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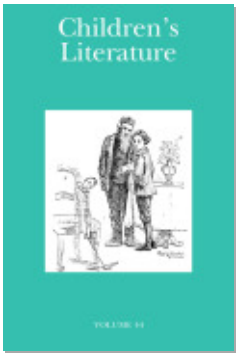

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Decolonizing Childhood: Coming of Age in Tamora Pierce's Fantastic Empire

Sarah F. Sahn

Rereading Tamora Pierce's Song of the Lioness series (1983–87) in 2015, it's tempting to dismiss it as a remnant of a certain brand of 1980s feminism, interested in liberation but equally invested in heteronormativity and whiteness. Alanna, the young protagonist who disguises herself as a boy in order to become a knight in the fantasy kingdom of Tortall, captivated me as a young reader in the mid-1990s, but when I revisited the novels as an adult, Alanna's subversiveness fell woefully short of what I remembered. I was surprised and dismayed by the text's policing Alanna's normative femininity. She is plagued with self-doubt in the early volumes because she is a girl, has a habit of pushing herself too far with her magic and passing out, is emphatically heterosexual, and is nearly always romantically attached. Although Alanna herself insists repeatedly that she has no interest in marriage and children, the text relentlessly emphasizes marriage as an endpoint and purpose, concluding not with Alanna's defeat of her nemesis, but with her agreeing to marry her friend George.[1] Mixed in with Alanna's story of self-determination is an accession to the power structures that limit her in the first place—and while Alanna breaks down the barriers that would keep her from her vocation as a knight, she does so for herself, not for anyone else. Ultimately, Alanna's transgressions only prove her exceptionalism, reinforcing the masculinism[2] of the institution of knighthood and of Tortall's gendered strictures and norms more generally.

But despite its disappointing investments in Alanna's heteronormativity, The Song of the Lioness challenges the often contradictory imperatives of gendered development as Alanna seeks a way to reject limiting gender norms without rejecting what she values and desires from her femininity. Underlying The Song of the Lioness is a dialectical desire to subvert certain gender norms on the one hand while maintaining a clear boundary between female and male, femininity and masculinity on the other—a boundary that, as Alanna comes of age and moves through her world, proves to align with East and West, childhood and adulthood, innocence and experience, and past and present. The layered possibilities and limitations of Alanna's resistance become particularly clear in the third novel of the series, *The Woman Who*

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Rides Like a Man (1984), when, having earned her knight's shield and revealed her gender to the court, Alanna leaves the capital city seeking adventure. She becomes involved with a tribe of the desert-dwelling Bazhir people who live under Tortall's colonial rule in a semiannexed territory to the kingdom's south. After killing the tribe's shaman in self-defense, Alanna finds herself appointed his successor, and must stay with them until she trains a new shaman to take her place. She proceeds to upend Bazhir traditions, training two young outcast women to use magic and succeed her as shamans, though women had been forbidden both; establishing an intertribal school for magic; and paving the way for Prince Jonathan—an outsider and heir to the colonial government—to become the Voice of the Tribes, the mystical leader who unites all Bazhir. In the process, Alanna herself matures, assuming greater responsibility for and comfort with both the mundane and magical powers that she possesses.

It isn't difficult to read the Orientalism here: Alanna leaves her quasi-medieval European home for the Other, colonized space of the desert tribes, where she gains new insights into herself and changes the "backward" tribes for the better. Her journey maps neatly onto Edward Said's analysis of Western literary Orientalism that constructs "the Orient [as] a place of pilgrimage" where "one could remake and restore not only the Orient but also oneself" (168, 166). However, even as it makes significant concessions to normative power structures, this plot arc highlights the links between gendered and colonial oppression, exploring the possibilities for and limitations of resistance. Further, even where it accedes to the power structures that it seeks to subvert, the series' form and genre create an openness in the text that invites the reader to engage its feminist and postcolonial potential and continue to ask questions where the text leaves off.

1. (Post)Colonial Girl

Roderick McGillis calls children "the most colonialized persons on the globe," and children's literature itself is deeply implicated in both colonial and postcolonial projects ("Postcolonialism" 7). As Perry Nodelman has observed, the discourse of Orientalism bears many parallels to "our most common assumptions about childhood and children's literature. . . . [Edward] Said's words force us to face the uncomfortable conclusion that our attempting to speak for and about children . . . will always confirm their difference from, and presumably,

inferiority to, ourselves as [adult] thinkers and speakers" (29). Donnarae MacCann further argues that "children's literature has a special connection with imperialist policies, since the ideal imperial strategy is to impel the young to colonize and marginalize themselves," a project for which the didactic function of children's literature is a powerful tool (2). These arguments echo Jacqueline Rose in their suggestion that children have no oppositional voice—or any voice at all—in children's literature, because the literature constructs the child "for its own purposes"—which are, Rose adds, "often perverse and mostly dishonest" (10). Considering children and children's literature as postcolonial, then, is inherently paradoxical: if "the postcolonial voice is a voice speaking its own authority and identity in confidence of that authority and identity, then children can only express a postcolonial voice after they have ceased to be children" (McGillis, "Postcolonialism," 8). The discourse that colonizes the child is the inverse of the discourse that infantilizes the native, both of whom, according to Western narratives of individual development, must mature into sanctioned categories of normative—that is, white, masculine, and heterosexual—adulthood.[3] Until they do, both child and native remain in a "primitive" past characterized as innocent at best and savage at worst.

Just as many scholars of childhood have noted the colonialism of adult discourse about children and childhood, scholars of medieval literature and history have noted the similarities between Western constructions of "the Oriental" and modern constructions of "the medieval." Indeed, as Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul argue, the ideas of "the medieval" and "the Oriental" are closely related as colonizing discourses of both time and space: "to an important degree the idea of the Middle Ages issued from the same colonial imaginary that subsumed territory and time to the sphere of its real and desired control" in the name of progress and civilization (2). In the colonial imaginary, the East is temporally as well as geographically distant, "an Old World to which one returned, as to Eden or Paradise, and a wholly new place to which one came . . . to set up a New World" (Said 58).[4] Similarly, "The Middle Ages" are themselves a construction of later European thinkers of the Renaissance who wanted to bracket off the historical period they imagined as a dark age between themselves and the classical period. Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Wiesl write that the term "by definition encodes a kind of magical thinking, in which both cultural difference and continuity can be cordoned off from prior and subsequent eras" (1). Set in a fantasy kingdom with the trappings of medieval Europe,

The Song of the Lioness is thus implicated in discourses that remove their Others not only in space but also in time, supporting narratives of social and individual development that privilege the West as both a location and as a temporal construct, with its notions of progress and modernity.

