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CHANGING ROLE OF THE FEMALE IN MYTHICALLY BASED  
FANTASTIC LITERATURE AND FILMS FOR  
YOUNG ADULTS

by

Deborah Dougherty Dietrich

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Masters of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division  
of Rowan College in  
School and Public Librarianship  
1996

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved May 1996

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## ABSTRACT

Deborah D. Dietrich,      Changing Role of the Female in Mythically Based Fantastic  
Literature for Young Adults, 1996. Thesis Advisor:  
Regina Pauly, School and Public Librarianship

Psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung first noted the archetypal symbolism to be found in the dreams, myths and legends of people around the world. Bruno Bertelheim, a disciple of Freud, and renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell applied these principles of universal symbolism to help explain the continuing appeal of fairy tale, legend and myth in contemporary society. The thesis addresses the universality of these archetypal messages as mirrored in contemporary fantastic fiction for young adults, showing how the adolescent rite of passage explored in the heroic quest myths of primitive peoples is still used in many works of fantastic literature and cinema aimed at young adults.

The thesis notes, however, that while the quest myth is still a popular format for fantastic literature, there has been a shift in emphasis. While in the past boys were almost always the focus of tales of heroic quest, in contemporary fantastic literature the protagonist is often a girl. Even when females characters are not the central focus of a story, in modern fantastic fiction, girls are more often depicted as capable, independent individuals. Additionally, the female myth of the Triple Goddess--Virgin, Mother and Crone--has begun to appear in works of adolescent fantastic literature with greater frequency.

Chapter One addresses the importance and relevance of fantastic literature for young adults. Chapter Two explains the psychological background of archetypal analysis through a brief look at the work of Freud and Jung. It explores the views of mythologist

Joseph Campbell on the importance of the mythic to modern life and looks at the support for archetypal, literary criticism from noted, literary critic Northrup Frye.

The third chapter examines the works of a number of authors in the area of fantastic literature for young adults and their use of the archetypal hero's quest. Authors whose works are explored are: J.R.R. Tolkein, T.H. White, Lloyd Alexander, Susan Cooper, Anne McCaffrey, Ursula Le Guin, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Robin McKinley and George Lucas. The Chapter also looks at the changing role of women as mirrored in these works and examines how the archetypes are applied to the female characters of these novels or movies.

Chapter Four provides an overview and comparison of how the various works examined make use of the hero's quest. A changed and more central role for females is noted in all the works examined, reflecting women's changing role in society. The chapter concludes by reiterating the importance of the mythic to even modern youth.

Appendix A

## MINI-ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the importance of mythic archetypes in fantastic literature for young adults. After examining the work of Sigmund Freud, C. G. Jung, Bruno Bettelheim and Joseph Campbell on the importance of the mythic in modern society, the paper looks at its role in fantastic literature for young adults. Looking at the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, T.H. White, Lloyd Alexander, Susan Cooper, Anne McCaffrey, Ursula Le Guin, Marion Bradley Zimmer, Robin McKinley and George Lucas, the paper explores their use of the mythic hero's quest and the changing role of the females featured in their novels and movies. The thesis finds extensive use of the archetypal hero's quest in these works, but with increasingly central and more active roles for female characters. Female myths of the Triple Goddess archetype also appear with great frequency, reflecting the increasing importance of the feminine as well as the mythic in modern life.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to acknowledge her thanks and appreciation to the following persons:

Donald Dietrich, my husband, who pitched in and pulled up the slack.

Gwendolyn Dietrich, my daughter, who gave me unwavering support.

Stephen Dietrich, my son, whose thoughtful neck rubs kept me going, hunched over the PC.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Thesis

Fantastic literature is the most mythically based of all genres of literature. Based on the folktales and legends of peoples around the world, both psychologist C.G. Jung and mythologist Joseph Campbell have stressed the importance of the mythic images contained in fantasy, dreams and folktales, even to modern day peoples. Are they right? Do the old myths still apply, or are the archetypes changing as the society in which we live evolves? On the whole, I believe that the old archetypes do apply, as reflected in the quest literature written for young adults. The increasing role of women in contemporary society has resulted in a shift in emphasis, however, with women seen more often as the central character of the quest; portrayed as strong and independent individuals, even when not the central character; and the feminine side of our mythology explored more often through increased usage of the archetype of the Triple Goddess.

Fantastic literature is quite popular with young adults. In a 1982 survey of children's reading, of the top fifty titles, eleven were modern fantasies, the second largest category, after realistic fiction (Elleman rpt. Norton 302). This strong showing for fantasy is especially surprising when you consider that modern fantasy is more popular with gifted children, than with the general population of children and young adults (Norton 328). Why have we, in the last half century, seen such a renaissance of interest in fantasy literature, for adults as well as children (Acquino 7)? Why has science fiction experienced

such an upsurge in interest among the general population, to the point that the science fiction television series occupies the dominate position enjoyed by the western in the 50's and 60's? "TV Week," from the Philadelphia Inquirer, shows seven different science fiction series airing during prime time plus a cable channel devoted entirely to science fiction.

Fantastic literature is a literature that packs a "triple whammy:" 1. It is exciting, with an emphasis on adventure. Most modern fantasy literature involves a mighty struggle. 2. This is a subject of interest to us all, but one of special interest to children and young adults as they try to affirm the human values of good and evil. It opens the imagination to worlds of possibility. In fantastic literature, *nothing*, is impossible as long as it stays within the logical framework the author develops (Norton 295 - 6).

3. Perhaps most importantly, in using myths and symbols which are found universally among ancient peoples, it draws upon universal truths which are a necessary part of human development (Aquino 15).

Do these myths and symbols still apply, however? The role of women in contemporary society has certainly changed radically from the roles assigned to that gender in the past. Old wives no longer sit by the fire and spin yarns about the value of showing kindness to strange old ladies. Grandma is attending the university, while Mom is trying to fill two roles as both breadwinner and sole parent. As our world has changed, have our myths undergone a transformation as well? Do the myths of the ancients apply as well today as in the past? Are our myths, as reflected in literature and the cinema,

reflecting the different needs of today's youth? Do the old archetypes still apply? I shall prove that, on the whole, the old archetypes do apply, but with some changes in inflection. In this era where the majority of children spend some part of their life in a home without their biological father, that the archetype of the wise old man is perhaps more important than ever, but the basic myth of the hero's quest is the same--the adolescent's journey to adulthood.

For young girls and women, the archetypes are changing, however. More than ever the quest myth is the girl's myth as well as that of the boy. There is a return to the more matriarchal myths and archetypes, which preceded those of the patriarchal Greeks, in the form of the myths of the Triple Goddess. Young women are seen as powerful beings in their own right, following their own quests for maturity.

### Definition

What is fantasy literature? What is meant by the genre, science fiction? Noted fantasy author, Ursula LeGuin, says that the fantastic is a literature that exists on two levels. On one level it is a game of "let's be dragons."

On another level, it is still a game, but a game played for very high stakes. Seen thus, as art, not spontaneous play, its affinity is not with daydream, but with dream. It is a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence. It is not anti-rational, but para-rational; not realistic, but surrealistic, superrealistic, a heightening of reality. In Freud's terminology, it employs primary, not secondary process thinking. It employs archetypes, which, as Jung warned us, are dangerous things (79).

