of hope. ‘Does that mean you will help me?’ Old Mother considered a long moment, then swayed again. ‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I will set you on the right path.’ (p. 91-2)

Although Old Mother denies it is Nell’s gender that makes her a more worthy apprentice, she continues to praise her for traits that are extraordinarily similar to Bem’s feminine list: “humble,” “good listener,” and “not full of own importance” fit seamlessly with “compassionate,” “sensitive to the needs of others,” and “understanding” (compare with the masculine traits “ambitious,” “assertive,” “independent,” “individualistic”). Additionally, Nell is not active in this exchange--she is “doing by being,” accomplishing tasks simply by being her naturally kind-hearted, feminine self.

Further in her quest, Nell is confronted with a pack of hinterbeasts--creatures with “heads like wolves but bodies like great cats,” but when she pulls out her dagger to defend herself, it begins to glow and play the “silvery, tinkling melody” of Nell’s childhood lullaby (Koller, 2003, p. 138). Instead of defending herself, Nell begins to quietly sing, lulling the beasts to sleep (Koller, 2003, p. 139). In the morning, they are
gone, but Nell meets a girl named Raechel, who has bloodpox, and is therefore a member of a roving tribe of Arduans called “garbage eaters” because of their subsistence on scraps (Koller, 2003, p. 141-2). After seeing the girl suffering, Nell gives Raechel the speaking star used to communicate over great distances, reuniting mother and daughter by providing Raechel a way to speak to her mother far away (Koller, 2003, p. 145-6).

Nell reflects on the suffering she has encountered along her journey--Owen, the street urchin starving in the streets below her own castle; the wee folk forced into secrecy; Leah and Talitha, terrorized by war; Raechel, separated from her mother by a disease Nell believed cured--and determines to change Eldearth for the better. Nell’s preexisting feminine qualities are reinforced and those she did not acquire during her sheltered childhood as a princess are gained through her quest, transforming her from a thoughtless girl to a sympathetic and compassionate young woman.

Igraine describes her and Sir Urban’s trials by neatly summarizing “we’ve rescued a dragon, fought the One-Eyed Duke, and outwitted Osmund’s guards!” (Funke, 1998, p. 121). Igraine alone is responsible for the first task set to her, retrieving hairs from the head of the local giant. Fortunately for Igraine, her father had previously done a favor for this giant, and Igraine’s challenge consists of asking very politely and diplomatically reminding the giant of favors due (Funke, 1998, p. 76-9). Despite her fear of the friendly giant, her task is not very much more difficult than asking a neighbor for a cup of sugar. After the giant allows her to harvest several of his hairs, he even helpfully introduces her to The Sorrowful Knight of the Mount of Tears, Sir Urban of Wintergreen, who sighs that “a knight must help a damsel in distress, even a knight who has lost his honor” (Funke, 1998, p. 83). In an odd reversal of the traditional task, Igraine effectively
rescues The Sorrowful Knight from a literal tower of his own building by providing him with an excuse to act, rather than mope, despite the fact that she does so not through any action of her own, but simply by being what he views as a “damsel in distress” (Funke, 1998, p. 83-4). She then must soothe the feelings and care for The Sorrowful Knight’s emotional plight, proving her to be womanly as well as knightly: gentle, sympathetic, and sensitive to the needs of others. After her “rescue” of Sir Urban, he, not Igraine, is mainly responsible for the dragon-rescuing and Duke-fighting. After defending a dragon (discussed below), Igraine, carrying the giant’s hairs, and Sir Urban return to the castle, briefly skirmish with Osmund’s guards--they make a brave stand and Igraine delivers the only blow, knocking off a helmet with her sword--and retreat into the safety of a secret tunnel leading into the castle (Funke, 1998, p. 110-3). Igraine has borrowed a horse, retrieved giant’s hairs, rescued a knight, and returned home, all without really doing anything.

The tasks of Princess Meg’s appropriated quest are laid out in the official description of the competition for her hand in marriage:

‘Be it known that the one who will be named Champion of Greeve must slay the dragon and bring back its treasure to enrich our kingdom, rid our wood of the most foul witch, and capture the notorious bandit Rodolfo and his men. Lastly, after said prince has completed these three tasks [...] if he can carefully bring the Princess Margaret down from her tower, he will win the prize: half the kingdom and the princess’s hand in marriage.’ (p. 56)

Instead of fulfilling these tasks as expected of the princes--kill the dragon and witch and capture the bandits--Meg decides to save them, and proves their worthy innocence to her father. Although the witch turns princes into frogs (and, in a humorous turn of events, those of less noble blood into other reptiles), it is in self defense (Coombs, 2006, p. 61-2). When she is visited by Meg and Cam, she invites them in for tea and calls upon
knowledge gained not from books of enchantment, but from stacks of romance novels (Coombs, 2006, p. 108). The witch is very much able to protect herself from both the princes and the sorcerers they have employed, but Meg kindly sets her up nicely in Cam’s farmhouse, where she and its proprietress can discuss romances in comfort.

The bandits are similarly in control of the situation. Upon finding herself in the hands of the bandit crew, Meg discovers that the Bandit King “Bold Rodolfo” of legend is actually Alya, Bandit Queen. “The bandit was strong and brave and living just the kind of adventure Meg had always dreamed of having. [...] Meg found herself wondering what it would be like to be a bandit queen instead of the ordinary, stuck-in-a-castle kind” (Coombs, 2006, p. 188). The bandits, far from being threatened by the prize for their capture, skillfully take advantage of the contest, stealing the dragon’s treasure (multiple times) and even secretly entering a bandit “prince” into the competition.

After having “rescued” the dragon (discussed below) and witch, Dilly, her handmaid, says “‘Meg’s already completed two of the three tasks. She’s practically won the contest.’ ‘She hasn’t actually destroyed anything,’ Nort began, but he trailed off at the sight of Meg’s expression,” (Coombs, 2006, p. 130). Her deception of the king and princes delays marriage to unwanted suitors and proves her pure heart. Meg, through proving the innocence of those she has rescued, also proves her innocence to her father—the innocence of youth, a girl too young to marry.

Elissa begins her story a young girl, but her story, unlike any others in this sample, deals with the physical transformation of a girl to young woman. Although her father has promised her to the Khan as a wife, he is not allowed to marry her “until [she is] fourteen, or until the moon has touched [her]” (Verrillo, 2009, p. 151). In her second
day in the Citadel, she wakes up feeling ill, and she and her maid and confidant, Maya, discover she has begun her “monthly,” (Verrillo, 2009, p. 181). Her physical quest has left her abandoned by her father, and her emotional, psychological quest has been brought one step closer to completion: “Today you are a woman,” (Verrillo, 2009, p. 181). Maya brings her to a secret pool to undergo her people’s rites; Campbell’s interpretation of coming-of-age ceremonies considers this a quest within a quest (Verrillo, 2009, p. 200-3). Elissa leaves this ceremony a woman, and gains through it a mysterious talisman from “the goddess” (Verrillo, 2009, p. 206).