The Song of the Lioness works on both of these axes: East/West as well as past/present. Layering them together, the series complicates their narratives of spatial and temporal otherness. The medievalist fantasy setting functions as a "safe" space associated with childhood, and removes subversive questioning of the status quo to a safe distance from the reader's present, much as Alanna's removal to the Bazhir Desert puts her subversiveness at a safe distance from Tortall proper. Pugh and Wiesl suggest as much when they describe the Middle Ages in children's literature "as a potent fantasy, whether of a simpler time of clearer values; a violent, dangerous era of tribal conflict and familial strife; or a place of potential, where the lack of central authority and traditional restraints on adolescent life . . . permits various types of exploration" (52).[5] Maria Nikolajeva similarly argues that children's fantasy "can interrogate the existing power relationships, including those between child and adult, without necessarily shattering the real order of the world" (61). The medievalist fantasy world becomes a setting where the conflicts of the developmental "middle" of adolescence can be safely negotiated in the ambiguous temporal "middle" of the Middle Ages.

Medievalism does more than simply isolate the conflict of adolescence, however; it "accept[s] both the alterity of the Middle Ages and its multivalent use as a time and place that embraces change and multiple points of view" (Pugh and Wiesl 61). Rather than a clean removal of alterity to "the past," medievalist fantasy offers something messier in its engagement with the present—an opportunity for counternarratives of dominant discourses of power, especially when it operates in what Farah Mendlesohn calls the immersive mode of fantasy. According to Mendlesohn, immersive fantasy is characterized by an "arguable world" in which "the emphasis is placed on the relationship of people to the world and to their societies, and the way people argue the world into being" (65). The protagonists of an immersive fantasy, "are *antagonists* within their world. . . . [They] make their worlds by continually arguing 'it doesn't have to be this way'" (66–67). Immersive fantasy contrasts the portal-quest fantasy, emblematized by The Chronicles of Narnia and The Lord of the Rings. In the portal-quest, the journey "serves to

divorce the protagonists from the world, and place them in a context within which they cannot question the primary narration" (7). The portal-quest fantasy "by its very nature needs to deny the possibility of a polysemic discourse. . . . There can be only one understanding of the world" (12–13). The immersive fantasy invites and even demands the opposite. Making room for characters and readers to question the built world of the text, immersive fantasies place the reader in a position to continue to "argue the world into being."

The Song of the Lioness quickly establishes itself in the immersive mode when, in the opening pages of *Alanna: The First Adventure* (1983), Alanna questions her world in a way that no one else around her does. Where her guardian Coram merely wishes that Alanna were a boy, since she far exceeds her twin brother in masculine pursuits such as archery and swordplay, she argues for her place as a knight in training. She secures Coram's complicity in her plan to take her brother's place, pointing out, "Thom can't shoot for beans, and I can. Thom wouldn't be a credit to you. I will, I think" (14). Alanna's questioning produces an openness that remains even when the text itself asserts closure in its events—an openness that remains available outside the secondary world. Even when she fails to raise questions the reader remains in a position to argue, "it doesn't have to be this way."

McGillis offers postcolonialism as an alternative way of conceiving the relationship between childhood, children's literature, and colonialism that echoes Mendlesohn's "arguable world" when he contends, "children and their literature are always postcolonial, if by postcolonial we mean that which stands outside and in opposition to tradition and power. Although children and their literature are not inevitably outside a Eurocentric vision of things, they do represent a challenge to the traditions of mainstream culture" (8). Thus, the dynamic between adult author and child or adolescent reader does not necessarily evacuate the text of any oppositional voice, as Rose would have it. Instead, I argue, the outsider status of children and their literature (even mainstream ones) represents an opportunity to argue a better world into being. I approach Pierce's text with McGillis's definition of postcolonialism in mind, in particular his assertion that "[p]ostcolonialism is a manifestation of the desire for the acceptance and understanding of otherness, and as such it has a logical affinity with children who seem to strive for recognition" (15). Alanna's quest for recognition is an attempt to argue meaning and change out of her world as a colonized figure—a child and a girl. Her association with the Bazhir occurs at the intersec-

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tion of gendered, racial, and colonial power and oppression, where Alanna herself is both complicit with and subjugated by normalizing discourses of whiteness and masculinity.

2. Striving for Recognition

Like Alanna, the Bazhir exist on the margins of Tortall, incorporated into the kingdom on precarious ground. Alanna's history teacher explains, "You see, the Old King is said to have conquered all this country . . . He never actually conquered this desert—it's far too big. Instead he worked out treaties with some Bazhir and slaughtered a few others." Some tribes accept the colonial government, while "others are called renegade." Focalized through Alanna, the narrative exoticizes the Bazhir as an inscrutable people, "hard riders and relentless fighters. They hid their women in goatskin tents. But all, men and women . . . watched the strangers through proud black eyes" (*Alanna* 182). Deirdre Baker argues that, despite the popularity of her "she-roes," "what Pierce doesn't give her readers, whether male or female, is a way to conceive power and power structures differently, beyond the gendered norm" ("What We Found," 247). While I agree that Pierce's text does, on the surface, reinforce normative power structures, I argue here that Alanna's time with the Bazhir offers openings for, and invitations to, resistant readings. Though the space of the desert and the Bazhir themselves facilitate Alanna's maturation, Pierce does not treat them simply as a backdrop to Alanna's self-realization, but as a complex society under threat from its imperial neighbor. It is during her time with them that Alanna begins to more thoroughly negotiate the aspects of femininity that she earlier rejected in order to succeed in the masculine institution of knighthood, and to explore and better understand the relationship between gendered and colonial oppression.

Despite their reputation for being a closed society hostile to women, Alanna finds a sense of ease and acceptance among the Bazhir. The space of the desert and her encounters with the Bazhir people facilitate Alanna's self-recognition—as well as others' recognition of her on her own terms—as a woman and a warrior. Alanna's adoption into the Bloody Hawk tribe at the beginning of *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man* constitutes a second moment of recognition by the Bazhir. The first comes at the end of *Alanna,* the first novel of the series, when she and Jonathan are lured to the haunted Black City and defeat the Ysandir, demons who had terrorized the Bazhir for centuries. When she

journeys to the desert again as a young knight, a member of the tribe recognizes her as "the Burning-Brightly One!" and recalls, "She came with the Blue-Eyed Prince, the Night One, and they freed us from the Black City! . . . I let them through the gate that morning!" (*Woman Who Rides* 10). This moment of recognition after the fact positions Alanna and Jonathan as white saviors,[6] who as children could defeat the demons no Bazhir could, but it notably does *not* guarantee her acceptance into the tribe, or even her safety in this second encounter.

