

MOMENTS
OF
ESCAPE

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INTRODUCTION

Fantasy—a world to live in, believe in, or to loose yourself in. The great realm of fantasy and horror attract us with their beauty and grace, fascinate us with their magic, lure us with the promises of fabulous wealth, and unimaginable power, which is free for the taking, with no twinge of conscience.

Moments of Escape will do more than entertain and delight readers. It will offer mystical journeys through enchanted landscapes and capture readers in the horror of the night. Readers who desire harrowing excursion into the darkest corners of the imagination or simple blood-lust will be delighted. To these readers this thesis is dedicated, this journey into fantasy and horror.

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PREFACE

In the beginning, (I have to start this way you know) I started my thesis as one is supposed to, with a specific academic topic and endless hours of planned research looming before me. Time passed and I diligently researched my chosen topic; then as time came to begin the writing, I hesitated. I realized (belatedly) that I did not want to write another academic paper; I wanted to write in the genre that was my passion, that had drawn me into writing in the first place. So I put off the writing until I knew I could not finish my thesis and then I officially gave up. At that point, I decided since I was not working on my thesis I might as well make a collection of my own fantasy and horror work just for me—and I did.

In the end, Valerie Gager saved the mess I had made out of my thesis project. I told her about what I really wanted to do and how I had managed to screw everything up, and miracle of all miracles—she managed to save the whole kit and caboodle and took the project farther than even I imagined it could go. Thanks Dr. Gager.

Again, I was back to working on the thesis, but this time I was doing the required part—the writing. As far as the plan for this thesis, it was non-existent. I really had no sense of direction except that I was writing in my beloved genre. I guess I wanted to experiment with as many different types of writing as possible, so I have poems, vignettes, short fiction pieces, a fairy tale, and even an academic piece (I had to do something in that field, but the good news is that the piece centers on fantasy).

Before I go any further, I believe it is important to state what the realm of fantasy and horror consist of for me, so that we are at least all in the same frame of mind as we approach the material ahead of us. Fantasy, to me, is the free play of the creative imagination, it creates unrealistic or improbable mental images in response to a psychological need that people feel for the unknown. Horror differs only slightly for me. While my fantasy creates unrealistic or improbable mental images, my horror engages readers in a twisted reality, or fiction that is only one step away from reality but still believable (if all goes as planned it does).

I bounce back and forth between the two genres because both capture my attention and feed my obsession for creating another world, another place—a new story. What genre I write in depends simply on what I am in the mood for writing but there is one term which embraces all of my work here—Escape Fiction. In my fantasy, people escape from this world into another, they escape from who they are and become other people or things. In my horror, people escape into their mind, they feel the adrenaline rush of fear. Humanity craves the rush, it craves mystery. I think that people read different genres to break away from reality, as if they need to escape their everyday existence—to engage in a new event or be apart of a new story. If I were to place my escape fiction and my poetry in the world's different categories, I would say that they are rooted in the fertile soil of myth, magic, and dream—the same as other writers.

Marion Zimmer Bradley, Mary Higgins Clark, Dean R. Koontz, Anne Rice, and Stephen King stand as my top models as creators of stories born in myth and dream. King and Koontz both develop reality with one component twisted and, no matter how bizarre that one component is, readers will immerse themselves in the story—believing the tale

developing before them. I want to do the same with my writing, I want to wash my readers out to sea in my creative waters.

Right now I have only my brief moments and poems in the field of horror. I look at “Doorknob”, “Blood”, and “Fear” as stepping stones, a beginning in a realm which consumes my interest. Even more than that, these stories were created because of my great love for catching one moment, one aspect of life in the most descriptive way possible. My love of description and the building of a moment is the reason I read Clark. She is a master, for she takes you to the edge—time and time again; in her writing the details count.

Bradley definitely was the inspiration behind “Promise”. As I was doing research on her for “Fantasy: A Females Place”, I came across Bradley’s fantasy magazine and in her writers guidelines, she tells her writers about the importance of strong female character roles. After that I really looked at the roles of females in fiction. I have to admit, *The Mists of Avalon* is the best piece of fiction for looking at strong female character roles. “Promise” was my attempt at a piece that empowers women, but my thesis as a whole does not feature strong women simply because it would be inappropriate to the nature of the other stories. I think that featuring women in strong character roles is harder because literature gravitates toward strong men and often it is hard to break the mold and go against the grain of what you are taught and most often read.

Gender roles still stands as an issue in writing today. Recently, I read King’s *The Green Mile* series. As I read this series, I did take note of the roles females played in his book—housewives, mothers, and molested children—no outstanding roles to my way of thinking. But putting gender wars aside for the moment, it would hardly be right not to admit that

I could not put down the book because it intrigued me so.

“Masterpiece” was born out of my great passion to understand the genius inside of writers. That and I was reading and re-reading two of Shakespeare’s plays a week for a full year. I think my obsessive nature took over in this case.

This may sound odd, (I have decided to say it anyway since you are still along for the ride), but there is always two words that bring me back to writing. *Carpe Diem*. Seize the day, seize the fish, (No, I mean the cookies), seize the **thesis requirements**, most importantly seize the story—the thread of a new existence. That’s what life is all about—seizing something, seizing anything—anything within arms reach anyway. The question in your mind right now is: ‘What am I talking about?’ Well, let me get to the point. A little theory that I call, *The Rhythm of Life*. There is rhythm in every aspect of life. Rhythm is what moves us forward and keeps us going. It is our heartbeat, our breath, and the passion that moves us inside.

Everything moves in rhythms. Mother nature desires it that way, almost demands it that way. Look at every part of nature and you will find a continuous rhythm in it, from fauna to flora. Many different rhythms exist in the lives of humans; all are needed for survival. We have rhythm in our daily lives, our routines, and in our stories.

Life is about stories, friends meet to share lunch and they speak of. . . Guess what happened to me? Or Did you hear about? That is the rhythm. I only try to seize the day by capturing the rhythm (the beginning, the building, the climax, and the ending) and making my stories engaging and unforgettable. I hope.

WOLF

Throughout

the darkness,

I hear a cry,

wild and free,

full of

relief and triumph.

My thoughts turn to dust,

fear ravages my soul,

For I know that cry;

my heart

abhors it.

The shock and terror strike me solid,

bringing waves of nausea

which sends me to my knees.

It is corrupt, that sound,

showering all in its

path with evil.

Many times I have heard this tone

cracking along the

green canopy,

each tremendous

tone vibrating the leaves which

shake

and fall in repulsion to the impure sound.

For the howl is one of

insatiable hunger

now

being satisfied.

DEMON'S DREAD

The piercing rays of
dawn
drive them down
into
the darkness of
their caves.

Fear of the
warming earth
stops their
wandering ways.

Freedom to walk the sunlit land
denied to them because
of their nature.
A pale moon shines
in the star-filled night sky
as their sun.

Only the scent of Humans
draws them from their
sacred earth each night.
The Human blood
pumping—
aggravates their avidity
to feed.

Humans are hunted for food,
for pleasure.
Koliolds distrust the ones
who feel the warm beams of light
on their fair skin.

Above ground
all is
forbidden.

PALE MOON

My senses tell me something nears
my personal space,
yet I feel nothing close—no warmth emanates from
the air close around me.

I look back over my shoulder and see a face.
White light radiates from the chalky flesh.
Questioning eyes glitter in the moonlight,
studying me.

