

Women in Literature:
The Impact of Feminism on Fantasy Literature,
1950–1990

The 1960s and 1970s were a tumultuous time, characterized by several different political movements, including the Women's Rights Movement. The Women's Rights Movement desired not only equality for women, but to change the way women were viewed in the world. In the post-World War II era, women looked to important feminist icons, such as Rosie the Riveter, to push the idea that women could be just as strong and useful as men. The women of the 1960s desired equal pay for equal work, opportunities to advance in the workplace, and most of all to no longer be subjected to the sexual harassment that ran rampant in the workplace. With the emergence of this second wave of the Women's Rights Movement, popular culture started to create projects with a feminist perspective. Women began to use literature as a means to force men to understand that they too were people worthy of respect.

Prior to the 1960s, fantasy literature lacked a female voice. The fantasy genre of literature has existed for almost the entire length of the written word; it has evolved from myths, to fairytale, to the fantasy genre recognized today and yet women only began to break into the genre after the second Women's Rights Movement. Most secondary sources that discuss the repercussions of the Women's Rights Movement on literature focus entirely on the first wave of the movement (1884-1920), and make only a passing mention of how that was reflected in fantasy literature. This paper aims to shed light on how the Women's Rights Movement impacted western fantasy literature genre from the United States and United Kingdom, starting in the 1960s. To begin, this paper will examine fantasy works in the mid-to-late 1900s and how a political movement helped to shape the genre. It will then look at how the women's movement

impacted literature in general, and then examine popular fantasy literature before, during, and after the second Women's Rights Movement. Finally, it will demonstrate that the women's movement was instrumental in changing the way fantasy literature was written.

Women's Rights Movement

During the 1960s, women began to realize that despite the strides they had made during the Women's Rights Movement of the 1920s, they were still heavily discriminated against in almost every aspect of American life. Feminism includes the belief that gender equality in society means equal representation in popular culture. There was a common belief that it was the movement of the 1920s that led women to become more prominent in literature, but it was not until this second wave of feminism that they were able to break into the fantasy genre in a meaningful way. Fantasy literature is a genre that uses the imaginary and the magical to add a missing element to life. Before the 1960s, the fantasy literature genre was dominated by male authors, writing strong male characters and one-dimensional female characters that added little to the story. The few female authors in the genre followed that same model. The Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s led female fantasy literature authors to write literature with well-rounded, strong female characters instead of maintaining the status quo of strong, male characters and one-dimensional female characters. T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1958) was written from Arthur's perspective, with the only important female characters being portrayed as evil and J.R.R. Tolkien's epic fantasy trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) contained only three notable female characters. Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) and Patricia A. McKillip's *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* (1974) both were tales of heroic wizards, but Le Guin's is a tale of the misdirected, male wizard Ged while McKillip's, written later, is a tale of the kind and powerful female wizard Sybel. During this renaissance of fantasy

literature, William Goldman's *The Princess Bride: S. Morgenstern's Classic Tale of True Love and High Adventure* (1973), showed that male authors still viewed women as damsels in distress. As fantasy literature began to progress, authors such as Marion Zimmer Bradley, Janny Wurts, and Raymond E. Feist wrote about powerful women and the impact they had on the world around them. Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1982) tells the Arthurian legends solely from the perspective of the women. Wurts' and Feist's *Daughter of the Empire* (1987), tells of a young woman that becomes the leader of her people and works to change the course of a nation. As the feminist movement took root, authors began to change the fantasy narrative from one solely centered on male heroes to one that included both male and female protagonists.

Although many sources have been written about women in literature and the Women's Rights Movement, most of the secondary sources discuss the first women's movement of the nineteenth century and not that of the 1960s and 1970s. Research on the fantasy literature genre is even more sparse and only the history and evolution of fantasy literature has been written about, but not what led to that evolution. Political movements and the impact that popular culture has on them has also been written about to some degree as well as the impact political movement has on popular culture, but not how recent political movements have influenced postmodern literature. Little has been written about the second Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s because most sources focus on the suffrage movement and end the discussion after women won the vote.