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines fantasy literature as "Fiction characterized by highly fanciful or supernatural elements" (660);

while science fiction is a close cousin--“a literary or cinematic genre in which fantasy, typically based on speculative scientific discoveries or developments, environmental changes, space travel, or life on other planets, forms part of the plot or background” (1616). The distinction between science fiction and fantasy is a vague one. This is why the two are usually grouped together in bookstores. A tale of dragons and wizards, queens and lords set on a distant planet is science fiction. The same tale set long ago and far away is fantasy.

Eric Rabkin sees fantasy literature as a continuum, incorporating varying amounts of the fantastic. He says:

The fantastic is the quality of astonishment that we feel when the ground rules of a narrative world are suddenly made to turn about 180°. We recognize this reversal in the reactions of characters, the statements of narrators, and the implications of structure, all playing on and against our whole experience as and readers....In more or less degree, a whole range of narratives uses the fantastic. And at the far end of this range, we find Fantasy, the genre whose center and concern, whose primary enterprise is to present and consider the fantastic (41).

For my purposes, I will concentrate on those stories of fantasy and science fiction which follow the format of ancient myths and legends.

### Importance of Fantasy

Writing in the text, Literature for Young Adults, Alleen Nilsen and Kenneth Donnelson tell us the term fantasy comes from the Greek word meaning “a making visible,” and perhaps that is a good starting place (215). Fantasy takes the fantastic and uses it to make visible universal truths about humankind. Rabkin tells us “the fantastic is used to reveal the truth of the human heart” (27). Of all contemporary literature, fantasy

is closest to the mythic; closest to our truest, yet most hidden self. Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, through his work, developed a deep interest in the role of fairy tales in the lives of children. He writes:

Just because his life is often bewildering to him, the child needs even more to be given the chance to understand himself in this complex world with which he must learn to cope. To be able to do so, the child must be helped to make some coherent sense out of the turmoil of his feelings....The child finds this kind of meaning through fairy tales....[as] the German poet Schiller wrote: "Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life" (5).

Another noted psychologist, C.G. Jung, felt that the mythic played an important part, even in the life of modern peoples.

...it struck me what it means to live with a myth, and what it means to live without one. Myth, says a Church Father, is "what is believed always, everywhere, by everybody;" hence the man who thinks he can live without myth, or outside it, is an exception. He is like one uprooted, having no true link either with the past, or with the ancestral life which continues within him, or yet with contemporary human society (5).

While this impact of the mythic in fantastic fiction is important, it will only have an effect if this literature is widely read. Fantastic literature is an important genre to both children and adults. One need only to check out the size of the Science Fiction and Fantasy section at any bookstore to see this graphically demonstrated—so much space would only be devoted to a genre with proven marketability. Approximately one out of every four or five books of fiction published are books of fantasy or science fiction (Gunn v). Of genre fiction, fantastic literature is one of the big draws in the library; second only to the mystery genre in popularity. A survey of the public library system in Salem, Oregon found that 95% of mysteries had been checked out in the last six months, followed closely

by science fiction, romance and Westerns (Annichiarico 2). Fantastic literature can become a lifetime habit with many young adults crossing over to the adult shelves as they deplete the material aimed specifically towards young people (Pierce 1).

Writing in School Library Journal about the importance of fantastic literature for children and young adults, Tamora Pierce notes that fantastic literature appeals to the idealism of the young adult reader: "Young people are drawn to battles for a discernible higher good" (1). She also notes that as a genre, fantasy is a literature of empowerment, where even a humble youth can, in the end, triumph, where magic is the great equalizer and where there exists a fountainhead of hope and optimism (2-3). Pierce notes that young people are drawn to fantasy because it contains the fuel to fire youthful idealism and "that fuel can be found--according to the writings of Jung Bettelheim, M. Ester Harding and Joseph Campbell--in the mighty symbols of myth and fairy tales, dreams legends--and fantasy" (1).

### Methodology

In my paper I will survey the studies of mythical and symbolic interpretation of literature. I will give special emphasis to the writing of Freud, Bruno Bettelheim, Carl G. Jung and his disciple Joseph L. Henderson. I will also focus on the writings of Joseph Campbell as he interprets the importance of the mythic to modern mankind and I will explore the ancient myth of the Triple Goddess. I will use these studies to do my own analysis of the mythic appeal of a number of works of fantastic fiction popular with young adults. This will include the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, T.H. White, Lloyd Alexander,

Susan Cooper, Anne McCaffrey, Ursula LeGuin, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Robin McKinley and George Lucas. My focus will be not only on these works' use of the traditional mythic format, I will also focus on changes in the traditional myths, as mirrored in these works, which I feel reflect the changing needs of youth and the society they live in.



## CHAPTER 2

### Survey of the Literature

#### Psychological Foundation

Sigmund Freud was the creator of psychoanalysis and was the first person to scientifically explore the human unconscious (Wolf). He felt that symbols played an important part in the unconscious mind and were "...to be found in a more developed condition in folklore, myths, legends, idiomatic phrases, proverbs and the current witticisms of a people..." (Freud 239). In this he agree with his early follower, Carl G. Jung. Jung, while a fervent early follower of Freud and a personal friend, came to believe that Freud placed too much emphasis on the significance of sexuality in human life. This eventually led Jung to break off his relationship with Freud. Jung then went on to found analytical psychology (Atwood). Jung, however, continued to agree with Freud in some areas. Though they may have differed in their interpretations of myth and symbol, they both agreed on the existence of the unconscious mind and on the fact that the contents of this unconscious mind were often revealed to the conscious, through symbols which appear in dreams. ( Freud 238 - 341 and Jung 10 -36).

Jung posited that humankind shares a collective unconscious--the areas of the psyche beyond the personal unconsciousness (287). He felt that this collective unconscious was an inherited structure shared by all human kind. It was represented by archetypes--"innate predispositions to experience and symbolize universal human situations in distinctively human ways" (Atwood). This collective unconsciousness

manifests itself through our myths, our dreams and our symbols. The many common formats found in fairy tales, folk tales and myths, around the world, are a representation of some aspect of this collective unconsciousness (Jung 373 - 376). These archetypes correspond to common human experiences—having parents, finding a mate, procreation, facing death-- and these themes are found throughout the great mythologies and religions (Atwood).

[Jung states]...the human mind has its own history and the psyche retains traces left from previous stages of development. More than this, the contents of the unconscious exert a formative influence on the psyche. Consciously we may ignore them, but unconsciously we respond to them, and to the symbolic forms—including dreams—in which they express themselves....For the analogies between ancient myths and the stories that appear in the dreams of modern patients are neither trivial or accidental. They exist because the unconscious mind of modern man preserves the symbol-making capacity that once found expression in the beliefs and rituals of the primitive. And that capacity still plays a role of vital psychic importance. In more ways than we realize, we are dependent on the messages that are carried by such symbols, and both our attitudes and our behavior are profoundly influenced by them (Henderson 106 - 107).

The archetypal myth of the hero is the most common—found in the mythology of Greece and Rome, stories from the Middle Ages and the Far East and even among the primitive tribes that exist today (Henderson 110). While these myths may vary in detail, the pattern is generally the same--the hero, often of humble birth or background, must go out and overcome evil. In doing this, he is often aided by a wise old man. The hero must overcome many obstacles, including facing his own flaws or failings. Eventually, he slays the dragon or other manifestation of evil and in doing so often rescues the damsel in distress. (Henderson 110 and 123). "...the essential function of the heroic myth is the

development of the individual's ego-consciousness--his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses--in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him" Henderson (112). This myth shows the ego's triumph over the negative side of personality. The hero must recognize his own capacity for evil and draw strength from it--"i.e. before the ego can triumph, it must master and assimilate the shadow" (Henderson 120 - 121).

