

April Dawn Disque. *Warriors and Healers: Messages About Heroines in Young Adult Fantasy Novels*. A Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April, 2005. 90 pages.  
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This study was a content analysis of ten fantasy novels for young adults. Each book was examined for the messages that it sends about women. The books were examined for whether the heroines played an active or passive role in the story and whether they stood up for themselves or needed others to rescue them. The opinions of other characters towards strong heroines and whether women in general were portrayed in stereotypical roles were also examined for each book.

For the most part, the messages presented about heroines in each book were positive. Most of the women were strong, self sufficient characters who did not need rescue and who were often among the toughest and smartest characters. However, some problems were noted in that women often stayed in stereotypical roles such as nurturing healers.

Headings:

Fantasy

Content analysis

Young adults' literature / Evaluation

Women in literature / Evaluation

Sex role in literature

WARRIORS AND HEALERS:  
MESSAGES ABOUT HEROINES IN YOUNG ADULT FANTASY NOVELS

by  
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A Master's paper submitted to the faculty  
of the School of Information and Library Science  
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science in  
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April, 2005

Approved by:

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## **I. Introduction**

The fantasy genre has taken off in popularity in recent years. Children and young adults are reading more fantasy than ever before. Cathi Dunn MacRae says that this genre appeals to young adults because fantasy fiction so often deals with issues of finding an identity, a struggle with which adolescents identify (1). John H. Timmerman writes that fantasy gives the reader a “distance from pragmatic affairs and offers us a far clearer insight into them,” and goes on to suggest that the more the pace of modern life quickens, the more fantasy appeals to all readers, young and old (1). Marjorie Allen writes that the appeal of fantasy is in having a setting in which ordinary rules do not apply and the reader can suspend his or her disbelief (46). Fantasy also inspires great devotion among its readers. Many fantasy readers will find a favorite series and read all of it; such series often total thousands of pages. Fantasy readers will often go into great detail, learning maps and histories of the realms in which their books are set. Because such incidental materials exist, it is possible for the reader to become deeply immersed in a fantasy realm. Darrell Schweitzer suggests that this devotion is because well written fantasy can “touch the emotions more deeply than any other kind of writing,” (56).

Additionally, fantasy is being read by both genders more frequently; in years past, fantasy was often largely read and written by men. Today, more and more young girls are reading fantasy and absorbing the messages present in fantasy novels. This study will attempt to examine what messages young adult fantasy fiction presents about girls and women. I will examine what sorts of roles female characters play in fantasy that appeals

to and is read by young adults, and will determine whether female characters in these books present positive and strong messages about women to female readers. I will also examine young adult fantasy fiction for stereotypes and attitudes about women.

## II. Background Literature

### Fantasy fiction and women within the genre

Fantasy as a genre is difficult to define. Cathi Dunn MacRae addresses this issue and concludes that fantasy readers simply know the feel of a fantasy book and can tell when they are reading one (1). Brian Attebery, who has written at length about the genre, says that simply gathering a shelf of fantasy books and using this variety of books as a definition of the genre may be most accurate (Tradition 1). He goes on to say that fantasy differs from other genres of fiction primarily in the sense of wonder that it produces in its readers (Attebery, Tradition 3). Richard Mathews also defines fantasy in terms of a sense of wonder, saying that “worlds of infinite possibility,” both define the genre and explain its appeal (1). John Timmerman defines fantasy by the conventions that it must possess, such as magic and a certain kind of character (4). Readers can relate to fantasy characters, who are generally common, everyday people thrown into fantastic situations where they must become heroes (Timmerman 29). He also says that the unique appeal of fantasy lies in how it can explore common spiritual and psychological issues faced by people in a unique, sometimes light-hearted manner (Timmerman 101). Fantasy originally derives from folktales, but it is very different from them in its portrayals of magic, faeries and other common features (Attebery, Tradition 4, 17). Fantasy has been compared to science fiction, but differs from it in that fantasy, unlike science fiction, does not need to seem plausible to the reader (Attebery, Tradition 2).

Fantasy can reflect the real world as much as it provides escapism into another. Attebery considers it on two levels: he says that the genre can be accurately described as either “escapist literature” that uses “stock characters and devices,” or as a “sophisticated mode of storytelling” that combines the feel of traditional myths and epics with a very modern and subversive way of thinking (Strategies 1). This sentiment of fantasy as a means of challenging accepted ideas appears in several other works. One author writes that “fantasies often have more to do with reality than any so-called realistic fiction,” and goes on to describe how fantasy often gets at social issues and moral themes using allegorical stories (Allen 41-42). Another book agrees that fantasy can work in one of two ways: someone can read it to escape the world as it is, or for its social commentary on the world that we know (Brown and St. Clair 128).

Fantasy has several conventions that tend to appear in a majority of works. The story must be well-paced; plot is often more important and literary style less important in fantasy (Timmerman 5). Magic is often present, and is often governed by a strict set of rules and laws (Attebery, Strategies 55). Time may be straightforward, but it may not: alternate ideas of time besides the typical linear one are common in fantasies (Attebery, Strategies 61-62). Fantasy usually takes place in another world; even if the fantasy seems to take place in our world, it is an alternate version of the world (Timmerman 49). Fantasy characters often seem larger than life, able to perform feats far beyond what is possible for most or all of the book’s readers (Attebery, Strategies 70-71). However, in recent years fantasy protagonists have started to seem less remote and heroic and more realistic (Egoff 303). Finally, fantasy often centers on an epic struggle of good against evil (Timmerman 4).

Women are appearing more frequently in fantasy in recent decades, and they are stronger characters than they used to be in fantasy. One study of young adult fiction praises fantasy as a genre that allows for more strong female characters than many other genres (O'Keefe 196-197). Another study agrees, criticizing fantasy in years past but praising newer works for featuring heroines that are strong, resourceful and independent (Allen 37). One book praises young adult fantasy fiction for allowing girls to have a wide variety of roles and for the genre's tendency to contain "in-depth exploration of gender and developmental issues," (Brown and St. Clair 129).

### Messages about women

Many women are still portrayed in traditional roles in the media today, and often their primary purpose in a story is passive rather than active (Lueptow 220). Women are often portrayed as being dependent on men and accepting ideas of male superiority (Gallagher 125). One study showed that in many works of popular fiction, "the main character did not solve her own problems but depended on someone else to do it for her," (Peirce 82). One author writes that many media outlets look as though they are progressive and responsive to social change and feminism, but they only include enough hints of feminism to placate viewers while for the most part clinging to old ideas (Dow 201). Women are often portrayed on the edges of the story rather than at the heart of the action in popular media (Driscoll 212). Adolescent girls said in one study that they felt that men dominate the storylines and the action of the stories in many popular media (Haag 14). Messages about women as weak were also discussed in a study of women's roles in action stories; in most cases, the stories portrayed women as dependent on the

male characters for rescue (Inness 4). Sherrie Inness also wrote that often in popular culture, “men are tough heroes... and women are frail victims,” (18). She goes on to say that it is still uncommon today for a media portrayal of a woman to show her as not needing to be rescued (Inness 176). Another book echoed this sentiment and specifically cites fantasy fiction, saying that in many fantasies, women are victims and men are heroes (Allen 37). One study showed that almost all heroic characters in media for children are male and said that “from the time girls understand that they are girls, they do not see themselves reflected as powerful or even important characters,” (Mann 48). This same study included examples showing that not only do women passively observe the action rather than driving it in media representations, but also that male characters often make condescending remarks about female characters being “dependent and annoying,” (Mann 49-50). This sends very negative messages about women as powerless and incompetent.

Women are often stereotyped as being nurturing and caring. Even as women are depicted in a wider variety of roles, they are still depicted as always being caring (Macdonald 141). This depiction stems both from tradition and from societal beliefs that women are biologically predisposed towards being nurturing (Macdonald 132-133). Margaret Gallagher writes that in a variety of popular media, the idea of women as maternal, nurturing and supportive of others was over-emphasized (125). Another study discusses cases in which otherwise strong female characters are softened by scenes in which they display a nurturing, more stereotypically “feminine” side (Inness 98, 107). One author writing about popular teen movies says that the movies send the message that “independent girls must become nurturing, responsive heterosexual partners in their

processes of growing-up,” (Driscoll 221). The heroines in many coming-of-age stories, she says, stop concerning themselves with their own needs and wants; they have grown up when they learn to always be caring and put the needs of their loved ones first.

There are changes appearing: 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. One book, Tough Girls by Sherrie A. Inness, focused completely and in depth on the increasing numbers of strong, self-confident female characters in popular media. She discusses the increasing prevalence of brave, intelligent heroines in media (Inness 13-14). Another author, Deborah O’Keefe, says that in recent years, heroines in an increasing number of young adult books send stronger messages and take a more active role. Today’s heroines, she says, “do not shrink from danger and exertion; they do not let others tell them how to think and act; and they do not constantly sacrifice their own plans and wishes,” (O’Keefe 186). She later celebrates young adult fantasy for having a particularly large number of strong heroines, specifically mentioning several heroines discussed in this study for their “triumph over the system” and presenting messages that women can be strong even in the face of opposition (O’Keefe 197). However, Sherrie Inness’ introduction says that while the messages sent by the media about women are improving, further progress is needed: too many popular media outlets still portray women as weak, or if they are tough, as still being less capable than tough men in the same context (4). She also criticizes the continued appearance of “pseudo-tough” women, whom she defines as “women who acted tough but also supported society’s gender norms,” (Inness 42).

These messages matter because they affect how teens view their roles as young women and men. The portrayal of men and women and their roles in various entertainment media consumed by teenagers is an important contributing factor in how those teens learn to think about gender roles (Lueptow 219). One study showed that girls tried harder to succeed after being exposed to stories and videos showing girls as achieving heroines rather than passive observers (Lueptow 221). In another study, children who read stories depicting girls and women in non-stereotypical and non-traditional roles were more likely to find traditionally male roles appropriate for females than were children who had not read such stories (Trepanier-Street and Romatowski 157). Judy Mann laments the effects on both boys and girls of negative media images of women, saying that boys learn to be condescending towards girls and women, while girls learn at a young age to think of themselves as powerless (Mann 48). She says that the messages about gender that are received during childhood and adolescence stay with a person for the rest of their lives (Mann 61). This is why it is vitally important to understand what messages adolescent boys and girls receive from the media that they watch and read. Sherrie Inness writes that popular media and the messages that they present about gender have the power to change societal attitudes (48). She says that media portrayals of weak or strong characters “shape our ideas about appropriate gender roles for women and men,” (Inness 4). Deborah O’Keefe writes on the importance of examining messages in young adult books, saying that teens are exposed to “so many millions of verbal messages that it seems obtuse,” to overlook their impact (189).

### **III. Methodology**

Ten books were analyzed using latent content analysis for this study. According to Ole Holsti, manifest content analysis examines only the surface meaning of the text, while latent content analysis involves “reading between the lines” (12). I wanted to examine the messages presented by the text, which requires inferences rather than word counts. Earl Babbie discusses latent content analysis and explains that it is useful for drawing out the underlying meaning of the text (312). I examined the words used to describe the heroines as well as what ideas can be inferred from the ways in which they are described. Margaret Gallagher writes that often, the media’s messages about gender roles are very complex and subtle and looking only at the surface language will not reveal everything (123). She goes on to say that to find the “implicit assumptions” made about gender, the researcher must learn to delve deeply into the meanings behind the words used (Gallagher 123). She recommends focusing on patterns of authority and who is allowed to take charge in the scenario presented (125). Based on this advice, I decided to focus much of my analysis on whether the heroines in the novels are active or passive in their stories.

I started the study by gathering the titles of numerous young adult fantasy books. I used the OPACs of several local public libraries and recommended booklists from several library systems to find books. I also used young adult fiction bibliographies, especially Cathi Dunn MacRae’s excellent Presenting Young Adult Fantasy Fiction, as well as drawing on my own knowledge as an avid reader of fantasy. My initial list

included titles that were originally written for children or for adults as well as those written for young adults; as long as the book would appeal to a young adult and be read by a young adult, it was included. Many fantasy novels originally intended for adults have been repackaged and marketed to young adults; a number of these novels appeared on recommended lists for young adults and were included in my original list. I came up with a list of sixty-five possible titles, from which I excluded all the books that did not include one or more female protagonists. The gender of the author was not considered in selecting titles, although a majority of the books featuring female protagonists happened to be written by female authors. No limitations were made based on the style of the fantasy novel; books set on Earth as we know it and high fantasy books set in other realms were given equal weight.

I used several methods to narrow down this huge sample. First of all, I tried to choose any books that appeared on the lists and were bestsellers, such as Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone and The Golden Compass. Because the goal of this paper is to study what messages are being sent by these popular novels, it makes sense to choose books that are popular and are being read frequently. Also, most of the books that appeared on two or more of the recommendation lists made it into the final sample; again, I made an effort to include popular works. I tried to include books that primarily focused on female characters. A few of the books in the final sample feature one female protagonist among several equally important primary characters, but most of the books selected have just one primary character. Favoring books with only one protagonist meant that the sample had books in which there was more written about one heroine, rather than the focus being divided among multiple characters. Finally, I narrowed the list down to books that I

either already owned or were readily available from local libraries. This left me with ten books to analyze.

One difficult decision involved series books. Much of the fantasy genre is written in lengthy series. At first, I considered choosing books from later in a series, but I ended up deciding to include only the first book in a given series on my list of possible titles; the first book would set the tone for the series. Many of the books chosen were one of several that were set in the same world. Six were the first in a series and three others had companion books that were not necessarily part of a series, but involved the same worlds and sometimes characters. This leaves only one book in this study that completely stood alone. I excluded books written before 1980, as I wanted to study fantasy primarily in recent decades when it has grown a great deal in popularity. Summaries of each of the books studied are in Appendix A. The books chosen are the following:

- Beagle, Peter S. The Unicorn Sonata. Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1996.
- Black, Holly. Tithe. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002.
- Jones, Diana Wynne. Howl's Moving Castle. New York: Harper Trophy, 1986.
- Kerner, Elizabeth. Song in the Silence. New York: Tor, 1997.
- McKinley, Robin. The Hero and the Crown. New York: Berkley Books, 1984.
- Pierce, Meredith Ann. The Darkangel. San Diego: Harcourt, 1982.
- Pierce, Tamora. Alanna: The First Adventure. New York: Atheneum, 1983.
- Pullman, Philip. The Golden Compass. New York: Knopf, 1995.
- Rowling, J.K. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. New York: Scholastic Press, 1997.
- Weis, Margaret and Tracy Hickman. A Rumor of Dragons. Renton, WA:

Wizards of the Coast, 2003.

After choosing the books, I started analyzing their content. I initially intended not to have any set list of items to look for in every book; I intended to analyze the books based only on the examples that seemed important from each book. I wanted to see what themes appeared rather than looking for certain criteria to impose on the books. However, as I began to study the books it became evident that it would be helpful to have at least a few basic questions to ask of every book to help draw out common threads or differences between them. I came up with several key criteria to examine in each book and recorded the results using the form in Appendix B. This form helped me analyze each book for common stereotypes and positive or negative messages. Much of my analysis, however, was based not on the form and the results of using it, but on noteworthy instances from each novel where positive or negative messages about female characters are presented.

Each book was examined for two main types of messages. First of all, I examined the portrayal of the individual female protagonists in the book. I looked for character development and whether these women present a positive or negative role model. I examined things that the characters thought about themselves as well as words used to describe them by the narrator. Secondly, I looked for examples of how women in general are seen in the books. This could include looking at secondary female characters as well as looking at the messages about women that are sent by the society described in each novel. One piece of this analysis involved examining what other characters think and say about the main female characters that I examined. I recorded as many instances as I

could find of messages that each book presents about women and then began to make conclusions and find common themes based on all of these examples.