The impact of the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s on various aspects of modern life (i.e., work, family life, and education) has been heavily examined by historians and yet, its impact on the fantasy literature genre has never before been studied. The impact the Second Women's Rights Movement had on the fantasy literature genre and the subsequent

development of many strong female characters is an entirely new topic. This topic is entirely new in its approach to how the feminist movement has impacted culture. The Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s led female fantasy literature authors to write literature with well-rounded, strong female characters instead of maintaining the status quo of strong, male characters and one-dimensional female characters. Two historical approaches will be used for this topic. The gender approach will be used to show the way that both genders are portrayed in fantasy literature before, during, and after the Women's Rights Movement. The cultural approach will also be used to show the ways in which the women's movement changed the way that cultures viewed the roles of the two genders and how that in turn shaped the way that authors chose to portray the different genders in their fantasy novels. It is important to show the ways in which changing culture has impacted the way that gender is viewed and the ways in which feminism has impacted culture.

Lack of a Female Voice

Fantasy literature had always been thought to be the province of men, with male authors dominating the genre. Female authors had broken into almost every literary genre since the First Women's Rights Movement, but it was not until the second movement began in the 1960s that there started to be a push for women in fantasy literature, from more female authorship to stronger female characters. The decade before the Second Women's Rights Movement was filled with some of the most well-known and beloved literature of the twentieth century, but those works also showed the view men had on a woman's place within the fantasy genre. T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* was a popular retelling of the Arthurian legends and yet it only contained five notable female characters—Morgause, Morgan le Fay, Guinevere, Elaine, and Nimue. These women caused no end of trouble for Arthur and his followers and were portrayed

as stupid, ugly, or evil. “The Queen is a real one [fairy], and one of the worst of them.”¹ Morgan le Fay was a vile, evil creature that was considered to be the Queen of the Fairies, in direct contrast with later retellings of the Arthurian legends, such as Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *The Mists of Avalon* where Morgaine is portrayed as a wise and powerful priestess of Avalon. “For one day the priests too will tell it, as it was known to them. Perhaps between the two, some glimmering of the truth may be seen.”² Male and female authors told the myth of King Arthur and his knights from two entirely different perspectives, but the original myth was likely somewhere between the male-centered myths and the female-centered myths. T. H. White tended to portray his female characters in a negative light, such as his description of Morgause, Morgan le Fay’s sister in his tale, “She was not a serious witch like her sister Morgan le Fay—for her head was too empty to take any great art seriously, even if it were the black one.”³ Prior to the Second Women’s Rights Movement, the female characters as evil or stupid was the accepted narrative, but feminism’s influence led Bradley to rewrite that narrative and show the female characters as strong-willed, wise, and powerful women.

J.R.R. Tolkien, arguably one of the most famous fantasy writers of the twentieth century, wrote the entire 1,000-page trilogy *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954), and *The Return of the King* (1955) with only three memorable female characters (Galadriel, Éowyn, and Arwen—along with the monstrous female spider, Shelob). Unlike most fantasy writers, Tolkien managed to write an epic fantasy without having overarching romantic entanglements. The women of *The Lord of the Rings*, along with any romantic notions in the books, were only added into the trilogy for added realism because it is impossible for men to go about their lives without encountering women or some form of romance.⁴ Published around the same time, Tolkien’s and White’s works could hardly have

represented women differently. The women of *The Lord of the Rings*, although few and far between, were intelligent, strong-willed, and beautiful. “I perceive the Dark Lord and know his mind, or all of his mind that concerns the Elves. And he gropes ever to see me and my thought. But still the door is closed!”⁵ Galadriel’s mind is even stronger than the Dark Lord’s, indicating that even before the women’s movement, some male authors felt the need for strong, female characters. Even with his acceptance of a few strong, female characters, Tolkien was unable to write an epic fantasy centered around a woman because at the time men had the adventures and if a woman happened to be around, she was only there to offer the men advice, at the most. In *The Two Towers*, Tolkien created the monstrous spider Shelob, choosing to make her female. Regarding the decision to make the monster a female, Tolkien said, “The female monster is certainly no deadlier than the male, but she is different. She is a sucking, strangling, trapping creature.”⁶ Tolkien did not write Shelob as a female because he thought she’d be a deadlier monster than a male, but rather because he felt she would be better able to trap the hobbits and cause them greater suffering as a more sinister enemy. This denotes the stigma that surrounded women at that time, that they were sneaky creatures capable of weaving webs around men and entrapping them. Even if a male author was willing to admit that female characters could be wise and powerful, he was just as likely to show how evil and strangling he believed women to be.