Why is this myth so universal? Jung felt that each person has within him or herself both a masculine and a feminine side, the feminine aspect called the anima and the masculine, the animus (273). When a child is born, he or she has little sense of self and the child tends to completely identify with the mother (352). As part of the normal process of growing up, the child must become independent of the mother. In adolescence, we must come to terms with who and what we are. We must free ourselves from the negative aspects of the mother (who would keep us ever tied to her apron strings) and, in achieving this, many teens are aided by their father (the wise old man). In freeing oneself, however, one must still keep the positive aspects of the anima. To successfully make the transition to adulthood, we must free ourselves of the negative maternal aspects which would keep us from becoming our own person and yet keep these positive aspects of creativity and belonging. To do this, the hero must slay the dragon and rescue the princess (Henderson 125). Girls share these hero myths with boys. Like boys, they also must develop an independent ego-identity, though they do not have to reunite with the anima (Henderson 137).

Girls have their own myths as well. One example of the female side of the myth is the myth of the Triple Goddess. In early cultures, worship of the Mother Goddess was common and widespread. This goddess is represented in three forms—The Virgin Goddess, the Mother Goddess and the Crone or Death-Bringer (Wilshire 21). In her various forms, the Goddess represents the cyclical nature of life. As the Virgin, she is the Blooming One. As the Mother she is the Fruiting One; as the Crone, the One who goes to Seed. In her form as Crone, the Goddess falls back into the womb of the Earth and is born again as the Blooming One. She represents the sacred cycle of Birth, Death and Re-Birth (Wilshire 22). As the Virgin One, the Goddess is not necessarily celibate, but rather is the “autonomous female who belongs to herself” (Wilshire 21). Annis Pratt noted in her book, Archtypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction, that in many ancient societies young girls retained personal freedom until married, retaining their own autonomy until the wedding day (9). Just so, heroines of young adult fantasy and science fiction often have much greater autonomy than might be expected of women of their culture; perhaps in doing so reflecting the Koré—the Triple Goddess in the form of the Virgin.

#### Importance of the Mythic in Modern Society

Joseph Campbell took the writings of the psychoanalysts and spoke to the importance of the mythic in modern society. “The bold and truly epoch-making writings of the psychoanalysts are indispensable to the student of mythology; for, whatever may be thought of the detailed and sometimes contradictory interpretations of specific cases and problems, Freud, Jung, and their followers have demonstrated irrefutably that the logic,

the heroes, and the deeds of myth survive into modern times (Hero 4). In a PBS interview, Bill Moyer summarized Campbell's beliefs: "I came to understand from reading your books--The Masks of God or The Hero with a Thousand Faces, for example--that what human beings have in common is revealed in myths. Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. We all need to tell our story and to understand our story" (Power 5). Campbell felt that..."the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous production of the psyche and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source" (Hero 4).

He felt that the numerous rituals of primitive tribes and ancient civilization were designed for and had the effect of easing people through the difficult transformations that demand a change in both one's conscious and unconscious life. These rites of passage include birth, naming, puberty, marriage, and burial. The rites of puberty are designed to wean the adolescent away from the mother and into independence and the wider world of society (Hero 10).

Campbell states that the image of the mother and child is the basic image of mythology. With the long infancy of humans, children are dependent on the parents until age 15. One of the psychological problems of humans is to become psychologically disengaged from the mother as the human child grows to adulthood (Power 3). This is why fantastic literature has such a strong appeal to adolescents. It symbolically restates

the adolescent experience of separation from the parents and the acquiring of competence and independence.

In his interview on PBS by Bill Moyer, Campbell states:

Young people just grab this stuff. Mythology teaches you what's behind literature and the arts, it teaches you about your own life. It's a great, exciting, life-nourishing subject. Mythology has a great deal to do with the stages of life, the initiation ceremonies as you have from childhood to adult responsibilities, from the unmarried state into the married state. All of those rituals are mythological rites. They have to do with your recognition of the new role that you're in, the process of throwing off the old one and coming out in the new, and entering into a responsible profession (11 - 12).

Campbell also notes that while "the themes [of mythology] are timeless,...the inflection is to the culture" (11).

#### Archetypal Criticism in Literature

One of the major trends in contemporary studies in literature has been that of mythic criticism (Vickery ix). Though there are a variety of views on this type of critical endeavor, most myth critics could subscribe to a group of core beliefs:

First, the creating of myths, the mythopoeic faculty, is inherent in the thinking process and answers a basic human need. Second, myth forms the matrix out of which literature emerges both historically and psychologically. As a result, literary plots, characters, themes, and images are basically complications and displacements of similar elements in myths and folktales. How myth gets into literature is variously explained by the Jungian racial memory, historical diffusion, or the essential similarity of the human mind everywhere. Third, not only can myth stimulate the creative artist, but it also provides concepts and patterns which the critic may use to interpret specific works of literature.

...Fourth and last, the ability of literature to move us profoundly is due to its mythic quality, to its possession of *mana*, the *numinous*, or the mystery in the face of which we feel an awed delight or terror at the world of man (Vickery ix).

Critic Northrup Frye used the analogy of viewing a painting to explain the importance of the use of the archetypal in literature. If one stands close to a painting one can analyze the details—the strokes of the brush and palette knife. If one stands back, the content of the painting can be viewed and appreciated. The further back one goes, however, the more the organizing design is revealed. “In the criticism of literature, too, we often have to ‘stand back’ from the poem [or other work of literature] to see its archetypal organization” (140).

#### Fantastic Literature for Young Adults

Noted Freudian psychologist Bruno Bettelheim examined the psychological appeal of fairy and folk tales. In his book The Uses of Enchantment, he explores the importance of fairy tales in allowing the child to safely explore the nature of themselves and the world he or she inhabits. Bettelheim states:

The more I try to understand why these stories [fairy tales] are so successful at enriching the inner life of the child, the more I realized that these tales, in a much deeper sense than any other reading material, start where the child really is in his psychological and emotional being. They speak about his severe inner pressures in a way that the child unconsciously understand, and—without belittling the most serious inner struggles which growing up entails—offer examples of both temporary and permanent solutions to pressing difficulties (6).

The message of fairy tales is not always as sanitary and squeaky clean as some adults would like. We would like our children believe that the world is a good place and that the dark side of man does not exist. Children know this is not true. The important message of fairy tale and particularly the hero quest is that while life is indeed a struggle against many difficulties and obstacles, if the hero perseveres in meeting unexpected and

often unfair hardships, he or she will gain skill and confidence and in the end triumph over that evil which would destroy (Bettleheim 8). This is part of the role that fantasy literature fulfills for young adults. It is a literature experienced on two levels—as the rousing story of attractive young people who triumph over evil; and, at a more visceral level, as a means of allowing young people to experience another's rite of passage, even as they go through their own often painful and frightening passage from child to adult (Molson and Miles 309-10).