Several of the authors studied for the literature review provided helpful guidelines in forming my study criteria. Sherrie Inness includes a wonderful chapter on determining whether a fictional woman is tough or weak and goes very in-depth, discussing aspects of toughness such as bravery, intelligence, and standing up for herself (11-27). This chapter helped me immensely in determining whether a character was strong and assertive or weak and passive. Inness also included a discussion later in her book on the lone tough girl in a setting otherwise filled with men – a character type that I encountered in several of the novels (97). Deborah O’Keefe analyzed the content and gender messages of a large number of books for young adults in her study Good Girl Messages. Her methods for determining whether the messages presented were positive or negative proved useful to me in building my own methods. Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair’s book Declarations of Independence also provided some useful insights into analyzing what makes a heroine a strong character that sends strong messages.

#### **IV. Analysis**

##### *The Heroines*

This analysis centers on one heroine from each of the books. Their stories are more fully summarized in Appendix A, but brief descriptions of each heroine also follow here. Alanna of *Alanna: The First Adventure* is aged ten to fourteen during her story, and is training to become a knight. Hermione from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* is eleven in this book and is attending a school for young witches and wizards. *The Darkangel* tells the story of Aerial, whose age is never given but seems to be about fifteen or sixteen. Aerial tries to fight a darkangel (also called a vampyre or an icarus) who kidnaps her friend, and ends up caught in a battle to save her world from an evil witch who commands the darkangel. Thirteen-year-old Joey discovers a way to travel to a magical realm full of unicorns and helps the unicorns fight off a terrible sickness in *The Unicorn Sonata*. Goldmoon is a young healer who is one of eight companions traveling together and seeking a magical item in *A Rumor of Dragons*; her exact age is not given. Lanen of *Song in the Silence* is older than most of the heroines discussed here; she is twenty-four when she travels in search of dragons. At age seventeen, Sophie leaves home to seek her fortune and ends up helping to defeat the evil Witch of the Waste in *Howl's Moving Castle*. All of Aerin's teen years are covered in *The Hero and the Crown*, but the second half of the book focuses on the important events that happen when she is eighteen and fights her evil uncle to recover a prized artifact. Kaye of *Tithe* is sixteen when she becomes involved in a power struggle between the Seelie Court and the

Unseelie Court of faeries. Lyra seems to be about eleven at the start of The Golden Compass, when she goes on a quest to rescue a missing friend.

### Seeking Adventure

Most of the girls studied here drove the book's action. They did not wait for adventure to find them; they actively sought danger and excitement, often journeying far from home in the effort. The girls who chose to go adventuring rather than being forced into it also tended to stand up for themselves much more than others.

Alanna at age ten formulated and executed a plan to disguise herself as a boy and travel to the king's palace to train as a knight (T. Pierce 2). Her brother is about to be sent off to train as a knight and she will be sent to a convent to learn magic. Neither sibling likes the plan, but her brother is resigned to it. Alanna, however, keeps trying to find another way, and finally formulates a plan that she tells to her brother:

“Tomorrow he gives us the letters for the man who trains the pages and the people at the convent. You can imitate his writing, so you can do new letters, saying we're twin boys. *You* go to the convent. Say in the letter that you're to be a sorcerer[...] And I'll go to the palace and learn to be a knight! (T. Pierce 2)

Her brother is at first reluctant, but then agrees to Alanna's plan. She took the initiative to fight for what she wanted from life even when no one thought it an appropriate desire for a young girl. Throughout the four years covered in this book, she seeks action and danger: she picks fights and goes off adventuring anytime she can. Alanna has a “feel for the fighting arts” necessary for a knight (T. Pierce 15). She wants to be a knight for the glory and strength of it, but also the excitement. Not only does she actively seek adventure, she will not let anything stand in her way. She is persistent and will never

give in to the pressures of others, for good or for bad; she is both praised for her perseverance and criticized for being “stubborn as a mule” (T. Pierce 15).

Lanen also grew up dreaming of adventure. From the time she was a child, she wanted to find new and exciting things, to travel and have great tales to tell of what she does along the way. She says that as a child “I longed to see the world, to go to those places that rang on the edge of stories like sweet distant bells,” (Kerner 8). At first, her plans for adventure had no focus; she wanted to travel but had no specific destinations. All of this changed when, as a young woman, she heard a song about dragons that thrilled her. She became convinced that the dragons were real and determined to seek out their mysterious, dangerous island, and from then on she “dreamed of meeting a True Dragon, a Dragon out of the ballads,” (Kerner 10). After Hadron dies and Lanen finally can leave to seek adventure, she describes herself as “happier I could remember being,” (Kerner 15). After a dangerous passage through stormy seas, she arrives at the Dragon Isle and immediately sets out to find the dragons; unfortunately another human traveling with her attempts to steal from them and is torched by fiery dragon breath (Kerner 114). Although she is scared of them after this, she is not willing to give up her attempts to find an adventure and speak with a dragon as she has always wanted. She boldly walks up to a dragon and begins speaking to him, hoping that he will be receptive to her attempts to communicate and will not kill her (Kerner 114-116). She calls out, “knowing that my words might bring my heart’s desire or the end of all,” (Kerner 115). Not only is he receptive to speaking with her, the two fall in love, and Lanen soon risks the anger of all the other dragons in order to travel to the heart of the Dragon Isle and see his home (Kerner 185).

Aerin has many similarities to Lanen. Aerin also was seen as a strange child and had only one close companion while growing up. While Lanen found a father figure in Jamie, Aerin became very close to her distant cousin Tor; the two grew up together and their strong friendship eventually turned into love. Just as Jamie taught Lanen, Tor taught Aerin to fight and hunt and fish and other skills that most people thought inappropriate for a girl (McKinley 40). As she grew older, Aerin wanted to learn advanced sword fighting, and Tor agreed to teach her that as well. He had respect for her abilities and thinks that “he could probably teach her to be a fair swordswoman,” (McKinley 41). Aerin had always been restless at home, ill at ease in court life. However, she didn’t really set her heart on leaving to seek adventure until she was about fifteen. Then, on a dare, she ate a large quantity of a hallucinogenic plant and became very ill, confined to resting for some months (McKinley 23-24). While recovering, she discovered a book about dragon-hunting and it intrigued her; she began pursuing the idea of hunting dragons (McKinley 30-31). Aerin becomes determined to be a dragon fighter and swears to her servant and friend Teka: “I will be famous in legend and story,” (McKinley 50). She spends the next several years training, and when she turns eighteen, her chance arrives. Dragons begin appearing more often, menacing small villages, and as soon as Aerin feels ready, she sneaks off from home to go slay one (McKinley 80-81). She is afraid as she readies her horse: “Her hands shook as she saddled Talat,” (McKinley 80). However, she is thrilled to be seeking adventure, and “the eerie feeling, and the headache, lifted at once when she and Talat set off,” (McKinley 80). She successfully kills the dragon, and continues to hunt the creatures. She loves the adventure of it and the respect that she earns. She seeks adventure in other ways, such as riding with the king’s

army, but is denied such opportunities (McKinley 8). She learns to sneak out at the dead of night to seek adventures until her dragon-slaying quests become so well known and respected that she is allowed to pursue them and is given the king's blessing (McKinley 93). Aerin is thrilled at this blessing and felt that "she had a place of her own" at last (McKinley 94). She also becomes fascinated with the idea of recovering the Hero's Crown once she learns of it (McKinley 69).

Lyra is a natural adventurer. At the start of her book, she is described as an explorer. In the first scene in which the reader meets Lyra, she is investigating a room that she knows perfectly well she is not allowed to enter (Pullman 4). She loves to explore Oxford and knows all of the rooftops and alleys in town, despite having "the feeling that the roof was forbidden," (Pullman 38). When she discovers that the town also has an extensive series of underground tunnels and chambers, she eagerly and fearlessly explores them as her next adventure (Pullman 39). Each person in Lyra's world has a *dæmon*, a companion that seems to be a manifestation of his or her soul; Lyra's *dæmon* Pantalaimon is an adventurous creature, reflecting Lyra herself. Soon into the book, things change for Lyra: her friend Roger vanishes and she decides to rescue him, and Lord Asriel is captured and can no longer guard Lyra. Mrs. Coulter, who Lyra later discovers is her mother, shows up and takes Lyra away from Oxford to live with her (Pullman 71). Lyra is at first eager to go with Mrs. Coulter, as she thinks that Mrs. Coulter will provide her with an opportunity to travel and seek adventure as well as rescuing her friend:

...Mrs Coulter said, "So, Lyra, I'm to have an assistant, am I?"  
"Yes," said Lyra simply. She would have said yes to anything.  
"There's a lot of work I need help with."  
"I can work!"

“And we might have to travel.”

“I don’t mind. I’d go anywhere.”

“But it might be dangerous. We might have to go to the North.”

Lyra was speechless. Then she found her voice: “Soon?” (Pullman 71).

Where others might be afraid, Lyra is eager. She becomes frustrated when they do not travel and instead spend most of their time making social calls and studying; Lyra is “feeling confined and cramped by this polite life” of parties and learning, and wants to be on her way traveling the world (Pullman 85). Finally, she runs away and is determined to head north. When she is picked up by traveling gypsies, they initially plan to travel North and rescue the missing children by themselves, but Lyra demands for them to take her along, saying “well, you might need kids too. You don’t know. So you oughter take me,” (Pullman 139). Once she arrives, she is a fearless and resourceful adventurer. Her use of the alethiometer that can answer any question saves the gypsies and herself from dangers, and she fearlessly approaches every new adventure, from meeting an armored bear to flying with witches. Lyra thrives on travel and new sights and becomes very uncomfortable if she is forced to sit and wait.

Kate initially stumbles into her adventures, but once she does, she eagerly seeks out more. When she first learned that she was going to be moving back to New Jersey, she was happy and hopeful that she could once again meet the faeries she befriended as a child and leaves out bowls of milk for them (Black 22). She actively seeks them out and wants to spend time with them again. She seeks them out at night, calling to them and hoping they will hear: “ ‘Lutie-loo,’ she whispered into the wind. ‘Spike, Gristle... please come back,’ ” (Black 46). However, before she ever meets up with the faeries she knew before, she meets another: Roiben, a knight working for the queen of the Unseelie Court. She finds him wounded in the woods and helps treat him and get him help (Black

26). Soon after meeting him, she is drawn into the struggle between the two groups of faeries. To some extent, she is pulled into all of these adventures by virtue of who she is – a pixie disguised as a human – rather than because she wants them. However, she also seeks out more danger than she needs to, often out of curiosity. For instance, she and her friend Corny seek out a kelpie, despite knowing that the creature is potentially dangerous, so that he can help Kaye learn to control her magic (Black 125-127). Later, when she and Corny discover the entrance to the Unseelie Court, she enters it to explore, although she knows it is dangerous to do so. She tells Corny to stay outside where it's safe, and enters despite the danger: “ ‘It's probably not safe for *me* to go. I'll be back as soon as I can.’ Kaye shimmied into the entrance,” (Black 142). Kaye is fascinated with the chance to explore this new world and learn more about her true identity, and is unafraid of the potential consequences of her adventurousness.

Joey seems to almost seek out adventure accidentally. She has a good deal of musical talent and a fascination with music. She initially discovers the realm of Shei'rah by following beautiful music down a street and walking straight into another world before she realizes it. She just notices that it had been night, but suddenly wasn't: “Between one step and the next, it was dawn,” (Beagle 30). She never intended to find another realm, only to find the source of the music. When she first arrives in Shei'rah, she is not concerned with seeking adventure, but instead keeps telling a satyr who has befriended her: “I have to get *home!*” (Beagle 35). She is scared of Shei'rah and worried about never getting back. However, this fear passes once she learns that she can get back whenever she wants and no time will have passed in her world (Beagle 56). Once she gets over her fear, she chooses to stay in Shei'rah for a while, but she still does not seek

out adventure as much as she seeks beauty and peace. Joey loves anything beautiful, and seeks to discover every beautiful thing in Shei'rah, of which there are many, rather than seeking an exciting adventure (Beagle 67-69). Her days in Shei'rah pass in a peaceful, dreamy state, each day full of playing with her friends, the satyrs and unicorns and a mer-creature called a *jalla*. Joey does seek out new things, but not an adventure in the usual sense. She also makes an effort to return to Shei'rah as often as she is able throughout the summer and always tries to find new things while she is visiting (Beagle 110). She also tries to explore and learn the geography of the land: "She began to bring a drawing pad and a few pens with her each time she crossed the Border, having determined to map Shei'rah in as much detail as she could," (Beagle 111). She continues these visits until, at the book's end, the border between the worlds shifts to a new, unknown place on Earth (Beagle 150).

Sophie needed a push to get her started, but after that she went to seek adventure on her own. She was timid at the start of the book, frightened of leaving her home for anything at all. She tries once to go in to town to visit her sister and is terrified: "She felt overwhelmed. There were too many people rushing past, laughing and shouting, far too much noise and jostling," (Jones 13). However, the evil Witch of the Waste puts a curse on Sophie, turning the teenaged girl into a wrinkled old woman (Jones 27). After this incident, Sophie leaves home, both to keep anyone she knows from seeing her under the spell's effects and to try to undo it. She proves very bold once she must rely on her own wits to get by. She strikes out on her own with no plan and hardly any provisions, and seems to have no fear at the thought of what dangers she may face (Jones 28-29). The curse seems to have emboldened Sophie: as she leaves her home, she describes herself as

“surprised at how calm she still felt,” (Jones 29). Later, as the day begins to turn to evening, the Wizard Howl’s moving castle drifts past her. She says that “she was not particularly frightened,” and she needs a place to stay, so she pushes her way in and invites herself to stay the night – a brave, almost foolhardy decision, since Howl is said to steal souls for use in his evil magics (Jones 35). Once there, she decides not only to stay, but to investigate and see if Howl is really evil; after realizing that he is not, she helps him challenge the Witch of the Waste despite the danger.

There were contrasts to the girls who sought out danger and excitement. Several characters in the books seemed meek, almost timid, and were fearful of the adventures in which they found themselves. These young women did not seek out trouble; instead, it found them. At first, some of them seemed to send less positive messages about women: the heroines of these books were not brave and bold. But in the end, most of them accomplished their missions.

Ariel, for example, is very timid and fearful at first. She has lived her whole life as a slave, most of it in one household. She never sought to escape from her life as a slave and has never strayed from her hometown. Although her life is hard, she feels grateful to have a mistress that is kinder to her than many slaves have, saying that “Eoduin had always protected her,” (M. Pierce 24). Ariel had never learned to stand up for herself, dependent on her mistress. However, after her mistress is kidnapped by a darkangel, she seeks him out to kill him in revenge. She is grief-stricken and determined and shares her decision with the rest of the servants: “ ‘I will kill the vampyre,’ she choked, longing for Eoduin and hating her murderer,” (M. Pierce 31). She fails, and he kidnaps her as well. Once she is carried off to his castle the adventure begins, and Ariel

quickly learns to take initiative to save herself and her friends. At first, she is overcome by all of the new and different things that she sees at the vampyre's castle. Soon, however, she becomes brave. She seeks adventure for a specific purpose: she and Talb, a strange creature that she meets who lives near the castle, plan to stop the darkangel from taking any more wraith-wives and using their souls to strengthen the evil Witch who is trying to control the world (M. Pierce 110-111). She never learns to love adventure, but she faces it bravely. At one point as she escapes the darkangel's castle on a small boat, she sails out of sight of Talb and "she sighed... then turned and looked ahead to see where the river led," (M. Pierce 135). This is typical for Aerial. She is never thrilled to seek out adventure for its own sake, but she faces it unflinchingly when it is the right choice for herself and her friends.