Alanna's recognition and self-recognition in the desert are not only, or even primarily, as the white savior of the Bazhir. Alanna meets her recognition as "The Burning-Brightly One" with a shrug, and despite the tribesman who vouches for her, her status remains uncertain until she proves herself in a trial by combat. The text frames her adoption into the Bloody Hawk tribe on Bazhir terms rather than couching it as a consequence of Alanna's status as "the Burning-Brightly One" or as a representative of the colonial government. When she tries to claim the latter, Halef Seif, the tribe's headman, tells her, "We know no king." Her attempt to push the issue is met with "some amusement among the riders. Only their leader remained grim. 'Is your king so weak he uses women for warriors? We cannot think well of such a king'" (9). Her status protects her from a swift execution, but no more. The tribe votes to "Let her prove herself worthy as a man, worthy of her weapons and of our friendship" by facing a trial by combat (18). The decision grants Alanna what she has always wanted, even in the face of explicit institutional sexism from her interlocutors: the opportunity to prove herself as a warrior, with no further questions asked. After she does so, the tribe accepts her as "The Woman Who Rides Like a Man" and formally adopts her.

The relative ease of her transition, and Alanna's sense that she "fits" among the Bazhir, perhaps better than she does in Tortall proper, invite an alternate reading of Alanna's positionality in relation to the Bazhir. While the power that Alanna acquires and exerts as a knight is patriarchal and colonial power, she also opposes both by resisting full assimilation into the institutions that marginalized and oppressed her to begin with. Alanna's time with the Bazhir may be read as bringing these institutions—of knighthood, of monarchy, of Western civility—to the Bazhir, highlighting Alanna herself as an enlightened Western subject and civilizing savior against the desert "savages"; but we may also read her as defining herself apart from these institutions by moving into a marginalized space where she can be recognized, and

recognize others, on her and their own terms. To do so requires a certain amount of reading against the grain, or at least below the surface, but I contend that the openness of the immersive text, in focalizing through a character antagonistic to the dominant ideologies of her world, invites such a counterreading even when Alanna herself does not always follow her arguments to their ends. Alanna speaks—sometimes implicitly—with an oppositional voice that highlights her own struggles against patriarchal authority, as well as the Bazhir's struggles against Tortall's colonial power.

For Alanna, the significance of defeating the Ysandir is not in having "saved" the Bazhir, but in the self-recognition the demons enforce when they reveal her disguise to Jonathan. Alanna's major internal conflict up to this point has been her persistent belief that she is less competent and worthy because "[s]he was a girl, and she was a liar" (*Alanna* 172). The very act of hiding her "true" identity in order to become a knight undermines the institution that she seeks to enter, with its emphasis on honesty, honor, and loyalty. Indeed, as an ideal embodied in (masculine) knighthood, Alanna can never fully claim chivalry as her own—both because of the deception she carries out to gain access to the institution, and because of the body that necessitates that deception. In an attempt to drive a wedge between her and Jonathan, the Ysandir make Alanna's clothing disappear. They taunt Jonathan as he and Alanna work together to defend themselves, demanding, "How long do you think she will last? . . . She is a girl. She is weak. She will give way, and where will you be?" Their words echo "the same small voice that taunted Alanna from within whenever she faced a taller, stronger opponent," but instead of making her give up, hearing her own doubts voiced by her enemies gives her strength (*Alanna* 201). She realizes that her female body does not make her weak. She quickly gives up "[trying] to cover herself with her hands" and instead asserts her competence: "I may be a girl, but I can defend—or attack—as well as any boy!" (200). Afterwards, Alanna finds that "[a]ll at once she [feels] different inside her own skin." She asserts her newfound confidence when Jonathan asks her who he should choose to be his squire: "Me," she tells him. "You should pick me" (*Alanna* 215).

In contrast to her sense of being recognized, and being able to recognize herself, among the Bazhir, Alanna's adoption into the Bloody Hawk is presaged by a moment of *mis*recognition at home in Tortall. After having lived disguised as a boy for eight years, Alanna's deception is revealed when she exposes the king's nephew, Roger, as a traitor.

Again, Alanna is unmasked through her clothing, when Roger's attempt to wound her cuts away the corset she wears to bind her breasts. Although she has just unearthed a plot to murder the royal family, the court and the king are considerably more interested in the revelation of Alanna's feminine body. Her confrontation with Roger grinds to a halt and the king turns his attention to her. Alanna claims her actions strongly here, wondering, "Would you have let me win my shield if I had told the truth? . . . I've tried to be honest about everything else. And I can't regret what I did" (*Hand* 204–05). She admits her distaste for her lies but refuses to regret telling them in the face of a system that would have limited her to the roles of wife and mother.

However, the conclusion of this scene suggests her greater ambivalence toward her actions and her identity. When she at last stands "swaying over Roger's body, shaking with rage, fear and exhaustion," she notices, "[e]veryone in the chamber . . . stared at her with some kind of horror. For a minute she was afraid of herself" (206). Alanna's fear and horror arise from having killed Roger, but they are tied up with the revelation of her identity, making the horror of the court, and Alanna's fear of herself, as much about Alanna's gender as it is about her killing Roger. The incident prompts her to leave the court, despite her friends' protests. "I need to get away from Court for a while and just think," she tells them, adding, "I've been planning this journey for a long time, and now I have more reason than ever to take it." She has sensed for some time that she could not "sort out . . . being a lady knight and what I want to do with my life" at a court whose social norms she has flouted; her actions against Roger simply add another layer to her sense that she cannot be recognized—or recognize herself—in Tortall (207). Alanna's adoption into the Bloody Hawk closes the circle that opens with the Ysandir, not only as a moment of self-recognition, but also as a recognition by others that finally acknowledges Alanna as she presents herself, "The Woman Who Rides Like a Man."