Although Elissa’s land does not include dragons, the empathetic link shared between woman and animals (and often manifested in the dragon relationship discussed on pages 28 through 35) is a crucial part of Elissa’s identity and quest. She learns at a young age of her Gift of speaking with animals (Verrillo, 2009, p. 29). She becomes close to the donkey Gertrude, who accompanies her on her quest, and utilizes her special link to the animal world to save herself and others several times. Near death in the desert, she speaks to two vultures, come to scavenge her body, and pleads for them to get help, leading to the two girls’ rescue by Ralph the camel and the Blue People (Verrillo, 2009, p. 270). In the final battle between the Blue People and the Khan’s army, she speaks with an eagle, who is able to tell them how many soldiers are on the horizon, (Verrillo, 2009, p. 302). She then frightens away the cavalry horses by calling snakes from the earth:

“Come to me,” cried Elissa.

Dozens and dozens--now hundreds--of snakes had emerged. They seemed to bail out of the ground. Soon there were so many snakes that the desert floor itself seemed to be moving. They slithered through the shadows and through the ranks of horses, toward Elissa, her siren call compelling them forward. By now the horses were frothy with terror [...] They reared and bucked in a frenzy throwing soldiers into the sky. (p. 321)
Through it all, Elissa is sympathetic towards the horses; “Elissa was sorry to cause them such distress,” (Verrillo, 2009, p. 321). Elissa’s Quest contains the most physical violence, but Elissa engages in none.

While the other girls may be acting in feminine modes, Addie is the only heroine who displays the single explicitly negative trait on Bem’s list of feminine traits: “gullible.” She is also sometimes portrayed as momentarily silly, for example letting her fear get the best of her and almost deciding to conquer a dragon rather than face spiders in the woods (Levine, 2001, p. 94); however, it is her gullibility that almost prematurely ends her quest, when a specter in the guise of her love interest attempts to lure her underground with promises of a cure for her sister and a happy, easy marriage for herself (Levine, 2001, p. 108-112). Her gullibility, paired with her deep emotions, would easily have outweighed her rationality if not for the true Rhys, who steps in to save his naive and trusting princess.

Still, it is her same mincing princess castle training that later saves her life, delaying her death at the hand of the dragon Vollys long enough for her to build up the courage and plan to escape. Like Igraine, Addie does not seem to accomplish much, stumbling desperately through a quest that isn’t hers. Unlike Igraine, however, this seems sufficient for Addie; this more realistic version of a quest, with less heroism and more humanism, is true to the quest form while remaining true to the character of Addie, leaving her the most all-around likable heroine, despite her shortcomings.

As aspiring dragon hunters, Parz and Judith’s quest, with which Tilda has been swept along, is understandably dragon-oriented. While it is not hindered by kidnapping, the three companions travel from dragon to dragon, and with each dragon, Tilda becomes
more understanding of their dragon’s place in the world. The first dragon they encounter is a baby—it hasn’t gotten its fire yet—and when Judith realizes they tried to kill a child, she sobs. Tilda seems more pragmatic, saying “it was clearly old enough to eat horses. And maybe people,” (Haskell, 2013, p. 87). However, she admits that when it comes to actually fighting, “It wasn’t just my foot that held me back [...] It was my nature first; I couldn’t imagine myself holding a sword with the intent to kill someone. Even a dragon,” (Haskell, 2013, p. 155). Her eventual confrontation with a dragon is not for glory, but to rescue her friend. She eventually realizes that the dragon who has trapped Judith in her cave is simply trying to protect its children, “like a swan with her cygnets” (Haskell, 2013, p. 170, 177). She realizes then that her companion’s quest is a mistake, that they “didn’t know the first true thing about dragons” and it was “thoughtless and irresponsible of them” to traipse around attempting to kill them (Haskell, 2013, p. 177-9). Her short interactions with dragons leave her and her friends bruised and slightly charred, but Tilda grows to understand dragons’ motivations, learning to appreciate, not training to kill, them. Haskell has shown that princesses must be understanding of other creatures as well as willing to sacrifice themselves for their friends and subjects--emphasizing once more that empathy, rather than bravery, is the motivating factor in the heroine’s quest.

Dealing with dragons

Regarding the familiar dragon-slaying culmination of a hero’s quest, Campbell says: “[t]he mythological hero is the champion not of things become but of things becoming; the dragon to be slain by him is precisely the monster of the status quo. […] From obscurity the hero emerges, but the enemy is great and conspicuous in the seat of power; he is enemy, dragon, tyrant, because he turns to his own advantage the authority
of his position,” (1998, p. 289). Here, it has been differentiated from other trials heroines face due to its pervasiveness and symbolic nature.

In female-protagonist quests, we see the dragon not slain, but otherwise transmuted or neutralized. Campbell considers the hero’s rescue of “the maiden of the innumerable dragon slayings” symbolic of “the hegemony wrested from the enemy”, (1998, p. 293). This damsel “is the ‘other portion’ of the hero himself [...] if his stature is that of world monarch she is the world,” once again relegating the female aspect to the submissive, the “mastered world” (Campbell, 2008, p. 293, 115). When the hero of the story is herself a woman, the prize of a woman becomes redundant. The ways in which heroines interact with dragons is one of the most revealing divergences from the masculine hero’s journey. Keeling (2009) posits that the alternate to the Dragon-Slayer model (the traditional, masculine quest, seen applied to a female in Robin McKinley’s *The Hero and the Crown*), is the Dragon-Sayer, “a girl who rejects the stereotypic masculine approach to conflict and danger (typically, overpower and conquer) and instead substitutes traditional feminine values of nurturing and caretaking to achieve her goals. Such girls seek to connect and form relationships,” (p. 14). Once again, the modifications seen in monomyth stories with female protagonists seem to be in reaction to the differing status of men and women in the mundane world--while men are expected and encouraged to be aggressive, ambitious, and dominant, women’s servility is reinforced.