## CHAPTER 3

Analysis of Fantastic Literature for Young AdultsModern Popularity

Though there have been stories which appealed to young adults since the first tale told around the tribal campfire, the 1930's saw the establishment of Young Adult literature as a separate genre (Nilsen and Donelson 562). The establishment of this genre was a marketing success, growing in popularity with pre-teen and teen readers. It was for this audience that J.R.R. Tolkien wrote The Hobbit. Published in 1937, The Hobbit sold well, positioned as a novel for young adults. Its success enabled him to publish The Lord of the Rings (Green 8-10).

During the period from 1941 to 1965 the quality of literature for young adults improved, gaining in respect and acceptance (Nilsen and Donelson 562-68). The first criticism of young adult novels as works of literature occurred in 1951, with Dwight L. Burton, and was expanded upon by Richard Alm and Emma Patterson (Nilsen and Donelson 573-74). This same period saw a flourishing in the availability and acceptance of science fiction and other forms of fantastic literature (Molson and Miles 307). By the 1960's writers of fantastic literature for young adults were gaining wide critical acceptance. Lloyd Alexander's The High King and Susan Cooper's The Grey King were Newbery Award winners, while Ursula LeGuin's The Farthest Shore garnered the National Book Award (Molson and Miles 307-8). I will begin my examination of specific works of fantastic literature with the rediscovery of fantastic literature for young adults

through the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and T.H. White and then jump to the many critically acclaimed works of fantastic literature that Tolkien's and White's success engendered.

### J.R.R. Tolkien

Tolkien was a man fascinated with the medieval period. From his teenage years, he had studied medieval language and myth. As he neared graduation World War I broke out and he saw in its evil destruction the coming of a dark era to people who had ceased to believe in good and evil and in the healing power of myth (Green 4). Tolkien felt that modern fiction for adults was expected to be morally realistic—colored with shades of gray rather than the stark blacks and whites of myth and legend. For this reason Tolkien published his first work of fiction, The Hobbit, as a work for older children or young adults (Green 5-6). “It is no accident that The Hobbit appeared at about the same time as Professor Tolkien's two great works of literary criticism, Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics and ‘On Fairy-Stories,’ for they are all about the same business. They set out to restore a heritage that he believed the literature of his century had sadly lost” (Green 7).

In The Hobbit, the protagonist is a middle-aged hobbit, perhaps an unlikely hero for juvenile fiction. Bilbo does not seem much like an adult, however. He has no familial responsibilities. He is a trickster, fond of practical jokes. He longs for a life of adventure, so that when invited to join a group of dwarves in a quest to reclaim a treasure, Bilbo goes along willingly. Bilbo grows and changes, though, as the story progresses; gaining courage, self-reliance and purpose.

The book is a narrative position paper in the debate between nihilistic relativism and traditional values. Monsters still exist: fighter bombers, if not dragons; bigots, if not goblins. Moral good and evil exist, and heroism

is still needed. However inexperienced and small we are, like Bilbo we can show courage and make a difference (Green 9).

In his quest for the dragon's treasure what Bilbo Baggins truly gains is maturity.

In his trilogy, The Lord of the Rings, Bilbo's nephew Frodo takes up the mantle of unlikely hero from Bilbo. With the passing of what is now revealed to be the great Ring of Power, Frodo takes up the mission to safeguard it from the dark powers rising in Mordor. Though only a young hobbit (a humble, practical folk), aided by the Wise Old Man (in the form of the wizard Gandalf) Frodo and his friends set off to do their part in the battle of Good and Evil. The story begins comically in The Fellowship of the Ring, but as the story progresses Frodo develops a nobility never attained by his Uncle Bilbo. Knowing that on his small shoulders rides the fate of the Middle Earth, Frodo trudges onward, feeling unequal to the task, but determined to carry on till he can go no more. While the band of hobbits provide a light side to these books, as the story progresses the hobbits grow in spiritual stature, if not in physical height. The books have a tone to them of high legend--Gandalf, Aragorn, Arwen, Galadriel, Théoden and Éowyn seem somehow more than ordinary mortals. Though they do all show their "human" side in parts of the story, overall, they are more like the heroes of legend. It is with the hobbits that we lesser mortals can identify. If they can overcome such daunting obstacles, why not we ourselves?

Critic Hugh Keenan sees the underlying theme of The Lord of the Rings to be one of the "basic struggle of Life against Death" (Keenan 62). This is particularly seen in the roles played by the books' female characters as reflections of the Triple Goddess. There

are a number of strong female characters in the series, though they make only cameo appearances.

“What the trilogy lacks is a mother with children. The women, even if married, are not shown as mothers....Not until the end of the book do women as child-bearers appear. Then their role is prominent. When Sauron is defeated, the Ring destroyed and the lands cleansed, there comes a succession of marriages: Faramir marries Éowyn; Aragorn marries Arwen; Sam marries Rose Cotton....Like the end of a Shakespeare comedy, the trilogy concludes with a series of engagements and marriages (Keenan 71-72).

The female characters through most of The Lord of the Rings are representations of the Koré—the female who yet retains autonomy over her own life. This is best seen in the character Éowyn. “For Éowyn...achieves the passing of the ‘Heroic Age’—the age in which girls rebel against their sex and their limitations and dream of male deeds” (Bradley 115). In The Return of the King, at the Battle of Pelennor Fields, it is Éowyn who defeats the Lord of the Nazgûl. Disguised as a man to enable her to fight as one of the Riders of Rohan, Éowyn alone stands between her lord and kin, King Théoden, and the dread Nazgûl. The Nazgûl warns her to come not between him and his prey, but Éowyn responds, as she draws her sword “Do what you will; but I will hinder it, if I may” (116). The Nazgûl responds “Hinder me? Thou fool. No living man may hinder me” (116)! With that Éowyn laughs and replied in a “clear voice...like the ring of steel. ‘But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn I am, Éomund’s daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone if you are not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him” (116). And smite him she does; aided by the hobbit Merry, Éowyn slays the Lord of the Nazgûl. In doing so, she is wounded and lies

in the Houses of Healing, close to death--sick in mind as well as body. For, as Gandalf describes her to Lord Faramir, "She, born in the body of a maid, had a spirit and courage at the least the match of yours...who knows what she spoke to the darkness, alone,....when all her life seemed shrinking, and the walls of her bower closing in about her, a hutch to trammel some wild thing in" (142-43).

In the end, the shieldmaiden Éowyn grows from Koré to the goddess as mother. As she states at the end of The Return of the King: "I will be a shield maiden no more, 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" (243). With the marriage of Éowyn and Faramir; Aragorn and Arwen Evenstar, fertility is restored to the land; as with the Great Marriage of myth and legend. Here is a story which speaks to the maturing process of girl to woman. As in the myths of old, the Great Mother is wedded to her consort in a relationship of equality (Wilshire 31).

#### T.H. White

With the publication of The Once and Future King, the Arthurian legends were once again brought into the limelight. The Once and Future King is really four novels bound together in one volume--The Sword in the Stone, The Queen of Air and Darkness, The Ill-made Knight, and The Candle in the Wind. Only the first book, The Sword in the Stone, can be considered a true quest myth. This first book concerns the youth of the boy Arthur. Though the son of Uther Pendragon, King of all the Britains, Arthur had no knowledge of his noble lineage. He had been fostered to Sir Ector as an infant and has no

memory of his past. In fact, the nickname, by which he is known throughout the book, is Wart. Though he knows he must be of somewhat noble background to be fostered to Sir Ector, Wart sees himself as the social inferior of his foster brother, Sir Kay (an opinion Kay is only too happy to reinforce).

