Fantasy Literature

Challenging Genres

Mark A. Fabrizi (Ed.)

Fantasy Literature

CRITICAL LITERACY TEACHING SERIES: CHALLENGING AUTHORS AND GENRES

Volume 8

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This series explores in separate volumes major authors and genres through a critical literacy lens that seeks to offer students opportunities as readers and writers to embrace and act upon their own empowerment. Each volume will challenge authors (along with examining authors that are themselves challenging) and genres as well as challenging norms and assumptions associated with those authors' works and genres themselves. Further, each volume will confront teachers, students, and scholars by exploring all texts as politically charged mediums of communication. The work of critical educators and scholars will guide each volume, including concerns about silenced voices and texts, marginalized people and perspectives, and normalized ways of being and teaching that ultimately dehumanize students and educators.

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INTRODUCTION

Challenging Fantasy Literature

Over the years, fantasy literature has attracted a body of scholarly criticism devoted to illuminating works of fantasy not unlike critical analyses of classic and canonical literary works. Critical analyses of fantasy are devoted to uncovering themes and patterns (Croft, 2009, 2010, 2011; Shippey 2002), narrative complexities (Bullard, 2011; Northrup, 2004; Swinfen, 1984), archetypal representations (Brown, 2006; Hiley, 2004; Rawls, 2008; Riga, 2008), sub-categories of the fantasy genre (Clute & Grant, 1997; Le Lievre, 2003; Stableford, 2005), cultural and linguistic commentary (Comoletti & Drout, 2001; Fredrick & McBride, 2007; Livingston, 2012; Shippey, 1977), and other philosophical inquires (Fife, 2006; Flieger, 2007, 2009; Hull, 1986) taken up by the authors of fantasy literature. As evidenced by the (growing) body of scholarly work in fantasy as well as the enormous and enduring commercial success of fantasy novels and films, it is clear that the genre of fantasy occupies a significant role in American culture. The purpose of this book is to demonstrate the value of using various works of fantasy in the classroom through discussions of the depth and complexity of various texts as well as their potential to elicit discussion and analysis among high school students through a critical literacy framework.

Fantasy has a great deal to offer the critical reader in terms of complexity and relevance. One of the most interesting aspects of fantasy literature is that it tends to ask the "big" questions of life, forcing students to consider such topics as the nature of good and evil, universal morality, the afterlife, heroism and the quality of one's character, the role of the individual in society, and the importance of cultural diversity. The fantasy novels discussed in this book address these issues and more in the context of rich, compelling narratives. Whether the text offers definitive answers or merely illustrates the complexity of the issues, students of fantasy can find numerous opportunities to engage with the text in writing—challenging the author, pondering the questions raised, acknowledging the author's viewpoint, or analyzing the diversity of views presented among several of the texts.

Additionally, works of fantasy provide an escape from our often prosaic existences. The concept of "escape" in literature, as discussed by J.R.R. Tolkien in his landmark essay "On Fairy-Stories" (1939), is often used in opposition to "interpret," where the former is meant to indicate superficiality, immaturity, vulgarity, and ignorance, and the latter refers to complexity, maturity, aesthetic refinement, and erudition. Tolkien attempted to divest from the term "escape" the disparagement and contempt which it endured (and still endures, to some extent,

today) in connection to literature, and reinvest the word with a connotation of respectful appreciation for describing the way a text can provide release from banality into the supernatural—a world of surprise and invention quite beyond our own.

This last point emphasizes the element of unfamiliarity inherent in many fantasy works. Not only is the *literary* landscape of the fantasy genre unusual, but the *fictional* landscape of the fantasy world of the novel is often unique and quite unlike our own. While this point may seem self-evident, it has interesting repercussions in the classroom, where students are learning to decode the complex literary conventions of canonical texts. Students reading William Golding's (1954) novel *Lord of the Flies*, for example, may have difficulty comprehending the symbolic interplay among the boys on the island, but this task is much easier given the fact that those boys interact in a world without magic, where the physics within the literary representation is understood and shared by the reader, where no trolls, witches, or dragons exist, where the land itself is not an active participant in the action, and where words have no power of themselves to change physical reality. In the world of fantasy, where all of the above elements may in fact have a basis in the reality of the text, students are forced to read the text more closely, participating more actively in the author-reader transaction (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978) in order to understand this foreign world which may not conform to the literary or mundane conventions they have become used to. The students' expectations of their own reality, and of the literary reality they are just coming to understand, will not serve them in constructing meaning if they do not engage intellectually and reflectively with the text.

The literary depth of fantasy works, as mentioned briefly in the paragraphs above, represents the temperate conditions which allow a teacher to plant the seeds of critical literacy skills in the fertile fields of student minds with a reasonable hope that their efforts will bear fruit. Character complexity, thematic depth, personal relevance, stylistic excellence, and a compelling story are necessary elements that comprise high-quality literature. These chapters will explore the extent to which the works of fantasy discussed herein contain these important elements and address some of the key components of critical literacy that enable students to acquire the skills of the critically literate reader, thus making the texts appropriate for use in the classroom to engender critical literacy skills.

CRITICAL LITERACY

Critical literacy has been an important pedagogical practice for many years, having its origins in Louise Rosenblatt's (1938, 1978) transactional theory of literary criticism which was developed in the late 1930s. Conceptions of critical literacy have expanded since its initial articulation by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970, 1976) in the 1970s. Some researchers view critical literacy as deriving from Marxist, feminist, and postmodern intellectual positions (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993), while others argue that no clear, identifiable position defines critical literacy (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). Still others (Comber, 1993; Donald, 1993; Grande,

2004) skirt the issue, identifying variations among critical literacy perspectives, differentiating them according to the types of questions that drive interpretation and analysis, instead of defining the theory itself (Green, 2001). However, despite one's definition (or not) of critical literacy, common ideas such as viewing literacy as a social and/or political practice, repositioning readers as active or even resistant readers, "problematizing" texts, and creating in readers an awareness of multiple perspectives from which to view texts help to clarify what is meant by the term (Green, 2001).