Although Campbell’s dragon represents the status quo which is the hero’s last “prerequisite to the bridal bed,” one may alternately interpret the dragon as the woman’s last defenses in retaining independence (Campbell, 2008, p. 295).
*Handbook for Dragon Slayers* (2013), the distinction between male and female treatment of dragons is made clear by contrasting the reactions of the questor and the protagonist. Love interest, failed squire, quest leader, and aspiring dragon-slayer Parz seeks to hunt down dragons and draw upon his meager skills to slay them, thereby gaining respect and glory and proving his trainer wrong (Haskell, 2013, p. 28). However, through Tilda’s careful observations, the reader learns that dragons are not inherently evil, but clever creatures with a culture of their own (Haskell, 2013, p. 177). She realizes that she has “only seen dragons protecting their homes, or being good parents--protective, like a swan with her cygnets or a hen with her eggs,” (Haskell, 2013, p. 177). Finally, the power hungry Sir Egan captures Princess Mathilda; he would marry her before sacrificing her to achieve immortality (Haskell, 2013, p. 264). Symbolically, one can interpret this ritual as that of the marital bed and the immortality achieved through the continuance of Sir Egan’s bloodline. Therefore, when our heroine Matilda uses a dragon’s claw and her ultimate boon, a magical book, to summon a dragon, the dragon-slaying is reversed, the maiden protecting herself with a final barrier in the form of a dragon (Haskell, 2013, p. 270-1). In the case of Mathilda, this role-reversal is exceptionally interesting, for the dragon she summons is herself (Haskell, 2013, p. 272). Mathilda, the crippled girl, in attempting to summon a protective dragon, instead is transfigured into a dragon herself: “I am strong. [...] All these men and their edges [swords] are frightening. I am not meant for men and edges. I am not meant for walls and rules. I am a dragon,” (Haskell, 2013, p. 275).

In distancing herself from men and their swords, she protects herself and leaves behind her crippled form, but also her humanity: she is confused, unable to think
properly, she inhabits not only the dragon’s body but its mind. Parz confronts and would kill her, asking “Where is Tilda, dragon? What did you do to her?” but soon recognizes her true self (Haskell, 2013, p. 279-80). However, his kiss is insufficient to bring her back from her protective dragon form (Haskell, 2013, p. 286). Judith, the handmaiden, however, representing Plato’s (and Jung’s) eros, causes Mathilda’s half-human, half-dragon brain to return her to her human form—the successful magical kiss does not represent the union of male and female (and the following subjugation of the female), it is instead the sisterhood of two women (Haskell, 2013, p. 289-91, 294-6).

The dragon Igraine and The Sorrowful Knight face is more irritated than ferocious, despite its three heads (Funke, 1998, p. 95). “Are you out hunting dragons for fun too? [...] Look at my third head, will you? The one-Eyed Duke cut it off, and it still hasn’t grown back any larger than one of your silly human heads. I am really sick and tired of this. [...] Don’t you and your sort in those silly tinpot helmets have anything better to do?” he gripes, before Igraine is even able to mention that they are not hunting dragons (Funke, 1998, p. 95-6). The dragon protests that he has “never done a living soul harm,” and instead of slaying the dragon, Igraine and Sir Urban volunteer to defend it from the One-Eyed Duke who pursues it (Funke, 1998, p. 98). While Igraine encourages the dragon to move somewhere free of dragon hunters, Sir Urban “fended off the wild sword strokes” of the Duke before disarming him (Funke, 1998, p. 99). Not only does the heroine Igraine not slay a dragon, she does not raise arms in its defense, leaving the--non-lethal--sword fighting to the men.

Princess Arenelle’s introduction and the reader’s introduction to her magical aptitude is her joyful play with her “Demidragon,” the faithful Minna (Koller, 2003, p. 1).
This familiarity and intimacy with dragons sets the tone for the remainder of her quest. Though Minna isn’t a full-sized dragon, she proves a worthy quest companion, providing friendship and encouragement to Nell when she falters.

During her short post as slave girl in the household of Orson, a Trog, Nell connects further with dragons, this time, full-sized dragons that Orson traps and cruelly uses as pit fighters (Koller, 2003, p. 117). All but one of the dragons’ wings are clipped, a young albino dragon who the other dragons, beaten into fear and violence like the Trogs themselves, have been biting and burning, and which Orson plans on butchering to feed the other dragons (Koller, 2003, p. 121). Nell brings her food, and Minna nuzzles Nell and the dragon, introducing them (Koller, 2003, p. 123). The dragon, who had been depressed and maimed to the verge of death, is saved by Nell and Minna’s kindnesses, and in return, helps them to escape, spreading her wings stiffly outside of her small cage, and allowing them to perch on her back as they soar away to continue the quest.

The runaway princess chooses to tackle the problem of the dragon first in her series of tasks. She is quick to defend the “innocent dragon,” (“‘Innocent dragons?’” interjects Cam, for “It wasn’t a common expression”) and is right to--the dragon who ate her great-aunt is discovered as a heap of bones on the floor and instead, guarding the vast hoard, they find a small baby dragon (Coombs, p. 28, 68). The small dragon has been eating rabbits and bats, not princesses, and Meg instantly connects with it: describing it in comforting adjectives and exclaiming “‘It’s beautiful, [...] We can’t let them kill it!’” (Coombs, 2006, p. 68, 78). Meg also learns that the dragon understands her; she asks it to stop glowing so brightly, and the dragon dims (Coombs, 2006, p. 80). It seems Meg and the dragon have an extraordinary bond; no one else in the book even attempts to speak to
it, and the dragon’s flames protect Meg from danger on several occasions (81, 258-9).

After her quest is over, Meg keeps the dragon child, which she has named Laddy, as a companion and pet (Coombs, 2006, p. 272).

The story of the two princesses of Bamarre is framed by another story, that of “Drualt, the epic poem of Bamarre’s greatest hero,” who “fought Bamarre’s monsters—the ogres, gryphons, specters, and dragons that still plague” the kingdom (Levine, 2001, p. 1). As Addie sets out in search of the dragon who she believes can help her find the cure for the Gray Death, she often repeats her sister’s favorite lines:

> Step follows step.
> Hope follows courage.
> Set your face toward danger.
> Set your heart on victory. (p. 93)

The dragon, Vollys, finds Addie by accident, introduces herself politely, and holds her captive in her cave as Meryl slowly succumbs to the Gray Death. However, the dragon does know the cure, and shares this secret with Addie, expecting her to die before she is able to use the knowledge: the afflicted must drink from a waterfall that pours down from the realm of fairies (Levine, 2001, p. 169).

Rhys, Addie’s sorcerer love interest, tells her that dragons “are solitary. They dislike other dragons and hate all other creatures. Yet they're lonely and they enjoy conversation. It's why they spin out the deaths of their human victims. If you're captured, you must keep the dragon entertained” (Levine, 2001, p. 123). This proves to be accurate; and Addie’s long hours of embroidery at the castle keep her alive as she uses her skills to create a beautiful embroidery for Vollys, depicting the dragon’s version of the Drualt tale (Levine, 2001, p. 157). Vollys relies on her human captors for
companionship and calls the time just after killing them her “unhappiest hours” (Levine, 2001, p. 153).