Alanna's sense that she has to go the geographic margins of the kingdom in order to "sort out . . . being a lady knight" visualizes her marginality, but moving Alanna out of the "Western" realm of Tortall and into the Bazhir Desert also normalizes her at the expense of the Orientalized Bazhir. When she becomes shaman of the Bloody Hawk tribe, Alanna is in a position to, as Coram puts it, "interfere" with the Bazhir, "settin' these poor folk on their ears. . . . They haven't changed in centuries, and we're forcin' them to accept things yer own people can't accept—not easily." Coram's description of the Bazhir,

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who "haven't changed in centuries," places them firmly in the past, primitive in relation to Alanna's Western modernity—despite her own people's unwillingness to accept her. Further, she does not hesitate to use her white savior status to push for the changes that will allow her to train two outcast young women to be her successors. "To the Bazhir, I'm a legend," she explains to Coram; "They take things from me they *wouldn't* take from anyone else. I don't ask them to change for *stupid* reasons" (*Woman Who Rides* 94–95). At the same time as Alanna's ability to be incorporated into the Bazhir opens up possibilities to read her as an oppositional figure, her need to go outside her own institutions in order to "liberate" others also shores up the power structures she wishes to oppose. Although Alanna's actions open doors for women in Tortall, as Pierce explores in later books, they are self-serving; she cross-dresses so that *she* can become a knight, not to seek widespread institutional change. But when she joins the Bloody Hawk, she insists that they change according to her ideals of gender equity. Though she seems not to be interested in larger societal changes in Tortall, she insists on "liberating" the Bazhir, who until she came "hid their women in goatskin tents."

Tellingly, when Alanna is accepted into the tribe after she proves herself in the trial by combat, she is aligned with the men of the tribe. She sits with the men at gender-segregated gatherings, fulfills a masculine role in the tribe as shaman, and does not participate in the "women's work" of the tribe's daily life. It is only after Alanna demonstrates her interest in and respect for the skilled work of Bazhir women that she begins to be integrated into the feminine spaces of the tribe's life and comes to realize that the Bazhir women may not need her to liberate them. Her interest in weaving attracts the notice of one of the women leaders in the tribe, from whom Alanna learns that Bazhir women are far from the silent, oppressed, veiled women she had believed. Instead, she discovers that "the tribeswomen viewed their men not with fear but with loving disrespect" (*Woman Who Rides* 98). Alanna's weaving lessons allow the text to further interrogate gender and power. Her single male apprentice dismisses weaving as "all right if you have nothing better to do." Alanna rebuts him by pointing both to the practical importance of weaving—"What's more important than the clothes I wear?"—and its magical applications, demonstrating magic worked by tying and untying knots. Though men use "thread magic" as well, "women acquire it more easily. I guess that's because most women know how to weave and spin and sew" (88–89).

Alanna's articulation of the value of the "women's work" of weaving reveals her own developing understanding of gendered power and labor. She places the mundane and magical applications of fiber work on equal footing; knowing how to "weave and spin and sew" is no less important than being able to work magic using thread, and indeed, she argues that the mundane skills associated with weaving lend the magic user a familiarity with her medium that allows her to use it for magical purposes. She further compares the process of learning to weave to her training as a knight. Kourrem, her apprentice, tells her, "I really shouldn't start you weaving right away. We always had to learn to card wool . . . and spin a good thread before we were let *near* a loom." Alanna replies, "It's just like every fighting art I studied. . . . We had to learn how to make our weapons before we got to use them" (86). After a disastrous attempt at the small loom Kourrem lends her, Alanna concludes ruefully, "My teachers were right—for real skills, there aren't any shortcuts" (87–88). She not only places the magical and mundane on an equal footing in their importance, but also affords masculine and feminine skills equal respect.

The weaving lessons echo and expand upon Alanna's other gendered lessons throughout the series. The text often aligns Alanna's gendered development with the development of her magical abilities and her growing skills in combat. In *Alanna*, a chapter titled "Womanhood" groups together her first menstruation with her gradual acceptance of herself as a mage—something she had resisted in part because she associates her healing magic with femininity—and her development into a skilled swordswoman. When she discovers her menstrual bleeding, Alanna seeks out a friend in the city, to whom she reveals her secret in a panic. "You're not used to your body doing things you haven't asked of it, are you?" her friend observes sympathetically (137). But although she is frustrated by her inability to control her body in some respects, that lack of control is subordinated to the physical and mental mastery she achieves as a swordswoman and a sorcerer. The text aligns all three of these developments under the rubric of womanhood. A parallel sequence in *In the Hand of the Goddess* (1984) highlights femininity as a set of behaviors to be performed, making Alanna's feminine body as controllable as her masculine disguise. Both femininity and masculinity are thus linked to bodily mastery, despite her initial experience of her female body as something out of her control. Her weaving lessons in *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man* help Alanna further integrate her sense of masculinity and femininity as embodied practices of gender and power, rather than as stable, static identities.

3. Cross-Dressing and Compromise

For both Alanna and the Bazhir, resistance means compromise, which the text visualizes through Alanna's cross-dressing. In her exploration of cross-dressing in children's literature, Victoria Flanagan uses Alanna as her prototypical female cross-dresser, arguing that female-to-male cross-dressing in children's and YA literature empowers young women. But while Alanna's cross-dressing is central to her ability to eschew the limited roles available to her, it is not strictly liberatory. Her cross-dressing both disrupts and shores up the binary categories Alanna seeks to traverse: man and woman, Tortallan and Bazhir, knight and lady. The text successfully deconstructs gender as performance when Alanna decides to experiment with feminine dress and behavior. Alanna herself shows remarkable awareness of the fact that she performs gender, telling the friend whom she approaches for guidance, "I'm going to have to be a girl someday. Why shouldn't I start practicing now?" (*Hand* 123).[7] But at the same time as the text constructs gender, here, as something one *does*, as opposed to something one *is*, it also insists upon Alanna's essential womanhood. Alanna is never confused about whether she is "really" a girl, nor is anyone else; there is no question, as Jes Battis notes, "that Alanna, rather than being a 'real' boy, or a girl passing as a boy, might actually be a queer boy instead." Alanna's cross-dressing thus shores up the categories of "boy" and "girl," by insisting that *dressing* as a boy does not *make* Alanna a boy. Nonetheless, her cross-dressing makes anxiously visible the contingency of these categories, such that "Alanna must constantly be reaffirmed as being a 'girl on the inside'" in order to maintain the stability of the gender binary she transgresses with her cross-dressing (Battis).

Alanna's cross-dressing encompasses cultural and class dimensions as well when she decides to start wearing a burnoose after her adoption into the Bloody Hawk, reasoning, "If she was a Bazhir, she might as well dress like one" (*Woman Who Rides* 27). Analogous to her gendered clothes, the burnoose functions both to integrate Alanna into the Bazhir and to distinguish her from them; to liberate her and to constrain. As a gender-nonconforming woman, Alanna's cultural/racialized cross-dressing also highlights the implications of gender in the colonial relationship between Tortall and the Bazhir. Kanniah Kadiatu explains, "Clothing becomes emblematic of a cultural or racial group; representing a colonial relationship which is both gendered and sexualized" (346). Donning the burnoose gains Alanna entry into

Bazhir society and bestows masculine status and privilege on her, but it keeps her separate from the veiled women "[hidden] . . . in goatskin tents," whom she feels compelled to liberate as she has liberated herself. Her cross-dressing highlights the overlapping dynamics of colonial and patriarchal power that clings to clothing: Alanna is able to claim both masculine and Tortallan (white) authority, at the same time as she is subject to both as a woman and as an adopted member of the Bazhir. Her cross-dressing, then, reveals the layered and often contradictory workings of patriarchal and colonial power that she both resists and carries with her.