A central premise of Freire's (1970, 1976) theory of critical literacy is that education is not neutral, that the purpose of education is human liberation through what Freire termed a "dialogical approach," the goal of which is critical thinking, leading ultimately toward participants gaining an understanding of the social and political forces that impact their world, an understanding that would help them gain control over their lives (Wallerstein, 1986). According to Freire's theories, "true knowledge evolves from the interaction of reflection and action" (Wallerstein, 1986, p. 34). Freire termed this interaction *praxis*. This is particularly important in that research on reading and literacy suggests that marginalized adolescent readers tend to "give the text authority, expecting it to provide its meaning unequivocally and effortlessly, rather than engaging in an active, dialogic exchange with the text" (Freebody & Freiberg, 2011, p. 442), a tendency which resistant reading, such as that advocated through Freire's concept of praxis, may help overcome. Essentially, the concept of resistant reading is embodied in the following statements: "I am not going to buy into your position as a matter of course. Still, for a fair understanding and assessment of that position, I will try to get at your underlying assumptions by reading, questioning, and considering your text carefully." An immature reader may not even be aware that resistant reading is even a possibility, much less how it may be accomplished, but critical theory gives them explicit permission to do so. Thus, critical literacy is a literacy of empowerment.

At the most basic level, teachers of critical literacy are trying to create an awareness of the relationship among language, ideology, and power (Kempe, 1993). They question whose interests are served through their curricular and pedagogical decisions, and even attempt to challenge the hidden assumptions that are intended to assimilate students into the hegemonic culture through socialization (Moss, 2001). They address social oppression, especially in the areas of gender, class, race, and ethnicity (Grande, 2004). Finally, they challenge the "banking" model of education in which information is "deposited" in students who are expected to retain it indefinitely—or at least until the exam—and instead favor praxis which promotes the idea that knowledge and learning are social constructions that are best realized through critical interactions between teacher and student, neither of whom is recognized as the absolute authority in the classroom (Freire, 1970).

In its most political interpretation, critical literacy implies that the process of gaining literacy (i.e., learning to read and write) should be done as part of the process of becoming conscious of being in some ways "constructed" by the social and political hegemony represented in one's historical era (Anderson & Irvine,

1993). In other words, one's growing aptitude for literacy must be linked to one's understanding of the impact of specific contemporary power relations, and critical literacy involves analyzing and questioning the ways a text positions the reader within the social and political hegemony. If one accepts the underlying assumption of critical literacy—that the concepts of power and social/political hegemony drive the writer who consciously or unconsciously strives to either perpetuate or subvert the social hierarchy—then critical literacy removes "meaning" from the author and text and re-positions the student/reader more centrally in a meaning-making dialogue as they work to uncover the "hidden" agendas of texts, agendas that the authors may not even be aware exist. According to McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004), "critical literacy involves the reader's understanding of the author's intent, bias, and purpose for writing" (p. 62) by "disrupting a common situation or understanding, … examining multiple viewpoints, … focusing on sociopolitical issues, … [and] taking action to promote social justice" (pp. 17-18) with the ultimate goal of readers becoming "critics of everyday life" (p. 23), reading the world with a critical edge, with an eye toward changing it by first recognizing, then questioning, extant political and social power structures.

It is important to note that critical literacy does not *necessitate* hegemonic subversion on the part of the reader just as feminism does not entail a requirement on the part of women to join the workforce, for example. Both offer only an informed and permissible choice. Some readers, while recognizing the political agenda of a particular text, may choose not to act any more than simply resisting the reading the author presents. Nor does critical literacy consider author bias inherently immoral. In fact, critical literacy presumes that all texts have bias to some degree and that bias is normal and unavoidable (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Critical literacy attempts to draw the attention of the reader to the idea of bias and help them uncover it in texts, requiring that the reader understand the power relationship between the author and the reader, not just decode the text.

Each of the following chapters in this book offers ways for readers to challenge fantasy texts, helping teachers develop critical literacy skills in their students through the genre of fantasy, building on the already-established popularity of fantasy to empower students through a skills-based curriculum. The texts discussed vary from children's literature to young adult to decidedly adult novels, and the approaches each scholar employs are similarly varied. Teachers seeking advice to bring fantasy into their classrooms at any level, from elementary through graduate school, will find a wealth of information and ideas in the following pages.

OVERVIEW

This collection begins with a discussion of two bookend fantasy texts for adults: Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. High fantasy is an inherently conservative genre usually concerned with the restoration or preservation of a status quo in the form of patriarchal monarchy or autocracy. These works chronicle a struggle between a transformative force and those—usually male, white, and heterosexual—who oppose it. Women and ethnic or

sexual minorities may assist the heroes but rarely reform the power structures in which they have no place. Through two genre standards—*The Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*—the authors examine how racism, sexism, and heterosexism pervade modern fantasy and chart a possible evolution towards a more progressive future.

Chapter two explores ways the main character (Arha) of Ursula K. Le Guin's fantasy novel, *The Tombs of Atuan*, is an example of adolescent resistance to learning. Arha's tumultuous growth and radical transformation serves as an allegory for learning through self-awareness that reflects the ideas of the ancient philosopher Plato as well as those of the modern psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. By using these supplementary texts to decode Le Guin's allegory, students can compare the ideas of all three authors to their own learning experiences, building self-awareness of their own learning habits, developing empathy for the difficulties of students and teachers alike, and finding their own voices in their communities.

Chapter three connects J. K. Rowling's works with those of political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli. Manipulation of a population through fear, preservation of hegemonic control through institutionalized oppression, and framing ethical choices through a long view that ignores small evils done along the way—these are concepts attributed to sixteenth century Italian philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, and they pervade the Harry Potter books, informing the decisions of Hogwarts students and professors as they fight against the specter of Voldemort's despotic rule. Through problematizing the text and questioning the decisions of the characters through the lens of Machiavelli's philosophical text, *The Prince*, a critical reader can explore issues of social justice similar to those impacting contemporary society.

Chapter four is unique among the essays included here in that it offers a fantasy literature syllabus resource from which teachers can draw to fit the needs of their course and their students. This chapter is an aid for teachers contemplating designing either a full course on the intersection of critical thinking, fantasy literature, and religious studies or at least material for one or two lessons along these lines in a course in religious studies or English. The chapter surveys eight topics that might be addressed, including (1) defining key terms, (2) colonialism, (3) capitalism, (4) perspectivism and pragmatism, (5) feminism and queer theory, (6) interrogating the self, (7) royal ideology and the monomyth, and (8) critical pedagogy and reflexivity.

Chapter five examines fairy tales using feminist criticism. Students often expect the women in these narratives to possess few choices, but this reductive mindset leads to students seeing the tales as mindless entertainment or as sinister sources of gender indoctrination. The chapter discusses an educational approach to fairy tales that reveals how notions of heteronormativity in the stories are produced by social codes and reader responses rather than inherent elements in the genre. Students learn to see fairy tales as cultural fantasies that continue to evolve as audience needs change.