During Princess Addie’s period of captivity, she and the reader are introduced to the complex emotional and psychological lives of dragons as well as their local history. “In Drualt” the conflict is presented simply as “the hero rescued a maiden after slaying the dragon Yune,” (Levine, 2001, p. 124). Of course, the dragons interpret this conflict differently, and in fact have their own epic poems regarding the incident, tragic rather than heroic:

Swift-flying Hothi,  
Slain by Drualt.  
And Zira, flame  
Of fury, young beauty,  
Her he slew also.  
Men call him  
The Laugher, the Hero.  
Drualt, stifling fire,  
Snuffing life,  
No hero to dragons. (p. 163)

Although Addie is too terrified to appreciate the dragons’ history, and only thinks it “odd, [...] like discovering what a wild boar thinks about its hunters,” the reader learns through Vollys’s recitation that “‘Humans are not the only poets and not the only ones to fashion tales to tell their truths. Dragons tell our own tales, and our truths are not the same as yours,’” (Levine, 2001, p. 162-3).

Over fifty pages are dedicated to Princess Addie and Vollys’ developing relationship: it is significant that Addie’s time in captivity is not used to display Vollys’ terrible power, but her complex psychological existence and deep emotion and, despite Addie’s revulsion, the dragons’ rich history. When Addie escapes, stabbing Vollys once
Kidnapping and captivity as quest element

Kidnapping is an unusually common element of the heroine’s journey, with questing girls continually plucked from their quests and sidetracked by captivity. It is possible that these dangerous, but usually not life-threatening diversions provide the suspense and emotion that would be provided by deaths and other sacrifices in more traditional monomyth stories—it should be noted that there is a very low mortality rate in the books in this study. Although all but one of these girls avoid imprisonment in towers (and Princess Meg easily escapes hers), their kidnapping creates a similar environment of temporary helplessness and powerlessness, whether they escape or are rescued. Each of these kidnappings is resolved either by receiving help from those with whom the heroines have close relationships or by once again relying upon the empathy that proves so crucial to the questing female’s survival. The importance of the kidnapping element is twofold: first, by reintroducing the of the heroine’s environmental limitations, this stage provides another barrier for the heroine, and one that reinforces her status as a female. Although the dual purpose of the heroine’s quest, like that of the hero, is to grow (and in the case of the heroine, assert herself) as in individual and better the world in which she lives, the kidnapping quest element reflects a brief return to her original state of captivity, from which the heroine must either escape, or temporarily relinquish control of her own tale in the act of being rescued. This restriction of freedom attempts, often successfully, to decrease the heroines’ agency in their own story; in the majority of cases, the heroine is rescued, rather than escaping by herself. By wresting the action from the hands of the

with her sister’s sword, she feels elated; the reader, removed from the story, feels conflicted (Levine, 2001, p. 181-2).
protagonist, the plot is advanced not through the agency of the protagonist herself, but by her captors and rescuers. Furthermore, in an extension of the vision of heroine as healer and empath, her time in captivity is often used to introduce the heroine and reader to sympathetic characters--her captors are worthy of pity or pride, never hate.

Princess Margaret of Greeve is the only girl in this study who has the unfortunate plight of being trapped in a tower. Meg’s father traps her in a tower to await the rescue of a lucky prince, but in an entertaining skewering of the classic fairytale trope, Meg and her companions easily orchestrate an escape, and she spends her days not embroidering and reading the provided books--concerning proper topics such as etiquette and royal weddings--but completing the princes’ tasks herself (Coombs, 2006, p. 21-24, 38).

During her quest she is captured again by the bandits as she attempts to warn them, spends several days living as a very well-treated prisoner in their camp, becoming acquainted with the Bandit Queen in the process (Coombs, 2006, p. 187-92). Rather than escaping, she decides she rather likes this alternate queen and her ragged troupe:

The bandit was strong and brave and living just the kind of adventure Meg had always dreamed of having. The adventure involved more dirt than Meg had imagined, and there was the whole problem of stealing, but Meg found herself wondering what it would be like to be a bandit queen instead of the ordinary, stuck-in-a-castle kind. (p. 188)

Unfortunately, she and the rest of the bandits are then captured by the most competent of the “evil princes,” Prince Vantor, on his own quest and thinking he has excellent luck in achieving two tasks in one, believing (due to a complicated string of events) Meg to be the witch: “‘We have the witch! We have the bandits! We’ll soon get the dragon’s bones back, and then--we’ll have half a kingdom!’” (Coombs, 2006, p. 193-7). Meg is not revealed as the princess--to the bandits or the prince--until their party arrives in the throne room, where she is recognized as who she is to the delighted amusement of the bandit
queen and the frustration of Prince Vantor (Coombs, 2006, p. 210). Even Meg, who after Nell arguably accomplishs the most of all the heroines, loses control of her quest several times.

After being captured by Orson, one of the troll-like Trogs inhabiting the valley, Nell finds herself a slave in his household (Koller, 2003, p. 106-9). Here she learns the plight of the Trogs and the Kwarts, two local factions that have been at war for many centuries (Koller, 2003, p. 118). At a young age, the boys from each community are taken from their families and placed in War Camps “‘Where them be taught ta hate and kill. Where all the love be beat out of them,’” (Koller, 2003, p. 115). Nell is surprised by the friendliness between her captor’s wife, Leah, and Talitha, her Kwart slave. In fact, the two women have much in common: “‘Tis a curse to be born female,’” Leah says, and Talitha agrees:

Us women be tired of war,’ said Talitha. ‘Us kill them. Them kill us. It haves no end. I growed up thinking Trogs was horrible monsters what would kill and eat the Kworts if them could. But Trogs be no different from Kwarts. The men is all just as stubborn and fierce, living for them’s blood games and them’s war. And the women is all just as sad, raising them’s little boys to be taught to hate and kill; raising them’s little girls to be slaves, whether captured in war or married off. It be much the same here.’ (p. 118)

Nell feels for the enslaved women, and resolves to help them and their children escape by giving them her vanishroud, allowing them to sneak away without their husbands noticing (Koller, 2003, p. 126). In return, they turn a blind eye as she escapes on one of her captor’s dragons (discussed below), and she leaves, promising to remember them when she is apprentice wizard and to “help you one day if I can” (Koller, 2003, p. 127). Like the other tasks Nell must undertake, her experience with the two women emphasizes Nell’s empathetic nature and increases her awareness of the injustices occurring in her realm.
Elissa shows least agency of all the heroines in this study, and her quest is almost entirely constructed of kidnappings, rescues and escapes. First, her father sweeps her away, but in her first night in his traveling camp, she is abducted by the guard sent from the Citadel of the Khan, where is rescued by Gertrude. She returns to her father, only to learn that he plans on trading her to the Khan in exchange for an army of mercenaries (Verrillo, 2009, p. 128-30). Her father’s betrayal wounds her, and when he attempts to make amends by taking her home to Nana, she insists on going to the Citadel, not due to loyalty or respect for her father, but out of spite (137). After making friends with her maid Maya, the two girls escape the Khan with the nomadic Blue People, but an imposter attempts to sell them as slaves (Verrillo, 2009, p. 235, 249). The two girls again escape, this time into the desert. On the verge of death, the girls are rescued, this time by Gertrude’s amour, a camel named Ralph, and brought to a second group of Blue People, who nurse them back to life (Verrillo, 2009, p. 270-2). Elissa does not rise even to “doing by being;” her quest progresses, not through her own actions or personality, but through the kindness of those who believe her to be the girl of the prophecy (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993, 221).