Women Enter the Field

In 1968, feminist author Ursula K. Le Guin followed the same general story line in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, that many male authors had followed before, a male wizard grew up to save the world and all the female characters were secondary and vague in their descriptions. “The hero does what a man is supposed to do: he uses his strength, wits, and courage to rise from humble beginnings to great fame and power, in a world where women are secondary, a man’s

world.”⁷ Although Le Guin was well-known for her feminist leanings, she could not help but to repeat the traditional narrative of a powerful male and unimportant, or evil, women. In 215 pages, *A Wizard of Earthsea* contained only three female characters—the first was a somewhat morally corrupt and weak witch, the second and most important was an evil sorceress bent on troubling the wizard Ged, and the third was an elderly woman that was portrayed as mentally delayed. Even in a story written by a woman, the biases against strong female characters that were rife in male authors’ works were prevalent. Le Guin was able to enter the field of fantasy literature, a remarkable feat for a female writer at the time, but she still wrote much the same way that male authors were writing at that time with male heroes and weak women.

Female fantasy authors were not widely accepted within the genre and as such they could not always publish under their own names and had an easier time breaking into the genre if they followed the already agreed upon masculine narrative.⁸ Le Guin wrote about a male wizard because it was more believable than if the wizard had been a female and she also would have an easier time being published if she followed the popular narrative. When asked if her gender had ever played a part in how a story is told, Le Guin said, “For a long time I wrote pretty much as a man, and men were at the center of most of my stories. Learning to write as a woman was the most important thing I did in the middle of my life.”⁹

Changing the Narrative

It took time for the changes that began with the start of the Second Women’s Rights Movement to take effect and make a noticeable change in fantasy literature. In 1974, another feminist author, Patricia A. McKillip, wrote her award-winning *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* but unlike Le Guin, McKillip was able to change the narrative through her beautiful, strong-willed, and intelligent female wizard Sybel. Six years after Le Guin wrote about the young, male wizard

Ged, McKillip was able to move away from the traditional tale of an elderly male wizard and created a world in which a female wizard was stronger than almost all the male wizards in the book.¹⁰ This marked a change in the way that women were portrayed in fantasy literature.

Women began to be viewed as viable heroines instead of background characters of little to no importance. The female characters were often more interesting than the male characters and as such it was understandable to create works solely about those interesting women. McKillip's later work *The Sorcerer and the Cygnet* (1991) changed from male to female-oriented for this very reason, "I was expecting to write just a plain, ordinary, male-oriented quest fantasy and that damn book just turned itself around and said, 'No, you're not doing this, you're writing about women.'"¹¹ Female fantasy authors began to realize that their female characters were more interesting and could make a better story than the male characters, something that had not been realized in fantasy literature before.

Female authors had begun to write strong, female characters, but male authors took longer to change their own narrative and change their biases about how women were supposed to be in fantasy literature. William Goldman's popular *The Princess Bride: S. Morgenstern's Classic Tale of True Love and High Adventure*, portrays the only notable female character, Buttercup, as beautiful but "never long on imagination."¹² Although female authors had begun to see women as more than damsels-in-distress, male authors had a more difficult time seeing women as anything else. Male characters, like Inigo Montoya and Westley, were intelligent, courageous, and strong, stopping at nothing to defeat the "bad guy." This narrative had been espoused for centuries making it difficult for men to think of women as the possible heroes of their stories, even after the second wave of feminism led female writers to change the way they wrote about women in fantasy literature. Buttercup oftentimes tried to prove that she was not as

stupid as she appeared and yet every time she did, she would invariably say something stupid, “I didn’t mean that, I didn’t, I didn’t, not a single syllabub of it.”¹³ Even when women tried to prove they were intelligent in literature, they would inevitably let slip that they were not as intelligent as the men. In trying to create a new fairytale, Goldman simply repeated the old narrative of a damsel-in-distress that was not intelligent enough to save herself.