Alanna's gendered cross-dressing is a source of deep anxiety in particular for the men with whom she has romantic relationships—not because of her decision to pursue a masculine vocation as a knight, but because of her rejection of marriage and motherhood. While her dress and behavior seem to be acceptable choices to her romantic partners, both men with whom Alanna has serious relationships before her marriage reveal the extent of their anxiety about her gender identity when the questions of marriage and motherhood arise. Prince Jonathan, with whom she shares a stable relationship for several years, takes for granted that she will accept his marriage proposal. Alanna, though, sees marrying Jonathan as "a great responsibility" that would require her to give up the life of a wandering knight she desires. Jonathan responds to her concerns with amusement: "Be serious. After all these years, I'd think your answer is plain." His exhortation of her to "be serious" reveals the extent to which he construes Alanna's masculine behavior as a game, something that she may easily give up when it is time for her to "grow up" and become a "real" woman—despite his having undergone the same grueling training as Alanna to earn his knight's shield. As their argument escalates, Jonathan compares her to the other women at court, who are "[a]t least . . . *women*, Lady Alanna! . . . And they know how to *act* like women!" (*Woman Who Rides* 161–62). Calling her "Lady Alanna" instead of her proper title of "Sir Alanna," Jonathan uses her womanhood as an insult and her failure to properly inhabit it as a measure of her inadequacy in an attempt to shore up his own masculine authority.

Alanna, of course, *does* know how to act like a woman; the fact that she does not always choose to do so provokes anger in Jonathan and confusion and scorn in Liam, the warrior with whom she has a relationship in the fourth novel of the series, *Lioness Rampant* (1988). Liam questions her assertion that marrying and having children would

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require that she "give up [her] shield" and "spend [her] time at court or on [her] husband's lands." He responds, mildly, "I just wondered why you feel you have to be all warrior or all woman. Can't you be both?" (55–56). But he reveals his uneasiness with her attempt to straddle the boundaries of masculine and feminine identity when Alanna chooses to wear a dress one evening while they are staying at an inn. In disgust, he surmises, "I suppose you'll want earbobs next, and bracelets and other frippery. What comes then? A noble-born husband and court intrigues?" Liam's response reveals the extent to which dress dictates behavior and uncovers an essential(ly masculine or feminine) self. He assumes that the desire to be a wife and mother are intrinsic to all women, and wonders why Alanna should reject them. But he also supposes that when she puts on a dress, Alanna is conceding that "a knight-errant's life isn't as glorious as [she] expected" and is ready to give it up for the ease of a lady's life at court (109). Alanna desires to be both woman and warrior, but not in the ways that Liam thinks she should: she rejects the "essential" aspects of her womanhood and embraces (sometimes) feminine dress and behavior. The ease with which she can move back and forth between masculine and feminine behaviors is what is most threatening to Liam and Jonathan; they can rely on her neither to act like other women, nor to act like a man.

The introduction of the burnoose after Alanna's adoption into the Bloody Hawk tribe builds on and complicates her gendered cross-dressing. Clothing, with its changeability, signals the shifting nature of Alanna's multiple identities, but it also signals her commitments to them. Rather than gendered or cultural drag, Alanna's cross-dressing—as a boy, knight, lady, and Bazhir—announce that all of these are fundamental aspects of her self. Kathryn Bond Stockton identifies clothing as "an unexamined switch point between . . . nonelective skins and what are for some queer women and men the highly preferred, habitually chosen, strongly valued, almost sewn-to-the-bone cloth skins that we call clothes" (39). In Stockton's analysis, the impermanent surface of clothing may carry as much meaning and authentic identity as the permanent, unchosen surface of (racialized and/or gendered) skin. Alanna's disguise as "Alan" during her training is not simply a means to an end, but also a part of her self with which she continues to identify—as she insists when her friends tell her that they feel they don't know her: "This 'Sir Alanna' you keep talking about is just Alan with the truth being told. . . . I haven't changed" (*Hand* 208). Though she gives up her disguise and adopts her given name, "Sir Alanna" looks

and acts just like Alan; it is her friends' perceptions that change when they must square the idea that a young woman can be as competent and brave a knight as any of them. Her cross-dressing both conceals and reveals her truth, in what Stockton calls "a centrifugal force." Clothing is a form of "social holding," a phrase which vividly illustrates Alanna's acts of cross-dressing as proud assertions of self: "In the act of clothing, one is thrown outward, body and skin, into cloth arms (the arms of one's clothes), caught and held as a public gesture, in the social field" (43). Despite others' attempts to pin a static identity on Alanna, she, and the text, resist the colonizing discourses that would inscribe her as statically feminine or masculine, Tortallan or Bazhir, woman or warrior. Concealed and revealed by her clothes, Alanna finds (self) recognition in the social fields at the margins of Tortall with all of her multiple identities.

In her disguise as Alan, Alanna uses clothing to conceal her body and reveal the self that she wishes to be—not a boy per se, but a knight-in-training, which she can only be as a boy. With her masculine clothing, Alanna writes a new self onto her body, but she must also contend with the female body that others will inevitably read no matter what she does and the aspects of her femininity that she eventually chooses to embrace. Her cultural cross-dressing is inscribed on her body in similarly contradictory ways. Alanna joins the Bazhir in a ceremony of embodied magic marked by an exchange of blood with Halef Seif, the tribe's headman. The ceremony makes her "truly [a member] of the Bazhir, tied by blood and magic to the desertmen" (*Woman Who Rides* 26). The burnoose both conceals and reveals the scar it leaves behind on her arm, announcing her embodied connection to the tribe through her choice of dress. The scar is connected to her female body, signaling both permanence and malleability, intrinsic and chosen identity. While her Bazhir title, "The Woman Who Rides Like a Man," seems to reinforce the gender binary by suggesting she is an exceptional woman who does masculine things, it, too, offers her a way to integrate the two selves she has struggled with. While she "rides like a man," taking on masculine roles both among the Bazhir and at home, Alanna also identifies strongly with her feminine self, the woman of her Bazhir title. Her ability to be a "woman who rides like a man" among the Bazhir allows her to integrate the masculine and feminine selves she struggled with while living as Alan.