Goldmoon had no desire to adventure at all. She was royalty among her people, a tribe of plains people based on Native American cultures of the Midwest. She loved a poor boy, and her father the chieftain ordered him to leave until he has completed a quest to prove himself by finding a magic object. However, when he returned with a magic staff, the chieftain went back on his promise to honor the young man and instead ordered him killed (Weis and Hickman 34). Goldmoon ran to him in desperation and the magic staff transported the two far away; they were then found on the road, "near exhaustion" and lost, by one of the six companions who had planned to meet one evening (Weis and Hickman 31). Faced with no other choice, Goldmoon and her lover, Riverwind, accompanied the companions as they traveled (Weis and Hickman 40). Goldmoon is unfailingly polite: although she does not want to go off adventuring, she tells the companions "Thank you for the offer," (Weis and Hickman 40). She traveled and fought

alongside the group past this point, but she never seeks out adventure and at first is very frightened of everything. Oftentimes, when the companions begin another leg of their journey, Goldmoon goes forward frightfully. For example, when the companions enter a forest that is said to be haunted, Goldmoon is the only one of the main characters to express a desire to avoid the spot as the rest accept it with stoicism, saying fearfully “Is it truly necessary to go that way?” when she knows that it is (Weis and Hickman 92). Goldmoon is also one of only two characters to have a phobia that significantly impedes the ability to go on quests. She is terrified of heights, to the point of placing her companions in danger by at first petulantly refusing to travel down a steep cliff when they are being pursued by enemies:

Goldmoon shook her head, her chin quivering. “There must be another way,” she said stubbornly. “We will search for it!”(Weis and Hickman 218).

She continues for a time to refuse to climb down the slope. Overall, Goldmoon seems timid and fearful, forced into adventure and hating it all.

### *Bravely Standing Her Ground – Or Not*

Many of the heroines in these books are brave and even foolhardy. They will stand up for themselves and their friends without hesitation. Kaye was one of the strongest characters in this respect. She doesn’t let anyone push her around. She will stand her ground against her mother, grandmother, and friends. She fights against her mother’s decision to move to New York, demanding a chance to stay somewhere and be happy a while and telling her mother “I love it here,” regarding New Jersey (Black 85). She also argues with her grandmother, who is trying to make her live a more “normal”

life by her standards (Black 166-167). She accidentally charms a womanizing boy into being obsessed with her, but once she realizes what she is done, she is reluctant to fix it, wanting to punish him for how he acts towards women and take revenge for all the men that have mistreated her family:

She wanted to control him.

He was every arrogant boyfriend that had treated her mother badly. He was every boy that told her she was too freaky, who had laughed at her, or just wanted her to shut up and make out. (Black 178)

She is just as unwilling to cave in or cower before one of the faeries as she is with any human. When she thinks that Roiben has heartlessly murdered one of her faerie friends, she stands up to him and thinks of a way to make him very angry: discovering his true name (Black 80). She does this despite being warned that he is very dangerous because she wants to anger him as he has angered her:

“That’s my third question: What is your full name?” She didn’t know what she had done, not really. She only knew that she was forcing him to do something he didn’t want to do, and that suited her fine. (Black 80)

She argues with the selkie, even knowing that it could also easily kill her (Black 126-127). She also saves herself by her own wits on several occasions, rather than depending on others for rescue. At one point she has been promised that the faeries who are on her side will rescue her at the last moment from being sacrificed as a tithe, but she realizes that it is not going to happen and devises a plan to save herself at the last minute (Black 221).

Not only does Kaye stand up to anyone who gets in her way, from her grandmother to the queen of the Seelie Court, but she frequently steps in to defend her friends when they are incapable of doing so themselves. Kaye steps in to help her mother when a boyfriend of her mom’s tries to stab her early on in the book: “Kaye reacted

without thinking, shoving him,” as he lunged to stab her mom (Black 4). She tries to save her friend Janet from being drowned by a selkie; although she fails, she willingly jumps into the water with the dangerous creature with no concern for her own safety (Black 270-271). She goes right into the heart of both the Seelie and Unseelie Courts in an attempt to save Corny from Nephamael, a faerie knight who has seduced him and could kill him. When she finally finds him, she walks right into the heart of the Unseelie Court, heedless of the danger in her determination to rescue her friend (Black 306). In the book’s final scenes, she has an opportunity to run and save herself from danger in the Unseelie Court, but she chooses to return to the main throne area and try to save Roiben instead, placing herself at great risk (Black 314-315).

Lyra stands up for herself bravely and without hesitation. She is fearless from the start of the book, a leader among the children in the mock wars they hold amongst themselves (Pullman 35-36). After traveling North, she faces real dangers; early on in the book, she is bold, but is not really in much danger. Once she travels North, she needs to stand up for herself and others. She faces a “severed” child who has been separated from his dæmon and tries to help him when everyone else who has seen him is too fearful to even go near. She is frightened and appalled by him, like everyone else. However, when everyone else abandoned him, “in Lyra’s heart, revulsion struggled with compassion, and compassion won,” (Pullman 216). She does what little she can to help the child before he dies. When she is kidnapped and taken to a place with other kidnapped children, she knows that she is in grave danger and is “very frightened,” but she gathers her courage and tries to learn everything she can rather than giving in to fear (Pullman 254). Lyra is terrified of her mother Mrs. Coulter, but faces her bravely when

the two meet in the North (Pullman 280). Lyra also stands up for her friends and loved ones, even placing herself in danger to do so. In the book's opening scene, she risks getting in a good deal of trouble in order to save Lord Asriel from an attempted poisoning (Pullman 13-14). Throughout much of the book's first half, she is determined to travel North to rescue her lost friend Roger despite the danger to herself. She manages to rescue Roger, but at the end he is kidnapped again, this time by Lyra's own father (Pullman 379-380). She is afraid, but determined to save her friend. When a servant tells her that Roger is gone, she immediately decides to go after him: " ' Help me!' she said, trembling all over with weakness and fear. 'Help me dress. I got to go. *Now!*' " (Pullman 380). Lyra sets out immediately and again does everything in her power to rescue Roger; although she fails, she shows great courage in the attempt (Pullman 393). Lyra also defends Iorek several times. First, she holds him back while he is in a rage to keep him from attacking a guard and getting himself killed. She knows that a bear in a rage is dangerous, but fearlessly "put her hand on the one vulnerable spot in the bear's armor," at his shoulders, and "dug her fingers in," determined to hold the big animal back (Pullman 199-200). Later, she comes up with a daring plan to rescue Iorek and herself from certain death when she is taken captive by one of his rivals (Pullman 342-343).

Alanna seems fearless, but this is portrayed as both a good and bad trait in the book. Sometimes Alanna displays great courage and overcomes challenges because of her bravery and dedication. Other times, her bravery is more unfounded bravado than true courage; her temper leads her to attempt too much. Either way, Alanna is definitely not in any way hesitant or meek. She is also a study in contrasts; she can be brave, but full of doubts in herself. She stands up for herself. On her first day at the castle, a bully

targets her for abuse and she stands up to him right away rather than backing down as the bully expected from a younger child:

The boy grabbed her collar, lifting her off her feet. “You’ll do what you’re told,” he hissed, “till you earn the right to call yourself a page. If *I* say you’re the goatherd’s son, *you* say, ‘Yes, Lord Ralon.’ ”

Alanna gasped with fury. “I’d as soon kiss a pig! Is that what *you’ve* been doing – kissing pigs?”(T. Pierce 27).

He remains a thorn in her side for her first year, but she continually stands her own ground, refusing to follow his commands despite knowing that he will fight her if she doesn’t do as he says (T. Pierce 55). She thinks to herself that “if she knuckled under, Ralon would do this all the time,” (T. Pierce 55). She also refuses to let her friends fight the bully despite their eager offer, telling them “I do my own fighting, thanks,” (T. Pierce 56). Alanna insists on training until she herself is capable of fighting him, and her glory and triumph is much greater for having accomplished the task herself when she beats him soundly in a fair fight and he no longer bullies her (T. Pierce 75-77). She tells him: “Never touch me again. If you do, I swear – I swear by Mithros and the Goddess – I’ll kill you,” (T. Pierce 77). She also displays bravery when she and a friend are faced with unknown, powerful old beings; despite the beings having almost godlike power, she does not hesitate to charge them with her sword drawn (T. Pierce 198-199).

Lanen generally stands up for herself and is resourceful in doing so. Although she is not skilled in combat, she bravely faces it when necessary. The first time she is threatened while adventuring, she does not hesitate to draw her sword. Although her traveling companions try to keep her safe and out of the battle, she is eager to jump in and stand up for herself. She says: “I drew steel for the first time in self-defense. I was frightened, excited, and sick to my stomach,” but she does not back down and fights for

herself (Kerner 21). She also stands up for herself when men try to push her around, as women get little respect in her world. After several innkeepers give her the worst rooms in the inns because she is a woman traveling alone, she learns how to trick them into agreeing to give her good rooms (Kerner 51-52). After traveling to the Dragon Isle, Lanen has two main forces threatening her: at first, some of the dragons hate her before they come to know her, and an evil mage is trying to kill her. She stands up to both forces quite well. Some of the dragons hate her because their king has fallen in love with her; they call the relationship unnatural and wish her to be sent away. Lanen pleads for their understanding in front of a great Council where they have all gathered (Kerner 297-300). She bravely stands up to the disapproval of giant creatures that could kill her with a single breath, even being sarcastic to one; she says that when she spoke to him, she “[put] as much venom in my voice as I could,” (Kerner 297). She also successfully resists the mage, Marik. When he tries to seduce her, plotting to kill her once she has her guard down, she sees through his plans and fights him instead, knocking him unconscious (Kerner 175-176). She also successfully stands up to her own fears; she is claustrophobic, but crawls into a cave and overcomes dizzying fear at one point when she needs to do so (Kerner 191-193).

Aerin stands up for herself against both the cruelties of her family and against dragons and other foes. At a young age, she learns to stand up to the insults of her cousin Galanna, a pretty and spoiled girl who hates Aerin. Although she is seven years younger than Galanna, Aerin does not fear her: when Galanna slaps the younger child in an argument, it provided “an excuse for Aerin to jump on her and roll her over on the floor, bruise one eye, and rip most of the lace off of her extremely ornate afternoon dress,”

(McKinley 14). After Galanna humiliates and torments Aerin especially harshly for a time, Aerin “drugged her supper wine and crept into her bedroom later,” and then cut off Galanna’s long black eyelashes (McKinley 23). Aerin also stands up for herself against enemies. She bravely faces down dragons, even when she is surprised by finding two dragons where she expected one (McKinley 83). In the book’s pivotal scene, she stands up to her uncle, an evil mage who has stolen a powerful Crown, even though the Crown should keep anyone from being able to stand up against him (McKinley 173). Aerin frequently finds the strength to stand up against powerful magic that renders others paralyzed or keeps them from opposing it in some other way. She is the only one to figure out that the skull of a powerful dragon that she killed is causing fatigue and listlessness in the residents of the king’s court. The skull was kept in the treasure room as a trophy, and has been affecting the armies and the royal family ever since (McKinley 209). Aerin insists on getting rid of it immediately to stop its ill effects, even when its magic convinces the others to do it later because they feel so tired, and she attacks it fiercely to stop its magic powers:

You shall not bully me again! Aerin said, and, almost not knowing what she did, pulled Gonturan free of her scabbard and slapped the flat of her across the base of Maur’s head where once the backbone had joined. Blue fire leapt up in sharp tongues that lit the entire vault, with its many shelves and cupboards and niches, and doors into further strongrooms. It was a ghostly unhealthy color, but the skull shrieked, and there was a crack like a mountain splitting, and the skull fell off its pedestal to the floor (McKinley 210).

Throughout her story, Aerin will never give up, no matter how tired or wounded she is. She is the most persistent heroine in the study sample, and will stand up for herself against anything that insults or threatens her.

Sophie does a remarkable job of learning to stand up for herself, considering how agoraphobic and timid she was at the start of the book. After she is cursed, she realizes that she can no longer let other people control her life, and she sets out to find a new start (Jones 27). From that point on, she does not let anyone, friend or foe, tell her what to do. When Michael, Howl's apprentice, tries to get her to leave the castle, she refuses, telling him "I'll wait, if you don't mind," even though "it was clear that Michael did mind," (Jones 40). She forces Calcifer, Howl's resident fire demon, to let her use his fire to cook, although he tries to keep her from being able to cook herself a meal (Jones 55). Finally, she won't let Howl keep her from doing as she wishes. At the start of the book, she was scared of him, but this quickly changes as she becomes more assertive. Howl has a fierce temper and often uses magic to annoy or intimidate others in order to get his way. He is not evil, but he is an egocentric, spoiled brat and routinely acts very immature and petulant. He gets away with this behavior with most people because they are frightened of him, but Sophie is not. When he covers the house with magical slime and then refuses to speak to anyone, Michael and Calcifer hide from him, but Sophie tells him to stop taking his bad mood out on everyone and tells Michael that it's "just a tantrum," (Jones 92-93). Later, when Howl gets really angry, Sophie is glad for it, because she's just as mad and "felt like a fight," (Jones 272). Sophie also starts standing up for herself against enemies. She fights off an animated scarecrow that she thinks is threatening the castle (Jones 99). She also stands up to the evil Witch the next time the two meet, although she is afraid; she refuses to help the Witch get any information and lies to her although she is "trembling with fear and anger," (Jones 195). In the final battle between the Witch and Howl, Howl is nearly killed. It is left to Sophie to destroy a powerful fire

demon, which she does skillfully and fearlessly (Jones 321-322). By the story's end, Sophie has changed so much that she is barely recognizable as the same girl that was so timid at first.

Other heroines in these books do not stand their ground as well and depend on others for rescue. Hermione seems to be brave, but it takes some time for this trait to appear and for her to start standing up for herself. Early in her time at Hogwarts, she is placed into Gryffindor House, where the students who are "brave at heart" with "daring and nerve" spend their school years (Rowling 118). However, when she is threatened by a troll in the first truly dangerous situation encountered by the students, it is left up to Harry and Ron to fight, as "Hermione had sunk to the floor in fright," (Rowling 176). Later, however, she finds her courage: she volunteers to help her friends on a dangerous adventure to recover a valuable magic object, knowing that to get it they will have to face a variety of dangerous spells and creatures (Rowling 271).

Ariel also learns to stand up for herself over time. At the start of the book, her mistress Eoduin insults her frequently, calling her ugly, clumsy and gullible at various points in the space of one conversation (M. Pierce 5-7). Ariel never defends herself. However, she learns to stand up against those who insult her or threaten her. After a few months in the darkangel's castle, she defies him openly, feeding the living gargoyles that he keeps abused and half-starved as castle guards (M. Pierce 74-76). She risks the darkangel's wrath because she says that the poor creatures "needed me," (M. Pierce 76). She learns to stand up both to the darkangel and his demands, and also to her friends who want to kill him rather than try to save what is left of his humanity. She learns bravery from Orroto-to, a wise woman who helps her. She learns to stand up to someone with

great courage, for if she does so with fear, she will lose, according to the saying she remembers from Orroto-to's teachings: "Go coward into battle, and you will fall. Go brave, and you may not," (M. Pierce 233). Aerial is inspired by this statement and takes it to heart.

Goldmoon never seems to learn to stand up for herself, against the opinions of her friends or against attacks by enemies. When she is insulted early on by a mage of the party who suggests that she is a charlatan, not a true healer, her lover Riverwind jumps to her defense as she sits silently (Weis and Hickman 43). Not only does she not defend herself, she begs Riverwind to be kind and understanding to their companions, telling him that "it is right that they do not trust us," (Weis and Hickman 43). Riverwind is the only person that she will ever argue with; she will stand her ground against him, but not against any other of her companions or against any enemies that threaten the group (Weis and Hickman 52-53). Even with Riverwind, she feels guilty and tries to placate him after standing up to him in any argument; she will even beg for forgiveness for expressing her opinion. After she argues for traveling with the companions when Riverwind doesn't want to, one of the companions overhears her speaking to him later:

Behind him, he could hear Goldmoon speaking softly in her own language. Riverwind replied – one, harsh word. Tanis heard Goldmoon sigh, then all other words were lost in the sound of cracking brush... (Weis and Hickman 69).