Igraine is only briefly held captive, not truly kidnapped, but seized by the dishonorable Osmund and his Spiky Knight. She is rescued by her brother, who appears magically, an impressive figure with “blue fire dripp[ing] from his magic coat, the little bells on its hem [...] ringing,” “[striking] everyone silent,” (Funke, 1998, p. 194-5). When he orders Osmund to release his sister, and tells everyone assembled that his parents have “returned,” Osmund’s soldiers are so terrified that they freeze, and when Igraine’s parents arrive shortly afterward, they easily overwhelm the mercenaries and magically imprison
them floating several feet above the ground, where they drift away, sparing Melisande, Lamorak, and reader the problem of murder (Funke, 1998, p. 197-210).

Tilda’s quest begins with a kidnapping. Her cousin Ivo has designs on the throne, and plans to detain her so she cannot go to her reswearing in, instead, taking her place (Haskell, 2013, p. 41). Tilda surprises him by declaring “‘You can have it,’ [...] Alder Brook is yours. They hate me. They think I’m, cursed… So. Take it,” (Haskell, 2013, p. 45). Tilda attempts to use this kidnapping to escape her obligations at home and begin her quiet scriptorium life, but power hungry Ivo doesn’t believe her attempts to rid herself of the power he so craves (Haskell, 2013, p. 47). When she arrives in her prison, she realizes “nothing had really changed since I was their Princess, [...] I had been confused and unhappy before I found myself locked in a small tower room” (Haskell, 2013, p. 49-51). Nevertheless, she is rescued from her tower by her love interest, the failed squire Parz, despite her protestations (Haskell, 2013, p. 53). After some time of riding around the countryside, failing to kill, but learning to appreciate, dragons, she is once again held captive, this time, by Sir Egan, who would marry her at midnight and then kill her in an attempt to call the Wild Hunt and gain immortality. Although she escapes once, she is recaptured, and it is only her final wild transformation that saves her. Like Elissa, Tilda’s several abductions further the story and provide her with incentive and means to quest.

Master of Two Worlds, mistress of none

Disque notes that while boys questing suffer overconfidence, girls “doubt their abilities, even those that outwardly seem confident,” (2005, p. 55). Boys often learn respect for others through a series of embarrassments while questing, but the girls who quest in these pages have been living castle lives quietly and respectfully. Although some
of them have been sheltered, and do not know of the hardships of those around them, respect comes if not naturally, then easily from years of practice. This respect is often a deferential respect, with princesses “eager to soothe hurt feelings” and “sensitive to the needs of others” even as they assert themselves and their beliefs (Bem, 1971). Where a questing hero might use aggression, heroines often use diplomacy and understanding to further their quests, like Nell, who is unaware of the troubles faced by the people of her land but quickly empathizes with their plight, and for this, is granted safe passage to her next task (Koller, 2003, p. 90). The deference expected of the heroines often causes problems even as they return to their homes: regardless of their successes in improving the lives of those around them, their own lives are only moderately improved, typically gaining status previously denied to them due to their age and more importantly, their gender. Campbell’s questing heroes return as Masters of Both Worlds, but heroines often return to an only slightly modified status quo, and often require a man’s approval or permission, given explicitly or implicitly, in order for their quests to truly be complete.

Having spoken with trees, met wee ones, rescued dragons, women, and children, and resisted temptation, not to mention learning about and empathizing with the plight of many of the citizens of her realm, Nell finally reaches the Palace of Light (Koller, 2003, p. 158). She announces that she has “completed the quest and seek[s] to be apprenticed to the Imperial Wizard,” (Koller, 2003, p. 159). She is dressed and fed, and reassured that she has reached her goal, before Lady Aurora, Grande Dame Witch of the Palace of Light admits that the Keeper, the Imperial Wizard has refused to see her, calling it a “‘waste of his time’” and “‘impossible’” (Koller, 2003, p. 163-5). “‘And it doesn’t matter how hard I’ve worked to get here?’ asked Nell. ‘Nothing matters except that I’m not a boy?’”
Nell is furious and frustrated, and storms into the Imperial Wizard chambers, demanding that she be apprenticed to him and confronting him regarding the “‘evil abroad in Eldearth’”--the hungry people, the warring tribes, the diseased (Koller, 2003, p. 171). Finally, the old wizard agrees to accept her as his apprentice, but only if her father agrees, by passing on the magical Mantle of Trust, traditionally given to the nearest male heir or relative (Koller, 2003, p. 174). After her arduous quest, her apprenticeship rests not on her own abilities, but on her father’s permission.

Igraine is one of the most self-confident heroines in this selection; she does not feel she needs anyone’s permission to become a knight, and in fact, it is unclear for most of the book whether or not her gender poses a problem. Regardless, her ambition is reinforced first by her parents, who grudgingly tolerate her unusual desire, and by The Sorrowful Knight at the final battle between the knight and Osmund’s castellan, the Spiky Knight, Rowan Heartless. “‘Who’s your squire?’ Rowan Heartless called to them. ‘Not that little minx, is it?’ [...] ‘But since when have girls been allowed to be squires?’” (Funke, 1998, p. 180). The question of gender streams from the antagonist’s mouth, displaying to the reader that it is wrong to discredit Igraine’s aspirations of knighthood.

Sir Urban of Wintergreen, the Sorrowful Knight, delivers the best speech in the book, declaring

The rules of honor are these: Protect the weak. Never covet what belongs to someone else. Use your strength and skill in arms only in honorable competition. Never, never break the word you have given. And do not strive for power for power’s sake. Those are the rules of chivalry by which a knight lives. And anyone who lives by them, whether a man or a girl, should be accorded the honor due to him or her. The girl at my side certainly deserves to be honored more than you or your predatory master. (p. 180)

This pronouncement, in addition to lauding Igraine, has the added benefit of making Sir Urban look assertive and willing to take a stand as he defends his own beliefs--Bem’s
masculine traits--immediately before beginning a battle to the death. Igraine does, in the end, achieve her goal. Through the collaboration of her friends and family, she gains access to the world of knights and chivalry, and at the close of Igraine the Brave, she will set off on another adventure before returning home to train as Sir Urban’s squire.