My heart beats fast,
I feel the anticipation coming to the surface
of my soul caught by his gaze.
I hold my hand up in the air between us,
either in offering or worship
I know not which.

Slowly he brings his own hand up to
touch my vulnerable flesh
and as our hands make contact
his icy-cold, inhuman hand
sends shivers down my body.

Looking into my eyes—or into my bare essence,
he brings his fingers down quickly
and crushes my hand,
letting the pain flow slowly into my body.
He receives pleasure from the ripples of pain
coursing through my nerves.

My confusion, my pain, my loss
bring him back to whom he had once been
and as the pain in my body finally overcomes
my steel composure—
exploding me into pieces never
recovered, he remembers
what he once was.

MANGLER

Fear erupts when power
brings the
monster machine to life.

Sweat trickles down
the taunt cords of back muscles
as the steam from
the hot laundry rises.

One surge of unstoppable power—
silken, white flesh
destroyed.

Adrenaline coursing
through the workers' veins
as attempts to save the
mangled one are made.

Bones crack as
the clamp snaps shut
and blood drips from
the turning wheels—
greasing the gears
in sanguine fluid.

malfunction

BARREN

I hear the shrill cry
as it sounds in the
far off distance.
I know what that sound means
but I ceased caring,
it means nothing to me.

Does anything now?
I can not be sure.

The landscape is barren,
rocks litter the ground and my bare
bloody feet stumble upon them.

The punctures caused from my stumbling
over the crushed rocks are
no longer discernible to me.

There is no feeling,
my feet have long since given up upon
sending any sensation to my nervous system,
as if my feet know I am incapable of feeling.

My soul is as shriveled as the dead grass
that lays upon the dry, dusty dirt.
Just as the moisture is missing from the ground,
so is feeling removed from my soul.
That is what finally happens in the end.

Fear no longer dances inside me;
happiness no longer invades my days or
sadness my long, lonely nights.

I realize I can only go so far.

PEGASUS

Born from the blood of Medusa
when Perseus cut off her head.
You, the only winged horse,
grew wild—untamable.

But Athena with a golden bridle
tamed your savage streak.
She gave the secret weapon to Bellerophon
so that he could subdue you and
kill the mighty Chimera.

In the stables of Zeus do you
make your home, and when the all-powerful
Zeus wishes to use his thunderbolt, it is you—
O Illustrious Pegasus, who bring the thunder and
lightning to him.

Your hooves made the fountain Hippocrene spring
from the Mountain Helicon which the God Poseidon
had dried upon the land.

Now immortalized forever—
Zeus made you into a northern constellation
near the vernal equinoctial point—
an everlasting tribute.

FEAR

A cold, still death
hangs heavily on your breast.
The unbearable weight shifts around in your body.
Causing unrest, causing pain
A sweat breaking over your brow

Creeping feet discernable if you listen quietly,
the breathing is stifled,
and the slow drag of the moving feet
—identifiable in the silent night.

The brand new steel holds its edge well and
glitters by the light of the full moon.
Reflections of light catch
the edge and blind staring eyes.

Lungs expanded with the quick drawn-in
breath
Reality or imagination?

FAIRY LOVE

The pain recedes into the background of his mind.

He wants only to rest, to feel nothing,
for death hovers close now.

Unconsciousness reaches out to grasp him,
clutch him, and secure him in its folds.

Gray, misty swirls dance in his head
pulling him deeper and deeper into
the blackness of oblivion.

He wants the waters of Lethe to carry him forward

because he has nothing to live for—
hope for in this life.

His fairy disappeared, he
felt the emptiness she left behind.

An incredible void created in his heart,
his love—his life—his temptress
gone.

Now finally, his nymph offered him
the chance to be with her
he had only to release his spirit from
the bodily constraints holding him back from her.

She'd called to him, she wanted him with her—
he had to go, to follow her wherever she lead him.

The people misunderstood,
she did not want his death—
she wanted only to be with him.
His fairy loves and needs him—
she came not to destroy, to kill
as others believe.

The light-headed feeling ended
now he feels an odd sensation of floating,
drifting through time and space
as if the great winds of the north are bearing down to take him
to a far away distance place
where only peace within oneself reigned.
Where he might once again
be with his fairy.

FOLLOWING THE BANNER

We both chase new signets
carried by the young, oblivious marching children
The same one Dante's people follow
outside the gates of Hell.

Masses follow different standards
for personal reasons.
A quest for honor—
to reap vengeance—
only for the money—

Our pious words binds us to the destruction.
Battles rage over land and sea
to satisfy a hastily spoken word.

Once we stood together,
pawns in the same game. Now we
stand on opposite sides of the board
trying to outwit the opponent we know so well.

What separates us?
an emblem, a mark, a symbol—

BLOOD

You can feel it,
smell it,
but you can not see it.

It is close,
the raw stench of it
fills your nostrils.

The darkness envelops your soul;
you don't know where to turn,
which direction to choose,
until your head begins to reel.

Standing upon the open floor,
your eyes lose focus;
your thoughts begin to whirl.

You search for a wall to steady
yourself against,

but as you reach out to control
the movements of your body,

you feel the sticky wetness on
the wall.

It is running down the wall,

like syrup dripping off

the trunk of a tree,

thick.

VIGNETTES

DOORKNOB

Defenseless and bare, you lie in the cooling water, wondering if in your haste you locked the front door. Anxiety mounts with every creak, whisper, and unfounded thought until you believe the outer door is being breached by something or someone. The charged energy that hangs in the misty air surrounding you keeps you alert, anxious that someone prowls behind the closed door, only feet away from your frail body. You hear one creak in the floor board and your muscles tighten and your entire body rises slowly above the water.

You turn your head to watch the door handle, making sure it does not turn to admit an unwelcome guest. Then your tender pulse quickens, and the white flesh of your chest rises and falls more rapidly. You no longer want to lie there, no longer want to read the book that began to shake in your hands because you swore you heard, *really heard*, the floor yielding to the weight of some unknown, unwanted body, but you could not move. Your pale wrinkled limbs feels as if an unbearable weight hangs from them and you cannot even raise your arms from the water.

Your stomach knots with dread because the doorknob has begun to turn. All the water in the tub cannot quench the sudden dryness of your mouth, as you watch the keyhole move from a vertical position to a horizontal one. As the doorknob reels back to its original position, you know that the lock—old and rusting—will not stop the intruder for long. You know only seconds remain, but still your naked body lies motionless in the cooling water—paralyzed with fear. The intruder pushes the pin

into the lock and the dooming click of release comes, enabling the traitorous knob full axis.

As the door swings slowly open, your body finally comes to life sloshing water over the side of the tub as his hands reach toward your mouth. Panic fills your chest threatening to explode your heart. Terror races its own course up your back and through your arms until only the tingling in your fingertips remains, your last sensation.

The odor of fear, raw and fresh wafts by the officers as they walk into the house. The rank stench of it permeates every bit of air, fabric, every corner of every room. They walk through the meticulous house, noting how all the nick-knacks stand in a specific place, how all of the lanterns on the mantle turn just a half of an inch to the right. They note how the bathroom looks, how the damp towels hang perfectly in place and how the tub gleams white against the forest green shag rug—no disturbance disrupts the room.