This integration, however, demands compromise. Though Alanna can perform masculinity, the narrative arc of the marriage plot demands

that she accede to the imperatives of her essential womanhood by accepting marriage and motherhood. As much as the Bazhir desert is a space in which Alanna can exist more comfortably on the margins, it is also a fragile space where she cannot remain secure in her difference. Alanna comes to understand this when she learns that Ali Mukhtab, the current Voice of the Tribes, intends to make Jonathan his heir. He tells Alanna that conquest is inevitable, but that by initiating Jonathan as the Voice, they can influence the shape of that conquest. He explains to her, "Conquered, my people—*our* people, now—would be riven from the desert that is mother and father to us. . . . The tribes would be scattered; we would be no more" (45). But if Jonathan becomes the Voice, he will be "a *Bazhir* King. . . . The tribes you call 'renegade' would make peace, for none may war against the Voice of the Tribes. . . . We must accept the King in the North; there is no other way. But we can do it so that we never forget who we are" (46). Alanna faces the same challenge: to find a way to "accept the King in the North" in a way that will not elide the complexities of her liminal and shifting identities. When the Bazhir incorporate Jonathan as the Voice, they demand *he* become more like *them*, rather than acceding to the demand that they become more like the Tortallans.

The power of the Voice is not simply symbolic, but a potent magical connection to the Bazhir people and the land in which they live; it alters Jonathan physically and psychologically, molding him as both an individual and a monarch. Like Alanna's adoption ceremony, Jonathan's initiation as the Voice involves an exchange of blood and magic. The magic of the Voice imbues him with the memories and knowledge of each of his predecessors, making him the embodiment of everyone who came before: "I lived all the lives of all the Voices," he tells Alanna after; "I was a chain. All my links were pulling apart. I lost Jonathan for a while; I was everyone *but* Jonathan" (156–57). The rite leaves behind a trace on Jonathan's body, a "blue scar [that] was warm to the touch" (155). Like Alanna's, Jonathan's scar inscribes a connection to the Bazhir not only on his body but on a deep ontological level; the exchange of blood is the vehicle for a transformation that subsumes Jonathan's individuality and makes him a link on a longer chain of history and cultural identity. Becoming the Voice further alters the nature of Jonathan's power as a monarch, as the Voice unites the disparate tribes by serving as a central node in a network. As "priest, father, and judge to the Bazhir," the Voice executes his role not by speaking, as his title would suggest, but by listening: each day "[a]t sunset we gather

at our fires and join with [the Voice]—each man and woman among the Bazhir. Thus he knows our thoughts, our wishes. . . . He judges with complete knowledge of our hearts and our minds" (149, 38). The colonized Bazhir in a sense colonize Jonathan with their history, their "hearts and [their] minds," making him "a *Bazhir* King" who will value the voices of all his people. Imbuing Jonathan with Bazhir magic and history that leaves its trace on his body in the form of the blue scar, the Bazhir enact a reversal of the power that has oppressed them in order to claim a measure of it back.

Alanna's cross-dressing functions as a similar reverse colonization. Disguising herself as a boy in order to gain entry into the institution of knighthood, Alanna concedes to the constructions of gender and power that had excluded her; but by proving herself to be as capable as any of her male peers, she also transforms the institution, paving the way for girls to train openly to become knights.[8] Alanna's exceptionalism as a knight has the contradictory effect of reinforcing the rules and codes of chivalry at the same time as it undermines them. Her confrontation with Roger immediately after her induction into knighthood highlights the paradox at the heart of her exceptionalism. As a knight, Alanna "[is] bound to uphold the law" and "may not look away from wrongdoing"; however, these imperatives are not always compatible (*Hand* 178). In order to confront Roger for his treason, Alanna must break into his rooms to find evidence, a transgression justified by the revelation of Roger's greater crimes—though both are nearly overshadowed by the revelation of her gender. Alanna seeks a way into the institution that excludes her because of her gender by proving she can not only meet but exceed its demands; she does not seek any fundamental change to it. Instead, she must master her self in order to enter the institution and embody its ideals. Her excellence compensates for her transgressions, much as her exposure of Roger's crimes compensates for the violation of searching his rooms.

Despite her excellence as a knight, however, Alanna's survival, and indeed her success, demand concessions to the oppressive power structures of her world. Ali Mukhtab's acceptance of one kind of conquest in order to avoid wholesale destruction articulates a central theme of Alanna's coming-of-age story: while her instinct to fight often serves her well, she also must learn when not to fight. Two key moments in the series show Alanna the importance of making these distinctions. Early in her training as a knight, Alanna explores the ruins of a castle where a magic force attacks her. Her own magic has no effect against

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it; exhausted, "For the first time in her life, Alanna stopped fighting . . . she was dying. With an inner sigh—almost one of relief—she accepted that fact" (*Alanna* 153). Her acceptance of her imminent death activates the magic in a sword she found in the ruins, saving her. This sequence anticipates Alanna's final confrontation with Duke Roger in *Lioness Rampant*, where she once again must *not* fight in order to survive and defeat her opponent. When Roger uses his more powerful magic to try to steal the magic sword, Alanna struggles to hold onto it until "[t]he cold part of herself that stood aloof from everything whispered, *He expects you to fight. So—stop fighting.*" Rather than trying to keep the sword from him, Alanna lets go of it: "Roger didn't break his calling spell. He didn't even seem to know what she'd done until [the sword] buried itself in his chest" (293). The emphasis on *not* fighting seems to suggest an imperative to surrender; however, the contrast between these two moments reveals Alanna's changing understanding of power and resistance. In the first, Alanna stops fighting only when "She had used up all her air, all her strength, all her magic" (*Alanna* 153); in the second, she makes a conscious choice to use Roger's expectation against him. Alanna does not surrender to Roger; rather, at the conclusion of the series, she better understands how to fight him. Not fighting emerges as its own resistance, acceptance as a kind of mastery.