In chapter six, the authors identify a growing trend of female protagonists who show strength and agency in the fantasy genre, particularly strong female

protagonists of color. In this chapter, they explain why *Fledgling* by Octavia Butler (2005) and *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin (1987) would be suitable for critical literacy discussions in high school classrooms. The authors acknowledge the perspectives of feminist poststructuralism, queer theory, and critical pedagogy and also discuss scholarship related to fantasy literature. Additionally, they discuss how television shows, parallel texts, and popular culture references can be used in conjunction with these novels to encourage critical literacy skills.

Chapter seven addresses the way Beatrix Potter's children's fantasy literature frequently enforces gender and class expectations and marginalizes various characters. From the standpoint of critical literacy, Potter's books are useful texts to study at the collegiate level, particularly because of their popularity and their intended audience. This chapter will approach *The Tale of Jemima Puddle Duck* (1908), *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers* (1908), *The Tale of Ginger and Pickles* (1909), and *The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse* (1910) using Edward H. Behrman's categories of reading multiple texts and reading from a resistant perspective to critically analyze systems of power and the marginalization they produce.

In chapter eight, the author examines how social class is depicted in award-winning fantasy books for children and analyzes these depictions through a critical literacy lens. The analysis suggests that these books 1) position the lives of affluent people as more desirable and important than poor and working class lives, and 2) present class status as a function of an individual's virtues or shortcomings, arguing that such depictions reinforce dominant discourses about class in the contemporary United States and could be potentially damaging to children's class identities unless they read from a critical literacy stance.

In his notable lecture-turned-essay "On Fairy-Stories," J.R.R. Tolkien (1939) ruminates on the origins, audiences, purposes, and benefits of fantasy. Chapter nine reflects upon Tolkien's musings, then unites them with Marxist literary theory and a cherished young adult literature text in the context of the contemporary classroom. As a whole, this chapter asserts that students can use the Marxist critical perspective to identify, analyze, and evaluate the sources of and responses to the two central forms of institutionalized oppression in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Through these exercises in the wizarding world, students will be better equipped to question, scrutinize, and enact change in our world.

Chapter ten explores how Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson's epic fantasy series, The Wheel of Time, can be used in a social justice classroom to explore power and privilege in American society. This fantastical work dramatically portrays how identity markers provide individuals with social, political, and economic privilege that are neither earned nor inherited. Through its depiction of magic, The Wheel of Time books illuminate the inequities of power and privilege in American society. By exploring how society celebrates power, and denigrates and exploits the powerless, Jordan and Sanderson offer insight into the world in which our students live.

Chapter eleven describes how a critical literacy framework allowed a group of preservice English teachers to actively question and challenge educational

traditions as portrayed in the Harry Potter series. The authors discuss the experiences of one participant whose interest in the titular character of the series motivated her to explore research about at-risk students and then apply her findings in a familiar and meaningful context, resulting in a year-long inquiry into cultural capital, funds of knowledge, and deficit models of education. Fantasy literature of this kind can nurture the development of preservice teachers into "transformative intellectuals" who develop critical thinking habits that "unite the language of critique with the language of possibility" (Giroux, 2013, p. 196) as they prepare to be active agents of change in educational institutions.

Chapter twelve examines fantasy texts from three very different cultures. Despite the growing popularity of fantasy studies, little has been said about the roles of material objects in fantasy narratives which can be used to advance the plot, shape identities, and determine relationships among characters. Most importantly, they help generate communities, both within the text and in the consensus reality. This chapter addresses this knowledge gap with a comparative close reading of three popular fantasy novels: the British *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (J.K. Rowling), the German *Reckless* (Cornelia Funke), and the Russian *The Stranger* (Max Frei). An understanding of the reciprocally transformative relationship between objects and subjects in fantasy narratives adds to the development of critical consciousness among students and readers.

Chapter thirteen examines a well-loved children's book. Due to its vivid illustrations and short page count, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is often recommended as a children's book; however, a critical look from the perspectives of students in eighth grade reveals issues students themselves face as they embark upon the transition from middle to high school, exploring how and why people make new friends and the sacrifices often made in friendships. Through perspective sharing via focus groups, dramatization, poetry, and song lyrics in an inquiry learning environment, students explore viewpoints of different characters in a story or different people in a real-life situation.

Chapter fourteen closes this collection with a description of how the author uses a novella-length fanfiction work entitled *The Hollow Men* by author "Lettered" as a way to introduce college students to key service learning concepts such as reflection, reciprocity, and community engagement. The chapter includes a primer section introducing the genre of fanfiction, a close reading of the specific text, and a case study describing how the author used the piece in class to bring up complex themes that included race, culture, socioeconomic status, global politics, and gender, which helped ready students for their field service projects in a diverse community.

Taken together, these chapters present a broad view of the applications of fantasy literature to the classroom, challenging the genre and the visions of represented authors and exploring their value to contemporary students. We hope these selections provide a new perspective on fantasy and that they provoke further investigations into the use of fantasy texts in the classroom.

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PART ONE

PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES

NEIL MCGARRY AND DANIEL RAVIPINTO

1. IN THE SHADOW OF THE STATUS QUO

The Forgotten in The Lord of the Rings *and* A Song of Ice and Fire

High fantasy is an inherently conservative genre, often revolving around the preservation or restoration of a status quo, usually in the form of a patriarchal monarchy or autocracy, or what author Charlie Stross (2010) once described as a 'benign tyranny':

> [T]he traditional format of a high fantasy novel is that some source of disruption threatens to destabilize the land; it is up to the hero (usually it is a 'he') to set things right and restore the order of benign tyranny to the world. Fantasy, in short, is frequently consolatory, and I don't get on with it. (para. 12)

Fantasy fiction is based on an assumption that the old ways are inherently good, and that the power structures that are to be protected or restored are ultimately best for all people. Many seminal works of fantasy are suffused with a romantic vision of earlier ages, a melancholy longing for better days, and the certain knowledge that the current generation is but a pale shadow of greater forefathers. Those that came before simply knew better, and the restoration of their ways is something to be celebrated. The future will be at its best when it is most like the past. As Stross notes, such works are indeed frequently consolatory—they encourage the comforting embrace of tradition and the preservation of the known.