The officers find your body in the bedroom, a naked form lifeless against the bed. They stare at the body, surprised that no bruise marks your powdered, white flesh. What draws the officers closer is your eyes—the blue pools still sparkling as they stare straight forward.

You lie with your head cocked to one side, resting against the side of the bed. Your body sprawls out on the floor; one leg straight out, the other bowed inward, as though you are lounging on the floor with your back to the bed—your eyes watching the doorknob.

PRESSURE

Did you choose this night, or did this night choose you? It doesn't really matter. This one night will make or break your career, your life. The goal you set long ago, the hours you spent in practice – tonight will be the testing ground. A win or lose situation. No second chances, no failures allowed.

The crowd gathers, pressure starts to build in the air as more and more people cram into the gym. Major league recruiters are incognito in the crowd, watching your moves, your style, and the way you handle the pressure of the final game. The tenseness of the moment starts cramping muscles in your shoulders. Your dry mouth drives you to the water on the bench, and as you stand on the sidelines watching the others, perspiration runs in streams down your body. You begin to wonder if others can see the desperation you hold rigid in your body.

Time ticks slowly. Your moment of glory is approaching. You take the ball, shoot, and as the ball flies through the air, you know. Suddenly, it is gone, your one golden moment passes by you. Within that moment, your life, your aspirations vanish. The goal you sought eludes your grasp. You made the wrong decision in one, small, quick move. There is no second chance. It is over.

Your night, the one you dreamt of forever took you in when everything else had gone wrong, and as you pull the trigger, you end the pressure.

FANTASY STORIES

PROMISE

The Lady lay on the floor of the Centre breathing in short gasps, suffering through the most painful moment of her short life. Looking down upon her immobile body, I remember my promise to her. I made a vow to her that she would not die in my lifetime. It did not matter that I had been forced to make that vow. The correct choice had been made and I should have been the first to acknowledge it. I am a Giver, I was born with the aura of Scarlet around me enabling me to save life. With this power, I am required to make a promise to one person, a Lady of the Royal House.

I kneel down beside her body and take her small, yellow hand in mine; I can feel the power flowing out of her body. I know that I should not let her die, as much as I want to. Her life is worth more than mine would ever be on this planet, although I believe she has still to prove her worth. The Lady exists to protect all, while my kind only exists to protect the Lady. At times I forget my place, I have ruled too long without a Lady.

The Lady whispers to me, "Sèrèba, I know you don't approve of my methods. Remember I do what I do for the people, for our land. We have been working against each other all these years that we should have been working together. We could have done such good for the land, but that is no longer possible. Only one of us will survive this attack. I know you will make the right decision for our land. You always do." My eyes gaze at her rapidly fading color, her hand almost white in my hand. My

lips grow taunt with the battle raging within me.

I recall the years I had watched over the Lady I was promised to, knowing that my promise to her was my destiny and as well as my death. When she was six, she had been attacked by the underground movement. They tried to kill her because they knew the balance of power on this planet would shift when she reached her twentieth year. That year her power would be unequaled, surpassing even my own. We, the Garenettes, had waited years for a new Lady to be born, having lost the last one over five hundred years ago. Our last Lady, The Great Enalia, died in the power struggle against the Phelans. The council could not allow this Lady to die without regenerating the life-force in the land. Relina's power will make the ground fertile again, and take the desert sands away. She will replenish the life-force.

"Lady Relina, what are you doing?" I remember asking her when she was a child. I had come upon her unaware as she took the life-force away from an animal and into herself. The fading yellow force of the animal stays sharp in my mind still. I never told the council about that incident or the others that followed, for what she did was forbidden. Although, I came to realize that she did not kill the animals only took what was left of their dying life-force, as if she bonded with them in a way that I never understood.

"Sèrèba, I will do what I will. You don't understand me, or what I do."

Even at age six, she knew why she had been born. Although twenty years was nothing to the people of Garenette, who live thousands of years, the first twenty years of a Lady's life were crucial because of her fragile state. A Lady is born without defenses, she has no chance of

surviving any attack upon her life-force.

In a old, abandoned tunnel when the Lady Relina was only six, I lost 3,000 years off my life. I was no longer a Scarlet, I had become only a Crimson, the color of my life-force had faded for this murdering child. But my honor was still high among the Garenettes for my life had not yet been spent serving Our Lady, but the loss of so much of my power brought the feeling that my end was coming for all.

After six thousand years of being the only Scarlet in existence, I had to retire my title as leader among the Givers. I knew a council would better serve the people, they would not always have me.

Thirteen years had passed since the underground last attacked Lady Relina. I have worked hard and kept her safe from the underground. Now in her nineteenth year something had gone wrong. Lady Relina lay close to death and I needed to fulfill my promise. I must make a choice, between her and myself. Let the child rule or continue to live another thousand years in stalemate with the underground. There is no choice, I exist to serve the Lady—even if I do not understand her methods.

Her body glowed a soft, faint yellow color in the darkness of the room, while I was a strong Crimson color. I gripped my hand around hers and willed my life-force into her body. I could see her body gaining my strength just as I could feel my body losing mine. Through the darkness, I could see her body brightening to an orange color, but as that happened, my own body started to dim. My years had decreased by half; my life-force faded before my eyes.

As My Lady's body grew to a strong orange color, I knew that she was almost healed. Her hand gripped mine tighter and tighter, and I

knew that consciousness was coming to her. When she opened her eyes and saw me kneeling at her side, I knew she was going to live and my time had come, time to fill the promise to the extreme. It didn't really matter if I lived or died at this point, because I knew that the ordained one was going to live and the promise to her was fulfilled. My strength was draining fast and I was so tired that all I wanted to do was lie down and rest.

Red body-life color flooded the room. I knew it was her life that flooded the room and not mine. Her grasp was now very strong and I knew that freedom's doors opened for me. I never did regret that I was a promised one—only who I was promised to.

When the windows blew open, one red body glowed in the darkness.

MASTERPIECE

Stepping over the line of decaying corpses, Wil made his way over the uneven cobblestone steps to the familiar path. While the death disgusted and revolted others, Wil viewed it as another part of life--something to learn from, take from. It had released him into another world, a place in which he created an environment with words that would bring indescribable beauty.

When the proclamation banning all public gatherings during the Plague had been issued, Wil thought all his work, his livelihood, would be lost. But now he knew the Plague had befallen his time for a reason. New blood flowed through his veins; he felt a vigor that had been absent in the previous years. A light shone in his work--his scripts were better than ever before. He had always been a man possessed by perfection, but lately his work even excelled his own expectations. His words ignited on the paper like fire. The proclamation gave him time to learn about the spirit in his work and time to understand what he was writing about. It was a time he relied on his new friend. For Wil's new friend assured him that 1593 and 1594 would be the greatest of all years in his career.

Unnoticed by the few who traveled outside their homes, Wil quickly crossed the muddy streets until he turned into the one that drew him as water draws a man dying of thirst. Because of the proclamation, Wil could move about freely without the hindrance of those who knew him. People had become hermits in their own houses, fearing the death that came with the plague. He held no fear. The new alliance he had made

would see to his safety. His fame was imminent. He only now started to understand how it would arrive.

Reaching the window, which weathered long ago, Wil ever so slightly raised up on his toes to peer through the crack between the faded, yellow curtains. He eagerly searched the room for the couple he wanted to observe. Watching each time they arrived for their secret meetings taught him something about what people were willing to do for love. He had first noticed the couple's quickened steps in a time when everyone was afraid and walked slowly, hoping with held breath that death did not lurk behind the next corner. Their unusual behavior was what enticed Wil to follow the couple that fateful morning.