She tries desperately to placate Riverwind; several times she begs and pleads for him to listen to her, rather than assertively defending her opinions. In combat, she generally ends up calling for help. She stands back out of battle while the others fight. In one case she finds herself in the middle of a fight; rather than get involved, she uses her staff to keep the creatures at a safe distance while she calls for help, screaming "Riverwind!"

until he jumps to her defense (Weis and Hickman 84). During this battle, she does end up fighting a few creatures, but not by choice. During another battle, she is ordered by Riverwind to go hide while the men battle; she “started to protest” but at a warning look from him, she “swallowed and fell silent,” doing as he said (Weis and Hickman 158).

Joey never learns to stand up for herself either. There is not much danger in Shei’rah, but there is one very deadly creature: the peryton. These vicious birds of prey travel in groups and will attack anything, stripping any creature’s flesh off in minutes if they are not fought off. Joey runs from them at her first encounter, which seems smart enough (Beagle 32). However, none of the creatures who call Shei’rah home seem as terrified of them as Joey does. Even as she becomes more used to them, she remains completely terrified and depends on others to come to her rescue. At a later encounter with the beasts, she screams for the unicorns to rescue her. As her unicorn friend Lisha fends the creatures off, Joey “cowered beside” her (Beagle 72). She is also very dependent on her friend Ko, a satyr, for aid. In another dangerous moment, she encounters a plant that uses its roots to trap and crush hapless beings. She does not even try to fight the monstrous plant of by herself. She wrenched the bough covering her mouth away and then “she sat up, drawing breath to scream for Ko,” (Beagle 44). He is too far away to hear her, but one of the unicorns does hear and rescues her, rather than Joey finding a way to save herself (Beagle 45).

### Using Her Brain

In some of the books, the female protagonist is the smartest of the primary characters. She may be good at solving riddles or especially resourceful in finding clever

solutions to problems. She may be very good at thinking quickly under pressure and finding ways to rescue herself and her companions. Or, she may simply be unusually skilled in some area.

Hermione is characterized primarily as being one of the smartest students in her classes. Not only is she intelligent, she works hard. She values scholarly achievement above all else. When she is first introduced to the other two main characters, she announces that she has already “learned all our course books by heart,” (Rowling 105). From the first week of classes, she outdoes most of the other students in every class. During the students’ first attempt at transforming a match into a needle, most of the students have little luck and “by the end of the lesson, only Hermione Granger had made any difference to her match,” (Rowling 134). She tries to convince her friends to study more as well, but none of them can or want to keep up with her heavy and well-organized manner of studying, which includes “drawing up study schedules and color-coding all her notes,” (Rowling 228). She ends up with the best grades of any student in her class (Rowling 307). Her intelligence and skill as a witch help her rescue her friends from a ferocious sentient plant that is trying to attack them; she is the only one who has learned enough about magical plants to fend it off (Rowling 277-278). She is also able to solve a complicated logic puzzle to help her friends, proving that her intelligence extends beyond simply casting magic spells (Rowling 286).

Sophie is also a brilliant and talented witch, although she does not realize it at first. Howl and the Witch are supposedly the best magic users in the realm of Ingary, but both are impressed by Sophie’s power. Sophie is a hat maker and seamstress at the start of the book, and she unknowingly pours magic into each item that she makes. She talks

to the hats and clothes that she makes and tells them what they will bring to their eventual owners, telling them things such as “You have mysterious allure” and “You are going to have to marry money!” (Jones 10). She thinks that she is just passing the time and does not know that she is actually filling each object with powerful magic, and everything that she says to each item will come true for the hat’s owner (Jones 27). The Witch of the Waste hears about Sophie’s magical hats and clothes and is envious of the power in them, so she punishes Sophie by turning her into an old woman (Jones 27). Sophie does not know why the Witch is angry, however. She continues to fill objects with magic. She animates a scarecrow by talking to it and telling it she wishes it “could come to life and offer me help in making my fortune,” (Jones 30). She does not realize that she animated it; it later shows up at the castle and Howl is amazed by it, telling Sophie that the scarecrow had “some of the strongest magic” that he had ever seen (Jones 114). Sophie also charms one of Howl’s favorite suits while mending it (Jones 86). Other magic users around her notice Sophie’s talent, but she does not know of it herself until another witch, Mrs. Pentstemmon, remarks upon Howl’s suit and says that it is charmed; she says that the magic is “very well done” and “barely detectable” because it is sewn directly into the seams (Jones 178). Sophie then realizes that she has been sewing spells into the clothes that she makes for some time now (Jones 178-179).

Kaye is notably good at thinking quickly under pressure. She seems to thrive under stress and always comes up with her best plans when the situation calls for immediate action. For instance, she solves a riddle posed to her by the Unseelie Queen in a last-minute bid to be set free when she is moments away from being killed for the Unseelie Court’s tithe (Black 215). She also realizes that no one else plans to rescue her

as they had promised and devises a last minute escape plan that proves successful (Black 222). Later, she comes up with a complicated plan to disguise herself and poison Nephamael in order to save Roiben (Black 310-311). Although it almost fails, it ends up working and saving Roiben from torment and probably from death (Black 314-315). Finally, as Kaye is being threatened by the Seelie Queen, her mind races to put together all of the various clues she has seen, and she figures out the Queen's devious plot and how she has orchestrated all of the book's events in a bid to increase her power (Black 322-323).

Lyra is barely educated, but very intelligent. She also possesses a unique talent: she is the only person able to read a remarkable instrument. The alethiometer is a complicated device; various symbols on it indicate different outcomes when Lyra asks a question of it (Pullman 125). There are books designed to go with the alethiometer to help the user decipher it, but Lyra teaches herself to read it without the books, a skill that no one else possesses. Even the man who originally taught her about the device is soon amazed at her ability to read its symbolism; he himself does not understand how she does it (Pullman 143). In time, she can read it with great accuracy. She tries to explain her abilities to another, but she is still the only one able to understand, saying that "there's a trick in it like focusing your eyes (Pullman 151). A wise man who watches her work notes her intense and unique understanding:

Farder Coram was a chess player, and he knew how chess players looked at a game in play. An expert player seemed to see lines of force and influence on the board, and looked along the important lines and ignored the weak ones; and Lyra's eyes moved the same way, according to some similar magnetic field that she could see and he couldn't. (Pullman 151)

This skill proves valuable to the gyptians as she is able to warn them of upcoming dangers and the plans of their enemies (Pullman 204). Beyond her skills in reading the alethiometer, Lyra is also praised for her uncanny ability to get anyone to believe the lies she invents to save herself from danger. She convinces the doctors and nurses who watch the kidnapped children that she is “shy and nervous and insignificant” while she plots her escape (Pullman 238). Later, when Mrs. Coulter arrives and realizes Lyra’s true identity, Lyra convinces her that she was taken away from Mrs. Coulter by others; Mrs. Coulter never discovers that in fact, Lyra had run away from her (Pullman 281). In Lyra’s biggest lie, she convinces an armored bear that she is a dæmon rather than a human, and that she can become his dæmon if he will fight Iorek, Lyra’s bear friend, fairly rather than having him killed on sight (Pullman 338-340). Lyra is thrilled with her lying abilities with this bear; she “found her power over him almost intoxicating” and had to keep herself in check lest she go too far and reveal the ruse (Pullman 343). She earns herself the name “Lyra Silvertongue” for her ability to get others to believe her lies (Pullman 348). So Lyra has unusually strong wits and skills in both reading the truth and telling lies.

Joey is remarkably talented, but not in academic subjects. She has a strong gift for music and understanding it, important in a realm like Shei’rah. Music accompanies everything the unicorns do; every move they make generates music, and Joey develops a strong connection to the creatures through music. She also communicates with other people best through music. She has befriended John Papas, an elderly musician who is trying to teach her how to read and write the music that comes naturally to her. Her talent is immense but raw and untrained. She is just learning to write music, but upon

encountering a new instrument for the first time, she improvises music so beautiful it astounds John Papas (Beagle 20-21). When she tries to tell him about Shei'rah she is unable, but then she improvises some music that reminds her of what she heard while there and it describes the place so perfectly that it brings tears to the old man (Beagle 83-84). Over the next few months, when she is not visiting Shei'rah, she is trying to capture its spirit and feel in music. She gets frustrated with the task of trying to translate its beauty to notes on paper, but she persists until she begins to feel that she "really might be getting it right," (Beagle 110). She also learns from the leader of the unicorns that her understanding of music is what allows her to travel to Shei'rah when others walk past the border every day and do not: they do not hear or understand the unicorns' music as she does (Beagle 56). Finally, after her last, dramatic visit to the land, she knows that she has captured all the beauty and joy of the land, and has composed a piece of music that, to judge from the descriptions of those who hear it, would be remarkable even for a composer with far more years of training than Joey has (Beagle 152).

### *The Tough Fighter*

In many of the books, the heroines are tough warriors who enjoy a good fight and display great skill in them. They may be fighters in the sense that they enjoy a physical sword battle, or they may be mental fighters with an iron will. Some of the young women studied are both. These characters went beyond simply standing up for themselves. They are the warriors who find joy and glory in the idea of triumphing in a fair fight.

Alanna finds much glory in the idea of being a knight. She trains hard at her fighting skills and is often praised for her dedication. She has difficulty learning some skills such as sword fighting, but persists and sees the struggle as a challenge worthy of her nature as a fighter, thinking to herself: “A sword could not beat her,” (T. Pierce 131). In a triumphant moment after winning a battle, she experiences a feeling of great power and joy and thinks: “Now *she* ruled the power she had pulled from the flames... She was a warrior!” (T. Pierce 101). She is known for her unbreakable will; her friends express utter amazement when she yields in a fight on one occasion. She tells a friend that she accepted her impending loss in the fight and he is astounded: “George heard her out, shaking his head in wonder. ‘You *accepted* something?’ he remarked,” (T. Pierce 158).

Aerin is also a warrior. She thinks of herself as a good swordswoman, and values this skill more than the skills that are traditionally considered appropriate for girls in Damar. When talking about herself, Aerin compliments herself by saying that “Sword handling is about the only thing she’s ever gotten remotely good at – her dancing is definitely not satisfactory,” (McKinley 18). She trains hard with her sword and is proud of her accomplishments as a fighter (McKinley 41). One of her happiest moments is receiving a real warrior’s sword on her eighteenth birthday to replace the training sword she has been using. She “watched with rising excitement” as the sword was unwrapped at her birthday party, and when she first held her sword “her hand trembled with the pride of it,” (McKinley 54). She has no use for fancy dress events and considers time spent training to be much more worthwhile, for she is driven to go adventuring, and her training fills her mind (McKinley 48). Aerin is also a fighter in her persistence. She spends three years perfecting a recipe for a fireproof ointment that protects her from

dragonfire; others have tried to make the ointment from the old, rather unspecific recipe, but only Aerin refuses to let the recipe defeat her and persists for several years until one day, she gets it right (McKinley 58).

Lanen is a fighter of a different nature. She is not a skilled fighter in hand to hand combat, although she tries her best. She has been trained by her mentor Jamie in numerous fighting skills and slips into them almost unthinkingly, but will never have the natural speed and agility to be a talented fighter (Kerner 140). She is a fighter by nature, but fights in indirect ways. She uses her wits to get through the dangers posed by her adventuring. She also has a fierce temper and an iron will; it is not in her nature to accept bad situations, even when they seem hopeless. Her fury powers her escape when she is being held captive by the mage who wishes to kill her. At first he tries to seduce her to put her off guard, and when that almost works but ends up failing, he becomes violent.

Lanen becomes furious:

Obviously he knew only two ways to use women, seduction or bullying. I can't bear that kind of cowardice, and as I've said, I have a terrible temper. Always have. And all the nausea, the loathing I felt for him (and which now included myself), poured through me and was transmuted into pure anger as I realized I was being threatened by the same man who had just enticed me into releasing my passions. (Kerner 176).

She then punches him multiple times with strength far beyond what she normally possesses, driven by her fury. Her temper also gives her the courage needed to challenge him later, despite the fact that he has conjured demons to fight with him and all odds stand against Lanen (Kerner 329). While he is distracted and attacking the dragons, Lanen says, she gets angry and attacks: "I ran into him at full tilt, with no thought for my safety until it was too late," (Kerner 329). Lanen's rages seem to power some sort of adrenaline-fueled state where she can win battles that she normally would not.

In some of the books featuring a fighter, others express surprise at a female fighter, thinking that being a fighter is best left to a boy. The best example of this taken to an extreme is Alanna. She wants to be a knight, but in the realm of Tortall women cannot become knights. Alanna defies society's expectations for her as a young woman; she disguises herself as a boy so that she can train as a knight (T. Pierce 9). She is determined to prove herself a capable knight and plans to reveal that she is a woman when she is eighteen and has been knighted. Coram, the sergeant-at-arms of Trebond Castle who trained Alanna to fight and hunt as a child, thought often that Alanna was better than her brother at such skills, although Tortallan girls rarely learned them. Alanna herself only learned them at first because she was inseparable from her brother: "To teach one twin was to teach the other, poor motherless things," thinks Coram (T. Pierce 12). George, a friend who knows her true gender, praises her for doing "men's things" and doing them "better than most young men," (T. Pierce 139). Aerin is another example where the characters express surprise at a young woman accomplishing so much as a fighter. The first time that she slays a pair of dragons, the men sent to do the job arrive after she has finished. Their leader has a difficult time accepting that this girl killed two dragons single-handedly:

Gebeth dismounted, slowly, and slowly stooped down to stare at her trophies. The jaws of one were open, and the sharp teeth showed. Gebeth was not a rapid nor an original thinker, and he remained squatting on his heels and staring at the grisly heads long after he needed only to verify the dragonness of them (McKinley 87).

Aerin is later mocked by other members of the king's court for going off to hunt dragons while the other women do more stereotypically feminine activities (McKinley 97). However, she learns to ignore the scorn of others and pursue her dreams of being a

warrior. She eventually wins accolades from villagers for following her dreams, despite the continued scorn from her family.

Ariel is a different sort of fighter. She does not want to fight, but she will do so bravely and unflinchingly when she sees no other way. Everyone else who was close to Eoduin is too frightened of the darkangel to track him down and try to kill him, but Ariel bravely sets out to kill him and, when she meets him, tries her best to do so (M. Pierce 36-37). She fails because he has a power to mesmerize humans and force them to listen to his commands, but she never flinches away or tries to run from the fight despite her instincts telling her to do just that; in her fear, “her voice was nothing – a muted squeak,” (M. Pierce 36). She persists until he forces her to stop, although she is terrified:

Ariel gripped the haft of her long-blade tighter and started toward him.

“Stop,” he cried, his voice of a sudden commanding and stern. “You have not the power, nor the will.”

Then he opened his wings, and Ariel found she could not move for wonder. (M. Pierce 37).

She has few actual battles, as most of her adventures consist more of trickery than outright fighting. However, when she must fight, she does so bravely and resourcefully. At one point, she and a companion are fighting a horde of jackals; they know that only a few are real and dangerous and the rest are illusions. Her companion simply lashes out at any near him, hoping to hit a real one, but Ariel uses her wits. She watches a jackal that she thinks is real because it just attacked her and has blood from her wounds showing on its snout. She soon notices “that only he cast a shadow across the orange sand,” (M. Pierce 193). She then focuses all her spear throwing talents on those jackals with a shadow and defeats them

*The Nurturing Healer*

Many times, characters in these books are magic users. Often, the young woman in the novel uses her magic mostly to heal others, not to fight. Many other of the heroines studied heal others by means other than magic. A majority of the characters perform some healing during their stories, and for several of them, healing is their primary task. While these actions are praiseworthy, the frequency of the female protagonist as a healer tells young readers that women's roles are more to heal and nurture, while men may use their abilities, magical or otherwise, to seek out pursuits of their own interest. Healing another person or creature may generally be a positive character trait, but the message sent by the frequent portrayals of heroines as healers is that women are more frequently nurturers than fighters. The stereotype of women as nurturers and healers appeared in the literature review for this study. Most of the authors read as background agreed that the healer stereotype is negative and relegates women to helping others and denying themselves.