Wart's quest is not the typical one of slaying a dragon and rescuing a princess. His quest is quite openly the quest for the maturity to rule a kingdom. For, his role is not only to rule England, but also to introduce a new moral code--the code of chivalry. Up until this time, the basic code of conduct for the ruling class was "Might makes Right." It is Arthur who will introduce the concept that the strong should protect the weak and use their might for good and noble purposes rather than warfare.

Wart is helped along the road to maturity by a wise old man--the wizard Merlyn. Hired as Wart's tutor, Merlyn helps him to embark on a number of educational adventures by turning the young Arthur into a myriad of creatures--a fish, hawk, ant, owl, wild goose and badger. Each animal adventure has a lesson to teach which will aid the future king to better understand human nature and the world of man. In doing so, Arthur, as in the classic quest, must face and overcome his own faults and weaknesses.

In the end, Arthur attains the maturity to undertake the rule of England. Not knowing what he is doing, Arthur, supported by the animal friends of his adventures, pulls from the stone and anvil the sword of his father--Uther Pendragon. In doing so he has proven himself as the rightful king of all England and must now undertake the just rule of

his new kingdom. The subsequent novels deal with Guinevere and Morgause, Lancelot and Mordred.

The story is more appealing to younger readers than The Lord of the Rings. It is written in a light and comical manner and while at one level quite satirical of social rank and custom; it can be taken by a younger reader as a straight, though amusing, adventure (Crane 85). The novel is also quite didactic—each adventure has a lesson or moral.

The novel perhaps reflects White's nostalgia for a boyhood he might have had. White grew up in an acrimonious atmosphere full of parental feuding; son of a mother he felt demanded his love but gave none in return (Warner 28). His mother is in fact portrayed as the evil Morgause in the next novel of the One and Future King--The Queen of Air and Darkness (Crane 86). The appeal of growing up as a parentless boy as Arthur did in The Sword in the Stone is contrasted with the malevolent influence Morgause has over her young sons in The Queen of Air and Darkness. In The Sword in the Stone Merlyn offers up to Arthur the only remedy that White himself found for unhappiness--  
 “‘The best things for being sad,’ replied Merlyn, beginning to puff and blow, ‘is to learn something. This is the only thing that never fails’” (White 183).

### Lloyd Alexander

In 1963, Lloyd Alexander published The Book of Three the first book in what was to be a series of five. The series also came to include The Black Cauldron (Newbery Honor), The Castle of Llyr, Taran the Wanderer and The High King (Newbery Award).

These books were based on a collection of medieval Welsh tales known as the Mabinogion (Nilsen and Donelson 225).

Following the classic format of the quest myth, our hero is a young man of indeed humble birth, for Taran is a young man whose origin is unknown, but whose job title is that of Assistant Pig-Keeper. While the pig he keeps is an enchanted one, Taran chafes under the dullness of his day to day existence and longs for adventure. His master, the wizard Dallben has news, however. A new lord has risen, perhaps as powerful as the good lord Gwydion. "But he is a man of evil for whom death is a black joy" (Alexander 15). Things soon go awry--Hen Wen, the oracular pig runs away and Taran chases after her. Thus begins the quest of our unlikely hero--a quest not only of adventure and excitement, but also for self-knowledge. "I don't think I have any kinsmen," Taran answers, upon meeting Lord Gwydion. "I don't know who my parents were. Dallben has never told me. I suppose...I don't even know who I am." "In a way," answers Gwydion, "that is something we all discover for ourselves" (Alexander 30-31).

Taran is, in a way, the classic quest hero--a youth of humble birth, who overcomes great difficulties, saves the princess, faces his own faults and weaknesses and saves the kingdom. Alexander, however, makes him much more human as he struggles to accept that even the poor, pathetically wicked Gurgi has some good in him, that the princess Eilonwy is much, much more than a "scatterbrained girl," and that all people have their own nobility which emanates from within--a nobility that means far more than titles conferred from without.



It is the classic message—though the transition is difficult and the way beset with peril, with faith and courage and a will to learn and change, maturity can be attained. The emphasis is less Jungian, though--the dark force is not the devouring maternal, but the desire for title and power without hard-work, title without substance. Eilonwy is not merely the helpless anima, waiting for her prince to free her. Instead she is a full-blown character who takes an active part in the quest. The Castle of Llyr is part of Taran's quest, but it is also Eilonwy's story. She too must come to terms with her own nature and find within herself the strength to break free of the evil spell cast upon her-- to deny, within herself, the temptation of power and pride, and in doing so achieve true maturity. Eilonwy too makes the hero's quest , "returning transfigured to teach the lessons of life renewed" (Campbell qtd. Powers 150).

The old mythic form still rings true, but the emphasis is changed. The focus is on the duality of human nature--the capacity within all of us to act for good or for evil, the importance of choosing the fellowship and the common good, over the hollow glory of self-aggrandizement, the greater good over solitary victory.

#### Susan Cooper

One of the earliest writers to gain note in the genre of fantasy for young adults was Susan Cooper, with her The Dark is Rising Sequence. The first book was published in 1965. The sequence is made up of five books--Over Sea, Under Stone, The Dark is Rising, Greenwitch, The Grey King and Silver on the Tree. The Dark is Rising is a Newbery Honor book and The Grey King won the Newbery Medal. These books are

loosely based on Arthurian legend and Celtic myth, with five children working together to overcome dark forces once again threatening England. In Over Sea, Under Stone, three ordinary children Simon, Jane and Barney Drew find the Holy Grail—keeping it from the hands of “the dark.” In doing so, they are aided by Great-Uncle Merryman Lyon, later in the series revealed to be an “Old One,” the immortal Merlin.

The second book in the sequence, introduces Will. Will is the seventh son of a seventh son--his birthday the Winter solstice. With his eleventh birthday, Will finds his world transformed, himself revealed as no ordinary child, but one of “the old ones” reborn. He is a youth of humble birth, growing up in a large and boisterous family. Now he finds the fate of the world seems to rest on his young, thin shoulders. He is confused and lost and feels unequal to the task. He must find the six Signs-- the signs of Fire and Water, of Iron and Bronze, of Wood and Stone--and return them to the “old ones,” so they may be linked. In doing so he has recreated the second of the Four Things of Power. The first was the grail, won in Over Sea and Under Stone. With the recovery of the Signs, the power of the “old ones” grows forcing “the dark” into at least a temporary retreat. Again aided by Merryman/Merlin he continues the fight against evil.

With book three, Greenwitch the action again returns to the Drew siblings and introduces them to Will Stanton; but this time the focus is on Jane. The Grail has been stolen from the museum to which the children entrusted it in Over Sea, Under Stone. Great-Uncle Merryman summons the children to Cornwall to help recover the stolen piece. They are in time for the festival of the Greenwitch, a ritual from the Celtic past.

The making of the Greenwitch...is an old spring rite still celebrated here[Trewissick, Cornwall], for greeting summer and charming a good harvest of crops and fish...No visitors are normally allowed near. And of the locals, only women are allowed to be present (Cooper 19).