Women in Fantasy Literature

The Women’s Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s had powerful implications for the fantasy literature genre as both men and women began to believe that powerful, strong-willed women could make realistic heroines within the genre. After the Second Women’s Rights Movement, female authors began to dominate the genre, creating many strong, female characters because although it was possible for male authors to create strong, female characters it was more common for females to long for and believe in a heroine. As the decade immediately following the end of the Second Women’s Rights Movement, the 1980s showed the first noticeable increase in strong-willed female characters. These new female characters were portrayed as strong-willed, intelligent, and beautiful women that were capable of changing the course of nations—often without making the same pitfalls as men. One of the most well-known feminist fantasy authors was Marion Zimmer Bradley who wrote *The Mists of Avalon*, in an effort to breathe new life into the Arthurian legends and the women of those tales that had been often overlooked as unimportant to the story. Her characters—Morgaine (better known as Morgan le Fay), Morgause, Igraine, the Lady of the Lake (Viviane), and Gwenhwyfar—showed that women were integral to a legend that had been previously thought to be solely about the male characters. Bradley wanted women to understand that they were always important in myths and that, “Restoring Morgan and the Lady of the Lake to real, integral movers in the drama is, I think, of

supreme importance in the religious and psychological development of women in our day.”¹⁴

Male authors had either overlooked Morgaine or they wrote her as an evil sorceress, determined to hinder Arthur’s happiness, but Bradley’s desire to promote feminism led her to write Morgaine as she felt she always was supposed to be—independent, wise, and powerful.

Throughout *The Mists of Avalon* it is difficult to overlook the many times that Bradley took a jab at the patriarchal society that Christianity created when it destroyed Pagan societies and the matriarchy they had followed. Despite the seemingly anti-Christian leanings of the book, Bradley let it be known that *The Mists of Avalon* was not meant to attack Christianity, but rather to attack the anti-feminism that is rife in Middle Eastern-based religions, such as Judaism.¹⁵ The rise of Christianity and other Middle Eastern-based religions led women to be marginalized in literature as they were in real life and the Second Women’s Rights Movement began to overturn some of that marginalization by shedding light on one of the root causes of sexism as well as by reclassifying previously marginalized characters as strong, independent women. Morgaine’s comment that, “You Christian’s are overfond of that word *unseemly*, especially when it relates to women,” is indicative of Bradley’s own opinion that Christianity is the reason women were held to such a different standard than men as well as why they were left out of so much literature.¹⁶ Bradley was a fan of Tolkien, a devout Christian, and it was her love of his works that led her to realize that in over 1000 pages, *The Lord of the Rings* contained only three significant female characters.¹⁷ The lack of strong, female characters in fantasy literature prior to the second feminist movement inspired Bradley to change the narrative and bring feminism to the fore of the fantasy genre.

Raymond E. Feist and Janny Wurts’s *Daughter of the Empire*, encapsulates the changes in fantasy literature in the decade following the end of the second Women’s Rights movement as

it is a tale about a strong female character, written through the combined efforts of a male and female author. Earlier fantasy works about strong women were often written by strong women, but once feminist authors such as Bradley showed that it was not unrealistic for such characters to exist, male authors also began to write books centered on a strong, female lead. Feist and Wurts worked together to create a female character that embodied “the commodities of womankind – beauty, wit, charm, [and] allure.”¹⁸ Women began to be viewed as beautiful and witty, by male and female authors alike. The traits used to describe women in fantasy were often physical or sexual traits, but their actions showed that women could lead a people and change the course of a nation as well as any man. Feist had come up with the character of Lady Mara and a general idea of what trouble she would need to conquer, but he decided to collaborate with Wurts because, “if [he] wrote it alone, [he’d] probably not get it ‘right.’”¹⁹ Feist was concerned that he could not write a realistic female character without the help of a female author. Male authors began to understand the valuable insight female authors could lend to their works and as such, they were able to work with female authors to create realistic, intelligent, and strong-willed women. Feist and Wurts worked together to write a best-selling novel that embodied female empowerment and turning over societal norms.

