

The Presence and Role of Female Characters in Raymond E. Feist's

The Riftwar Cycle

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Abstract

Diversity is an increasingly important subject in today's society. This importance is reflected in literature, but not all genres seem to follow this trend. Traditionally, the fantasy literature genre is male-dominated, with a strong preference for male heroes. Raymond E. Feist's *Riftwar Cycle* is a fantasy novel series which focuses heavily on quest narratives and other epic fantasy tropes, such as heroism, adventure and sword-and-sorcery. This novel series also has an abundance of male heroes and under-represents its female characters.

This thesis analyses eight novels of *The Riftwar Cycle* and shows the imbalance between male and female characters, as well as their roles in the story. At best, female characters form 30% of the cast, with equivalent dialogue. Furthermore, female characters are often marginalised, put in traditional roles or a victim of sexism. It shows that this sub-genre of fantasy literature still has improvements to make to diversify.

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Introduction: Fantasy and women – they are limited

The fantasy genre has long been a literary genre focused on writings by male authors and written for a male audience. Even with female authors like Ursula Le Guin and Anne McCaffery writing novels for all audiences, the majority of fantasy authors has historically been male. Moreover, fantasy is a literary genre which is still undervalued in academic discussions. The question is: why?

Gender critique and gender studies is an area that is often discussed in literature, yet it has only scarcely been discussed within fantasy literature. For example, the *Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, which ought to be a complete overview of the genre, only addresses the struggles of writers of colour, not of female writers (Okorafor 179). While gender and ethnicity intersect, they are hardly the same. An example of gender critique and fantasy literature being discussed is Robin Anne Reid's multi-volume work *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2009), a general reference work focusing on women's contributions to science fiction and fantasy in multiple media (7). How male and female characters act and interact in fantasy novels is not addressed in this work, but it is an interesting field of research that would definitely benefit from a specifically gendered point of view. Gender-based stereotypes that have been subverted or deconstructed in other literary genres are still used in fantasy literature. As Mary Talbot explains it in her essay "Gender Stereotypes: Reproduction and Challenge": "Stereotyping, by contrast, reduces and simplifies" (471). Classic fantasy stories often have clear contrasts between good and evil. Stereotypes, which are easy to understand, are often used to show those contrasts.

Even though the genre embodies limitless imagination, the boundaries between men and women are still very strictly defined in most classic fantasy novels: men are the heroes, women are the damsels in distress. If women want to be the hero, they have to 'become' men. As Melissa Thomas explains in her essay "Teaching Fantasy: Overcoming the Stigma of Fluff": "Ironically

[women] have to take on male characteristics in order to overcome... What we alarmingly see, is that women must become men and enter the world of men that is 'war'... to defeat the evil of men” (62). Thus it seems like only people with a certain kind of masculinity perform heroic acts, and that people who show feminine traits are less likely to be heroes.

Raymond E. Feist (1945-) is an American author who has written over forty books and short stories. He started writing his epic fantasy novel series *The Riftwar Cycle* in the 1980's and was influenced by classic fantasy role-playing games and novels like *Dungeons & Dragons* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The world of Midkemia, in which *The Riftwar Cycle* takes place, is partially based on a college *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign. These franchises have set the tone for how gender and gender roles are traditionally portrayed, and they have undoubtedly influenced *The Riftwar Cycle*. To analyse Feist's writings means acknowledging the influences these classics have had on the fantasy genre as a whole, which will give a better image of the state of female characters in fantasy than when classics are discussed individually.

Women are limited in fantasy literature. They are less visible, and when they do have a role, it is often traditional and stereotypical. Visibility will be discussed further in Chapter 1. If there are no women present in stories, there can be no change in how they are portrayed. Furthermore, they are treated in harmful and violent ways that would be seen as normal (to the reader) in a traditional medieval society, but not in modern society. Why is this treatment accepted in fantasy literature? It is important to explore this question and its underlying causes, to better understand the consequences this violence and marginalisation has.

In this thesis eight of Feist's novels will be compared and contrasted, two per decade. An analysis of female characters will be made to see if they increase in number, importance within the story and development. The first chapter will consist of a statistical analysis of the page time of male and female characters and the amount of lines they have and a discussion of gender in fantasy

literature. Chapters two to five will be the proper comparison of the novels and finally those comparisons will be used to answer if Feist's female characters develop and receive more attention.