The rustle of her silken skirts as she moved quickly through the streets were shortly followed by the quick pace of a man's well-worn, black boots. Out of curiosity, Wil followed the pair who thought they covered their tracks so well. As he peered through the old window, Wil saw a woman of standing with a man she should never have met.

Their illicit meetings so intrigued him, he began stopping by every morning to see their passion ignite. He became a man of shadows. Where once Wil had stood in the light, he now observed through windows, viewing scenes never meant to be witnessed.

This new passion consumed him. Wil wrote with the desire to convey everything he was seeing. Taking on new dimensions, his plays finally expressed the emotions of humanity. He no longer used impossible, unfeeling images but took his time turning feelings into the language of poetry. With his sonnets underway and the start of three wonderful plays he could not stop himself from watching the couple. They were the inspiration behind his current masterpiece, instead of the quick

work he had done before. His demon friend insisted this was to be one of his best works. The demon was right about the couple. His offer had been too hard to refuse.

Wil now watched them as he had often done in past days. How they would hurry to their meeting place to be together for precious hours before rushing off to where they had to be. In time he came to know their names and families. They were of different classes. Their passion for one another, their sorrow of what could not be nourished Wil. He needed to feel as they felt, to be with them along their journey.

Straining to see through the small crack in the curtains, Wil nearly lost his balance and gave himself away. Luckily, the couple had not noticed the scuffling that was coming from beyond their window. They were only interested in each other.

Wil wished to hear their voices, listen to the love they shared. The couple spoke only in the hushed tones of lovers and never opened a window. He couldn't blame them, for they were hiding as he was hiding. Wil turned to leave before the lovers had finished; he couldn't risk being caught. He walked slowly, thinking of all he had seen. So wrapped up in one another, nothing seemed to break their connection to each other. Maybe tomorrow he would get to their hiding spot before them and open a window. Wil needed to know what they said to each other. He needed to hear their passion expressed in words. With their words he could convey the fullness of their love in his new play. He was using them, yes. True the demon had foretold his discovery of them and had told him how to use their desire, their desperation--for his work. As Wil recorded the couple's emotions for his piece, they would become nothing more than dried, empty husks with nothing left inside their bodies because

their emotion now belonged to him. Such was the price that the demon demanded. Wil got their emotions, while the demon waited for their death.

“Good morrow, lord. What bringest thou into the death filled streets at this hour?” a guard asked Wil.

“Is the day so young that a man cannot walk and collect his thoughts?” Wil returned brusquely. The guard had interrupted his train of thought, making him angry. Should not all the guards by now recognize him and not bother him? His standing should count for something.

The guard finally recognized him and hastily made his apology and moved on. Master Wil was not one to tarry with. It was best to leave him alone. He was one of the Queen’s loyal subjects. Also, Master Will was thought to have a touch of something--not the Fever, but something to do with the creative genius inside of him. Such creativity had to originate from foul means.

Back at his workroom, Wil was a madman, hurriedly trying to convey on paper all the emotion he had witnessed that morning. He worked to capture how each moment was precious and spent to its fullest, when another may not be forth coming. By nightfall, Wil felt he had completed the task he had set for himself. Yet he had not found an ending commensurate with the intensity of the rest. So he decided to keep watch until the ending came to him. He might still learn something from his star-crossed lovers.

Again in the morning, Wil stood on his toes to look into the small room the lovers would enter. He believed today would be the day. Wil had come early and opened the window a crack in hopes he would hear how they expressed their deepest emotions to each other. Waiting for

them was almost unbearable, so great was his need to finally hear them, to complete the play he was working on. His new demon friend had started pushing him to work faster and harder, as if time were running out.

The door cracked open and the young woman rushed in, checking her surroundings to make sure no one had been there during her absence. She sat waiting on the bed for her lover to come, as he was always a distance behind her.

He entered the small room more hurriedly, rushing over to be in her arms. As they held one another close, a rodent with needle-sharp teeth bit into Wil's shoe. He could not help falling from the peeping hole of the window and crying out. Wil was not afraid of the Black Death because of his friend's promise, but having this rat bite him did not bode well.

Fearful they had heard him, Wil darted down the way and hid from view behind a broken down door. The couple emerged from their haven only seconds later, fearful looks on their faces. Stealing a kiss, they parted, rushing back whence they came. The lady, in her haste, embarked upon the same path as Wil. Tripping on the uneven cobblestones, she fell hard. As she staggered to her feet, the rat's teeth sank into her delicate cloth slippers, the deadly fleas crawled onto the fibers. She cried as she stumbled on her way, not used to the events common people encountered everyday of their lives.

For seven days the sun passed over the lovers' haven, yet they still did not return. Wil had been there waiting for them, watching the entire time. Still angry at the rodent who had cost him the chance of hearing

them speak to each other, Wil paced back and forth over the cobblestones. He had to believe that the opportunity would come again. It had to. He needed an end to his masterpiece--the demon grew impatient.

As twilight closed upon the day, Wil was about to give up waiting and head for his workroom when he saw her. The woman was pale. Deathly pale. Her steps were not hurried as they had been before. They were slow, determined and tread heavily upon the ground. Her dress fell slack where it had once been tight.

When she entered the small room, Wil could see her sweating profusely. The Fever was upon her. Lying down on the bed, she waited. Wil wondered if her lover knew what had befallen her. For the first time Wil felt guilty for observing them. But he had to finish this play soon.

The dying woman finally spoke, "My Romere, journey fast to our love nest so that my final hours be with thee." Her body soon ceased to move and Wil felt the silence.

Wil kept his vigil knowing Romere would return, but it was hours too late before he finally arrived. The bright light in his eyes dulled as he pulled his lover into his arms. "I will lie with thee tonight. I must first make a sale whose present is death." He ran out of his small room that once was his haven. Now, it would be his tomb.

Not an hour later Romere was back with a vile in his hand. "Here's to my love, my Jewel!" He drank the drugs. "O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die," Romere whispered as he kissed his love for the last time, ending his life.

Wil left to finish his masterpiece with nothing more to learn in this place. The demon had been right, they were what he needed. He only wondered at the price paid for his work.

Wil shivered as the wind whipped around the Globe Theater. This play would be one of his best. He could feel it in his heart for it would be real. No one needed to know what he had done to create this great piece of work. His fame was on the way.

He stopped in the street and stood staring as if lost in thought.

Two peasants deep in conversation stood beside him. "The intentions of our great Queen, I doubt," quietly said a peasant on the street to the other.

"The fair creature needs to learn the aspects of a good Kingship," said the other as they quickly moved past Wil.

Wil thought to himself, *'I could do such a thing. I could teach Queen Elizabeth to know the aspects of a good Kingship. I would have to observe the Queen, then would I be able to show her the error of her ways in my next masterpiece. I only wonder what it will cost me this time.'*

FAIRY TALE

THE GIRL WHO WENT FORTH TO FIND LOVE

Once, there was a mother who had three daughters. The eldest was smart and dependable, the middle was talented and reliable, but the youngest was a dreamer and could never be trusted to do anything right because she was such a klutz. When people saw her they said: "There's a lady who would be better off falling in love and leaving her family in peace!"