Ariel is a resourceful healer of both bodies and spirits. From the book's start, she invents herbal remedies for wounds on the spur of the moment. She uses a plant with a naturally warm sap to heal her frozen hand:

She poured the bright liquid out onto her limp, waxy hand, then grimaced, rocked in pain as the heat soaked through the frostbite, burned to the bone and then to the marrow. As the heat diminished and was gone, color returned to her hand; she could move it. (M. Pierce 16).

When she meets the darkangel's wives, they are all wraiths, bodies with the souls and hearts removed by the vampyre's kiss. They are pathetic creatures who have no memories of their former lives and seem unable to string together a coherent thought. Ariel learns that their previous servant never felt anything for them but pity and

loathing; but Aerial herself learns patience with them and eventually learns to love them. Her patient attention seems to help them, and as she spends months talking with them whenever she can, they begin to regain some of their mental capacity. Aerial notices the change and thinks that “their painfully dull wits actually seemed to have improved slightly as she spent time with them, talked to them. Glimmerings of memory came to them now,” (M. Pierce 72). She also disobeys the darkangel’s orders to leave his suffering gargoyles untended; he leaves the creatures starving and unsheltered so that they will be hateful and hungry and attack anyone who comes near the castle. Aerial can not bear to leave them suffering, so she tends to them, feeding and taming them and teaching them to trust her, despite the dangers that the wild creatures pose:

“Then why did you go up?” he asked her.

“They needed someone to feed them,” she stammered as his eyes wandered.

“They would have killed you if they could,” said the vampyre.

She answered, “Yes.”

“Then why?” he said, with real curiosity now. “Why did you go up?”  
Said Aerial, “They needed me.” (M. Pierce 75-76).

She later attempts to soothe the wounds of a great intelligent lion that she has befriended and is overcome by feelings of helplessness when she is unable to, as she is ordinarily able to heal (M. Pierce 200-201). He tells her to simply let her rest, and she replies: “But how may I aid you?” and later, more urgently: “But what may *I* do?” (M. Pierce 200). She becomes upset when she is unable to heal.

Aerial’s greatest challenge as a healer comes in treating the darkangel himself. He was taken as a small child by the evil Witch that is striving to control the world (M. Pierce 270). Most of the humanity in him has been extinguished and the others who fight against him believe that he must be killed, but Aerial holds onto the hope that he can be

redeemed. She sees the first glimmerings of humanity in him when she begins telling him stories (M. Pierce 84). The stories awaken emotion in him for the first time in many years, both pleasing and tormenting him. This storytelling therapy continues until one story troubles him so deeply that he flies into a rage and threatens Aeriell, telling her “Do not come again,” (M. Pierce 97). Still, Aeriell thinks that he is able to turn from his evil ways and from helping the Witch and she refuses to go along with her friends’ plans to kill him (M. Pierce 109). She tells her friend Talb: “I do not want to kill the vampyre[...] I want to save the wraiths, but not... not to kill him,” (M. Pierce 110). Killing is not in Aeriell’s nature; she wants to heal and redeem the vampyre. She cannot stand to cause him pain, even if it is necessary to saving him; she is horrified when a draught that will knock him unconscious so that she can heal him seems to hurt him first:

He sank down on one knee, his face twisted in pain. Aeriell shrank back from him, appalled. She had not known it would be like this. The duarough had never told her the potion would bring him pain. She had imagined he would fall insensate at the first sip. (M. Pierce 245).

In the ultimate act of sacrificing oneself to heal another, she cuts out her own heart and gives it to the darkangel to replace the lump of lead that is all that he has (M. Pierce 264-265). In doing so, she is willing to die to save him, saying: “The cure must come from me[...] He must have a heart of flesh to live, and if it must be mine, I’ll freely give it,” (M. Pierce 264). She ends up being saved herself by her friend Talb. When she awakens, she finds the former darkangel in anguish over what he had done while serving the Witch, and Aeriell decides that her work is not done; she tells him “It was not solely your body I meant to heal,” (M. Pierce 274).

Goldmoon is also a healer above all else. She is the owner of a magical blue staff that helps her heal. Like some of the other healers studied, she is concerned with the

well-being of others to the point of being self-sacrificing. For instance, she refuses to borrow a cloak from another when she is “chilled and shivering,” for fear that he would be cold without the cloak (Weis and Hickman 57). Her healing powers are still new to her at the start of the book, and they improve over time. They are not intrinsic to her, but rather are granted to her through the staff; others may also heal if they have the blue staff (Weis and Hickman 38). However, only some people can touch it. The mage with the party, familiar with such enchanted objects, declares that “only those of simple goodness, pure in heart,” can touch it safely (Weis and Hickman 44). It will burn anyone else, as he himself demonstrates. Although her healing skills are new to Goldmoon, they seem to come naturally to her. She is a nurturing sort of person and driven to help others even when they do not need the blue staff, and she also seems to have learned some minor herbal healing skills. When one of the party is sick and coughing, she tries to tend him as one would normally tend someone with a cold, with fluids, blankets and rest, rather than using the blue staff’s power (Weis and Hickman 60). In another instance, the group is captured and imprisoned and the staff taken. The mage in the group is injured, and Goldmoon tends him as best she can without the magic staff while the others formulate their escape plans. As the others plot, “Goldmoon knelt beside him, her hand on his forehead, stroking back the white hair,” (Weis and Hickman 153). She continues to keep watch over him and try to make him comfortable as the others make plans. As always with Goldmoon, she is more concerned about healing the injured party than about her own imminent danger; she is a perfect example of the stereotypical healer who nurtures others even to the point of self-sacrifice.

Goldmoon's natural tendencies towards healing are greatly helped along by the power of the magical staff, a relic of an ancient goddess of healing (Weis and Hickman 179-180). She heals not only her companions, but also enemies, even when doing so places her in danger. At one point the party meets a suspicious group of travelers carrying an injured cleric. Goldmoon goes up "to touch the pitiful cleric with her staff," (Weis and Hickman 83). The companions are soon attacked by the group now that Goldmoon has drawn their attention to the staff. Throughout the book, Goldmoon uses the staff to heal grave wounds; at one point she brings back a man so gravely wounded that his companions at first thought that he was dead (Weis and Hickman 182). She heals her companions whether they have grievous injuries or mild problems that they insist are not serious enough to require magical intervention. At one point she uses the staff's power to heal a headache (Weis and Hickman 209). Healing is so integral to Goldmoon's character that she cannot see another creature with any sort of sickness or injury and not attempt to heal it.

Alanna's primary interest does not lie in healing and she is certainly not a nurturing, maternal sort of young woman. However, even she is a healer: she is described as an unusually gifted healer, thanks to the magic Gift that she has had since birth. The Gift is not uncommon in Alanna's world; about half of the book's characters seem to have at least some form of it. However, Alanna's powers are unusual in that they are very strongly focused towards healing abilities, and these healing abilities are extremely strong. Early on, a village wisewoman and healer tells Alanna that she has a talent for healing and says that it is "greater than mine, greater than any I have ever known," (T. Pierce 8). Because her magic is so strong, Alanna is scared of it and "the

thought of using sorcery gave her the shakes,” (T. Pierce 83). However, as she learns to use it, she becomes more confident, and saves her friend from a sickness that even well-trained mage healers cannot treat (T. Pierce 99-103).

Joey is not primarily a healer, but she helps save the unicorns from a disease that is blinding them. Although the cure is mixed and applied to the unicorns by her grandmother, Joey gathers the ingredients, most notably the gold that is crucial to the potion (Beagle 140). She convinces one stubborn unicorn who does not seem to care for the rest to help her journey back and forth between the two worlds to gather necessary items. Helping to heal the unicorns is so important to Joey that when the stubborn unicorn is reluctant to help at first, she yells at him furiously – the only time that she really stands up for what she wants in the entire book (Beagle 138-139). She calls him contrary and selfish, and finally tells him “The hell with you,” which is the only time she ever shows any anger or argues with another (Beagle 139).

Lanen is another example of a heroine who does not think of herself primarily as a healer, but who manages to heal someone when no one else could. She is also very self-sacrificing, almost dying in the attempt to save a newborn dragon and his mother. The mother is having a difficult breech birth, and none of the dragons can help, as all have destructive claws rather than hands. Lanen, however, reaches in and turns the baby, and mother and child both survive when this had seemed unlikely before Lanen’s intervention (Kerner 233). She sustains grave burns to her hands from touching dragons for so long and almost dies (Kerner 235). After she finishes delivering the baby, she goes into a lake to cool her arms and discovers the severity of her wounds: “My hands were terribly burned[...] Then I looked down and saw great lumps of skin in the water. Then I

realized they had come off my arms,” (Kerner 233). At this point, Lanen passes out. She gets a high fever, and the only thing that keeps Lanen alive is the skill of a human healer and some help from a magical plant that grows on the Dragon Isle (Kerner 251).

Even in those books where healing is not a major component of the story, the heroines are likely to perform some minor healing. Hermione, although she never really heals any injuries or sickness, undoes a curse placed on another student by a bully. While the two male protagonists laughed at the helpless student, whose legs were locked together so that he had to hop to move, Hermione “leapt up and performed the countercurse,” (Rowling 217). Aerin rehabilitates a wounded war horse that all of the male horse trainers have given up on. First, she soothes him and calms him when he had been wild and usually angry at anyone who came near – like many other healers in these books, she healed the mind first (McKinley 27). Later, she devises workouts for him to retrain his lame leg and help him regain his strength until she is able to ride him (McKinley 33-34). When Iorek suffers wounds in a fight, Lyra uses snow and a mossy plant to stop the profuse bleeding and treat the wound, “packing in the bloodmoss and freezing the raw flesh till it stopped bleeding,” (Pullman 355). Kaye doesn’t really heal anyone, but she does help Roiben out when he is wounded. She pulls an arrow from his chest and calls help for him (Black 28, 32). Roiben was nearly resigned to death before she came along, so she seems to have accomplished some sort of useful treatment. Nearly every heroine studied heals at least in some minor way during the course of her tale.

*Rule Breakers and Rule Followers*

Hermione is a stickler for rules and tries to get the other students to be as concerned with them as she is herself. She is also very troubled when an infraction of the rules goes overlooked by the adults in the story. Throughout the book, she criticizes her fellow students for breaking rules and at one point snaps at her friends angrily when they are rewarded rather than punished for an infraction, angrily saying “So I suppose you think that’s a reward for breaking rules?” (Rowling 166). While the other students test the limits of how much rebellion they can manage, Hermione hangs back. She refrains from breaking any rules primarily not because she thinks that they are good rules, but because she fears the consequences. Early on in the book she begins interfering when other students break rules; she tries to stop Harry from flying before the students are allowed to do so, telling him “you’ll get us all into trouble,” (Rowling 148). She eavesdrops on other students’ plans to sneak out of the dorm late at night and lectures them about how they shouldn’t break school rules and that it is “selfish” for them to risk bringing disgrace upon the rest of their house (Rowling 154). She lightens up somewhat on her strict adherence to rules by the book’s end, but is for the most part still far more concerned with them than the other students.

Ariel challenges many accepted standards in her own quiet way. Everyone else in the tale gives up any hope of rescuing Eoduin or even avenging her death because fighting a darkangel is simply not done; it is too dangerous. Ariel decides that even if she dies trying, she will fight him because it is the right thing to do for Eoduin’s sake (M. Pierce 31). She later decides that she will redeem him rather than killing him even though no one else thinks it possible (M. Pierce 110-112). She thinks there must be a

way to save him and, she says: “I am determined to find it,” (M. Pierce 110). Throughout the book, she follows her heart even when the rules set for her tell her not to. She eventually releases the darkangel’s captive gargoyles, knowing that she is breaking one of his rules and she is inviting his fury. She is willing to do so out of compassion, saying of his rule: “It makes no matter. To please him is no longer my great concern[...] The gargoyles suffer. I shall free them,” (M. Pierce 224).

Aerin fights against many of the restraints placed on her as a young woman in Damar and as a member of the royal family. She learns to fight over a period of several years despite it being considered unfit for a girl. The first day that she rides the wounded horse that she has healed, she decides to go adventuring, knowing how difficult it will be for a young royal woman: “It was that day that a small but terrible hope first bloomed in Aerin’s heart,” (McKinley 34). She routinely slips away from the castle to visit other places in the city over the objections of her lady in waiting, and she begins sneaking out of the castle late at night to pursue her adventures and hunt dragons (McKinley 56, 80). Aerin rebels against the constraints of her life, and ends up rewarded by being honored as a heroine and made queen of the realm (McKinley 222). The people love her for her accomplishments; they “seemed to have more or less forgotten that they had ever held the king’s daughter in so lively an antipathy,” and they celebrate her and view her with great affection (McKinley 222-223).

Some of the characters are not regular rule-breakers. They don’t routinely fight against societal standards. However, they break just a few big rules, and those few instances shape their lives and fates. For example, Sophie starts out assuming that she

will never accomplish anything in life. She is the eldest of three sisters, and in her land of Ingary this is very bad luck:

In the land of Ingary, where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist, it is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three. Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes. (Jones 1).

Because this was accepted as truth, no one ever expected eldest children of three to even try to seek their fortunes. This idea was well accepted by everyone in Ingary and frequent reference is made to the fact that Sophie shouldn't even try to seek her fortune. However, Sophie did, and ended up having the grandest adventures of the three sisters.

Another heroine who only challenges a few rules but is changed by the experience is Goldmoon. For most of her life, she was happy to live in luxury, exalted and praised as the beautiful young daughter of the powerful chieftain. She tells the others "I was a princess of my people. I was a priestess. They worshipped me as a goddess," (Weis and Hickman 53). However, all that changed when she fell in love with Riverwind, who was not considered an appropriate match for the chieftain's daughter. He was from a poor family considered heretics by the rest, a family that had been "cast out of [the] tribe years ago for refusing to worship ancestors," (Weis and Hickman 73). She defied her father to be with him, and when her father ordered Riverwind stoned to death, she ran to him to die with him. She would have died alongside him had they not both been magically saved at the last minute (Weis and Hickman 73-74). Other than her love for Riverwind, Goldmoon lived her whole life as she was expected to, but breaking one rule and falling in love with someone considered beneath her station shaped the rest of her life.

Kaye challenged tradition by keeping the Unseelie Court from providing its sacrificial tithe at dawn on Halloween. She thought that this would be good and helpful,

and her faerie friends begged her to help them keep the tithe from happening; one of them tells her that “If you help us, we’ll be freeeeee,” (Black 99). By tradition, if the tithe is not performed by the correct time, then the faeries that are not associated with either court are free for the next seven years. Kaye is happy to have accomplished this, until the next day when news stories talk of all kinds of strange events, from kidnappings to zoo animals going missing (Black 251). She did not really realize what the consequences, good and bad, of her breaking of tradition would be until after the fact.

### Self-Doubt

Many of the young women in these books doubt their abilities, even those that outwardly seem confident to those around them. Some of them never build up much confidence during the course of their tales, but many of them grow stronger and learn to feel pride in their achievements by the end of their tale.