High fantasy frequently chronicles the struggle between a transformative, conquering force understood to be evil and the heroes who stand against it. These saviors embody privilege; they are almost always white, heterosexual, and (as Stross notes) male. Women and ethnic or sexual minorities may end up assisting the heroes, but those that do rarely question the societal structures they fight to preserve or restore, nor do they attempt to change those structures for their benefit or for the benefit of those like them. Such people are the forgotten of modern fantasy, lost in the shadow of the status quo, made powerless and invisible by the very society they strive to protect.

These themes can be found in countless works of high fantasy, but we have chosen to limit our examination to two works that bookend the genre: J.R.R. Tolkien's (1954, 1955) *The Lord of the Rings* and George R.R. Martin's (1996) *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. Tolkien's seminal work paved the way for high fantasy in popular fiction. Many notable authors including Dennis McKiernan, Terry Brooks, and Martin himself point to *The Lord of the Rings* as a major influence that, through its impact on both the publishing industry and the reading public, made their own works possible (Hajela, 2001). In many ways, *A Song of Ice and*

Fire is something of a response to *The Lord of the Rings*. For example, while both series deal with issues of power and leadership, Martin is of the opinion that Tolkien might have gone further:

> "You see that at the end of the ['Lord of the Rings'] books, when Sauron has been defeated and Aragorn is king," Martin told the Advance. "It's easy to type, 'he ruled wisely and well,' but what does that constitute?
>
> "What was his tax policy? How did the economy function? What about the class system?" (Steussey, 2015, para. 6-7)

While both of these excellent works deserve their place in literary history, the evolution from Tolkien to Martin might be taken further, resulting in a truly progressive fantasy where the normally marginalized—women, homosexuals, people of color—may step out from the shadow of traditional heroes and become heroes themselves.

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The hero of high fantasy is traditionally male and usually begins the story as a young man. The story then follows his development as he comes into his power—a *bildungsroman*, a coming of age. The hero may be of questionable parentage, an orphan who does not know his origins, but he is almost never a member of a persecuted minority in terms of race or sexuality. In many cases, the hero is later revealed to be of noble or even royal lineage; thus, he is often *more* privileged than even he himself knew. Examples are easy to come by: Rand al'Thor of *The Eye of the World* (Jordan, 1990) is Ta'veren and the Dragon Reborn; Shea Ohmsford of *The Sword of Shannara* (Brooks, 1977) is a descendant of the King of the Elves; Harry Potter of the eponymous series by J. K. Rowling (1997) is not only the child of famous parents but unknowingly becomes a hero while still a baby; Garion of *The Belgariad* (Eddings, 1982) was a scion of the first King of Riva. Counterexamples exist—the dark-skinned Ged of Ursula Le Guin's (1968) *Earthsea* or the heroines of Marion Zimmer Bradley's (1982) *The Mists of Avalon*—but they are exceptions that prove the rule.

The hero begins his journey with the peace of his normal existence shaken—the status quo disturbed. He must flee the idyllic, protected home he has known and journey through danger towards an unknown future. He is not alone on his journey. He may have a guide, often in the form of a protective elder such as Tolkien's Gandalf (Campbell, 1949). Other fantasy works have echoed the elder-mentor represented in Gandalf, such as Allanon in the *Shannara* series, or Moiraine Damodred and al'Lan Mandragoran in *The Wheel of Time* (Jordan, 1990). The hero may also have other companions, though these secondary characters are often defined in relation to him—a friend, a lover, a rival—and they are often not beneficiaries of the land's power structures to the same extent as he himself.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo finds himself the unlikely bearer of a dark legacy, the One Ring. Danger comes to his home in the Shire in the form of the Nazgûl, and Frodo must flee before he is discovered by Sauron's minions. He is

led on this journey by the wizard Gandalf, and is accompanied by Pippin, Merry and, of course, the redoubtable Samwise Gamgee. Frodo himself is essentially landed gentry, comfortable in the inheritance left to him by his uncle, and the master of Bag End. Merry and Pippin, second-cousins to Frodo, are hobbits of good parentage, though not quite as good as Frodo himself. Samwise, meanwhile, is Frodo's gardener, most definitely not as wealthy or as well born as Frodo. All four are good, simple, salt-of-the-earth folk who love nothing more than food, family, and a good drink.

All four characters—whether well-born or common—are invested in the status quo, their quest an attempt to preserve the idyllic lifestyle of the Shire. They have nothing to gain from the victory of the West but everything to lose in its defeat. This is depicted in the Scouring of the Shire (Tolkien, 1955, pp. 300-327), in which an industrial world, ushered in by the defeated Saruman, invades and transforms the hobbits' home. The true victory of these heroes is the restoration of the world they left behind.

A Song of Ice and Fire, meanwhile, subverts but still reinforces many of these tropes. Jon Snow, in particular, embodies several elements of the classic high-fantasy hero. He is, ostensibly, a bastard, brought home by his putative father, Lord Eddard Stark. Lord Stark refuses to provide details about the identity of Jon's mother, and it is widely believed that Jon's heredity might be even higher than a son of Winterfell (Haglund, 2014). He may, in fact, be the secret child of Rhaegar Targaryen and Eddard's sister, Lyanna Stark. If this is true, Jon is not only of noble lineage (guaranteed by his Stark blood) but is secret royalty.

Jon eventually goes to the Wall, following the footsteps of his uncle Benjen by joining the Night's Watch, which guards the realm from the dangers—both mundane and supernatural—of the north. In doing so, he becomes a comrade to the thieves, rapists, and murderers who have been conscripted by the Night's Watch as punishment for their crimes. All are obviously lesser than the nobly born Jon, even given his nominal bastard heritage. Even those whose offenses are minor, like Satin (whose crime was working as a prostitute) or Sam (a nobleman exiled by his disapproving father), are presented as less heroic than Jon. Sam is fat and inept at weaponry, and Satin is tainted with possible homosexuality. Thus, from the beginning, Jon Snow is already better than the men he accepts as his brothers. The other men of the Watch accept this without real objection, and the Watch commander quickly becomes a mentor and father-figure to Jon, grooming him for command and even giving him the sword that was meant for his own son.

Facing such heroes are the enemies of the status quo, represented as evil and transformative forces. In *The Lord of the Rings*, these forces are led by Sauron, Lord of Barad-dûr and master of the One Ring that is the very symbol of doom. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the evil manifests as the Others, demons of ice and snow who use the dead as their soldiers and who threaten to bring endless winter to the southern lands protected by the Wall. These forces are obviously not merely destructive; they do not leave a void in their wake. Instead they transform all they touch, a process that is presented respectively by Tolkien and Martin as both perverse and disturbing.