When anything had to be done, it was the eldest who was forced to do it. If anything had to be made creatively, it was the middle sister who was forced to do it. Men loved the two older sister, all men needed to do was visit the farm once and then they just seemed to fall in love. Oddly enough it also happened that if anyone in town stood close to the youngest they would suddenly end up falling in love with someone soon afterwards. Sorrow filled the youngest when she noticed how everyone was always falling in love when they were around her. So the youngest sat in a corner and listened to the rest of them, hoping to understand why they were always falling in love and she never was. They are always saying: "I was going along with my everyday work and then I just fell in love with the next person who walked in the door."

'I haven't fallen in love,' she thought. 'That must be something I am too clumsy to do.'

Unknowingly the youngest correctly interpreted why she had not fallen in love. For the gods marked her as one that should fall in love while she was young. But wherever she went she always tripped, turned, or was so clumsy that Cupid never got a good shot in, and everyone around her would end up falling in love with the wrong people. Cupid's frustration over the situation felt unbearable to him.

Now it came to pass that her mother said to her one day: "Hearken to me, you, lady in the corner there, you are growing up and must soon learn a trade or make yourself a marriage in which you will not have to work. Look how your sisters work, but you do nothing worthwhile."

"Well, mother," she replied, "I am quite willing to learn something—indeed, if it could be managed without trouble I should like to learn how to fall in love. I have tried everything I can think of and yet I cannot manage to fall in love."

The elder sisters smiled when they heard that, and thought to themselves: "Good God, what a klutz she is. She will never be in love with anyone or anyone with her if she falls on all the men she meets or spills her drinks on them."

The mother sighed, and answered her: "You shall one day fall in love, but that might not come about for a long time for you. Like your sisters you must learn another trade to earn your bread."

Soon after this the sexton came to the house on a visit, and the mother bewailed her trouble, and told him how her youngest daughter was so klutzy that she broke everything and no one could possibly ever want to be around her. "Just think," she said, "when I asked her how she was to survive in the world all she wanted was to fall in love."

'clumsy girl to have ruined such a good opportunity to fall in love as that. I will give her another chance only since she is so beautiful.'

The next night she was again awakened to bake bread. This time the sexton had taken his last son and had him bathe and prepare himself in the best manner possible. The son shone like a vision. But the plan failed again, for Cupid and the sexton both.

The sexton with loud screams hastened her to her mother. "Your daughter has caused all of my sons to leave home, vowing never to return to me. Take this good-for-nothing girl out of our house. May we never set eyes on her again."

The mother was terrified, and ran thither and scolded the girl. "What wicked tricks are these you play on our benefactor, the sexton? The devil must have put them into your head."

"Mother," she replied, "do listen to me. I am quite innocent. I only threw pots and pans at thieves that were in the sexton's kitchen."

"Ahh," sighed the mother, "I have nothing but unhappiness with you. Go out of my sight. I will see you no more."

"Yes, mother, right willingly, wait only until it is day. Then will I go forth and find love. Then I will never have to find a trade because I will have love."

"Find what you will," spoke the mother, "it is all the same to me. Here are fifty talers for you. Take these and go into the wide world, and tell no one whence you came, and who is your mother, for I have reason to be ashamed of you."

"Yes, mother, it shall be as you will. If you desire nothing more than that, I can easily keep it in mind."

Therefore, when day dawned the girl put her fifty talers into her

pocket and went forth on her way and once began to mutter to herself:
“Ahh, could I but learn how to fall in love.”

A wagoner who was striding behind her heard this and asked:
“Who are you?”

“I am a klutzy girl,” answered the girl.

Then the wagoner asked, “Whence do you come?”

“I know not.”

“Who is your mother?” he asked.

“That I may not tell you.”

“What is it that you are always muttering between you teeth?”

“Ahh,” replied the youth, “I do so wish to fall in love, but no one can teach me how to do it and I can not find out on my own.”

“Enough of your foolish chatter,” said the wagoner. “Come, go with me, I shall see about a place for you.” The youth went with the wagoner, and in the evening they arrived at an inn where they wished to pass the night.

Then at the entrance of the parlor the girl again said quite loudly:
“If I could but fall in love! If I could but fall in love!”

The host who heard this, laughed and said: “If that is your desire, there ought to be a good opportunity for you here.”

“Ahh, be silent,” said the hostess, “so many prying ladies have already lost their lives, it would be a pity and a shame if such a beautiful young lady were to lose her life.”

But the lady said: “However difficult it may be, I will learn it. For this purpose indeed I journeyed forth.” She let the hostess have no rest, until the latter told her, that not far from thence stood a haunted castle where anyone could go to get a love potion, but she would have to do

three things for the witch that lived in the haunted castle. The witch had a handsome Prince captive in the castle and whoever was to drink the potion would fall in love with him as he would fall in love with her. Likewise in the castle lay great treasures, which were guarded by evil spirits, and these treasures would then be freed, and would make a poor couple very rich indeed.

Many young maidens had gone into the castle for the draught of love, but as yet none had come out again. So the next morning the young lady set out for the castle, not deterred by the words of the hostess.

On her way to the castle she tripped over a rock and while she was on the ground she picked it up and put it in her pocket so she would not be bothered with it on the way back. Going through a forest she again fell over a large stick. While she was on the ground she picked it up and put it in her pocket so she would not be bothered with it on the way back. Then as she was going through a meadow that led up to the castle she again tripped over a plant. While she was on the ground she picked it up and put it in her pocket so she would not be bothered with it on the way back.

When she reached the castle the witch came out and bid her to leave. The girl refused, "I will not leave for I have tried everything to fall in love and this is my last chance. I will be the one to try and get the potion which will make me fall in love." So the witch invited her into the castle. "To receive the potion you must do three things for me. But as it is late you will sleep here and tomorrow we will start."

The girl went in and as she was hungry headed straight for the kitchen. In her great rush she was not mindful of where she was step-

ping and slipped in some water that was on the floor; at this time the plant that had been in her pocket fell into the witch's cooking pot. The witch, angered at the girl for rushing into her kitchen, sent her to a cold room to sleep in and ate the entire pot of food without her.

The next morning when the witch had not come to find the girl, she went in search for her. At the top of the tower she found the witch very sick in bed. The witch called her over to her bed and in her haste to obey the old hag she missed her step and fell, sending the stone in her pocket flying out. Such was the speed of the falling girl, that the rock flew all the way to the bed of the witch and knocked her unconscious.

The girl, fearful of what happened to the witch, walked over to beside the bed. As she neared the bed she saw a large rat jump up onto the bed. Trying to make up for what had just happened she made to hit the rat with the stick she had in her pocket. She figured the witch might forgive her if she saved her life when she was unable to help herself.

Bringing the large stick over her head she crept close to the bed watching the rat the entire time. As she neared the bed she realized she should have looked down because she tripped over that rock again and fell, bringing the heavy weight down upon the head of the old witch and killing her instantly.

Seeing that the witch had died, the poor girl thought she had lost her chance at finding something that would allow her to fall in love. So she turned away from old hag's bed to walk out of the room and back to the inn. She did not notice the prince staring at her from the window of the old prison door. As she left the room, he tried the knob of this old door and found that his bonds had been broken at the time she killed the witch.