Alanna constantly worries that she is not strong enough or skilled enough compared to the other pages. She displays a great amount of bravado to those around her; she tells her twin how well she will do in knight training, but thinks to herself that her own words are “foolhardy,” (T. Pierce 11). She revels in a good fight but often anguishes later, afraid that she has done the wrong thing even when she was clearly fighting fair and in self defense (T. Pierce 77-79). She often worries that no girl can ever be as good a knight as a boy, at one point saying that she, because of being female, “doubted that she would ever believe herself to be as good as the stupidest, clumsiest male” (T. Pierce 78). Some of her doubts relate to her gender, others to her own fighting skills; when the knights are deciding which of the older pages will make good squires

soon, Alanna is convinced that she is not skilled enough to be chosen by a knight, despite being the best fighter among her class of pages (T. Pierce 170-171). When her friends start talking about who will be chosen, she “did not consider herself to be in the running, and she said so,” (T. Pierce 171).

While Hermione excels at any sort of intellectual work, she has far less confidence in her physical skills. She is very afraid of learning to fly and doubts her ability to learn because “this was something you couldn’t learn by heart out of a book,” (Rowling 144). She is also afraid to do anything not sanctioned by a teacher or other adult with authority. For Hermione, confidence in herself seems to be based more on pleasing a teacher than on any sense of innate self-worth or pride in her skills. For this reason, succeeding in school seems more important to her than life itself. At one point she describes being expelled as the worst imaginable fate, telling Harry “We could all have been killed – or worse, expelled,” (Rowling 162). Without her scholastic achievements, Hermione has nothing upon which to base her self-confidence. She even undervalues her intelligence at one point, telling Harry that he is a better wizard because his bravery is “more important” than her cleverness (Rowling 287). However, she does seem to feel confident in her intelligence and think that her bookish knowledge is valuable. When Harry goes off to face a dangerous set of spells and traps, she says that she and Ron will help, and she implies that he would be unable to complete the task without them: “How do you think you’d get to the Stone without us? I’d better go and look through my books, there might be something useful...” (Rowling 271).

Joey doubts herself in all things. She is a poor student and thinks that she is stupid. At one point after a bad school day, she says “I can’t do anything right. Nothing.

You name it, I screw it up,” (Beagle 13). She has an amazing amount of musical talent, but it takes repeated visits to Shei’rah for her to appreciate her own skills and feel confident in them. Before she discovers Shei’rah, she is learning music from an elderly musician who owns a small music shop (Beagle 13). She is always humming or singing her own tunes to herself, but does not feel confident enough in her abilities to write any of it down (Beagle 13-14). She spends roughly the first half of the book on one trip into Shei’rah, learning the music that she hears all day by heart, but doubts her ability to accurately remember or express it for the musician, John Papas. When she tries to play a song that she has written that was inspired by Shei’rah, she thinks to herself “It’s all wrong, wrong, it’s garbage, you ought to be ashamed,” (Beagle 83-84). However, as she spends more time in Shei’rah, her confidence in her abilities grows, and at the end she composes a piece of music about the realm that she is very proud of. She tells John Papas that she captured the feel of it just right with this piece, and it makes her happier than she has been with herself at any other point in the book (Beagle 153).

Ariel starts out her story with no feelings of self-worth or self-confidence at all. She accepts the insults that others heap upon her and thinks of herself as worthless, clumsy and ugly (M. Pierce 7-10). After Eoduin is taken by the darkangel, Ariel loathes herself and feels responsible, despite having made her best efforts to fight the creature. She decides to avenge it, knowing she will probably die and thinking that she deserves this fate; she says: “I myself am of no consequence,” (M. Pierce 33). When Ariel decides face the darkangel again after Eoduin’s kidnapping, she scolds herself when she cries with fear, saying “I’m coward enough without weeping,” even though she is the only one with the bravery to even try (M. Pierce 34). She prays to the powerful people

that those on her world worship as gods, but later recalls this and “blushed now to think of her presumption” for daring to pray to them (M. Pierce 62). Her feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness continue at the darkangel’s castle; she considers herself unable to do anything to oppose his evil; she tells the wraiths: “I am powerless against him,” (M. Pierce 99). However, after she escapes his castle and spends time living with a desert tribe, she begins to learn her own strength. She learns to fight and learns more about the world from their stories. After staying with the desert tribe for three months, Aerial is more confident than she has ever been before: she describes herself as feeling “fitter, freer, stronger, surer,” (M. Pierce 159). She later returns to the darkangel’s castle to try to stop his plans to kidnap another young woman as a bride and make her a wraith; when the darkangel sees her, he is amazed by the newfound confidence that Aerial displays (M. Pierce 215). He thinks she seems like a whole different person because of her self-assurance, telling her “You move straight-shouldered as a princess now, no longer creep and cringe like a little slave,” (M. Pierce 215).

Goldmoon displays little self-confidence, despite the fact that she is described as proud on several occasions. She is described as having “her head held proudly” and later as “the daughter of a strong, proud people,” (Weis and Hickman 81, 219). However, her actions indicate insecurity with herself, not pride. She is the daughter of the chieftain of her people, and she did most of the work of ruling them for several years due to her father’s ill health (Weis and Hickman 81). Yet rather than gaining confidence in her abilities after several years of this, ruling seems to only increase her feelings of inadequacy. She tells the others of the constant worry and second guessing of her tasks as ruler and tells them all how unpleasant a task it was. Her tendency to find everything

that she does lacking was the main reason that ruling was so unpleasant for her; she tells her companions that worried over all of her decisions when she ruled (Weis and Hickman 142). She also blames herself whenever anyone criticizes her. Riverwind makes some very cruel comments to her at one point and she won't speak to him for a bit. Soon, however, she comes to him begging forgiveness and saying that she's been disagreeing with him because she has "been so afraid" as they travel (Weis and Hickman 235). Throughout the book, this is how she handles criticism: rather than defending herself, she tends to agree with criticism of herself and apologize for not being "better" in some way.

Not only does Goldmoon lack confidence in herself, she also seems to think her life worthless. When she realizes that her village was destroyed by creatures right after she left, she insists upon going there, despite the danger that the destroyers are still there:

"I don't care if there are thousands of those monsters waiting. I will die with our people, as I should have done." Her voice failed her. (Weis and Hickman 135)

When Riverwind was about to be stoned to death, she ran to be with him – not to save him, but to die alongside him (Weis and Hickman 74). She frequently walks right into grave danger that she is warned will kill her. Once might be courage, but doing things like this multiple times seems to be a death wish

### *The Opinions of Others*

Some of the messages sent by the books are expressed not by the female protagonists of the books, but by other characters and what they think of the young heroines. If a heroine thinks of herself as strong, but all of the other characters think of her as weak, then the book may seem to present a positive message about women, but it

really presents very mixed messages. Also, in much of the literature, many of the important messages sent about women were those sent by comments that the male characters made about them: often, male characters were shown to have very little respect for female characters in some of the studies of media that have been done.

Alanna is a unique case. Much of what other characters think about her does not reveal their opinions of her as a female fighter, because most of the other characters do not know that Alanna is female. However, Coram Smythesson, the sergeant-at-arms for Trebond Castle who became Alanna's manservant when she was a page, knew her secret and admired her strength. He describes her as "a fighter," a high compliment from Coram, who admires soldiers above all other people (T. Pierce 12). He also admires her bravery and quick thinking in emergencies, as when she stands directly in the path of a frightened, bucking horse to calm it, with no fear of being hit by its pounding hooves (T. Pierce 16). Coram considers this an example of "the kind of courage a knight needed in plenty," and he knows that Alanna has this courage (T. Pierce 16).

Throughout her first year at Hogwarts, Hermione is often criticized by other students for being a showoff. Before the students even arrive at the school, Ron decides that he doesn't like her know-it-all behavior and says that "Whatever house I'm in, I hope she's not in it," (Rowling 106). Later, when another student realizes that she is right about something she had told him, he decides not to say as much because he thinks that she will gloat about it (Rowling 159). When she decides not to speak to Harry and Ron for a time when she is angry with them, they see this as a good thing because "she [is] such a bossy know-it-all," (Rowling 164). The problems between the three protagonists reach a peak when Ron says that no one likes Hermione and she overhears; she realizes

the truth of his statement and runs off by herself in tears (Rowling 172). Their opinions of her eventually improve as she grows less bossy and the boys become less critical; the three become friends, but she is still viewed as being somewhat of a know-it-all at the story's conclusion. However, she is also praised for her intelligence and bravery. She becomes a favorite with teachers from the first day of classes, when she is one of the most successful students attempting the first few basic spells that the first year students are learning. She is the most successful student on the first day in Transfiguration, and the very demanding teacher "gave Hermione a rare smile," (Rowling 134). Even when other students mock her tendency to show off, the teachers praise her intelligence and perseverance in her schoolwork (Rowling 171).

Ariel is at first treated very badly by others around her; she is a slave to Eoduin and is constantly berated by Eoduin and her family. They laugh at her gawkiness and her clumsiness and tell her that she is ugly. When Eoduin is kidnapped, her mother is furious with Ariel for not managing to rescue her, slapping her and calling her "worthless chattel," (M. Pierce 23). The darkangel also insults her after taking her to his castle, telling her that she is too ugly to be one of his wives and she will instead be a servant spinning and sewing clothes for his wraith wives (M. Pierce 41-42). Soon, however, she befriends the wraiths and Talb, all of whom hold high opinions of her and think that she could finally be the person who is able to save them from the darkangel. The wraiths have confidence in her abilities and tell her that she alone can rescue them; they spend much of their time talking amongst themselves about their admiration for Ariel's bravery, saying to each other "Ariel will help us," (M. Pierce 102). The desert people who nurse Ariel back to health after she is wounded badly all come to love Ariel and

teach her their skills (M. Pierce 158-160). A great lion that is helping her try to defeat the darkangel is badly wounded and can no longer help, but he remains confident that Aerial has the intelligence and resourcefulness to complete the task on her own. As he sees her off, he tells her that “much rides on chance, and the gods, and your own skill,” (M. Pierce 203). When she makes her way back to the castle after these events, the darkangel is astounded at the changes in her and praises her new beauty and strength, telling her that “desert life agrees with you,” (M. Pierce 210).

Lanen says that she was treated harshly, but this changes quickly in the book. Her father Hadron is cruel and calls Lanen ugly, and the village girls won't befriend her because they think she is strange, always dreaming of adventure (Kerner 7). After Hadron's death Lanen does not grieve; instead, she spends the time right after he dies coming to terms with her anger over years of being made to feel that she was ugly, gangly and unworthy (Kerner 13). However, even in childhood she has Jamie, her father's main farmhand who takes care of his horses. Jamie became more of a father to Lanen than Hadron ever was, showing her love and encouraging her adventurous nature. Lanen says that “to me, Jamie was ever love and kindness,” (Kerner 7). Soon, she travels to the Dragon Isle and becomes close to the dragons, some of whom befriend her and think highly of her. From the first, they are fascinated by this strange human who does not wish any favors of them as most humans do, but simply wants to know and understand them (Kerner 116). They are impressed by her bravery and her interest in them. They are also amazed by her ability to speak to them telepathically, an ability that no other human that they have encountered has had, but that the dragons all have and refer to as “the Language of Truth,” (Kerner 120). One of the dragons entrusts her early

on with his true name, which gives her great power over him (Kerner 122). This same dragon, Akhor, thinks of Lanen as powerful and describes her as “a warrior,” (Kerner 300). Some of the dragons also hate and fear Lanen, but they change their minds over time after she proves her good heart time and again.

Joey assembles a piecemeal group of people around her who understand and love her. Her parents are frequently at work for long hours, and she does not get along well with her brother (Beagle 12-13). She mentions in passing one friend at school but does not seem to have any very close friends her own age (Beagle 44). However, she spends her time with John Papas, an elderly musician who appreciates her musical talent. He is often gruff, but he cares a great deal for Joey and thinks very highly of her abilities. He is the first to suggest that her music is good enough to start writing down (Beagle 13). Joey also spends as much time as she can with her Abuelita, her grandmother, who is a dreamer like Joey and understands her better than anyone else in the family. She is the only person who really believes and understands everything that Joey says about Shei'rah, and one of the few that Joey tells at all (Beagle 97-98). Many of the creatures of Shei'rah befriend Joey and all find her fascinating, but none understand her as well or think as highly of her as John Papas and Abuelita.

Goldmoon is admired by the others, but they seem to have more affection for her than respect. She is often protected; the men jump in and fight for her while she hangs back. Goldmoon is described as the “strong child of a warrior race,” yet the others seem to think of her as a charming, but helpless young woman who needs to be protected (Weis and Hickman 84). In battle, they always protect her and shield her. In one instance where cover is handy, two of the men in her traveling party order her to go hide

in the shelter rather than fight (Weis and Hickman 158). They don't seem to trust her abilities to defend the others or even to get help. At night, the group always sets a watch, with several shifts with one person keeping watch as the others sleep. Goldmoon is one of only two characters who never take a watch shift, and the other is very sickly and needs his rest to recover. The men that Goldmoon travels with don't even seem to trust her to stay out of trouble for a few minutes: when the group is exploring some ruins and Goldmoon steps out of sight for a moment, they all begin to worry, especially her lover: "Riverwind searched frantically for Goldmoon, calling her name," (Weis and Hickman 170). She is the only character that the others worry about getting separated from the group; some of the others routinely wander alone.

Everyone who knows Sophie seems to admire her or at least respect her formidable magic skills. Her sisters adore her and watch out for her. They encourage her to have more self-confidence throughout the book. Early on, one of her sisters encourages her to protest her treatment as an apprentice and stop "slaving away" at the hat shop and to demand a wage; her sisters are afraid that she won't stand up for herself (Jones 21). Her other sister sends a magical dog to help Sophie when she hears about the spell that the Witch cast (Jones 279). The other magic users in the book are all impressed by Sophie's skills. The Witch is jealous and sees Sophie as a potential barrier to her chances to increase her power, saying that she cursed Sophie because the girl was inadvertently "preventing [the Witch] from getting some information" through her magic skills (Jones 196). Howl considers Sophie's magic to be incredibly strong and tells her that it is "some of the strongest magic" that he's seen, which is impressive since Howl himself is known as one of the most powerful magic users in the world (Jones 114). At

times, Howl and Michael complain about Sophie's nosiness and bossiness, but for the most part she is well-respected by the others in the book.

At the start of her tale, Aerin seems to be ignored at best and scorned at worst by the others. Since childhood, she has been set apart from others by her heritage: her mother was a foreigner and was said to be a witch who "enspelled the king into marrying her," (McKinley 15). She was either ignored or hated by her royal cousins, who resented the attention that she received because of her mother's background and who later scorned her because she seemed to lack the magical Gift that most children of royal blood had (McKinley 22-23). Her appearance also made her stand out and she was mocked for it: Aerin looked like her foreign mother rather than other Damarians and was "the only pale-skinned redhead in a country of cinnamon-skinned brunettes," (McKinley 116). However, Aerin gradually earned more respect and opinions of her began to change. Her father loved her despite what other royals thought, and he was fiercely proud of her dragon slaying skills (McKinley 93). Her cousin Tor also respected her throughout the book. By the end of the book, Aerin has recovered the magical Crown and saved Damar from destruction by the kingdom to the north. She receives the accolades that she deserves: she becomes Queen and is celebrated in stories, just as she had hoped for in her younger days (McKinley 222-223). She was still seen as being odd by many Damarians, but they viewed her strangeness in an affectionate manner by the story's end, rather than as something dangerous. They even give her nicknames of endearment such as "Fire-hair" and "Dragon-Killer," (McKinley 223).