Elissa’s quest is sprung upon her by her mysterious father, about whom she has always wondered. Because of or despite his negligence--after thirteen years, only calling upon her to set in motion political plans--Elissa is desperate to prove herself to him and gain his attention and love. “‘Perhaps I wasn’t worth looking for,’” she concludes, wondering why it took him so long to come to her (Verrillo, 2009, p. 94). “In the short time they’d been together, she’d done everything a good daughter was supposed to do. She’d been patient, obedient, kind; and if he’d let her, she’d be loving. But he hadn’t seemed to want any of those things from her,” (Verrillo, 2009, p. 95). After their escape from the Citadel of the Khan into the desert, Elissa confesses to Maya her deepest wish: “‘I wish my father loved me,’ she said softly” (Verrillo, 2009, p. 268). As they slowly dehydrate, Maya reassures Elissa that despite his actions, her father loves her, and Elissa is satisfied--regardless of the fact that he has done absolutely nothing that would support this for the duration of the book (Verrillo, 2009, p. 269). At the conclusion of her journey, after joining the near-immortal servants of Ankaa, the Divine Healer, fulfilling a prophecy by calling upon flora and fauna to defend the Blue People, and defeating the armies of the Khan single-handedly, the novel concludes with our heroine setting off into the sunset “to find her father. There was something he needed to tell her,” (Verrillo, 2009, p. 336). The approval and love of a father who abandoned her as an infant is still Elissa’s desire above all else.
When, after befriending the witch, dragon, and bandits, Meg returns to the castle in the company of devious Prince Vantor, her father listens in disbelief as his daughter recounts her adventure: ‘That’s not all!’ Meg cried, unable to restrain herself any longer.

“[Prince Vantor] stole all of the dragon’s gold, and then the bandits stole it from [him], and then [he] stole it back!’ The king frowned. ‘Now, Margaret, you mustn’t go telling tales on this heroic young man. He did just rescue you,’” (Coombs, 2006, p. 217). King Stromgard, exhibiting remarkable intractibility, continues to side with Prince Vantor.

Her father turned his attention to her. ‘Margaret, go to your room.’ ‘Not until you listen,’ she said. ‘Vantor is a liar and a thief!’ [...] ‘Guard, escort my daughter to her room.’ ‘So you can marry me to Prince Vantor?’ Meg demanded. ‘This morning I watched him steal a mountain of dragon’s gold, break his sworn word, and threaten small children. He’s not worthy to be king of Greeve or anywhere else!’ ‘I never thought,’ His Majesty said heavily, ‘that you would take your dislike of your duties to the extent of besmirching a young man’s character. Guard!’ (p. 217)

In this case, his daughter’s slight rebellion and not-quite-suitable for a princess personality has made her in her father’s eyes a less credible source than a prince with whom he has only very recently been acquainted. His reaction to his daughter’s renewed disappearance is unsatisfactory as well: “I arrange a glorious quest, a marriage any princess would envy, and the ungrateful child defies me!” (Coombs, 2006, 225). Meg’s kingly father stalls her quest, but empathetic women triumph: it is the beautiful wife, Queen Istilda, who saves the day and protects her daughter’s integrity by pointing out the “second-rate” collection of dragon treasure Prince Vantor claims is complete, and admonishing him: “‘How would you feel if your father took the word of a stranger over yours?’” (Coombs, 2006, p. 226).

Princess Tilda shows the most personal growth’ and her return to her kingdom is similarly nuanced. She has always felt like an outcast, and has protected herself from the
people she fears dislike her by closing herself off emotionally (Haskell, 2013, p. 16). Her return to the castle marks a turning point in how she views her subjects as well as how they view their ruler. Parz insists, “Tilda, I understand that you have not always felt as welcome and loved here as you would want, but I wonder if you have ignored some of the love that is truly here. It would be easier for people to love you if they could see that you loved them, too,” (Haskell, 2013, p. 315). Although she does begin to write her book, having “given up writing the Handbook for Dragon Slayers and started over with the Historia Draconum,” she also begins planning her succession to the throne as Princess of Alder Brook (Haskell, 2013, p. 321-2). This traditional ending would have the hero ascending to the throne, happily wed and confident. The heroine, however, had no desire to rule, and seems to take on the role out of obligation. Additionally, Parz, and therefore the novel, suggest that not only will she rule, but she will love, as a mother to her country--were she a man she would not have been encouraged to emotionally connect to--to love--her people, but to rule *wisely*. Tilda had dreamed of escaping not only her structured schedule and strict manners, but her return sees her shrug into her burden, emphasizing selflessness, responsibility, and nurturing, taught as well as inherent.

Despite its traditionalism, Princesses Addie and Meryl both experience dramatic personal change at the conclusion of their journey: Meryl, whom Addie was unable to save, has died, but in death, has been transformed into a fairy, allowing her to carry on and to fight against the dark creatures that continue to threaten Bamarre (Levine, 2001, p. 210-4). Addie’s transformation is internal; as she regains her strength, she begins to understand that she fulfilled the prophecy: “‘The Gray Death will be cured when cowards find courage and rain falls over all Bamarre,’” rescuing not only her family members, but
her kingdom (Levine, 2001, p. 210). Addie has shown immense courage on her quest, and more importantly, has come to better understand her capabilities (Levine, 2001, p. 212). Brave Meryl tells her “You are strong [...] stronger than I was, stronger than I had any idea of” and instead of shyly demurring, Addie agrees, joking “I had no idea either. You could have started your adventures years ago and taken me along,” (Levine, 2001, p. 212). Although the two princesses’ father is generally shown as a comedic fool and is generally ignored, this is the only book that ends in happily-ever-after marriage, with Princess Addie marrying the sorcerer Rhys and her sister happily in love with fellow fairy and warrior of epic, Drualt (Levine, 2001, p. 227-37). This traditional fairy-tale wedding would seem forced for other heroines in this selection, but seems a natural conclusion for sensitive Princess Addie, and she enters into it a strong, capable woman with an equally emotional husband and a happily adventurous fairy sister.
V. Conclusions

If fantasy is, as author Jane Yolen asserts, “Life in Truth [...] the world as it should be,” then the world which is prescribed to young women in this selection of novels is both encouraging and problematic (Yolen, 1981, p. 62-70). While it is encouraging to see princess literature escaping from its tower, these damsels, while no longer waiting for rescue, are wrongly limited in the scope of their questing. When in Igraine the Brave, Sir Urban of Wintergreen declares that “the rules of honor” and “of chivalry by which a knight lives” apply to everyone “who lives by them, whether a man or a girl,” critical readers should consider the additional rules of womanhood to which female protagonists are held (Funke, 2007, p. 180).

Girl readers of fantasy encounter women who appear to have a choice between three distinct ways: the damsel in distress, the masculine warrior, as in McKinley’s The Hero and the Crown, or a third way, the empath, discussed in this study. Although it may seem that heroines are actively choosing to solve quests in a way that suits them, this may not be the case. Recent research has begun to show that those in positions of power show less empathy than disempowered members of society (van Cleef et al., 2008). In conversations between people of differing status, the higher-status conversants consistently showed less empathy towards the plight of the lower-status partner, while the lower-status conversants showed high level of empathy towards the high-status partner: “participants with a higher sense of power experienced less distress and less compassion and exhibited greater autonomic emotion regulation when confronted with another
participant's suffering” (van Cleef et al., 2008, p. 1315). This suggests that empathy is negatively correlated with power. Psychologists theorize that low-status people experience greater empathetic reactions because disempowered communities rely on and reciprocate the compassion of others within and outside of their communities.