The Greenwitch is the feminine life force; the Goddess. It awakens in Barney Drew his artistic talent, part of the anima. Woven of leaves and branches, Jane Drew recognizes that “this silent image somehow held within it more power than she had ever sensed before in any creature or thing” (Cooper 29). Jane Drew, communicates with this primordial force and together with Will and Merryman and “The White Lady,” helps to recover the Grail. Written in 1974, this book explores the female side of the myth; Demeter, the Earth Mother, the Greenwitch. Without feminine help, the Grail, one of the Four Things of Power, would be lost to “the Dark.”

The Grey King returns the focus to Will Stanton. This time the setting is Wales and a new character is introduced—Bran. The format is again Arthurian legend, with a touch of Celtic myth. Bran means the raven and refers to a Celtic hero of the Mabinogion. In legend Bran was a Celtic hero, who led an army to fight in England. Fatally wounded with a poisoned arrow, Bran ordered his men to cut off his head and bury it on White Mount, facing towards France. It is here later that the Tower of London was built. From here Bran protected England from foreign invasion till King Arthur, in his pride, had the head dug up from its hallowed resting place for Arthur will have the kingdom saved only by himself (Fife 126). In this book and the final book of the sequence, Silver on the Tree, Will joins forces with Bran, a boy whose mother died with his birth, and the Drew children to recover the sword of crystal and the harp of gold to finally defeat “the Dark.”

With a skillful blending of the Morte d'Arthure and the Mabinogion, Susan Cooper again lets young people experience the quest of Will and Bran for the adult maturity to fend off the encroachment of "the Dark." In their quest, the boys are aided not only by Merlin/Merryman, but also by Bran's father—King Arthur. Growing up as an orphaned child, Bran finally finds the father he has always yearned for.

While male protagonists dominate the action, Cooper does not deny the feminine force or its importance. "The White Lady" and Jane Drew play important, vital roles in bringing about the eventual defeat of "the Dark," as does that primordial force of nature—the Greenwitch.

#### Anne McCaffrey

Next, chronologically, comes McCaffrey, with "Weyr Search" published in 1967 (later expanded into Dragonflight in 1968). In Dragonflight you have a clear-cut, strong female protagonist in the role of quest hero. Lessa's entire family was slaughtered when Lord Fax subjugated Ruatha Hold through conspiracy and betrayal. Since the fall of the hold, Lessa has concealed her identity as rightful heir to the hold by disguising herself as a kitchen drudge. In this world, where some gifted humans can communicate telepathically with dragons, Lessa's only friend and protector is the Hold's watchweyr, an old, powerless dragon who serves the function of watchdog. On search for candidates to bond with the queen dragon egg, which is about to hatch, F'lar discovers Lessa and recognizing some of her power returns with her to the Benden Weyr. There she bonds with the newly hatched queen dragon and becomes the Weyrwoman of Benden.

Dragons and their riders are the saviors of the planet, for when the red star (a planet orbiting the sun in an erratic pattern) comes too close to Pern, Thread can make its way from the red star to Pern, burrow into the soil and destroy almost all life on the planet if left unchecked. Its only predators are the dragons who, bonding with the humans, have been trained to fight the Thread. It has been 400 cycles, though, since Thread have fallen and the stories of its dangers are no longer believed. Lessa must use all her special powers to save the planet from destruction.

This is the classic hero's tale, but with a twist. A youth, seemingly of humble origin, finds that she has special powers. This time aided by her mate F'lar, rather than the wise old man, our hero must face her own strengths and weaknesses and overcome many obstacles to finally defeat the evil threatening her planet--Thread. In doing so, Lessa must come to terms with her own sexuality and come to love F'lar, getting past his gruff exterior to the man who loves and admires her. In the process she helps him to become the leader he is destined to be.

McCaffrey is Irish and a lover of the poetry of Yeats. Many of the words she used in her novels come from Yeats' poetry, beginning with the name of the planet--Pern. She sees Pern as a planet in its time of Renaissance, as in Yeats' "The Second Coming." Lessa can be compared to Leda in Yeats' "Leda and the Swan." Like Leda she too is taken up by something with "great wings," though it is a dragon, not a swan (Brizzi 35). The swan was, of course Zeus. In his Masks of God series Campbell suggests that such rapes are representations of Indo-European conquests of goddess revering Bronze age cultures,

with their pantheon of male gods usurping the power of the goddesses of the peoples they conquered (rpt. Pratt 8). In Dragonflight, however, Lessa is not the conquered victim, but shares a mutually beneficial relationship with her dragon.

Pern is a world at the beginning of a time of upheaval. Women and men are not equal, but with change comes more equality and opportunity for women (Brizzi 45). Many of McCaffrey's novels focus on a young woman breaking down the old structures and charting a new course for herself. Remembering that Friedan's The Feminine Mystique was not published until 1963, McCaffrey does a nice job of exploring the possibilities of true equality between the sexes. Her stories encompass the traditional form of the hero myth, but also give young women new forms of the myth to buttress their ongoing struggle with the insidious wearing down of sexism.

#### Ursula Le Guin

Published in 1968 is A Wizard of Earthsea, first in Le Guin's Earthsea Series, Wizard features Ged as its protagonist--a young man of humble birth who discovers in himself special powers. Misusing his power for pride, Ged unleashes a being of the shadow. He must confront this shadow and recognize it as a part of himself, before he can defeat it. Writing of Jung and the Winnebago myth encompassed in the Hare cycle, Henderson states:

The ego, nevertheless, is in conflict with the shadow, in what Dr. Jung once called "the battle for deliverance." In the struggle of primitive man to achieve consciousness, the conflict is expressed by the contest between the archetypal hero and the cosmic doers of evil, personified by dragons and other monsters. In the developing consciousness of the individual the hero figure is the symbolic means by which the emerging ego overcomes the inertia of the unconscious mind, and liberates the mature man from a

regressive longing to return to the blissful state of infancy in a world dominated by his mother (120).

In 1971, came The Tombs of Atuan a Newbery Honor book. It features a 15 year old, female protagonist--Tenar. Tenar is of humble birth, but when still a very young child, she is identified as the priestess reborn and wrested from her parents to serve as high priestess to the "Nameless Ones." Tenar, like the classic hero, must face her own weaknesses and doubts; aided by the Wise Old Man (Ged of A Wizard). She must defeat the priestess of the GodKing, destroying the temple of the "Nameless Ones." Rather than a princess, she redeems for Earthsea the Lost Rune, which will bring peace to the world. The next two books in the series, The Farthest Shore and Tehanu, delve greatly into Le Guin's Taoist philosophy and stray from the classic, heroic quest format. While The Farthest Shore does have a young prince as its protagonist, much of the focus is on Ged and his mission to restore the balance of the world by defeating a wizard who has denied death and thus destroyed the balance of Earthsea.

Tehanu has a forty-something, female protagonist--Tenar in her middle-age, who must come to terms with herself and with Ged, now shorn of his magic powers. She must also protect her maimed ward, the child Therru who was raped and left to die in a fire. This is the least mythic of all the books in the series. It has less to do with the passage of the adolescent to adulthood and more to do with the acceptance of the choices we have made as one approaches middle age. It is not clear if this book should really be considered a young adult novel; but, it is the last in the Earthsea series.

Why does Le Guin focus on male protagonists in so many of her novels?

In an article written in 1990 Le Guin was asked just this question. She responded: "The first three books are very much about a man's world, even when seen through a woman's eyes. Neither I nor our literature was ready for a female point of view in the '70's. But we now know the male viewpoint is partial--it's not *the* viewpoint" (McQuade 131).