Historiography

In “Folklore and Fantastic Literature,” C.W. Sullivan III discusses what defines fantasy literature and what themes inspire its creation. Sullivan argues that Fantasy literature is a mixture of mimesis of folklore and the desire to create something that is missing from the life of the author.²⁰ “Folklore and Fantastic Literature” discusses the creation of Fantasy literature as a genre and the ability of authors such as Marion Zimmer Bradley to take a well-known story (ex: King Arthur), and rewrite it to make it more fantastic and to tell the story of King Arthur from

the perspective of the women in the story—Morgaine, Igraine, Gwenhwyfar, and Morgause. Sullivan suggests that *The Mists of Avalon* was written to showcase the great changes that were occurring during the time of King Arthur; the change from the Celtic beliefs to Christianity and the change from a matriarchy to a patriarchy.²¹ “Folklore and Fantastic Literature” explores the ways in which fantasy writers can use mimesis to retell old stories in a new way to shed light on things that might have otherwise gone overlooked.

The most comprehensive study of the history of the fantasy literature genre is *A Short History of Fantasy*, by Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James. Mendlesohn and James argue that fantasy novels can be considered literary works and can be enjoyed by adults and children alike. To argue their point Mendlesohn and James discuss the evolution of the fantasy genre of literature from the time it was considered myth to the fantasy that is common today. Mendlesohn and James discuss the evolution of the fantasy genre from the time of the classics through the first decade of the twenty-first century. Their book covers how fantasy evolved but not necessarily why it evolved. Chapter Two of *A Short History of Fantasy* discusses the evolution of fantasy, starting with *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and Homer’s *Odyssey* to the Arthurian legends with Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain* and Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*.²² The writings of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien are given their own chapter due to their massive impact on the fantasy genre. Lewis and Tolkien help prove Mendlesohn’s and James’ argument that fantasy can be considered literature because Lewis and Tolkien wrote more than pop novels; they wrote fantasy novels that were about religion, masked in magical fantasy. Mendlesohn and James argue that Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy can be considered books about the Great War just as much as *All Quiet on the Western Front* because they were heavily influenced by Tolkien’s experiences fighting in the war.²³ The writings of modern authors

such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass* are used to prove that even children's fantasy books can be written on a level that enable adults to enjoy and even argue over them. *A Short History of Fantasy* is a decade-by-decade summary of the evolution of the fantasy genre, from myth to modern urban fantasy.

Historians have researched literary fiction and the first Women's Rights Movement to determine what impact the movement had on fictional writing in the mid-1800s. In Marc Egnal's "Historicizing Domesticity: The Impact of the Women's Rights Movement," he discusses how the depiction of the role of women in domestic settings has changed due to the Women's Rights Movement. Egnal uses literature to argue that women started to be portrayed as strong and intelligent after the women's movements of the nineteenth century. Before that, women in literature were portrayed as strong willed, but they were always young, single women and did not challenge the accepted norms for female behavior.²⁴ In his article, Egnal suggests that it was not until after the Women's Rights Movement that the relationships between the two sexes were changed in literature. He uses the writings of literary romance author, Nathaniel Hawthorne to show the emergence of feminism in literature during the very start of the women's movement. Egnal suggests that although Hawthorne's heroines all seem to be feminists, Hawthorne's writing leads many to believe that he was somewhat ambivalent to the movement. It is suggested that *The Scarlet Letter*'s (1850) Hester Prynne only acts to protect those she cares about and her role as a mother, not as a means to gain greater freedom for women.²⁵ Experts argue over whether Hawthorne was for feminism or against because his protagonists, although strong female characters, often made statements about it being a woman's job to follow her husband.²⁶

In *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), Hawthorne's feminist protagonist Zenobia falls in love with a chauvinist and commits suicide after he rejects her.²⁷ Egnal also uses *Ruth Hall*

(1854), by Fanny Fern to argue that some books may never have been written if not for the women's movement. *Ruth Hall* discusses the problems women faced at the time with being beautiful and it being considered unnecessary to be smart if one was pretty. Egnal suggests that without the women's movement Fanny Fern would not have been able to write a book that shed light upon the many challenges facing women at the time.²⁸ "Historicizing Domesticity: The Impact of the Women's Rights Movement" argues that the expansion of the first Women's Rights Movement changed the way that many authors represented domesticity in their literary works.