Although the marriage plot feels like a disappointing concession to heteropatriarchy, Alanna's choice to marry her friend George Cooper, a commoner and a thief, is another moment in which acceptance emerges as its own form of mastery. Alanna refuses Jonathan's proposal because of all it would require her to give up. In marrying George, Alanna changes her mind about marriage without fully acceding to the social structures that would restrict her to the role of a mother and manager of her husband's estate. As Anastasia Salter argues, "When Alanna chooses [George] as a life companion, it is with full agency in the decision and no sacrifice of the position she has earned. She compromises none of her male or female identity to choose her desires." Alanna's marriage to George is not, however, "an apolitical choice," as Salter characterizes it (169). Indeed, Alanna's marriage is highly political, adding class crossing to Alanna's gendered and cultural boundary crossing. George himself is a kind of cross-dresser, "clever and unorthodox, someone who could venture among all classes without trouble" (*Lioness Rampant* 243). For much of the series, he runs the underworld of Tortall's capital city as King of the Thieves, appropriating court forms to maintain order among criminals. Once he gives that

up and turns "respectable," as he puts it, he remains a liminal figure, putting his skills to use as a spy for Jonathan (307). Rather than move her out of her liminal, marginal spaces and roles, Alanna's marriage to George reinforces them—right down to geography: Jonathan gives George and Alanna the barony of Pirate's Swoop, whose keep is built into a cliff on the coastal border of Tortall.

Like the other concessions to power structures in the series, Alanna's marriage is unorthodox and maintains her liminality, both because of her association with George and his activities, and because of her refusal to adhere to either strictly masculine or feminine roles and codes. After her final confrontation with Roger, her magic sword remains embedded in the stone floor of the catacombs where she fought him. Although the sword may be what Battis calls "the representation of her phallic power, the most important piece of artifice in her performance as a male knight," giving it up does not mean Alanna surrenders her power or her role as a knight. Rather, the loss of the sword opens up possibilities for a more expansive understanding of what it means to perform knighthood and chivalry that isn't defined by masculinity. Battis rightly points out the text's missed opportunities to explore nonnormative gender identities, but we can nonetheless read in Alanna a nascent queerness in her negotiation of masculine and feminine roles and gender performance. She embraces the markers of femininity in her fondness for beautiful clothing while subverting the association of feminine beauty with weakness, a transformation that slowly takes hold in Tortall in Pierce's subsequent novels. Much as the Bazhir transform Jonathan and the kingdom for which he metonymically stands in giving him the power of the Voice, Alanna transforms the institutions she enters even when she must accede to their parameters.

4. Reading in the Middle

I began by asking what it might mean to read Alanna as a postcolonial subject, resistant to colonial power even as she carries it from the metropole to the Bazhir Desert. As much as the series is implicated in the colonizing discourses of Orientalism and medievalism, I have argued that The Song of the Lioness also engages in a complex interrogation of patriarchal and colonial power structures in its imagined world. The novels raise questions about the institutions and ideologies that Alanna enters, accepts, resists, and transforms, inviting readers to interrogate analogous ideologies in our own world. To conclude, I ask

the same question of the text's setting: How might we read the medievalist fantasy setting as a productive site of resistance for contemporary subjects, despite associations of the medieval with a backward, violent, and ignorant past—or, less extremely, as a more innocent time?

Noting the parallels between Orientalist constructions of the East—located in the past—and contemporary constructions of the "exotic" Middle Ages, Catherine Brown offers an alternative reading of the medieval(ist) past when she argues, "For all its 'common-sense' resonance, 'the past is a foreign country' may not be a helpful model. . . . If the past is a foreign country, what are we who spend so much time in it? Anthropologists? Archaeologists? Tourists? Colonists? Orientalists? Go-betweens?" (4). As modern readers, she argues, we might learn from medieval readers to "embrace coevalness" between reader and text, and read "in that in-between state where polarities (subject/object, self/Other, now/then) are confused, where simultaneous, apparently conflicting truths can be equally in effect, where things really begin to live" (13). Dinshaw points similarly to "the noncontemporaneous contemporaneity of the moment of reading, or the spectral asynchronies of the present," arguing for "an approach to . . . medieval texts that acknowledges the heterogeneity of times in the present (29, 77). Though both of these critics focus on contemporary readers engaging with medieval texts, their approaches to reading as asynchronous and temporally slippery are instructive for understanding the relationship between adolescence and the medieval as analogous, enabling middles. Helen Dell describes the "medieval otherworlds presented in fantasy fiction" as "more real than reality, sites of plenitude and presence for which the heart longs," suggesting the layered potentialities of Pierce's imagined world, and medievalist fantasy otherworlds more generally (173). I read this "plenitude and presence" in the unruly temporality of the "middles" encoded in the "Middle Ages" and its analogous middle in adolescence. The indeterminacy of these middles, at once "dark ages" to be bracketed off and magical times to be reclaimed in the present—suggests alternatives to the orderly procession of linear development, from child to adolescent to adult. The plenitude of these middles extends outward, taking in past and future as well as the present.

Applying Brown and Dinshaw's theories of medieval reading to Pierce's medievalist fantasy series draws a connection between our modern fantasies of the Middle Ages as an exotic, Other time, and the historical practices with which that fantasy engages, however obliquely.

Pugh and Weisl also engage Brown to explore how medievalist YA texts help readers "make sense of themselves in the alien world of the present through a fantasy vision of the past" (62). I build on their analysis by considering how Brown's ideas enable a resistant politics to ideologies that abject their Others in both space and time. Engaging the coevalness of medieval reading allows the text to talk back as something more than an Orientalist/medievalist fantasy, a "girl power" story, or a fictional manifesto of 1980s feminism. Instead of an escapist fantasy that safely isolates the questioning of a status quo in an Other time and place, it becomes a text "where polarities . . . are confused, where simultaneous, apparently conflicting truths can be equally in effect." Reading becomes a process of mutual transformation between reader and text, which Brown expands on in relation to the food metaphors that are prevalent in medieval accounts of reading and interpretation: "The text resists; you take it into you, but it is not 'you'; you break it open, suck it, chew it; you change it, and it will change you, so that, ultimately, you and it, subject and object, then and now, are not easily distinguishable" (15). The Song of the Lioness visualizes this process in Alanna's cross-dressing, as her multiple selves—masculine, feminine, knight, lady, Tortallan, Bazhir—become coeval, "not easily distinguishable" from one another. The text itself similarly enacts a kind of cross-dressing in its constructed medievalist past, which is coeval with our own present.[9] Pierce's texts are at once radically removed from the reader's context and deeply entrenched in it. Young readers recognize Alanna's struggles to overcome the masculinist biases of her society, even as her interventions seem far different from anything a child or teenager of the late twentieth or early twenty-first centuries might undertake.