As she matured, Le Guin became comfortable with speaking from the female point-of-view. Speaking of her final novel in the Earthsea series, Le Guin says:

...in Tehanu the reader follows a tale of the adult Arha [Tenar] and Sparrowhawk [Ged], who join forces to unite a domain torn, much like the "real" world by "human perversion and ill-will." Tehanu [the adult Tenar] isn't casting spells--she's looking for a way to be. She's done the things one does in life and wonders, "Is that all?" Power is the central theme of the novel (McQuade 131)

Le Guin has read Jung and has used his teachings to explain the power of fantasy. It is interesting to note, however, that she did not read Jung until after she had published the Earthsea trilogy (Cummins 29). With her focus on the need for balance as the core of most of this series, Le Guin brings to western, fantasy literature the Taoist philosophy of the east. Her maturing Tenar takes the hero quest beyond the Tombs of Atuan and on to self-reflective, fully adult maturity.

#### Marion Zimmer Bradley

The Mists of Avalon is Bradley's most critically acclaimed book and the most mythic. It is a retelling of the Arthurian legend, but from the point of view of Morgaine or Morgan Le Fay. Bradley sees the conflict of Arthur and Morgaine as a clash of cultures--Christian vs. the Druid, Father-God vs. the Earth Mother (Arbur 98). Here we have a powerful, female protagonist telling the woman's side of the myth:



## MORGAINE SPEAKS [sic]...

In my time I have been called many things: sister, lover, priestess, wise-woman, queen. Now in truth I have come to be wise-woman, and a time may come when these things may need to be known. But in sober truth, I think it is the Christians who will tell the last tale. For ever the world of Fairy drifts further from the world in which the Christ holds sway. I have no quarrel with the Christ, only with his priests, who call the Great Goddess a demon and deny that she ever held power in this world. At best, they say that her power was of Satan. Or else they clothe her in the blue robe of the Lady of Nazareth—who indeed had power in her way, too—and say that she was ever virgin. But what can a virgin know of the sorrows and travail of mankind (Bradley ix)?

Morgaine is a child of Avalon. Born granddaughter to the High Priestess of that magic isle, she has been trained in the worship of the Great Mother. Her mother Igraine has no calling to be a priestess though and is married to Duke Gorlis of Cornwall in a political union—to buttress the power of Avalon in an increasingly Christian world. Later these same political interests call for Igraine's marriage to Uther Pendragon and the resulting birth of Morgaine's half brother, Arthur.

In the first part of the book, we see Morgaine as the Koré, the Goddess in her virgin form. Later, as a virgin priestess, she mates with the King Stag in the fertility ritual of the Great Marriage. Unbeknownst to either partner, the King Stag is Morgaine's half-brother Arthur and out of this union comes Arthur's only off-spring, Mordred. Morgaine's role as the Great Mother is not played out toward her son, Mordred, however (he is fostered to her sister Morguage), but towards King Arthur for whom she has always been as much mother as sister.

In the end it is Morgaine in the role of the Crone, who carries the mortally wounded King Arthur back to Avalon, even as the island fades from contact with the outside world. Of course, in the Goddess cycle, from death comes rebirth--the once and future king, who will arise when Britain is at her greatest need.

The Mists of Avalon deals with the Goddess cycle from a feminist viewpoint. Bradley's theme--there is value in both the maternal and paternal manifestations of God and when we ignore and devalue one, we do so at enormous expense to our own humanity.

#### Robin McKinley

The next author I shall consider is Robin McKinley. Two of her more noted novels are The Blue Sword, which was a 1983 Newbery Honor book, and The Hero and the Crown which won the Newbery Medal for 1986. Though written latter, The Hero and the Crown is a prequel to The Blue Sword.

Both books follow the classic format of the heroic quest, but with a very strong, self-aware female protagonist. In The Hero and the Crown, Aerin is the King's daughter, but she was born under a cloud. Her mother was a "witch-woman" from the North and some say it was enchantment which charmed the king into marrying her after the death of his first wife. Aerin's birth, while legitimate, does not entitle her to a place in the succession. And Aerin herself is a mess--tall and gangly, cursed with flame-colored hair, awkward and clumsy and more skilled in sword play than in dancing. Worst of all, she does not have The Gift, special psychic powers inherited by those of royal blood. Aerin is

15 and if she had The Gift, it would have begun to manifest itself by now. Her hated cousin Galanna (compact, beautiful, graceful) is quick to point out all Aerin's failings. But Aerin is not one to give in and accept the submissive role her society has for its women. If she cannot ride at her father's side to deal with the troubles in the North, at least she can help rid the country-side of dragon vermin which plague the farms. Finding comfort in the dusty old tomes in the royal library, Aerin comes across a text which indicates dragons were as legends describe them of old, not the petty beasts which now plague the country-side. It warns they will come again. In the back of the book, Aerin finds an ancient manuscript giving a recipe for a fire-proof ointment and she sets as her goal to rediscover this ointment, deciphering the archaic names of the herbs and plants, and to rid the area of dragons—a dirty, dangerous job.

Thus begins Aerin's voyage of self-discovery, for it happens that The Gift comes latest in those where it is strongest. The Black Dragon has healed and again menaces the earth and Aerin, aided by the mysterious Luthe, must find the Blue Sword, slay the dragon, and lead her people to victory against the armies of the North and restore to them the Hero's Crown.

Again, beneath an exciting story, the archetypal hero's quest, the child's successful passage to full adulthood. However, this quest is accomplished by a young woman; who goes on to successfully rule a kingdom. McKinley says about her writing:

My major literary preoccupation is with girls who do things I loved—and still love--the old-fashioned British Empire adventure novels by writers like P. C. Wren and A. W. W. Mason and H. Rider Haggard and especially Rudyard Kipling. But in their stories the boys go off and have adventures

while the girls stay home and wring their hands. Thus, I write stories about girls who go off and have adventures too (qtd. Holtze 212-13).

### George Lucas

In the past decade, movies dealing with the fantastic has become a more common, with the success of Star Wars leading the way. Star Wars, written and directed by George Lucas, was a phenomenal success when it was released in 1977 (Pollock 159). It was nominated for ten Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Direction and Best Screenplay. The movie garnered five Oscars, though not in the major categories (Pollock 187-88). Almost twenty years later, the Star Wars Trilogy is still popular, with a recently reissued package of video cassettes, a plethora of Star Wars action figures, and numerous video and computer games continuing to sell well. Star Wars is popular with teens who were not even born when the movie was first released. New books adding to the Star Wars saga are published regularly. What is the secret to its continuing success?

When George Lucas was about to graduate from high school, he was involved in a near-fatal automobile accident. During his long recovery, Lucas read avidly and discovered the writings of Joseph Campbell on the importance of myths to all times and cultures (Champlin 41). "From early folklore writings from many cultures, Lucas devoured the great themes: epic struggles between good and evil, heroes and villains, magical princes and ogres, heroines and evil princesses, the transmission from fathers to sons of the powers of both good and evil" (Champlin 41). Lucas felt "there was no modern mythology to give kids a sense of values, to give them a strong mythological fantasy life. Westerns were the last of that genre for Americans. Nothing was being done

for young people that had real psychological underpinnings and was aimed at intelligent beings" (qtd. Champlin 42). "I suppose it's [Star Wars] a space fantasy," Lucas said.