In *The Lord of the Rings,* Gandalf tells Frodo about what will happen if Sauron should triumph: "'The Enemy still lacks one thing to give him strength and knowledge to beat down all resistance, break down the last defenses, and cover all the lands in a second darkness. He lacks the One Ring'" (Tolkien, 1954a, p. 56). The first darkness to which Gandalf obliquely refers was dispelled by the Last Alliance of Elves and Men, and the name of that coalition itself gives away the nostalgia for a lost world that suffuses Tolkien's work.

In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the consequences of a victory by the Others is described to Brandon Stark: "'They swept over holdfasts and cities and kingdoms, felled heroes and armies by the score, riding their pale horses and leading armies of the slain. All the swords of men could not stay their advance, and even maidens and suckling babes found no pity in them'" (Martin, 1996, p. 213). In the wake of this inexorable tide of transformation lies a changed world, one covered in darkness (in Tolkien) and cold (in Martin). This perversion of the known must therefore be fought with all of the forces that can be mustered on the side of good and light.

The respective forces of evil are, interestingly, also led by figures that are only *nominally* male, who claim manhood but are no longer masculine in any substantial way. Sauron no longer has a body, having lost his in the Fall of Númenor, and appears only as a giant, disembodied eye:

> Sauron was not of mortal flesh, and though he was robbed now of that shape in which had wrought so great an evil, so that he could never again appear fair to the eyes of Men, yet his spirit arose out of the deep and passed as a shadow and a black wind over the sea, and came back to Middle-earth and to Mordor that was his home. There he took up again his great Ring in Barad-dûr, and dwelt there, dark and silent, until he wrought himself a new guise, an image of malice and hatred made visible; and the Eye of Sauron the Terrible few could endure. (Tolkien, 1977, pp. 336-337)

The Others are clearly sentient creatures, but are most assuredly not human. They increase their numbers through the sacrifice of male children by wildlings (lesser men who live in the frozen north), as we learn after the death of Craster, a wildling who "gives his sons to the wood":

> "I'll be your wife, like I was Craster's. Please, ser crow. He's a boy, just like Nella said he'd be. If you don't take him, they will."
>
> "They?" said Sam.
>
> "The boy's brothers," said the old woman on the left. "Craster's son. The white cold's rising out there, crow. I can feel it in my bones. These poor old bones don't lie. They'll be here soon, the sons." (Martin, 2000, p. 380)

Both Sauron and the Others are ostensibly male, but they do not desire women nor father children, and are essentially emasculated and thus transformed, as are the evils they birth. Such metamorphoses gain an almost talismanic quality in both works, perversions of the right and known. They are embodiments of time, of transfiguration, of inevitability and thus to be feared.

The heroes, in contrast, embody all that men should be. Aragorn is promised the hand of Arwen Evenstar if he should regain his rightful kingdom, and Jon Snow is required to start a sexual relationship with the wildling Ygritte in order to deceive his enemies and protect the Wall. We see that heroes embrace a heteronormative model of male sexuality from which the villains are excluded.

When evil is defeated and the hero's journey is complete, there is no question what they must then do: restore the world to older, and thus better, ways. In Middle-earth this means the return of the Reunited Kingdom under Aragorn's rule. In Westeros it will presumably be the restoration of the Targaryen dynasty. These triumphs will bring almost nothing to those who have journeyed with and fought for the hero. After the fall of Sauron the hobbits return to the Shire and take up their previous lives, their own lots hardly improved. Ultimately, they are faced with the hero's struggle in miniature, and the restoration of yet another status quo in the Scouring of the Shire. If the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros are ultimately saved, Jon's fellows on the Wall will still be criminals and outcasts. No better future awaits them.

The best the hero's companions can hope for is a return to where they began. The new order ultimately offers them nothing.

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The worlds of both Tolkien and Martin are crafted with care and detail, each with a long, storied history. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the most ancient days of Middle-earth are bathed in the light of the Trees, when the Children of Ilúvatar awoke; the roots of Westeros in *A Song of Ice and Fire* are deep in the Age of Heroes, when Lann the Clever stole gold from the sun to brighten his hair, and Bran the Builder constructed the great castle Winterfell.

Each of these worlds also contains a once-great civilization now lost to fire and water. For Tolkien, this is Númenor, greatest of the realms of men, a gift from the gods themselves in return for service against evil. The Númenoreans were the pinnacle of humanity: taller, wiser, longer-lived, and stronger of body. In the end they were seduced by Sauron into betraying the gods, who responded by destroying their island home and sending them into exile. For Martin, the lost homeland is Valyria, a grand and ancient empire ruled by sorcerous dragonlords with purple eyes and gold and silver hair. They crafted items of unmatched strength and beauty—until the Doom came, leaving nothing of Valyria but a smoking ruin, its people dead or scattered.

Both Middle-earth and Westeros resonate to the loss of these lands. The Númenoreans did not all perish and those who escaped the Fall founded the great kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor, and their descendants—Faramir, Denethor, and Aragorn among them—are prominent in *The Lord of the Rings*. In *A Song of Ice and Fire,* Aegon the Conqueror and his descendants survived the Doom to found the mighty Targaryen dynasty, which would rule Westeros for centuries. In both works, the survivors of the lost empires are greater than their lesser descendants who are themselves greater than the people they come to dominate. The

Númenoreans are depicted as almost being comparable to the Maiar, as Sam notes of Faramir, "'You have an air, sir, that reminds me of, of—well, wizards, of Gandalf …'" to which Faramir replies, "'Maybe you discern from far away the air of Númenor'" (Tolkien, 1954b, p. 327).

The Freehold of Valyria is also presented as a place that produced wonders, some of which still exist in the present day, such as the family sword of House Stark: "It had been forged in Valyria, before the Doom had come to the Freehold, when the ironsmiths had worked their metal with spells as well as hammers. Four hundred years old it was, and as sharp as the day it was forged" (Martin, 1996, p. 21).

These tales of lost homelands and of a great people now diminished suffuse both *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* with a sense of melancholic romance. Both worlds are clearly in decline, now in twilight, long after the dawn of greater ages. Because of this, the men of the past are undeniably greater than their poor descendants, both in their achievements and as individuals. These world-building elements reinforce the notion of restoring the past as something good and proper and a future of change as frightening and evil.