The Song of the Lioness invites the reader to step out of her skin to identify with Alanna in a moment of imaginative cross-dressing. For me, revisiting the text as an adult, the identification was provisional, as I recognized all the problems with the novels' feminism and multiculturalism. On second and third (and fourth, and fifth) readings, my engagement with Alanna became what queer theorist José Muñoz would call *disidentification*, a provisional, partial identification that responds to and interrogates dominant ideology.[10] Disidentification refuses to sanitize its object, but rather acknowledges its limits without dismissing what it has to offer, in "an identification that is both mediated and immediate, a disidentification that enables politics" (7). Muñoz theorizes disidentification as both a reading practice—related to the theories of medieval reading above—and "the survival strategies the

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minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (4). Alanna, then, also disidentifies. She neither fully assimilates nor openly opposes the masculine ideologies associated with knighthood and chivalry; but by entering the institution of knighthood, she "read[s] [herself] . . . in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect'" with her as a feminine subject (12). Alanna reads herself "in the middle"—between assimilation and resistance; past, present, and future; masculine and feminine. The reader finds herself in the middle as well, between fantasy and reality, imagined otherworld and heterogeneous present.

Fantasy stories, Pierce wrote in 1993, "appear to have little to do with reality, but they do provide readers with the impetus to challenge the way things are, something YAs respond to wholeheartedly" (50). Readers of fantasy are particularly tuned in to the relationship between these stories and their own realities, Pierce continues: "Some youngsters will always say, 'But that only happens in *books*,' but fantasy readers seem to know that what happens in books can be carried over, that the idea of change is universal, and that willpower and work are formidable forces, wherever they are applied" (51). The "safe" Otherness of the medievalist, Orientalist, fantasy setting masks its potentially subversive questioning of the "real" world—even when the text's subversiveness is limited. These texts help us imagine self and Other, past and present, power and subordination as coeval, in ambiguous and shifting relation to one another. Though their answers may not always be satisfactory, these texts empower readers by prompting them to interrogate discourses of power within the text's imagined world, and to keep asking questions about our own.

Notes

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[1]Alanna is thus disciplined by the text every time she uses too much (magic) power—something we never see her brother Thom do, despite his misuse of his own magic—and,

for all her resistance, she is still yoked to normative femininity through what Judith Butler calls the heterosexual matrix, "a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender . . . that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (208n6).

[2]I choose "masculinism" here over "patriarchal" or "phallocentric"—both also accurate descriptions—to emphasize that Tortallan knighthood, before and after Alanna, values men and masculinity over women and femininity. Alanna challenges the equation of chivalry and masculinity by proving herself the exception, that she can be a knight *despite* her gender, rather than engaging her gender as a potential strength. Later installments of the Tortall books, notably the Protector of the Small sequence (1999–2002), more expansively challenge the institution's equation of masculinity with strength and chivalric virtue.

[3]In *The Modern Age*, Kent Baxter explores this dynamic in some detail in his chapters on British and American youth scouting and Native American boarding schools.

[4]Carolyn Dinshaw expands on the construction of the Orient as temporally Other in medieval travelogues and the Victorian colonial imagination in chapter two of *How Soon is Now*, "Temporally Oriented: The *Book of John Mandeville*, British India, Philology, and the Postcolonial Medievalist" (73–104).

[5]In *Recasting the Past: The Middle Ages in Young Adult Literature*, and *The Middle Ages in Literature for Youth*, Rebecca Barnhouse gives a useful overview of medievalist YA fiction, but focuses on historical fiction and retellings of medieval legends (e.g., Robin Hood and Arthurian cycles), rather than on fantasy that takes place in imagined "medieval" settings. Helen Dell notes "a perception, shared by authors and readers, that fantasy and the medieval have a privileged link or are even interchangeable," although "[m]edieval allusions . . . may be only fleeting or indeterminate or they may be explicit and saturate the story at every level" (172). Carolyn Dinshaw also suggests the expansiveness of medievalist tropes beyond the trappings of knighthood and courtly love in *How Soon is Now?*

[6]Articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with the statement, "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (296), the white savior complex is a widespread trope in fantasy literature across audience age groups, and in children's and YA literature across genres. Yulisa Amadu Maddy and Donnarae MacCann critique Isabel Allende's YA novel *Forest of the Pygmies* (2005) for its portrayal of "the 'Pygmy' population . . . so backward that survival depends upon guidance from a newcomer in Africa: an American teenager" (63). China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun* (2007) subverts the trope when the "tall and striking" blonde Zanna is sidelined early in the novel and her "shorter and rounder and messier," dark-haired friend Deeba Resham takes over her role as "Schwazzy" to save an alternate London (4, 7). As Baker suggests in "What We Found on Our Journey Through Fantasy Land," fantasy often relies on racist tropes to "type" Good and Evil along the lines of light/dark or civilized/savage (which she also discusses in her essay "Musings on Diverse Worlds"). Despite a rise in fantasy writers of color in the 1990s who have worked to interrogate and subvert these tropes (see Okorafor, "Writers of Colour"), children's and YA fantasy has lagged behind in meaningful portrayals of characters of color. A 2003 survey of YA genre texts reviewed in *VOYA* and *School Library Journal* between 1992 and 2001 found "only about 62 (6 percent) of the 976 reviews of youth fantasy novels featured a protagonist or secondary character of color" (Agosto 268). See also Dharmadikari, "Surviving Fantasy Through Postcolonialism"; McGillis, ed., *Voices of the Other*; Leonard, ed., *Into Darkness Peering*; Stewart, "Beyond Borders"; and Woo, "Toward a Poetics of Asian American Fantasy."

[7]This sequence is somewhat prescient, appearing several years before Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* canonized the notion that gender is not natural or essential, but constructed through a reiterative process of performance.

[8]Pierce explores the ramifications of Alanna's success for Tortall in her follow-up series, Protector of the Small (1999–2002), in which she also offers an interesting counterpoint to Alanna in the androgynous Kel. Where Alanna's experience of her female body and her exploration of feminine dress and behavior are often fraught with doubt, when Kel decides to perform femininity it is a grim assertion of self. After a group of pages attempts to drive her off by vandalizing her room, she resolves not to let those who think she has no place as a knight-in-training forget who and what she is: "She was a girl; she had nothing to be ashamed of, and they [the other pages] had better learn *that* first thing. The best way to remind them was to dress at least part of the time as a girl" (*First Test* 32). Her attitude toward her gender identity is not neutral, either, but positive. When the knight in charge of training the young pages later tells her, "I would you had been born a boy," Kel's only response is to think to herself: "But I *like* being a girl" (*Page* 246).

[9]My thanks to Deborah Stevenson for suggesting this connection.

[10]Muñoz expands on Judith Butler, who asks, "What are the possibilities of politicizing disidentification, this experience of misrecognition, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong?" (qtd. in Muñoz 12).

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