"But we can't explain anything. We take all the hardware for granted. The story is really an action adventure, a fantasy hero's journey" (qtd. Champlain 45).

The Star Wars trilogy is indeed the fantasy hero's journey--the quest myth. The young hero, Luke Skywalker, is a youth of seemingly humble birth. Aided by the wise old man in the form of Obi-Wan Kenobi and later Yoda, Luke must face his own weaknesses and shortcomings to become a Jedi knight. He saves the princess, restores power to the rebels and even finds and redeems his own father. Through the course of the film, Luke Skywalker grows from callow youth to competent adult, even though faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Perhaps this is the secret of Star War's enduring success--it is the mythic retelling the adolescent's quest for adulthood and maturity.

The princess of the story is not that of tales of old, however. Princess Leia is no shrinking violet waiting helplessly for her prince to rescue her. Rather, she is a strong-willed, independent leader. As handy with a laser gun as either Hans Solo or Luke Skywalker, she is a dynamic individual, meeting each challenge head on.

Lucas did not limit his quests to boys alone. In his 1986 movie Labyrinth, the protagonist is a teenage girl whose baby brother is kidnapped by the King of the Goblins. Like the classic quest hero, Sarah faces a quest through a confusing and dangerous labyrinth. She must face her own fears and failings to confront the Goblin King and find within herself the strength to regain possession of the child.

In the film Willow the hero's quest is undertaken by one of the little people or Nelwyns. The infant princess Elora Danan is found by a young Nelwyn farmer named Willow who is advised to return the baby to her own people by the wise man of his tribe. Willow must overcome his own weaknesses and failings and joining up with a human, Madmartigan, save the baby princess. Both Willow and Madmartigan, though adults throughout the film, still have to gain maturity and destroy the consuming feminine in the form of the evil Queen Bavmorda.

Again, females are portrayed as vital and capable in the characters of Queen Bavmorda, the Sorceress Raziel and the Princess General Sorsha. Sorsha also makes the hero's quest, defying her mother's evil influence, she leaves command of the queen's armies to join forces with Willow and Madmartigan. In the end it is the princess Elora Danan whose restoration to her rightful throne is seen as the redemption of her people, with Madmartigan and Sorsha to rule as joint regents till she attains her maturity.

George Lucas acknowledged his indebtedness to Joseph Campbell for the mythic themes reflected in so many of his movies. Joseph Campbell was likewise an admirer of the films of George Lucas. It is interesting to note that much of the PBS special, The Power of Myth was recorded at Lucas' Skywalker ranch (Campbell and Moyer xi).

## CHAPTER 4

### Conclusion

#### The Hero's Quest

The hero's quest survives in modern literature and cinema for young adults. We see the basic format repeated again and again in fantasy works ranging from The Lord of the Rings to Star Wars. The myth remains the same because the problem remains the same--how to successfully make the difficult transition from child to adult. It is a problem of as great an importance to the youth of today as those of yesteryear. It is indeed perhaps of even greater importance for the modern breakdown of family, community and church have left a generation with few signposts and little help to guide them on this difficult journey.

#### The Changing Role of Females

There has been a shift in intonation in retellings of the quest myth. The hero's quest is seen as the girl's quest as well as the boy's. While quest myths and folk tales featuring female protagonists have always existed ("Cupid and Psyche," "East of the Sun, West of the Moon, etc.) they have been a rare exception. Today in books and movies like The Tomb of Atuan, Dragonflight, The Hero and the Crown and Labyrinth, we see strong female protagonists pursuing their own quests. The female is no longer the passive anima waiting to be rescued by the dashing young prince. Instead, it is more often the female who is the protagonist of the story, overcoming her own weaknesses and failings till she is

at last ready to meet the dragon in battle and bring home his head to display in the treasure hall (McKinley 207).

The mythic image of the Great Goddess is also of increasing importance. She is seen more in adolescent fantasy literature as the Koré, for the Koré is the form of the Goddess as a young, unmarried woman who retains her personal autonomy. We see her as Éowyn in The Return of the King, Eilonwy in the Lloyd's Prydain series, Jane in The Dark is Rising sequence, Lessa in Dragonflight, Tenar in the Earthsea series, Aerin in The Hero and the Crown and Princess Leia of Star Wars.

We see the Goddess as Demeter, the Great Mother in the weddings at the end of Return of the King, the Greenwich in the book of the same name and in Igraine in The Mists of Avalon. We see her as the Crone in Tehanu which presents the young Tenar of The Tombs of Atuan as the post-menopausal, middle-aged protagonist of the story—coming to terms with who she is and what she will never be, taking joy in her grown children and preparing to enjoy her declining days. She is also seen in the Sorceress Raziél, of the movie Willow, who sacrifices her life in battle with the evil Queen Bavmorda and in so doing bringing rebirth to the land.

All forms of the Triple Goddess are manifested in Morgaine of The Mists of Avalon. Retelling Arthurian legend from the point of view of the women involved, Bradley reiterates the totality of the Goddess Cycle--retelling Arthurian myth as a cycle of birth, growth, death and rebirth. The Goddess Cycle is in a way the story of every woman, a nice alternative to the masculine based tales of conquest and victory.



### Continuing Importance of Fantasy

In an increasingly fragmented world where church and family can no longer be counted on for the transmission of values or culture, the retelling of the myths of our culture through the mass media becomes increasingly important. One sees the old myths played out in He-Man and Wonder Woman, in Star Trek and Star Wars, in Excalibur and First Knight. A good story is hard to ignore.

The emphasis of the myth keeps changing, though. Faust faced the dilemma: shall I fulfill all my wants and desires, but at the cost of my soul? Today, technology promises to fulfill those same wants and desires. Is the price still the same--our humanity, our souls? This is a common theme in fantasy and science fiction. Is technology the demon or the answer? What is the proper role of woman? Can she both nurture and lead? Is there value in the female vision? What are the marks of true maturity? If you blow someone away for "dising" you or get your girlfriend pregnant are you now a man; or are you a man when you join in an equal union with a woman and work together to raise a family? Is there really a "Force" which is greater than ourselves?

Bill Moyer noted to Joseph Campbell that "after our youngest son had seen Star Wars for the twelfth or thirteenth time, I said, 'Why do you go so often?' He said, 'For the same reason you have been reading the Old Testament all of your life.' He was in the new world of myth" (18). As a culture, we are creating our own mythology now. In our books and movies the next generation is finding their answers. Is fantastic literature of value? Does the youth of today need their own myths as young people have done in the

past? The answer from both Jung and Campbell is a resounding yes. The popularity of fantastic literature and films show that even if unconsciously, these mythic themes strike a chord in today's youth just as it did in the past. It will be interesting to see how these mythic influences continue to be played out as we rush headlong into the future.

Perhaps John Steinbeck said it best in his novel The Winter of Our Discontent:

I guess we're all, or most of us, the wards of that nineteenth-century science which denied existence to anything it could not measure or explain. The things we couldn't explain went right on but surely not with our blessing. We did not see what we wouldn't explain, and meanwhile a great part of the world was abandoned to children, insane people, fools, and mystics, who were more interested in what is than why it is. So many old and lovely things are stored in the world's attic, because we don't want them around us and we don't dare throw them out (89).

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