The Return of the King, the third part of *The Lord of the Rings*, chronicles the return of the united kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor under the leadership of Aragorn, heir to Númenor. No one—human, elf, or dwarf— questions whether or not this restoration is proper, necessary, or just. The only character to object is Denethor, Steward of Gondor, whose line has reigned for centuries. Since he is portrayed as clearly mad (he burns himself alive not long after), his objections are ignored. As George R.R. Martin himself notes, "He ruled wisely and well" is a glossing-over of what will most likely be a challenging transition, but Aragorn is never shown as less than a noble man who both does well and does good. In this way Gandalf, who orchestrates Aragorn's rise to power, is much more a reactionary than a reformer. The hobbits, the linchpin of the plan to defeat Sauron, are honored after the fall of Mordor, but their "common man" status remains unchanged and they look forward to returning to their middle-class lives in the Shire; indeed, no better option is presented to them.

Why do such characters seem to accept this blatant inequality? The simplest explanation is that, within the context of the story, Aragorn, like all descendants of Númenor, is simply made of better stuff (Shippey, 2000). These folk are superior to their allies the Rohirrim, and most certainly to the Easterlings and the Haradrim, who openly serve Sauron. Faramir describes this hierarchy to Frodo and Sam:

"For so we reckon Men in our lore, calling them the High, or Men of the West, which were Númenoreans; and the Middle Peoples, Men of the Twilight, such as are the Rohirrim and their kin that dwell still far in the North, and the Wild, the Men of Darkness." (Tolkien, 1954b, p. 323)

This hierarchy is not something Faramir feels in the least self-conscious about, which is unsurprising since he, like all men of Gondor, is one of the "Men of the West." This description of "Men of Darkness" is particularly striking because the

Haradrim are described as brown and swarthy; in other words, not even white, as are the Rohirrim and Númenoreans.

It is interesting to note that this sort of racial stratification is not restricted only to humans. The elves were divided into the *Eldar*, who had answered the call of the Valar, and the *Avari*, who had not. The Eldar themselves are further subdivided: the *Vanyar*, who responded most swiftly to the summons of the gods, and who were the least numerous; the *Noldor*, who came second; and the *Teleri*, who tarried most along the way. Human beings were similarly subdivided, between the House of Beor, the House of Halath, and the House of Hadar. Hobbits were also stratified, split into the Fallohides, the Harfoots, and the Stoors. The Fallohides most resembled the elves in appearance and the most important hobbit families—Baggins, Took, and Brandybuck—were all of this sub-race. Naturally, the Vanyar are the fairest of the elves—the most blond-haired and blue-eyed—just as the Fallohides were the fairest of the hobbits and the House of Hador were the fairest of the humans. Clearly, the "best" of each race is that which most possesses an Aryan look, a troubling observation.

In *A Song of Ice and Fire* the hierarchy is not so clear-cut, but is real nonetheless. Daenerys is the last of the blood of Old Valyria, the sole living descendant of Aerys Targaryen, the Mad King. Daenerys's father was thrown down in Robert's Rebellion, and she and her brother were spirited away before they could be killed along with him. She grew up in the land of Essos, far from Westeros, with nothing left of her heritage but scattered memories and the color of her eyes and hair. Yet by hatching dragons from stone she restored to the world a fire and magic that had not been seen in an age. Like Aragorn, she too is an echo of a romanticized past.

As she gains power and influence, she forces upon Essos the cultural standards of Westeros—or those that she has read about, for ultimately she is a pretender to the culture she champions. She breaks the slave trade, throws down tyrants, ends bloodsport in the form of the fighting pits because the Westerosi consider these things wrong, but despite these reforms it never occurs to her to improve upon the customs of a homeland she does not even remember.

The ultimate rightness of her given tradition is never questioned, which makes even her most well-intentioned efforts look colonial, and worse for the fact that she is white and the denizens of Essos are most definitely not. For all her reformist zeal, Daenerys never attempts to improve the lot of women, ultimately content to leave them as the virtual property of their fathers or husbands, nor of racial minorities such the folk of the Summer Islands, who are described as "black as pitch." She does not listen to the voice of these forgotten folk, nor does she further their cause.

Both Aragorn and Daenerys are given the choice between restoration and transformation, between conservatism and progressivism, between the past and the future and both, in the end, make the same choice.

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There are many ways in which sexual minorities are marginalized in fantasy fiction. In *The Lord of the Rings*, this is accomplished simply by ignoring their existence. As far as we can tell, every biological resident of Middle-Earth—human, elf, or orc—is cis-gendered and heterosexual. The transformative and evil forces—in this case, Sauron—may be once-men, but the sexuality of all "normal" beings of the world is much more clearly defined. Men love women, women love men, and there is no suggestion that things have ever been otherwise. Obviously, some of this is due to the time in which the series was written—a more progressive approach might have gained Tolkien censorship or even charges of indecency—but it still set a troubling precedent that extends even to a more progressive era.

This presents an interesting problem to modern readers of Tolkien's work, as much of the series concerns only the relationships between male characters. Women are prizes to be won or treasures to be protected (this is most particularly true of Aragorn's fiancé, Arwen), and are almost always kept "off-screen." It is therefore not surprising that modern readers see homoeroticism in the close friendship of Frodo and Samwise (Goodreads, 2010-2015). Samwise occasionally pines over Rosie Cotton, back in the Shire, but it is his love for Frodo that keeps him on the quest of Mount Doom, and that saves him from the Ring's corrupting influence. Since overt homosexuality does not exist in Tolkien's world, the deep connection between the hobbits seems even more sexual in nature.

In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Martin again goes far beyond Tolkien and includes several characters who are gay or bisexual, even if not openly. Renly Baratheon is clearly involved in a relationship with the commander of his personal guard, Loras Tyrell, also known as the Knight of Flowers. Loras, favorite son of a powerful House, is indulged in his indiscretions, while Renly's homosexuality is used by the Tyrells as a political tool. Renly's love for Loras binds him to the Tyrell family as tightly as his marriage to Loras' sister Margaery. This affair is well known amongst the nobility, if not openly acknowledged except in mockery. Jamie Lannister refers to this relationship in his attempts to take Loras down a peg: "'Now sheathe that bloody sword, or I'll take it from you and shove it up some place even Renly never found'" (Martin, 2000, p. 698). Prince Oberyn Martell also makes a snide reference, during a conversation with Tyrion Lannister: "'There are those who say Ser Loras is better than Leo Longthorn ever was,' said Tyrion. 'Renly's little rose? I doubt that'" (Martin, 2000, p. 437).