In "From Mrs. Warren's Profession to Press Cuttings: The Woman Question in George Bernard Shaw's Plays" ÖĞÜNCÜ Banu discusses how Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* reflects Shaw's support of and work in the women's rights movement of the Victorian era to the Edwardian era. Banu states that George Bernard Shaw was one of the playwrights that changed Victorian theatre by writing plays containing independent, strong-willed female characters.²⁹ Banu discusses the tactics that women used in the suffragist movement that led to criticism of the suffragettes. "From Mrs. Warren's Profession to Press Cuttings: The Woman Question in George Bernard Shaw's Plays" discusses the way in which suffragettes changed theatre and created a new genre "the suffrage play" for a short time and uses the play *Votes for Women* by American actress Elizabeth Robins to show that although suffrage plays were being used to gain a larger following for the suffrage movement, they were not always received well by the audience.³⁰ Banu suggests that Shaw had a greater impact on the women's movement because his plays *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *The Press Cuttings* show Shaw's support of equality for women, but not support of suffragettes.³¹ "From Mrs. Warren's Profession to Press Cuttings: The Woman Question in George Bernard Shaw's Plays" discusses the impact that the women's movement

had on the theatre and the ability of the theatre to spread the movement, if written in a way the audience could accept. The audience did not like the tactics of the suffragettes and therefore did not support plays that stated explicit support for the suffragette movement and instead supported plays that subtly suggested women should have equal rights and equal pay for equal work.

In “The New Woman as a Boy: Female Masculinity in Ellen Idström’s *Tvillingsysstrarna*,” Maria Andersson writes about the response of the people of Sweden to the women’s movement. Andersson discusses the idea that people in Sweden were worried that with the growing freedom for women, women would lose their feminine traits and started to criticize the women’s movement. In her article, Andersson discusses the novel *Tvillingsysstrarna: Berättelse för unga flickor (The Twin Sisters: A Story for Young Girls)* by Swedish author Ellen Idström about twin girls, one raised as a boy and the other as a girl to show Sweden what women could become if they were treated the same as men.³² Andersson discusses the way in which Idström’s novel portrays femininity and the new female masculinity and how that helped change the way tomboys were viewed. Before *The Twin Sisters: A Story for Young Girls* many books about female masculinity held that masculine women desired to be boys and there was often same-sex desire expressed in the novels, but Idström changed that with making her masculine Anna enjoy the freedom of boyhood without the desire to be a boy herself and without desiring her female friend.³³ “The New Woman as a Boy: Female Masculinity in Ellen Idström’s *Tvillingsysstrarna*” discusses the way in which the women’s movement in Sweden led to the creation of literary works containing female characters with masculine qualities but without masculine desires.

In “C. S. Lewis' Mythopoeia of Heaven and Earth: Implications for the Ethical and Spiritual Formation of Multicultural Young Learners,” S.C. Lee discusses the impact that Lewis’

theological novels had on youth of all different cultures. This article takes one of the most well-known fantasy writers of all time and discusses the impact his writings had on society. Lee argues that Lewis' works should be taught in multicultural classrooms because his writings can help with the moral development of students, regardless of their religious beliefs.³⁴ Lee primarily uses Lewis' series *The Chronicles of Narnia* to prove that his works have influenced the moral and spiritual development of young readers around the world.³⁵ "C. S. Lewis' mythopoeia of Heaven and Earth: Implications for the Ethical and Spiritual Formation of Multicultural Young Learners" discusses the ways in which fantasy literature can impact the development of ethics in young people and how that can help shape society into a world worth living.