Kaye is treated by the others in her story as a very important person. The faeries that she befriended as a child think that she is their one chance at freedom from the

commands of the Unseelie Court (Black 97). However, while the solitary fey and the Seelie Court think that Kaye is important to their plans to make the Unseelie Court's title fail, they don't actually care about her. Kaye discovers – almost too late to save herself – that the faeries plan to let her be killed as part of their plan. One faerie, Nephamael, promises to remove the glamour that she is wearing to disguise her pixie self as a human and thus reveal that she is really a faerie and doesn't qualify for the title. However, he doesn't do it and Kaye realizes that she has been used by the faeries, saying: "If Nephamael was going to take the glamour off me, he was going to take it off my corpse," (Black 230). The only people in the story who care for Kaye are her mother Ellen, who is generally disinterested in her, and Roiben. Roiben dislikes Kaye at first but eventually comes to care for her. He also respects her and her intelligence; he is the only one that is willing to believe Kaye at first when she discovers the Seelie Queen's plot to take over both faerie courts. Everyone else finds her idea ridiculous, but Roiben is willing to listen: "Roiben held up his hand. 'I will hear her,' " (Black 321).

Lyra is respected by the other children and by the adults in the story. She proves herself a strong leader and the other children trust her to look after them. The gyptian adults that she travels with at first care for her but do not really have respect for her ideas. However, she soon proves her ability to read the alethiometer, and the gyptian leader John Faa lets her help plan their course of action using the device (Pullman 207). In this book, Lyra's closest relationship other than that with Pantalaimon, her dæmon, is her relationship with the armored bear Iorek. He cares a great deal for Lyra from the first time that he meets her; she helps him retrieve his armor, and he is very grateful (Pullman 197). He has great respect for her intelligence and dubs her "Lyra Silvertongue" when he

is amazed that she has managed to trick the king of the bears (Pullman 348). The respect that the adults and Iorek show to young Lyra is one of the most positive messages presented in this novel.

### *The Outcast Heroine*

Some of the books take place in realms where women are seen as weaker or less worthy than men. These realms have very strictly defined gender roles, and the female protagonists that star in these books often defy these roles. In several cases, the whole story is built around the idea of a young woman defying her proscribed role in society. An unfortunate message sent by these books is that girls who try to succeed at tasks more often performed by men will become social pariahs.

Alanna is one of the primary examples of this. In the realm of Tortall, women have little power and few choices. An upper class woman such as Alanna could only become a noble wife or a priestess. Girls from noble families all studied at convents “until they were fifteen or sixteen, at which time they went to Court to find noble husbands,” (T. Pierce 7). If they chose instead to be priestesses, they lived their lives confined to temple grounds (T. Pierce 19). Neither option appeals to Alanna. However, although she breaks free and accomplishes a different sort of life, she does not feel that she fits in. She can never be honest about her gender or she will be forced to leave her training.

The opinions expressed by others in Alanna’s world towards women are very negative. While Coram praises Alanna, he does so because he considers her different from most girls. When she complains about the difficulty of her training, he goads her

about being a “soft noble lady” after all, just when he was starting to think that she was succeeding (T. Pierce 43). The trained fighters who teach the young pages new skills berate the pages when they fail by calling them “girls,” (T. Pierce 127). When Alanna stands up to strange, powerful old beings in battle, they see that she is really female despite her disguise. They make her clothes vanish and laugh at her for attempting to be a fighter despite her gender:

The Ysandir were laughing with Ylanda. “A girl! His boy companion was a girl!”

The one called Ylira laughed scornfully as Alanna tried to cover herself with her hands. “A girl who hopes to protect her prince? A jest indeed!” (T. Pierce 199-200).

Her friend Prince Jon hears this and learns that she is female; after the two friends win the battle, he seems surprised that a girl has done so well as a page, although he acknowledges that “you do better than most of us,” (T. Pierce 209).

Lanen lives in a similar realm; in her land of Kolmar, women are generally powerless and spend their lives thinking about getting married and having babies. Lanen describes the area around her home region, Ilsa, as restrictive for women: “Ilsa does not encourage women to go beyond the narrow boundaries of home,” (Kerner 6). Lanen has no close friends while she is growing up. The village girls think she is strange because of her adventurous nature, and the men of the village all think that she is too wild and too plain-looking to be worth their time (Kerner 7). Until Lanen arrives at the Dragon Isle, she continues to have nasty encounters with men who mistreat women. One man tries to rape her, and she is told by a traveling companion who helps her fight the man off that rape is likely for a woman traveling without the protection of a husband (Kerner 21). Jamie, who is like a father to Lanen, understands her better than anyone. He is the only

one who is happy for Lanen to be off adventuring as she wishes, but even he says that “none would be more pleased than I to see you happy with a man,” as though she would be better off settling down than adventuring (Kerner 65). However, Lanen soon leaves Kolmar and heads to the Dragon Isle, where male and female dragons share equal rank.

Goldmoon seems to live in a similar realm, although it is difficult to tell. There are no other significant female characters in the book. A few others are mentioned in passing, but nothing is revealed about them, and the only other female character who actually appears in the book is a barmaid who shows up briefly (Weis and Hickman 26). The lack of other female characters itself seems to suggest that women generally do not go adventuring in this realm. In the story, a party of men set out on a dangerous but exciting quest to help their realm; only one woman traveled with them, and she ended up with them solely because she had nowhere else safe to go. Generally, the women in this story seem to be at home in their villages, being barmaids or waiting on adventuring men. Another clue lies in the way the men treat Goldmoon; they act as though she can not ever be exposed to battle, although she is supposedly trained to fight if necessary due to being born of a “warrior race,” (Weis and Hickman 84). This desire to protect the one woman in the group could indicate that the men were unused to seeing a female fighter.

Aerin lives in a world where women do not generally go adventuring, but her people seem more willing to accept her than in the other realms discussed. In Damar, women are not trained to fight and Aerin’s family thinks her strange because of her desire to learn to use a sword. Her cousin and friend Tor agrees to teach her sword fighting skills, but at the same time “he knew that for her own sake he should not encourage her now,” (McKinley 41). Women are not permitted to fight with the army, much to Aerin’s

disappointment, and are only allowed to travel along with it if they are charming and demure and willing to look after the men (McKinley 7). Some in Aerin's family mock her reputation as a dragon killer (McKinley 97). In the strongest example of the disdain for women in the realm, Aerin's mother is said to have died from despair when she realized that she had borne a daughter who she thought would be weak, rather than a son who would fight her brother, the evil mage who had stolen the Crown. Aerin's mother was convinced that a girl could not accomplish the task:

Luthe closed his eyes. "It is true your mother wanted a son; she believed that as only one of [the mage's] own blood might defeat him, so only one of his own sex might, for to such she ascribed her own failure. She felt that it was because she was a woman that she could not kill her own brother." (McKinley 152)

However, while the royal family might mock her, the villagers accept her. They appreciate her efforts to rid their villages of dragons, although at first they are startled and find it unusual that a woman wore armor and fought dragons with a sword (McKinley 87). In time, "the small villagers came to love her, and they called her Aerin Fire-hair, and they were kind to her, and not only respectful," (McKinley 96). The villagers even begin to sing ballads about her applauding her deeds (McKinley 97). So although Aerin's world of Damar does not encourage women to be fighters, they seem more accepting of a different sort of woman than some of the other patriarchal societies presented in these novels.

### Other Women

Other female characters besides the main heroine contribute to the overall message that a book sends about young women. The messages that the book presents

about the female protagonist are the most important, because she is the woman who appears the most. However, the roles and depictions of minor female characters can help to paint a more complete picture of women in the fantasy realm of each book. The characters mentioned below are those that add in some way to the complete portrayal of women in these novels.

Alanna: The First Adventure features almost no other women; only three individual women besides Alanna that are mentioned. All three appear for only a few pages. Two of them are healers, confirming the stereotype of women as primarily nurturing others rather than seeking fulfillment of self (T. Pierce 3, 137). The other is only briefly mentioned; she is part of a group of rogues that Alanna befriends, but nothing more is said about her (T. Pierce 70).

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone features another strong female character in the form of Professor Minerva McGonagall. She is a talented, intelligent witch who teaches Transfiguration, considered some of the most difficult magic for students to learn (Rowling 134). She is herself very skilled at it; the students are "all very impressed" at her feats such as turning her desk into a pig (134). She can even transfigure herself into a cat (Rowling 9). She is also portrayed as being fair; she is the head of Gryffindor House and wants Gryffindors to excel, but makes an effort never to favor them despite this. She is perfectly willing to praise and reward students from other houses and punish students from her own house, while some of the other teachers are known for favoring the houses that they head (Rowling 178). While the students are not always happy with the results of her fairness, overall the book implies that this is a good trait.

The Darkangel contains a large cast of characters, many of them female. Some are only briefly mentioned, such as Ravenna and the Witch. These two characters are both distant and removed; they are referred to often throughout this book but never seen until later books in the trilogy. However, their presence is interesting: they are the primary forces for good and evil in Aerial's world and the closest thing to goddesses that the world has. Both are extremely powerful and reshape the world as they wish. The fact that the two greatest powers in the world are both women has shaped Aerial's world, which comes closer to having gender equality than many fantasy realms.

Another important, powerful woman in Aerial's tale is Orroto-to, a desert woman who looks after Aerial after she escapes the darkangel's castle with grave wounds. She is the leader of a tribe that hosts Aerial as a guest while she heals (M. Pierce 152). Orroto-to personally tends to Aerial's wounds and helps the girl recover her strength, another example of the prominence of healers among women in fantasy books. Orroto-to, however, is much more than a healer. She is also a skilled spear thrower and teaches Aerial to hunt and to defend herself if necessary (M. Pierce 159). Orroto-to is also known for wisdom and kindness, traits for which Aerial admires her greatly. She is sometimes referred to as "the wisewoman," (M. Pierce 154-155).

The only other woman who features prominently in Lanen's story is Rella, an old woman who is aboard the ship sailing to the Dragon Isle. She is supposedly there to gather herbs along with most of the humans, but she turns out to be a spy who has been stalking the evil mage in order to ensure that he does not gather too much power (Kerner 254). Everyone including Lanen underestimates Rella, but she turns out to be a skilled

fighter and keenly intelligent. Rella comes up with a plan to trick the mage and his guards; without her help, Lanen would never have defeated the mage (Kerner 263-264).

Joey's Abuelita is the other primary character in The Unicorn Sonata besides Joey herself. Joey tells Abuelita about the realm and Abuelita believes her and is thrilled by it (Beagle 98). She later tells Joey that she herself has heard music that must be from the realm "every night, all night," but she did not know what it was until Joey told her (Beagle 115-116). The two women who hear the music are both dreamers, able to listen to and appreciate the beauty in the world while others rush past it. Joey takes Abuelita to Shei'rah to see it for herself, and Abuelita is as thrilled with the magic as Joey was and not afraid at all at the moment that they first ride a unicorn named Indigo into the realm:

Behind Joey, Abuelita said softly, "Oh."

Joey had carefully prepared herself to calm Abuelita, to pet away an old woman's fear and bewilderment, but it did not happen so. Her grandmother's soft cry of wonder as she slipped gracefully from Indigo's back was for the meadow that had been Joey's earliest sight of Shei'rah (Beagle 122-123).

Abuelita also fulfills the healer stereotype of women in fantasy: she is able to heal the unicorns of a mysterious disease that is blinding them all (Beagle 143-144). She tenderly "anoint[s] the caked, swollen eyes of each Eldest in turn," with an ointment that cures them (Beagle 143). She remembers an old remedy for blindness that was used in her childhood in a Mexican village; both that remedy and the one she uses for the unicorns seem to depend as much on faith as on the ingredients (Beagle 133-134). Once she and Joey obtain the ingredients, Abuelita becomes an example of the self-sacrificing nature of many fantasy novel healers. She spends two full days and nights applying to the unicorns, exhausting herself so much that she sleeps for several days after completing the task (Beagle 144). Abuelita is portrayed overall as very kind, but a bit lost in the world

as she has aged and been forgotten by most of the family. But she still has the traits most important to success in Shei'rah: she is able to understand and appreciate the simple beauty of the unicorns' music. In the end, she chooses to stay in Shei'rah with them, rather than return to a world that she no longer fit into (Beagle 146).

His Dark Materials features another strong female character. Lyra's mother Mrs. Coulter is charming and intelligent and a main driving force behind the book's plot. In her world, women are not well-respected. Most of the scholars in the world are male, and the female scholars are treated with disdain. Lyra imitates the attitudes of the male scholars towards the few female ones when she meets one: "[Lyra] regarded female scholars with a proper Jordan disdain: there were such people, but, poor things, they could never be taken more seriously than animals dressed up and acting a play" (Pullman 66). However, Mrs. Coulter has fought to earn respect and uses her charm and her wits to gain power among the highest social classes. Lyra thinks that "Mrs. Coulter knew everyone important in London" and once Lyra moves in with her, on a typical day the two meet with an important politician or cleric (Pullman 81). Lyra eventually discovers to her horror that Mrs. Coulter is working for the Oblation Board, a position that gains her much power within the all-controlling church, but where her primary task is to kidnap children for use in experiments (Pullman 94-96). Mrs. Coulter is as smooth a liar as Lyra herself. She charms most people into believing that she is kind and good when she is really twisted and power-hungry. Lyra, who knows the true nature of Mrs. Coulter's work, thinks of her as "a wicked liar," (Pullman 284). Lord Asriel, who also knows Mrs. Coulter well, knows that she wants power and she wants a part in shaping the world and tells her not to "lie about what you truly want" when she claims otherwise (Pullman 396).

In all, Mrs. Coulter sends some positive messages about the role of women, although she is an evil character. Although her goals are twisted, she has managed to rise to a position of power and respect in a world where few women accomplish this goal.

### Other Issues

These issues are outliers: they only arose in one or two books, so they aren't common themes, yet they were significant enough to mention here.

Most of the heroines studied struggled with a lack of confidence in themselves and their abilities. However, one stood out for feeling very self-assured, but not arrogant. Aerin has confidence in her abilities. She “took pride” in having worked hard and does “hours of drill”; she studies sword fighting with devotion and becomes very skilled and gets into top physical form as well (McKinley 41). She also prides herself on other tasks at which she works hard and succeeds; she trains a horse and fixes his tack, then thinks to herself: “I did a good job on this,” (McKinley 46). She also rediscovers an old recipe for an ointment that shields her from dragonfire and is proud when she gets the formula just right after three years of trying (McKinley 58-59). She is also proud of her accomplishments: of killing dragons, but most importantly of retrieving the Hero's Crown. She feels that getting the Crown back has finally earned her a place of honor within her family and says that after winning it, “she would no longer be afraid – of her heritage, of her place in the royal house of Damar, of her father's people,” (McKinley 193). Aerin is never haughty, but is not afraid to celebrate her worthy achievements.

Alanna seems to hate women and hates that she is herself female. This issue is tied to many other issues mentioned about Alanna: her self-doubt and her role as a social

outcast. She disguises herself as a boy and wishes on numerous occasions that she were a boy. She is ashamed whenever a friend discovers that she is female and is convinced that these friends will now find her lacking, although they do not give her any reason to think so. When she is praised at one point for being a “worthy young man,” she is embarrassed and thinks to herself that “if they knew the truth, they wouldn’t speak well of her,” (T. Pierce 115). Later, she expresses her concern to George, one of the few friends who know that she is a girl, that her other friends will hate her when she reveals at age eighteen that she is really female. She plans on leaving to escape their scorn: “I’ll go into the world and have adventures. They needn’t ever see me again,” (T. Pierce 139). Towards the end of her page years, she thinks that she will never be chosen as a squire to assist a knight, thinking to herself that “she didn’t feel worthy of being someone’s squire. She was a girl, and she was a liar,” (T. Pierce 172).