Even the Tyrells are unwilling to speak frankly about the sexuality of their favorite son, as Loras' own brother Garlan says to the girl who pines after him: "'My lady, I have seen how you look at my brother. Loras is valiant and handsome, and we all love him dearly … but your Imp will make a better husband'" (Martin, 2000, p. 322).

Among the gay characters of the series is Jon Connington, an exiled lord bent on restoring to power the son of a prince he once loved, and several minor characters like Kem, servant of the mercenary group the Second Sons. Even characters who are essentially heterosexual have same-sex encounters: Daenerys with her handmaid Irri, and Cersei with her lady-in-waiting Taena Merryweather.

Although Martin outshines Tolkien in the presentation of homosexuality, *A Song of Ice and Fire* still remains problematic. Cersei Lannister and Daenerys Targaryen—both important, "point of view" characters—experience same-sex encounters, and these are so explicitly detailed that they qualify the books in which they appear as inappropriate reading for children. The romantic relationship between male characters, however, is never spelled out with such specificity; indeed, many readers remain unaware that Renly and Loras were sexually involved, or that Jon Connington's feelings for Prince Rhaegar were more than platonic. Even Kem offers only hints of his feelings for the "boy he knew once." In fact, when Loras' and Renly's relationship was explicitly laid out in the television series, many viewers complained that that element had been "added in" for no reason (Goodreads, 2012).

This imbalance in presentation sends a clear message: female homosexuality can be safely presented as titillation for the presumed mostly male audience, while male homosexuality may be hinted at but must never be confirmed. This practice has in recent years come to be known as "queerbaiting," adding homoerotic tension between characters to attract attention without ever making that tension more than subtext (Mai, 2015). Examples of queerbaiting can be found anywhere, but the television series "Supernatural" is a good example of the way a storyteller can strongly imply the presence of homosexuality while retaining the ability to deny its reality.

Queerbaiting is often used in relation to male homosexuality, as such feelings between women are assumed to be more palatable to a mass audience (AP, 2013). This is particularly toxic when the creators/actors choose to deny that the tension exists anywhere but in the imagination of the readers (Bridges, 2013; Westeros.org, 2011). To his credit, Martin has been willing to acknowledge the homosexuality of certain of his characters, but since the implications are so vague, the possibility of retraction always exists. Part of marginalizing a minority is the insistence that its concerns and even its perceptions are purely imaginary (Gennis, 2014), and it is disturbing to find the groundwork so neatly laid in *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

This distinction plays into the perception that same sex relationships are either titillating (when the participants are female) or deviant (when the participants are male), but in no case do they deserve the same respect afforded to heterosexual pairings. Thus, the heteronormative model of love is justified and reinforced, closing the door to any true consideration of alternate sexual orientations.

The heroes may indulge in same-sex relationships—Cersei and Daenerys may sleep with women, Frodo and Sam may be "very close"—but ultimately these relationships are always relegated to the margins. Renly is a schemer and not a reformer, and expresses no intention to challenge the mores of the very culture that marginalizes him. Daenerys, fair-minded in so many ways, considers her dalliances with her bed maid an illicit pleasure, and never seeks to expand the privilege she enjoys to those for whom it is forbidden. These characters, personally and politically powerful, never work towards the betterment of people like them, and sometimes even hold them in contempt. Cersei even thinks about the deleterious effect Ser Loras may be having on her royal son: "She did not want Tommen

growing close to Loras Tyrell. The Knight of Flowers was no sort of man for any boy to emulate" (Martin, 2005, p. 350). If the very characters who engage in homosexual behavior will not validate it, who will?

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The marginalization of minorities—both racial and sexual—extends also to women. It is no surprise that women are sidelined in fantasy, which deals primarily with patriarchal models (Kuznets, 1985). There are nearly *no* women of importance in the *The Lord of the Rings* and those few that exist serve primarily as prizes or caretakers. In Middle-earth, it is men who fight the battles, men who solve the problems, and men who change the world. Whatever small role Tolkien's few women—Galadriel, Arwen, and Eowyn—may play in saving Middle-Earth from Sauron, ultimately the story of the War of the Ring is not theirs.

At the time of the final confrontation with Sauron, Galadriel is arguably the oldest humanoid left in Middle-Earth. Born in Valinor during the time of the Trees, by the Third Age (in which *The Lord of the Rings* is set), she is thousands and thousands of years old; in fact, since she predates the sun, there is no sure way to know just how long she has lived. Her grandfather, one uncle, and two of her cousins all once held the title High King of the Noldor, a title she could herself have claimed upon the death of Gil-galad in the Second Age. She also bears Nenya, one of the Three Rings. Yet for all this lineage and distinction, Galadriel plays a very small role in the War of the Ring. She welcomes the Fellowship to her home in Lothlórien, lades them with gifts, and provides Frodo with cryptic advice. It is mentioned in *The Return of the King* (Tolkien, 1955) that while Aragorn battled Sauron, Galadriel participated in an attack on the forces of Dol Guldur, but this struggle goes on "off-screen" and is by implication relatively unimportant.

There is little to say about Arwen Evenstar, who in the entire series sews a banner and marries Aragorn, two traditionally female roles that have little impact on the struggle against Sauron. Indeed, her primary story purpose is as a motivation for Aragorn, who has been promised her hand if he should prevail against the Dark Lord.

Eowyn's place in the series is more complicated. In *The Two Towers* (Tolkien, 1954b), Eowyn complains bitterly to Aragorn about the unfairness of the role she is expected to play, complaints that would not have been out of place in the 20th-century:

> "All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house. But when the men have died in battle and honour, you have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more. But I am of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman. I can ride and wield blade, and I do not fear either pain or death." (Tolkien, 1954b, p. 47)

These encouraging words are reinforced when Eowyn disguises herself as a man so as to ride to war with her people, and even more so when she avenges the death of her king by slaying the Lord of the Nazgûl in single combat. In this, however,

Eowyn's gender is ultimately revealed to be more a plot device than an upsetting of gender roles. In Tolkien's subversion of *Macbeth*, the marching of Birnam Wood becomes the walking and speaking Ents, and Macbeth's own prophecy becomes the instrument of the demise of the Witch King, about whom it was prophesied, "Not by the hand of man shall he fall" (Tolkien, 1955, p. 363). Instead of using Shakespeare's "cesarean loophole," Tolkien instead has the King fall at the hands of Eowyn.