Cupid at this time had been waiting for her to go near the prison where the Prince was kept. His arrow was pointed in that direction so as to shoot her when she got close but she turned and left, catching him unaware. Cupid again had missed his chance.

Now the Prince had been watching this beautiful, brave girl from between his bars of imprisonment and wanted to get to know her better because she had risked so much for him. So hours later after he had found his way out of the castle and found a suitable mount he followed the girl.

The girl, greatly saddened by the loss of yet another chance at love, was sitting by the fire trying to wish away her sorrow. The Prince, finding the inn, went straight in and saw the girl sitting by the fire as if in deep thought. So as not to disturb her, he crossed the room and sat in a chair just a small distance from the fire.

Cupid finally saw he had a real chance and prepared three arrows close by his side so that he could get her this time, no matter what happened. This was going to be it, and if not then to hell with the whole issue.

The girl rising from her place by the fire, started across the room towards the stairs. As she was crossing the room, Cupid pointed his bow at her and let one fly. It was a second too late because she had tripped over the head of a bear rug on the floor and fell. But Cupid had the second one in and let loose before she had even hit the ground. Unfortunately, the Prince who had been witness to this entire episode had stepped forward at that time and caught Cupid's arrow in the arm.

Cupid's anger was so great at that time he put the third arrow in his bow and shot the girl in the butt while she was enveloped in the

Prince's arms and could not get away. He was done with his job.

The girl and the Prince looked into each others' eyes and fell in love at that very moment. She finally spoke, "Oh, I am in love with you. Ahh, thank you. Now I know what it is to fall in love." They then kissed and spent the rest of their lives living in the witch's castle with all the riches they found there.

ESSAY

FANTASY WRITING: A FEMALE'S ROLE

*"Fantasy Stories Wanted: The Readers of **Dragon Magazine** are mostly men, teenaged and older, who are interested in fantasy, dragons, and role-playing games" (The Writer 30).*

The preceding solicitation for stories presents a specific gender controversy repeated in many different fantasy magazines today: the belief that there are few female writers or readers in the genre of fantasy. Simply put, this is not true. Fantasy is the desktop providing a workspace for women to experiment and create with the tenets of feminist consciousness in the fantasy genre.

The request in *The Writer* illustrates the belief that there are more male readers in fantasy than females. The solicitation encourages the notion that boundaries exist between the sexes. It promotes the myth that males and females do not both have the same human needs or desires. This misconception about the differences of gender must be fought, for even though the primary target of fantasy once was the male adolescent, this is no longer the case. For in the beginning years of science fiction and fantasy, "women were less than 10% of the readership, and less than ½ of 1% of the authors: science fiction and fantasy, as with all fiction, addressed itself largely to the perceived needs of its readership, more than 90% white and male and more than 74% adolescent" (Bradley 25). The sexual revolution and the rise of feminism have proven that there is a market for work that explores female problems and

gender roles. Female fantasy writers are helping to change the nature of fantasy and science fiction from a conservative genre to one open with possibilities for both sexes.

The question of the female's place in fantasy writing has become more than apparent to many writers and readers of fantasy, it has become a crucial point of investigation. Exploring the societal views of females in fantasy, as writers and characters, allows readers to see that the female fantasy writer has the unique, and important place within the fantasy genre of creating new female role-models.

Since there have been few female character role-models available to women in literature, a female writer often feels the obligation to provide a female role-model in society for her readers. "Only science fiction and fantasy literature can show women in entirely new or strange surroundings. It can explore what women might become if and when the present restriction on their lives vanish, or show them new problems and restrictions that might arise" (Sargent lx). The restrictions that female writers faced in fantasy is why fantasy has emerged as such a dominant voice for female writers and characters. The breaking of those restrictions stands as an important victory for the voice of the female, where before her voice was rarely heard or wanted.

An example of a female writer trying to change the myths of female in fantasy is Marion Zimmer Bradley, a writer of considerable originality, who is also an independent-minded individual with small tolerance for the cultural determinism that distorts the female being. She believes women writers have the role of providing entertainment like any other fiction writer but that they have certain additional responsibilities: the "responsibilities include, besides the providing of entertainment not to be

dismissed lightly, inasmuch as this builds, (and has always built, cultural and social values), the provision of new role models, and new social and possibly technological culture patterns” (25). Bradley thinks that fantasy provides a “special opportunity for the experiment in thinking, in which social patterns and societies can be tested to destruction.” Fantasy is the ideological construction of a particular social reality that masks a real social desire. The ideological fantasy is constructed as an escape from reality because of the desire to see the reality change.

Bradley thinks that novels should not be didactic: “novels are worlds where the author should never intrude and should make her point only by her artistry.” The woman must seek to reach, to entertain, and thus to teach all the women in her readership, not just the radical feminists at the far edge. She must also serve the whole population of the readership: not just the radical feminists, not just the women, not just even the enlightened men; she must write in a logical and compelling way of women as they are, and of men too (36).

Consider the following definitions about fantasy that are held by readers of the genre:

1. Fantasy is a form of popular escapist literature that combines stock characters and devices-wizards, dragons, magic swords, and the like-into a predictable plot in which the perennially understaffed forces of good triumph over a monolithic evil (Attebery 1).
2. Fantasy is a sophisticated mode of storytelling characterized by stylistic playfulness, self-reflexiveness, and a subversive treatment of established orders of society and thought. Arguably the major fictional mode of the late twentieth century, it draws upon contemporary ideas about the sign systems and the indeterminacy of meaning and at the same time recaptures the vitality and freedom of nonmimetic traditional forms such as epic, folktale, romance, and myth (Attebery 1).

Women are conflicted about the different goals of fantasy writing.

Some fantasy is written in the conservative way mentioned above, but then there are other writers like Bradley, who take a different approach to the genre. For women writers like Bradley use fantasy as escape fiction, with all the frills of magic and sorcery involved but, more importantly, they also use artistry to make the reader see what they are escaping from in reality and how reality would be improved if it was like the fantasy world created.

Fantasy is, indeed, a way for female writers to empower women characters and a way to use fiction to construct reality itself. Since in society, women are not located at the center of contemporary culture and society, but are defined from the negated perspective of the other or the one different. More befitting, perhaps, is the need for women to escape into or depict an alternate reality within which the centrality of the female is possible. For the creators of high fantasy offer to their readers a *mundus alter* that resolutely denies the most pressing and problematical aspects of their real world, but never forgets any of them. These denials of reality are rooted in an acute sensitivity to the world's failure to provide a place of importance for the female. According to Schlobin, "this disappointment generated fantasies that are sentimental escapism which offered imaginative alternatives to the reality that embodies ideal solutions for females in fantasy. Their banalities and their excellencies are, of course, the products of individual authors, like Marion Zimmer Bradley, who bring to the form their own particular influence, who make it their own"(235).

In view of the violence and degradation of women and slaves in contemporary male fantasy texts, it is clear that female fantasy has to be written by those females with "strong belief systems" for moral ends.

Bradley's body of work demonstrates that she explored, as an innovative female writer with strong beliefs about females, not only the different genres but also the potential for feminine characterization inherent in those genres.

Bradley writes about the importance of the female writer and the female character. She believes that "fantasy forces us to confront our own archetypes--what lives eternally in the human mind" (Du Pont 95). The archetype of the female character is trying to be changed with the work of female fantasy writers like Bradley, who has striven to make her female characters seem more than just "the Angel in the House." Through the writing of *The Mists of Avalon*, she has created a new type of role-model for female fantasy writers, a new female character for female readers.