The Priestess & the Pen: Marion Zimmer Bradley, Dion Fortune & Diana Paxson's Influence on Modern Paganism discusses the named authors' works and how those works helped give energy to the Women's Rights Movement as well as how they changed Neopagan and Goddess-centered spirituality. Sonja Sardovsky argues that these female writers were not only influenced by feminism but helped motivate the Women's Rights Movement themselves. Sardovsky devotes a large portion of her book to the study of *The Mists of Avalon* and analyzing Marion Zimmer Bradley and Diana Paxson's belief in female-centered religions and Paganism and how those beliefs were incorporated into *The Mists of Avalon*.³⁶ *The Priestess & the Pen: Marion Zimmer Bradley, Dion Fortune & Diana Paxson's Influence on Modern Paganism* discusses the impact that female writers can have on political movements and religion.

Conclusion

Prior to the second Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, female characters were often inconsequential or evil, but after the second Women's Rights Movement female authors started to enter the fantasy genre and create wise, powerful, and strong-willed

characters. The feminist movement impacted much of the English-speaking world, but its impact on the often-overlooked fantasy literature genre was among one of the most notable changes during this era. Before this second-wave of feminism, fantasy authors were primarily male, as were most characters within the genre. Female characters were added to literary works to either add a bit of realism to the story or to trouble the gallant hero. T.H. White and J.R.R. Tolkien were among many male authors of the time that did not fully value the female character. Male authors could not yet fathom the idea that a fantasy novel could center around a female protagonist. When the second Women's Rights Movement began, female fantasy authors tried to change the male-narrative, but it was not always easy. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* became a standard tale of a male wizard that grows up to save the day, with few female characters, because a male wizard was more realistic than a female. Just a few short years later, however, McKillip's *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* told the tale of a wise and powerful female wizard because the popular narrative, that only males could be the hero, began to shift. William Goldman's popular *The Princess Bride*, on the other hand, tried to maintain the idea that women could only be stupid damsels-in-distress because male authors of the time still had trouble accepting that a female could save herself. The decade after the end of the second Women's Rights Movement saw the greatest change in the popular narrative as feminist author Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* retold the Arthurian legends solely from the perspective of the female characters because she saw the need that women had for powerful, wise, and strong-willed female characters in literature. By this point, the narrative had shifted so much that even male authors began see that females could make for realistic heroes. Raymond E. Feist envisioned a female character that would change the course of her nation but acknowledging his shortcomings in the realistic development of such a character, he enlisted the aid of Janny Wurts. Together they

created a wise and powerful female character that overturned societal norms. Male and female authors were able to see the need society had for strong, female characters. The second Women's Rights Movement enabled women to break into the male-dominated fantasy literature genre and create realistic heroines that were beautiful, wise, powerful, and strong-willed, completely changing the popular narrative.

There is much more that can be studied regarding the evolution of fantasy literature. Fantasy literature has evolved differently in other countries. This paper only looked at fantasy literature from the United States and United Kingdom, therefore a look at fantasy literature in other countries would be invaluable to the discussion. Feminism has also evolved differently in other cultures, and it would be interesting to see how that progress shaped the fantasy literature from those cultures. The Women's Rights Movement has looked different and had distinct outcomes in many countries around the world and that will likely change the way their literature has evolved. There are also many more fantasy writers and their works in western fantasy that can be researched to determine what, if any, impact the feminist movement had on those works. It is also important to look at different political movements to see what impact those movements had on evolving the fantasy genre. The Civil Rights Movement, for example, could have had a tremendous impact on fantasy literature as well, adding more minorities to the genre. Political movements have a unique way of shaping literature and fantasy literature is no exception. Le Guin, McKillip, Zimmer Bradley, Wurts, and Feist along with countless others were all influenced by the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Without these forerunners, heroines like Rowling's Hermione from the *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) series, Veronica Roth's Beatrice from *Divergent* (2011-2013), Suzanne Collins' Katniss from *The Hunger Games* (2008-

2010), Leigh Bardugo's Alina from the *Shadow and Bone* (2012-2014) trilogy, and Rick Riordan's Annabeth from the *Percy Jackson* (2005-2009) series would not be able to exist.

ENDNOTES

1. T.H. White, *The Once and Future King*, (The Berkley Publishing Group, 1958), 101.
2. Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, (The Random House Publishing Group, 1982), prologue.
3. T.H. White, *The Once and Future King*, 217.
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