The implications of this study are clear: heroes of the traditional masculine quest are privileged by having the social status necessary to complete quests in this way; heroes are less empathetic than heroines because they don’t rely on compassion in order to survive. Consider the swashbuckling heroes of many male-protagonist fantasy novels--which overwhelmingly feature fighting and physical prowess as the primary method of conflict-resolution, and conclude with the hero as triumphant leader. A hero, ripped from the comfort allowed him by the status quo, can crash through a quest, conquering his obstacles, and upon his return, be crowned king in exchange for a slight increase in humility, concluding, as T.H. White’s King Arthur does, that one should harness pre-existing power to further justice. The triumphant hero sees himself as the controller of destiny, the leader of a people.

As members of a disempowered group, girls who wish to be heroines have two choices: reject their sex and become a “hero in drag,” or adopt the strategies of the underclass, whether or not they feel comfortable with expressing themselves in these “feminine” modes. The heroines of this study are shown to simply exist in this way, showing an instinctual acceptance of this socialization, or to unwillingly adopt this alternate strategy, reluctantly accepting it as the only way available. In the first, empathetic traits are presented without comment: heroines like Princess Nell simply are humble, sympathetic, and cheerful--it is their nature to be so, not a choice, and they
complete their quests by being rather than doing. The second presents these traits as
constricting: Tilda finds courtly manners tedious, snapping “[d]on’t confuse my training
with my nature” (Haskell, 2013, p. 265), but in these cases, the stifling nature of imposed
femininity is revealed as having been the better choice all along: Tilda eventually accepts
her role as princess.

The heroine, compressed to bursting point by the status quo, finally finds an
excuse to have an adventure, and discovers that those same female expectations which
she has previously found so limiting are all she has to draw upon on her adventure; they
become her greatest tools. It is important to note that when heroines learn to accept their
feminine skills, they are not presented as using their skills to subvert--they are not
manipulating others with false caring or empathy in order to get what they want, they are
ture and honest in their acceptance of roles and responsibilities. Despite reluctance to
engage with the traditional modes of femininity which correspond to a low-status
strategy, it is shown to be the only way for women to succeed.

However, the Heroine’s reliance on empathy, compassion, and understanding
should not devalue the quest. The themes which heroes and heroines explore, although
different, are not more or less important or impactful: manhood and womanhood, honor
and respect, kingdom and family, chivalry and sacrifice, physical strength and emotional
resiliency. The issue with the portrayal of the heroine’s quest then is not the methods in
which they are completed, or the concepts these quests explore. It is that these feminine
quests are seen as invalid without the approval of a man, whether father, companion, or
love interest. Upon the heroine’s return, having learned to accept her feminine skills, she
must be forgiven for her trespass. Even after proving that being kind and compassionate
is a functional (and, given the lower body count, morally preferable) way to complete a quest, the heroine is once again confronted with male superiority. Girl readers have only one possible conclusion: that female questing is not an equivalent alternative, but a poor substitution for a quest of domination; that the additional step of male approval is required for a woman’s successes to be valid. For better or worse, the empathetic heroines in these texts are perfectly preparing girl readers for the society in which disempowered groups such as women continue to rely on alternative survival strategies, and continue to be told these strategies are not good enough.

The gendered nature of the quest does a disservice to male readers as well as female. Unfortunately, Diekman & Murnen acknowledged that “even books praised as nonsexist portrayed at best a narrow vision of gender equality, in which women adopt male-stereotypic attributes and roles” (2004, p. 381). By providing the journey of conquest as the standard from which women deviate and showing the empathetic quest as a lesser female strategy, fantasy wrongly reinforces the macho-heroic ideal as the natural definition of masculinity. When combined with children’s reading preferences, this limits male readers’ exposure to positive traits such as those seen in the heroine’s quest. The lighter tone and decreased violence described in fantasy novels with female protagonists has the potential to be a positive influence for children of both sexes, encouraging non-violent conflict resolution and compassion for others. We need, if anything, more of these messages of empathy, compassion and peace, rather than less; these attributes are clearly positive and “such traits are favorable human characteristics when judged apart from any reference to sex stereotypes” (Williams and Best, 1977, p. 109). Unfortunately, if these traits are encouraged only when writing about female characters, this vision of questing
maidens serves only to reinforce and inflate a gender dichotomy; young men may rarely encounter an empathetic quest while on their own journey towards manhood. While girls are willing to read books featuring male and female protagonists, boys are less willing to read books with female leads. Their reluctance to read about girl characters, combined with the lack of flexibility in the definition of masculinity, means boys are receiving very few positive examples of Bem’s “feminine” qualities in protagonists.

The heroine’s quest is unquestionably an advancement from the original damsel in distress and is possibly more attractive to today’s girls than the “hero in drag” defined by McKinley’s *The Hero and the Crown*, published in 1985 during the second-wave period of feminism. The new Heroine’s Journey provides a third model for female protagonists and their young female readers and accurately reflects the world in which it is written: imperfect, but improving. All quests allow their heroes and heroines to find their places in the world; it is in the disparate conclusions drawn by male and female protagonists, and those that read their stories, in which the latent messages of current society are shown. In cases of a rise to power, the heroine sees herself as serving, not controlling, her people. Given the state of the world today, what a difference it would make if this message was emphasized for men as well as women.
VI. Further Research

This study suggests that the gender of the protagonist alters ways in which the monomyth is utilized and interpreted in six fantasy novels for children ages eight to twelve. An expansion of this thesis could illuminate additional trends and strengthen the argument in several ways. Firstly, a larger segment of novels would decrease sampling bias. Although I found it difficult to find books, by relaxing my admittedly strict selection criteria, more books could be added to the sample. For example, I chose only high fantasy novels entirely set in other worlds in order to find similarly structured books, excluding books that incorporated portals from our world to a secondary magical realm (for example, Bruce Coville’s *Into the Land of the Unicorns*), which also lend themselves to the monomyth structure. It would also be interesting to extend the genre limitations slightly to examine the quest as seen in genres currently experiencing popularity, like urban fantasy or dystopia. Additionally, I chose to focus on books published recently; the oldest book, Igraine the Brave, was written in 1998, but not translated and published for an American audience until 2007. It would be interesting to expand the sample to books published in the last 100 years, in which the western world has seen such dynamic views of womanhood and femininity. While these six books provide an intriguing snapshot, a study with books of different eras could show the ways in which the heroine’s quest is determined by historical circumstance as well as gender.
VII. Bibliography


Appendix A: Book Summaries

Coombs, K. (2006). *The runaway princess*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Princess Margaret—she prefers Meg—would rather play with the townspeople than sit in court. When her father decides she must be married off to a prince, he has the clever idea to hold a tournament of princess, simultaneously finding a husband for his daughter and ridding his kingdom of three scourges: a dragon, a witch, and a troop of bandits. He attempts to trap Meg in a tower for the duration of the tournament, but Meg enlists the help of her friends, and spends the hours that her father believes she is devoting to embroidery in completing the tasks herself. Rather than slaying the dragon and witch and capturing the bandits, however, she decides to rescue them—after all, the dragon is just a baby, the witch loves nothing more than romance novels, and the bandit queen is a wonderful role model.