Yet even this small victory is soon taken from Eowyn, for shortly after Sauron's fall, she quickly repents her martial ways in favor of the more marital, as she indicates when accepting Faramir's proposal: "'I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren.'" (Tolkien, 1955, p. 262). Thus a character who began by railing against the restrictions under which women labor retreats swiftly to the role of wife, nurturer and, by implication of her engagement to Faramir, mother.

The women of Martin's world receive better treatment than those of Tolkien, playing more prominent and significant roles in the struggles that threaten to consume the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. They are more than simply healers and helpers; they are leaders, schemers and, occasionally, warriors. Daenerys goes from the arranged bride of a Dothraki clan leader to a dragonlord and ruler in her own right. Cersei Lannister reigns over the Seven Kingdoms as Queen Dowager. Brienne of Tarth cleaves her way through enemies mean and mighty on her quest to fulfill an oath. Arya Stark follows a darker path by apprenticing herself to a guild of mystical assassins. Each of these is a far cry from Arwen Evenstar, inviting but impotent.

Yet even in *A Song of Ice and Fire* there are problems. Both Cersei and Daenerys derive their power initially from their respective husbands. Daenerys comes into her own by becoming the Mother of Dragons, and the slaves she later frees call her *mysa*, which in Ghiscari means "mother," thus playing neatly into the traditional female role of nurturer/caretaker. And for all her advancement, Daenerys surrounds herself almost entirely with male advisers and never wonders if things might be otherwise. Cersei Lannister is keenly aware of the disadvantages of her sex, and, like Antigone, grumbles repeatedly about her misfortune in not being born a man: "She had a warrior's heart, but the gods in their blind malice had given her the feeble body of a woman" (Martin, 2011, p. 719). Instead of attempting to broaden the opportunities for her fellow women, Cersei instead wishes they were all more like men.

Interestingly, it seems that, even on a primal, mystical level, the world is not ready for the likes of them. Several times prophecy is mentioned in relation to Daenerys Stormborn. When brought before the *dosh khaleen*, the high widows of the Dothraki, Daenerys is told that she will bear the Stallion Who Mounts the World. This image gives away a great deal of the Dothraki worldview: conquest shown as a male horse engaging in an act of masculine dominance. The figure of their visions will not work with nor persuade others, but will rather crush and humiliate in the most emasculating way possible. Ultimately, Daenerys loses her

child along with her husband and so the prophecy itself comes into question. Is it possible that the vision given to the *dosh khaleen* was one they could not understand—a *mare* which would rule the world?

We see the same in the image of the Prince That Was Promised. Several characters, including Stannis Baratheon, consider themselves the fulfillment of the prophecy of Azor Ahai, the conquering hero who once stood against the Others. As Maester Aemon points out, it is possible that the prophecies are confused, for dragons do not have gender: "'It was a prince that was promised, not a princess…dragons are neither male nor female. Barth saw the truth of that, but now one and then the other'" (Martin, 2005, p. 520).

Even those women that attempt to gain power by becoming more like men are judged for it. Brienne of Tarth's greatest barrier is not any internal vice, but her putative physical unattractiveness, which is remarked upon by everyone she encounters. Martin's male characters sport all manner of physical deformities—dwarfs with malformed heads, knights with faces scarred by fire, and even an executioner with no tongue—yet none of them draw the same level of scrutiny. Brienne's most noteworthy feature is not her martial prowess but her appearance, which is judged unacceptable. In fact, Martin is careful to note all of the physical imperfections of the female warriors: Asha Greyjoy has a prominent nose, Dacey Mormont a plain, long face, etc. The male knights and soldiers are sometimes barely described in a physical sense, yet the reader knows in excruciating detail the various physical shortcomings of Brienne of Tarth. Women like Catelyn Stark and Margaery Tyrell, who play more traditional roles, are afflicted with no such physical flaws. Although there is room in *A Song of Ice and Fire* for women who break from tradition, only those who know their place seem rewarded with acclamations of beauty.

As with all of the forgotten, there seems no hope of better days ahead for these women. Redemption as restoration provides no chance of a social transformation which would allow them power while remaining wholly women.

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From *The Lord of the Rings* to *A Song of Ice and Fire* we can trace an evolution from Tolkien's straightforward, epic Middle-earth to Martin's more morally nuanced and grittily realistic Westeros. In a real sense, Martin is trying to answer the question of what happens if we do not accept at face value that a conquering hero "ruled wisely and well," and in that he has undoubtedly been successful. His characters are more complex, come from a wider variety of backgrounds and grapple with shades of gray rather than the often less complex black-and-white conflict of Tolkien's War of the Ring.

That said, the arc of that evolution can obviously extend much further, and in some cases, already has. Yeine Darr of *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* (Jemisin, 2010), both a woman and a person of color, certainly represents a bold move towards a more inclusive style of fantasy fiction, as does the openly gay Seregil of *The Nightrunner* series (Flewelling & Ruddell, 1996). However, in both the works

of Tolkien and those of Martin, the forgotten of modern fantasy—women, and ethnic and sexual minorities—are still left largely on the sidelines, and the story centers on the restoration of a better past, rather than the hope of transformation in the future. The next step after Martin would be a truly progressive fantasy in which minorities not empowered by the status quo would be able to tell the tale of their struggles, and would be equal partners in the stewardship of order, fellow protectors and, ultimately, reformers. Such characters would be people unto themselves, rather than being defined in relationship to a hero who is largely unlike them. They would be deep, complex, flawed, and ultimately real. They would stand up not only against evil, but against the restoration of an old order that never benefited them and never will. Women would seek status of their own, separate from the men around them; homosexuals would be free to proclaim their own truth, both in the sanctity of their own minds and in their relationships with others; ethnic minorities would be unencumbered by a system in which men are born of light or of darkness.

In reality, the true status quo is not homogeneity, but diversity. Progressive ideas are not an invading, transformative addition to the genre, but rather an acknowledgement of how things truly are, the dispelling of the illusion that all heroes are straight white men who carry the burden of restoring the glories of the past. High fantasy that does this becomes more welcoming to readers by saying that people who look like them can stand up and do great things. To do otherwise is to be relegated to the history that most of the genre celebrates.

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