FEMALE WRITERS FIGHT INTO FANTASY

"The literary achievements of women have rarely been questioned on grounds other than orthodoxy. Rather, it is the genres themselves and the spirit that pervades them that have fallen into disfavor" (Wilson ix).

The first woman to earn her living by her pen was called the producer of detestable trash and dramatic sewage. She was coined as the first abolitionist. Damned for the wrong reason, praised for the wrong reason. Aphra Behn, the writer, started on the path that many female writers were afraid to walk upon.

Readers cannot truly understand the position of women writers in fantasy now and why their position is so important, unless they are

honest about the systematic discouragement women writers have received, and unless readers try to see clearly the form the discouragement takes, and the strategies of survival it imposes upon the individual artist. School is a good place to start. Readers should note that from Puritan time on, women were warned of the dangerous effects of education. Women were taught that they could be driven mad not through repression but through too much learning. Then in the sixties, women in writing classes heard, "Women can't be writers. They don't know blood and guts, and puking in the streets, and fucking whores, and swaggering through Pigalle at 5 a.m." (Sternburg 170). For women writers, the systematic discouragement even to attempt to become writers has been so constant and pervasive a force that we cannot consider their literary productions without somehow assessing the effects of that barrage of discouragement (Sternburg 169).

That female writers should have to face the systematic discouragement of a male-oriented literary establishment is grievous but nonetheless a real fact of life for many women writers. A question persists to this day that women are fighting, "Wherein does a woman's honor reside, old chap? In her vagina or in her spirit?" (Blodgett 56). Once readers get past the gender of a writer and a character and view their characteristics as more important, then we will have made a giant leap overcoming the stereotypes of our time.

These discouragements must be resisted by a new type of woman, active in every sphere of life; a new person out in the world, a new ruler of actions. Of the old ideal "feminine" virtues readers can retain many, but they have to add to them those which have been thought appropriate only in men. Let a woman be gentle, but at the same time let her be

strong; let her be pure of ear, but none the less wise and instructed. It is enough to know that our natural growth has been stunted.

Women have been known as many things throughout time: re-cluse, sufferer, housewife, mother, and lover, but never as writers. A woman writer in the future may well feel released from the question of gender and its effects on her work, but I believe that the experience of her predecessors will be telling. "Even now a woman who acknowledges her creative power goes against deep prohibitions. To reveal oneself is to be open to criticism, and women have not been trained to sustain commitment in a hostile critical arena" (Sternburg xvi). But nothing is more freeing for a women writer than giving up the pleasure of masochism and beginning to fight. As Sternburg says, "*Conflict is the soul of all literature*" (175 emphasis mine).

This fight, otherwise known as the women's movement, brought out the female side of the literary heritage. Women's language became important. Language first belonged to the masculine world, where openings and guidance are male-generated; silence and nonverbal communication are, in contrast, a woman's traditional providence. There have been these divisions between the languages of the sexes, but that is justifiable because women writers write differently, respond differently, and create literature in a significantly different way from male writers. With a rich array of symbolic structures and deviant narrative techniques, women writers address special issues in distinct ways. The different ways females express themselves should not be condemned but pointed out for critics and readers since distinctions have always existed between the sexes.

Why do some women still allow themselves to be repressed? And

why do we still accept verbal barriers and taboos? Because in our culture, our writing has established them. "Sexual euphemism and secrecy have long been associated with cultures which are repressive toward women," said Barbara Drake. Our culture still retains repression under which women suffer. Hence, the popularity of feminist science fiction and fantasy writers with women readers. Fantasy and science fiction have also played their part as a function and instrument of women's repression, just like other forms of popular culture, but that, with a peculiar literary justice, has become a most attractive genre for those writers who want to end this repression. Fantasy and science fiction allows "their imagination free rein to construct alternative futures in which sexuality and biology themselves can be redefined and redesigned." It is also due to the genre's unique ability to express women's concerns with their current role in society and their hopes for a better future role.

"Since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1818, women writers have occupied a major place in the development of modern science fiction and fantasy" (Schlobin 91). Fantasy and science fiction have generated an increasing amount of interest in the last decade, and that by women in particular. In part, according to Armit, the latter has accompanied the very welcome explosion of interest in women's writing of all kinds, which has taken place over the last ten or fifteen years; and in this context one must begin by acknowledging that the relatively recent growth of critical attention paid to women's science fiction and fantasy is, in no small part, due to the efforts of a certain section of the publishing industry, like the Women's Press (1).

Women writers have tried to change the world of social conventions

from the 1930's and 1940's where men were "By God REAL MEN," and women were there to be decorative. On the covers of *Planet Stories*, scantily clad women were carried off, usually screaming, by lustful-looking monsters. These covers, which were made by the male-oriented art department, gave the message that female characters were weak and nothing more than sex objects. The interesting part is, the stories themselves usually contained few or no women at all, scantily or amply clothed. Even though this was in the time when science fiction and fantasy was almost sexless, it delivered the message that the female is the weaker sex.

During the 50's, 60's and early 70's, female fantasy writers knew if they wrote fantasy they had to write better than their male competitors. They had to be better because everyone knew that female fantasy writers were not published. These pioneering females, if they did write, had to write the same kind of thing as men—but better. As Bradley said, "One of the reasons I might have been so tough was because I knew I was better. Any woman, I felt, could do what I had done if she were willing to work like a son of a bitch and ask no favors—and if she were really good enough" (31). There was no way to write about women doing women things. If females wanted to write about adventure, it had to be men who were having the adventure. This was just one of the hard facts of the marketplace. Anyone who had attempted to address thoroughly feminist issues would have remained unpublished.

Then in the early and later seventies, there was a virtual explosion of women's books. It then became possible for female fantasy writers to write a book about women's concerns that did not contain the saccharine romance elements. During this time, Bradley took a chance on a female

protagonist; she put them where she thought they belonged in her books, in power.

Bradley, a writer who works to create a new female role-model, aims at enhancing female power and countering the inscriptions of patriarchy. Her fictions have been actively fashioning new images to bring women to knowledge of their gendering and, increasingly, to a sense of the power she believes rightfully theirs. Bradley has, in her missionary aim of creating positive images of femaleness from the start of her writing, designed her fiction to enhance the nature and quality of female life, and they do so in distinctively original ways.

By looking at Bradley's new book *The Mists of Avalon*, readers can see that this book was created from a strong woman's inexhaustible voice. Bradley introduces a distinct fantasy novel with a keen feminist insight. *The Mists of Avalon* depicts a world in transition, at the end of the worship of the great earth goddess and the beginning of the dominance of men, who reject the female value of harmony with nature. It is a feminist medievalist reworking of the traditional Arthurian legend. Bradley's Morgaine is a goddess-worshipping strong and independent woman and not a evil character. "Gwenhwyfar" is shown as repressed by the anti-female bias of Christianity. Bradley challenges the glorification of medieval chivalry and Christianity and attempts to create a new tradition empowering women.