*School Library Journal* 09/01/2006 pg. 204
*Publishers Weekly* 09/11/2006 pg. 56
*Horn Book Magazine* 09/01/2006 pg. 577
*Booklist* 09/01/2006 pg. 125

Funke, C. (2007). *Igraine the brave*. New York, NY: Chicken House. Igraine’s parents are sorcerers, but she dreams of being a knight. When her parents accidentally turn themselves into pigs on the eve of her twelfth birthday, she must find a way to turn them back before the attack of the evil Osmund the Greedy, who wants the singing books of magic that Igraine’s parents safeguard in their castle. With the help of a depressed knight, Igraine retrieves the ingredients for her parents’ potion, and she and her family are able to fend off evil Osmund, protecting the castle and the magic books.

*Publishers Weekly* 09/10/2007 pg. 61 *Starred Review
*Kirkus Review - Children* 09/01/2007 pg. 928
*School Library Journal* 11/01/2007 pg. 122
*Booklist* 10/01/2007 pg. 54

Haskell, M. (2013). *Handbook for dragon slayers*. New York, NY: HarperCollins. Young princess Matilda’s father died on crusade. Due to her mother’s foreign ancestry and a twisted foot, her people do not trust her, and she longs to escape her tedious palace life and the forced interaction with a population that treats her with disdain. Rather than go adventuring, though, she desires to become a cloister scribe and “copy every day in a silent spacious scriptorium” (p. 10). After being kidnapped by her cousin, who has designs to steal the throne, she escapes with love interest, the squire Parz, and her handmaiden and best friend, Judith. Parz and Judith desire to become dragon slayers, and Tilda offers to be their quest stenographer—keeping notes on their adventures and creating “Handbook for Dragon Slayers.” While accompanying her friends on their quest, Tilda discovers that she is more capable than she had been led to believe, and learns that
dragons are not creatures to be slain, but understood. In a final battle to rescue her kingdom from the machinations of her cousin, she herself uses magic to embody a dragon, and must decide whether to return to her physically crippled human form or remain a dragon. She is returned to human form by a kiss--not from Parz, but from her friend and servant Judith.

Kirkus Reviews 03/15/2013
Horn Book Magazine 07/01/2013 pg. 131

Koller, J. F. (2003). A wizard named Nell. New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks. A Wizard Named Nell is the first book in Jackie French Koller’s Keepers series. Nell is a princess in a land where the forces of darkness and evil are kept at bay by a powerful wizard of light. Nell reads a secret prophecy related to the next wizard, and although several of the prophecy’s conditions do not apply to her--and regardless of the fact that wizards are traditionally boys--she decides that she is the one about which it is written and sets off on a quest to find the Wizard and request an apprenticeship. Along the way she makes several helpful friends and frees various creatures. When she meets the wizard, he refuses to make her his apprentice until she can get her father the King’s permission.

Booklist 10/01/2003 pg. 321
School Library Journal 11/01/2003 pg. 142

Levine, G. C. (2001). The two princesses of Bamarre. New York: HarperCollins. Princesses Meryl and Addie live in Bamarre, a kingdom afflicted by a mysterious magical plague, the Grey Death, which took its queen as well as randomly striking young and old, rich and poor alike. Brave Princess Meryl dreams of finding the cure and saving her kingdom, but when she falls victim to the disease, it is her reluctant sister, the timid Addie, who must quest for a cure. While her sister slowly dies, Addie searches for the kingdom of the fairies, who she believes knows how to save her sister. She is captured by an ancient dragon who tells her the secret of the disease, and after a dramatic escape, she fulfills the ancient prophecy, freeing her kingdom from the Grey Death and learning she is stronger than she ever knew.

Booklist 04/15/2001 pg. 1558
Horn Book Magazine 05/01/2001 pg. 330
Publishers Weekly 05/07/2001 pg. 248
School Library Journal 05/01/2001 pg. 155

Verrillo, E. (2007). Elissa’s quest. New York: Random House. Elissa is the apprentice of a healer woman, an animal-speaker, and generally believed to be an orphan. When her father arrives mysteriously and reveals himself to be the king, Elissa is confused, but eager to meet the man about whom she has always wondered. However, Elissa’s father has political, not personal reasons for meeting his daughter, and trades her to a foreign king in exchange for troops in order to win a war. Elissa and her servant girl escape when the foreign king announces his intention to marry his new ward, and set off across the desert. Close to death, the two girls are saved by a tribe of desert nomads who believe Elissa to be the girl of an ancient prophecy. Elissa is inducted into
their sect, and fulfills the prophecy by calling upon the snakes of the desert to protect the tribe from her intended husband’s army.

Booklist 06/01/2007 pg. 72
Publishers Weekly 06/25/2007 pg. 60
School Library Journal 08/01/2007 pg. 128
Appendix B: The monomyth cycle

- Call to Adventure
- Refusal of the Call
- Supernatural Aid
- Crossing of the First Threshold
- Belly of the Whale
- Road of Trials
- Meeting with the Goddess
- Woman as Temptress
- Atonement with the Father
- Freedom to Live
- Master of Two Worlds
- Crossing of the Return
- Rescue from Without
- Magic Flight
- Refusal of the Return
- Ultimate Boon
- Apotheosis
### Appendix C: Bem’s list of feminine and masculine traits

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<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
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<td>cheerful</td>
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<td>ambitious</td>
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<td>analytical</td>
<td>compassionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assertive</td>
<td>does not use harsh language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>athletic</td>
<td>eager to soothe hurt feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competitive</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defends own beliefs</td>
<td>flatterable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dominant</td>
<td>gentle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forceful</td>
<td>gullible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has leadership abilities</td>
<td>loves children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independent</td>
<td>loyal</td>
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<tr>
<td>individualistic</td>
<td>shy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>makes decisions easily</td>
<td>soft spoken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>sympathetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-reliant</td>
<td>sensitive to the needs of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-sufficient</td>
<td>tender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong personality</td>
<td>understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>willing to take a stand</td>
<td>warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>willing to take risks</td>
<td>yielding</td>
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</tbody>
</table>