Some of the more interesting scenes in the book are when Alanna must deal with the signs that she is growing into a young woman. She is emotionally devastated when she notices that she is growing breasts. Coram tries to convince her that she must accept being both female and a knight, but Alanna does not want any part in being female:

He looked at her with alarm. “Lass, ye’ve got to accept who ye are,” he protested. “Ye can be a woman and still be a warrior.”  
 “I hate it!” she yelled, losing her temper. “People will think I’m soft and silly!” (T. Pierce 106)

To some extent, she is correct: women are generally not accepted as fighters in her world. However, much of her anguish comes from the fact that Alanna herself thinks that all women are “soft and silly.” Later in the book, when she begins menstruating, she has a similar emotional scene and thinks of trying to change her gender using her magical Gift until a healer tells her that it won’t work (T. Pierce 136-138). In both cases, she realizes

that try as she might, she cannot wish herself into being male, and she is furious with herself and with the world for her femaleness. She thinks to herself often that girls are weaker than boys and that she is inferior to her fellow pages for this reason. Although she is at the top of her class in fighting skills, when another page is bullying her, she worries about the imminent fight, thinking to herself “I’m just a girl, and he’ll kill me,” (T. Pierce 57). She does not think that he will win in a fight because he is bigger and older than her, but rather because he is male. After she fights him and loses, she again blames the loss on her gender, thinking “This wouldn’t have happened to a *real* boy,” (T. Pierce 62). She becomes obsessed with beating him so that she will feel that “she had finally earned her place among the boys,” (T. Pierce 68). Although Alanna does eventually triumph, it is disturbing how often she berates herself for her gender and equates it with weakness.

In a few cases, girls who are generally tough and stand their own ground suddenly wilt into being weepy and dependent around men who try to protect them. After spending the whole of her book standing up for herself, Alanna collapses, sobbing, into her friend Jon’s arms after a battle in which he discovers that she is female (T. Pierce 210). The two have been equals until this point, but as soon as he knows her gender, he becomes protective of her and she allows him to stand up for her and to comfort her. Lanen does something similar; throughout most of the book, she is very self-reliant, but soon after she and Akhor fall in love, when she is endangered by a demon she calls for his help (Kerner 278).

A few of the girls were kind above all else and the books sent very positive messages about these young women and their love for all those around them. Aerial

learns to love the thirteen wraith women who at first seem dull-witted and horrifying. Her love helps them remember who they used to be, and her conversation helps them recover some of their ability to think, speak and remember (M. Pierce 72). Her love for the darkangel leads her to find a way to redeem him rather than simply killing him, which is the only solution that anyone else finds to the danger he poses. She remains convinced throughout the story that his soul still contains some good, and she is right: her own kindness and love brings this good out the end, saving him and his potential victims. The others in the book wish to kill him, but she says that her desire is to “save him from the witch as I have saved the wraiths from him,” (M. Pierce 259). Sophie is also noted for her kindness and her trusting nature. Once she learns of her magic abilities, she freely and generously uses them to help people. She is so kind that her sisters fear that she cannot ever see the bad side of anyone (Jones 21). One of them later worries that Sophie may be in danger because she’s so forgiving and accepting in her nature that she may not suspect when someone poses a danger to her (Jones 279).

Lyra has a notable trait that stands out: she is a strong natural leader. Some of the other girls in the books studied could take charge if the situation called for it, but none of them had Lyra’s natural charm, ability to get others to follow her, and quick thinking while leading others through danger. Early on in the book, Lyra is described as a leader among the children in Oxford (Pullman 36). When the gyptians decide to retrieve Iorek the armored bear’s armor for him and Lyra doesn’t like their plan, she takes charge and gets Iorek to go along with her new plan instead (Pullman 196). In the most notable instance of Lyra leading a group, she forms a plan to evacuate all of the children being held captive (Pullman 266-267). All of the children trust her and follow her plan when

the time comes, running to freedom together (Pullman 286-287). After the children run away and must survive a blizzard, Lyra considers herself their caretaker and is determined to see all of the other children to safety (Pullman 295).

Goldmoon is an outlier that stands apart from the rest of the group. Some of the other heroines have their weaknesses, but Goldmoon is by far the weakest character. Overall, A Rumor of Dragons presents very negative messages about women. Goldmoon is the only significant female character and she is almost helpless and dependent. In general, women are seen as less powerful and important than men in the world of Krynn. For this reason, Goldmoon is never really treated as an equal to her male companions. When the others take turns standing watch at night, she never takes a watch; everyone seems to assume that she wouldn't be able to do much against a threat if one appeared (Weis and Hickman 64). She is so afraid of ever stepping on others' toes that she shrinks back and simpers whenever she upsets anyone; she is not happy again until she is certain that everyone is still happy with her. Occasionally the others in her party are understandably cautious in accepting other groups that they meet, but Goldmoon is always warm to strangers, desperate to avoid giving offense (Weis and Hickman 113, 121). While she is kind, the overall message that her actions send is that the only woman in the group is so eager to please others that she ignores safety in favor of politeness.

## **V. Conclusions**

Overall, most of the messages that these novels present about girls are positive. The heroines studied have a range of personality traits; some fall into stereotypes, but most are fully realized, unique characters who deal with their adventures and dangers in their own way. They rescue themselves for the most part, and in some cases also stand up for their friends when the friends are unable to do so. Few of the women studied are ever portrayed as helpless victims, dependent on the male characters for rescue.

One disturbing trend was that the novels that tried too hard to display strong female characters often ended up having the opposite effect. In many of the stories where young women defied society's expectations for them, they experienced a great deal of self-doubt and ended up as social outcasts. While these books send a message that young women can achieve their dreams even if faced with opposition and sexism, they also send some very strong messages about the possible negative consequences of pursuing one's dreams when society disapproves.

In most of the books, the female protagonists are active and self-assured. They are courageous young women who seek out what they want from life and are willing to fight for it. In many of the books where the heroine is fearful and unsure of herself at the start of the book, by the end of the book she has grown more comfortable with herself and her abilities. Many of the heroines are very active and will fight if necessary. They do not passively accept things that they are unhappy with; instead, they fight with iron will to change them.

A few of the books included some negative examples of female characters shaping their lives around those of other characters in the books. These women fit into the self-sacrificing model of female characters as described in the literature on messages about gender role. Some of them went off on adventures they did not want for the sake of the men they loved. Others spent more of their time focused on healing others, even to the point of ignoring their own needs and wants. Most of the heroines did not take this nurturing behavior quite to the extreme of ignoring their own needs. However, it was still problematic that so often in these books, one way in which a heroine proves that she is “good” is to nurture others.

The most positive messages were presented in the books where gender was never an issue. Lyra is one of the strongest, most self-assured young women in these books, and no one in her tale ever expresses the slightest surprise that a girl is capable of so much. Kaye is another example: she takes charge and rescues herself and her friends from danger on numerous occasions, and her gender is never brought up as an issue. Some of the less positive messages were presented by those books that tried too hard to stress “girl power.” Whenever Alanna accomplished anything, it was presented as being amazing that a girl achieved such a goal. The primary message that ends up coming out of the book is that it is unusual and noteworthy if a young woman accomplished something, rather than being commonplace for heroines to take charge.

## **VI. Further Research**

This study focused on gender and how the young heroines in the books discussed send messages to readers about gender roles. However, another study could be done examining coming-of-age stories in these novels. Most of the heroines discussed in this book are between the ages of eleven and eighteen. Many of their stories focus on the heroine learning to seek out a place for herself in the world. The characters in these books often mature considerably during the course of the novel. Some of the characters, such as Sophie and Joey, are timid and unsure of themselves at the start of their stories and become more self-confident over time. Some of the fighters such as Alanna and Aerin are pursuing a certain goal and during the book prove their worthiness to accomplish that goal to the rest of the world. They work hard and master the skills that they will need on the paths that they have chosen for their futures.

Another area for further research could be a study of how the fantasy novels discussed here compare to other young adult books. Although many of the books contain gender stereotypes and some negative messages, overall these books contained more positive and strong messages about female characters than weak and negative messages. However, only fantasy novels were studied. A larger study could examine several other genres as well. This would present a more complete picture of the portrayal of female characters in young adult fiction, whereas my study only examines female characters in one genre of young adult fiction.

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## Appendix A: Book Summaries

Beagle, Peter S. The Unicorn Sonata. Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1996.

Josephine Rivera, aka Joey, is a young teen who wants nothing more from life than to play and enjoy music. She does not excel at anything else, but has an amazing talent for music. One day, she follows mysterious music that she hears down the street and steps into Shei'rah, another world. It is filled with unicorns, satyrs, water nymphs and many other magical creatures. The music that she heard is generated by the unicorns' every move, and only those who truly appreciate the music can travel to Shei'rah. Joey visits multiple times and eventually takes her grandmother with her. Her grandmother is able to heal a disease that has struck the unicorns blind, and she ends up deciding to stay with the unicorns when Joey leaves Shei'rah for the last time.

Black, Holly. Tithe. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002.

Kaye Fierch lives with her mother, an aspiring rock musician who drifts from band to band and home to home. After a breakup with her most recent boyfriend and roommate, Kaye's mother has no choice but to move back in with her own mother. Kaye is thrilled to be back in her grandmother's home by the New Jersey shore and hopes to meet the faeries that she befriended as a child. She does eventually meet them again, but not before meeting and helping a wounded elven knight named Roiben. Before she knows it, Kaye has gotten drawn into the middle of a power struggle between the dark Unseelie Court and the lighter – at least on the surface – Seelie Court. Kaye also discovers that she herself is a pixie that was changed with a human child long ago. The faeries that Kaye knows are solitary, part of neither group, and are bound to obey the Unseelie queen as long as a human is sacrificed once every seven years. The faeries plan to use the fact that Kaye looks human to trick the court into trying to sacrifice her and then, at the last minute, reveal that she is not human. However, the plan does not work and she barely escapes with her life. Kaye and Roiben must then try to safely negotiate both sides and come out alive.

Jones, Diana Wynne. Howl's Moving Castle. New York: Harper Trophy, 1986.

Seventeen year old Sophie Hatter doesn't really plan to seek her fortune. She is the eldest of three and therefore doomed to fail if she tries, according to the beliefs of her people in the land of Ingary. So, she is content to spend her days working in her late father's hat shop, making and selling beautiful hats and clothes. Then one day the Witch of the Waste puts a terrible spell on Sophie, changing her to an old woman, and Sophie must set out to try to reverse the spell. She ends up staying with the Wizard Howl, who is said to be evil but has really just allowed such rumors to spread about him so that the villagers will keep their distance from him. The Witch is after him and he tries to avoid her until Sophie comes along. Sophie forces him to finally confront his nemesis, the evil Witch, and helps him defeat her at last.

Kerner, Elizabeth. Song in the Silence. New York: Tor, 1997.

Lanen Kaelar has dreamed of traveling to find dragons for her whole life. When her father dies and leaves her a sizeable inheritance, she is free to travel as she wishes and has the money to do so. She finds a ship sailing westward through the dangerous seas to the Dragon Isle; no ships have safely made the passage in a century, but people continue to try from time to time. Most of the voyagers travel to harvest a very valuable plant that grows on the island's shores, but Lanen travels seeking the dragons that inhabit the deep interior of the island. She does meet dragons and in fact falls in love with Akhor, their king. He returns her love, and the two must overcome problems such as the opposition of the other dragons to this relationship. They also must evade the danger from Marik, an evil sorcerer who has been trying to find Lanen's mother and kill her for years since she foiled a plot of his, and is now threatening Lanen.

McKinley, Robin. The Hero and the Crown. New York: Berkley Books, 1984.

Aerin has never really fit in with the rest of her family, the royal family of Damar. Her mother, who died just after giving birth to Aerin, was said to be a witch. Some suspect that Aerin inherited her mother's powers. Because of this and because she was considered a strange child, not interested in the things that the other young royal girls were interested in, she was always an outcast growing up. However, as a young teen she becomes fascinated with the idea of being a dragon slayer. She trains and does become one, traveling and killing the dragons that menace villages. All her training is necessary when she faces a new challenge – fighting her uncle, an evil mage, and recovering the Hero's Crown that he has stolen and that the realm of Damar needs to win against forces trying to destroy it.

Pierce, Meredith Ann. The Darkangel. San Diego: Harcourt, 1982.

Aeriel is a slave to Eoduin, a wealthy, haughty girl. Although Eoduin can be cruel, she and Aeriel have become attached to each other. As the girls gather flowers one evening, Eoduin is kidnapped by a darkangel – a winged once-human vampiric creature that inhabits the girls' homeland – who wants to make her his bride. Aeriel sets out to kill the darkangel and avenge Eoduin when no one else will. She finds the creature, but is herself captured rather than killing him. She is taken to his castle to serve his wives, all wraiths that he has killed. Eoduin is among them but is no longer alive and Aeriel cannot rescue her. Aeriel eventually escapes the castle, but builds up her strength and returns to try to stop him from capturing another wife; he needs only one more and he will become unstoppable, his soul forever removed and all chance of returning him to his human state gone. She sets out to kill him, but ends up redeeming what human good is left in him and returning him to his natural, pre-darkangel state.

Pierce, Tamora. Alanna: The First Adventure. New York: Atheneum, 1983.

Alanna of Trebond enjoys hunting, fighting and other skills generally deemed inappropriate for young girls in the realm of Tortall, so she is horrified at her father's plan to send her off to a school where she will learn a few magic skills, but mostly focus on learning to be a proper noble lady. To escape this plan, she disguises herself as a boy and becomes a page at the king's castle, training to be a knight alongside other young nobles. This book is the first in a quartet and follows Alanna's four years as a page as

she struggles with sword fighting lessons, academic work, and an older bully. She proves her worth as both a healer and a fighter in these years. She successfully saves her best friend from a sorcery-induced sickness and she helps defeat ancient, powerful beings that have been haunting a city that she visits.

Pullman, Philip. The Golden Compass. New York: Knopf, 1995.

This book is the first in a trilogy and introduces the main character and plot, but leaves most of the story unexplained. Lyra Belacqua is a child living without parents at an otherworldly version of Oxford University and being raised by the scholars. Lyra's life before the events of the book consists of sporadic education and a lot of time roaming the streets with other children. However, events are set in motion when Asriel – a man that Lyra thinks to be her uncle but turns out to be her father – is imprisoned after discovering Dust, a mysterious substance that could change the world. Around this same time, children begin mysteriously disappearing. Lyra sets out to rescue her friend Roger when he disappears. She travels to the far north with a group of companions including traveling gypsies and an intelligent bear named Iorek, and along the way learns more about Dust, although the reader has many unanswered questions at the end of this book. She also rescues a number of children from a mysterious group that is separating them from their dæmons, which are physical manifestations of their innermost selves.

Rowling, J.K. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. New York: Scholastic Press, 1997.

Harry Potter discovers at age eleven that he is a wizard and is admitted to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He and his two friends Ron and Hermione all experience ups and downs during the first year of their schooling as wizards. They make friends and enemies and all excel in different subjects at school. Towards the end of the year, they uncover a plot by one of the professors to steal a valuable magic object and use it to help Voldemort, an evil wizard who is trying to return from the dead. The students work together to foil the plot, each using their own talents to save the day.

Weis, Margaret and Tracy Hickman. A Rumor of Dragons. Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 2003.

This book is the first in a lengthy series and as such, the first book is dedicated mostly to introducing the setting and characters and hinting at the overall plot. A group of old friends meet at an inn after five years of journeying to discuss their adventures. They are forced to flee town together when the forces that have recently occupied their town decide that they mean trouble. They decide to travel together and investigate the dark forces that seem to be gathering in their homeland. They discover great armies and strange half human, half dragon creatures gathering quietly – all led by an evil unknown person intent on ruling the land.

## **Appendix B: Content Analysis Form**

### Section A: The Female Protagonist

1. Does she primarily drive or observe the book's action?
2. Does she stand up for herself when threatened?
3. Is she active or passive in finding adventure? Does she go seeking danger and excitement, or does it find her?
4. What language does she use to describe herself?

### Section B: The General Setting

1. Are there other female characters in the book? How are they portrayed?
2. Are women in general powerful or submissive in the book's realm?
3. How do others describe the female protagonist?
4. If the female protagonist is strong, do others in the book view this as good or bad? Is she praised for her strength, or is she seen as being strange?