Women writers quite often restore the pagan background as an integral part of the Arthurian Legend. Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* revolves around this conflict. By doing this, writer can remove the romantic chivalric element and explore aspects of women's lives and situations. Concentration on the magical elements and the Celtic background

give the opportunity for the female writer to create strong and mature female characters and observation. Bradley in particular excels in this. She produces a distinct fantasy novel with a keen feminist insight. Morgaine is the central character but most of the females associated with the legend are called to give their viewpoints. Apart from Gwenhwyfar, who is a Christian, the others have close familial ties and are of a pagan religion, worshipful of the mother goddess, which is in conflict with the rise of Christianity. Through this, her narrative leaves Arthur's heroic chronicle in preference for the affairs and activities of the women.

Female fantasy represents, as in Northrop Frye's mythos of comedy, the world restored and refreshed—even if not in the usual patriarchal terms, thus violating the happy female fate patriarchal imagination has traditionally envisioned. Restoration comes not only through subversion of male-engendered expectations, it also and more emphatically comes in terms of female self-discovery. Bradley's fantasy may be self-reflexive, but it aims to be about the outside world and even to improve upon it, if only with the art of her fantasy. Through Bradley's novel about the Arthur legend, readers can see that females are breaking into the genre of fantasy writing and dealing with female issues in their works.

FEMALE CHARACTERS IN FANTASY

Even though "seventeenth-century women writers often succeeded in creating female heroes (not heroines who were appendages to men) in an effort to valorize the female experience and women's contributions to society," they were still denied as being important or having a place in any specific genre (Wilson xiii).

The roles that female characters played were extremely limited both

in science fiction and in fantasy in the earlier years. In fantasy, women were goddesses, witches, fairies, or devil-women. In science fiction, they were wives, girlfriends, scientists' daughters, or rewards for heroic deeds performed. In neither genre did female characters have any psychological reality other than the stereotypes in which they were cast. It took large numbers of female writers in the 60s and 70s to give readers female protagonists and other strong female characters in nonstereotyped roles. Women, in the works of feminist fantasy and science fiction authors, are now astronauts, scientists, warriors, rulers.

This change in the gender-specific roles and the characters' traits, that was imposed by the world, allowed for stronger female characters in the novel. Strong female role-models are needed for female readers. As Bradley says, "we all need strong women with whom to identify, strong enough to say openly what needs to be said without being frightened by the fact that many people will no longer like us. But strong does not mean having no doubts, no anxieties" (38). Women readers need strong female role-models, for changing how female characters in novels are stereotyped will change how females in society are viewed. Fantasy is a metaphor for the human condition, where females and males live together. Saying that, readers also need role-models for nonsexist men who can live with strong women without their masculinity being threatened.

There are three types of feminist fantasy and science fiction stories now on the market which are fulfilling the need for stronger female characters, or role models: the "Amazon" tale, the "world without men" stories, and the "*bildungsroman*" stories (Weedman 85). All three types of the stories generally focus on male/female relationships with strong,

well-rounded female characters in them.

The first type, the “Amazon” stories have as protagonist a sort of female version of Conan, who is either extremely strong physically or has psi powers that make her invincible. These tales sometimes resemble picaresque novels in that the heroine travels around winning battles and frustrating various male opponents who are unable to beat her. Thus the female character is ridiculed by other, weaker women and men in the story for trying to be a “man.” These tales are more than the traditional sword and sorcery novel. They demonstrate important tensions between the female’s role as a woman and her role as a super hero. An example of an “Amazon” story would be the tale *Wolves of Nakesk*, written by Janrae Frank in 1982. This author explores the plight of the amazon who must live in a land that will not tolerate such strength in a woman. The “Amazon” story, in reality, is a serious exploration of the nature of a strong woman’s role in a society that expects weakness from woman.

The second, more radical type of feminist science fiction and fantasy is the “world without men” stories. These tales usually have men either eradicated from the four corners of the earth by a man-made device of destruction or completely separated from the women. The females of this story are then freed from the constraints males have placed on them and they move as self-reliant human beings into positions of power. The conflict of the story occurs when these societies come into contact with some version of a male-dominated culture, then readers are exposed to the struggle against the sexism that the women societies face.

By showing their societies at the point where men come into contact with them, the authors set up the expectation in the reader that the men and the women will get together again and form a new, stronger

society. By frustrating these expectations, feminist science fiction and fantasy writers express the realistic doubt of many feminists that there can be any easy answers to the problems of sexism.

By far the most common type of feminist fantasy or science fiction novel is the feminist version of the *bildungsroman* stories. These stories are ones where the main character, usually a female but not always, goes through a search for self that takes her through various traumatic experiences but finally results in her becoming a whole and committed person. These tales are related to the traditional quests of mythology, where the quest was to retrieve some sort of sacred talisman that would reunite the community with the gods. The goals of the feminist fantasy heroine is more explicitly to find herself, and only in the process of rediscovering her true identity does she also save her society. Another part of rediscovering herself is often searching for her sexual identity as a part of her psychological identity and therefore the female character engages in various forms of sexual experimentation.

An example of a *bildungsroman* story is Bradley's book revising the King Arthur legend. *The Mists of Avalon*, set against a colorful historical background, demonstrates its author's familiarity with medieval work on the Arthurian Legend. Bradley's novel deals with these questions: What happens if a woman in a patriarchal society breaks the rules? What happens when female characters dare to be different—when they are true to themselves but not to their community? Removed from the constraints of the early Christian church's expectations of women, Bradley's revision of the Arthurian legend provides a fresh look at many interesting female characters. Bradley works on self-identification and socially defined

gender roles with her characters in this book. She questions the definitions of gender in a number of ways, often generating new fictional situations and symbols by the fusion of traditional male and female types. Yet despite the displacement of gender-specific role-models, the stories do not so much reverse as fuse more conventional portraits. There is a new female character type in the novel, which has surfaced in many of her other tales, the strong women. In her characterizations of women, she raised a voice to protest a moral code that would deny individual human liberty. For example, the heroine, exemplified in Morgaine le Fay, is neither passive, suffering, nor a particularly moral character, but she does fascinate in her intricate plotting and desperate struggles with Arthur over his oath to Avalon.

Bradley competently demonstrates how the women surrounding King Arthur are on a quest to save their religion and their society; but she also includes women who are in feminine dilemmas and shows how they deal with them. The characters in her books, have evolved out of her generation's feminist politics: thus we see Igraine, who is a pagan, married to a Christian, and Gwenhwyfar who is married to a man she 'betrays', and Elaine who is the mother of Galahad only by trickery and witchcraft. Bradley shows how these women, who have been thrust into situations by men or other women, have handled the lot pressed upon them.

But, it is Morgaine of the Fairies and Viviane, Lady of Avalon, who have the real power in this book. Their sight and wisdom leads people and societies, as well as tries to unite the kingdom of Avalon with Britain to be ruled as one; and all, in the end, must bow to their wisdom. So women can be seen in positions of power and active in society only when

the early Christian notions of their place are removed through either matriarchal respect, a religious sorority, or by being in possession of knowledge.

The very nature of maleness and femaleness and the impact of gender on psyche and character are being explored by writers of feminist fantasy and science fiction. For the fantasy novel rejects realism as inadequate to convey the female sense of "life!" Through Bradley's writing, readers can see that some female writers have emerged into the genre of fantasy and are changing the archetype of female characters in fantasy through strong female characters.

Female writers have always been searching for their place in the literary history and now they have found one in the genre of fantasy. What could be more powerful than the female voice emerging in a male dominated genre that stated females had no place in the genre, as writers or as important characters?

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