Chapter 1: Theory, Fantasy and Statistics

	Male characters	Female characters	Percentage	Male dialogue (pages)	Female dialogue (pages)	Percentage
<i>Magician</i>	32	4	89% male, 11% female	587	96	86% male, 14% female
<i>Silverthorn</i>	33	8	80% male, 20% female	242	39	86% male, 14% female
<i>Shadow of a Dark Queen</i>	28	8	78% male, 22% female	291	56	84% male, 16% female
<i>Krondor: the Betrayal</i>	29	6	83% male, 17% female	251	22	92% male, 8% female
<i>Talon of the Silver Hawk</i>	18	4	82% male, 18% female	171	24	88% male, 12% female
<i>Flight of the Nighthawks</i>	25	5	83% male, 17% female	214	48	82% male, 18% female
<i>A Kingdom Besieged</i>	25	6	81% male, 19% female	161	68	70% male, 30% female
<i>A Crown Imperilled</i>	21	9	70% male, 30% female	204	101	67% male, 33% female

Table 1: Spread of named male and female characters and dialogue across the novels

As seen in table 1, the ratio between male and female characters in selected novels of *The Riftwar Cycle* is highly unbalanced. Both in the amount of speaking time they have and in their actual numbers, male characters vastly outnumber female characters. In the two most recent books, *A Kingdom Besieged* (2011) and *A Crown Imperilled* (2012) female characters play a bigger role in the overall plot, which accounts for the increase in pages of dialogue. Those novels also contain a female viewpoint character, Sandreena, Knight-Adamant of the Temple of Dala. Her role will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

The sub-genre of Feist's novels within fantasy is sword-and-sorcery. The 1982 essay "Women in Science Fiction" by William Sims Bainbridge describes it as a genre where "[...] the

protagonist is often a sword-wielding barbarian who battles fiends armed with magic spells.” (1084). Furthermore, Bainbridge gives an explanation for the lack of diversity and exploration in this genre. “Typical societies in this sub-genre are feudal or tribal, not realistic models for social change in our own society” (1085). Are fantasy writers not comfortable enough in their own shaped world to change the norm? Bainbridge adds an interesting point to this: “However, by exploring impossibly radical alternatives, Sword-and-Sorcery can urge the insights of cultural relativism on the reader and help explore essential questions about the limits of human variation” (1085). In short, writers could use fantasy to help explore new frontiers in feminism and gender, but Feist clearly does not.

In Robin Anne Reid’s *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, a clear overview is given by different authors of female writers in fantasy literature, as well as how they break gender stereotypes. In “Fantasy, 1960–2005: Novels and Short Fiction” Mains argues that an early example of this is Ursula Le Guin’s *Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), which imagines a gender system and subsequent society completely different from our own. Le Guin asked questions about gender and sexuality no one else had before. Feist, however, keeps to the style of many other (epic) fantasy authors:

Many of these works center on a hero, inevitably male, with a destiny to fulfil and companions (also mostly male) to help him achieve it; all too often, female characters are relegated to princess-brides (sometimes spunky) and enchantresses (often evil) (64).

The only way Feist writes female characters, is if they are useful or significant to the male hero protagonist. They are often the love interest, or the reason for the hero to embark on his quest. As Mains et al. explain it in “Heroes or Sheroes”, they are only relevant in relation to the hero: “[...] the damsel in distress, the virginal bride who is the object of his quest and the reward for his heroism” (180). This lack of female agency is a concept that was mostly propagated through the

nineteen fifties, sixties and seventies by science-fiction and fantasy writers which started to be used less in the eighties, as seen in “Men Writing Women” by Janice M. Bogstad (171-76). However, Feist draws on it for most of his plots. Female characters are tools rather than full-fledged people.

Chapter 2: An analysis of *Magician* (1982) and *Silverthorn* (1985)

Magician (1982) – Carline, Aglaranna, Katala

Princess Carline is by far the most fleshed-out female character in *Magician*. She grows up with the protagonists, influencing them and playing a large role in the first part of the novel. Pug and another boy, Roland, fight for her affection, but end up forming a lasting friendship instead. Moreover, she serves as a reason to elevate Pug from a simple orphan to a squire after he saves her from trolls. Carline resolves to teach herself the blade to defend herself better afterwards, but the focus immediately shifts away from the castle and her ability to take care of herself does not show until the second part of the book, during the Tsurani attack on Crydee. Only then the reader gets to see some of the strength she possesses.

Throughout the novel there is a clear subtext of ‘do well, but not great’ when it comes to female characters. Male characters are the ones who perform acts of bravery, with female characters being the ones in danger or the ones emotionally supporting their husbands and family. For example, despite her own valour, Roland is the one who saves Carline and gives his life for her. Passive female heroines exist in many sword-and-sorcery novels (Mains et al. 180).

Aglaranna, the elf queen of Elvandar, is also introduced in the first part of *Magician*. Tomas is starstruck the moment he lays eyes on her, but she initially rebuffs him because she was recently widowed and Tomas is a boy. Aglaranna is hundreds of years old as an elf, and yet she marries Tomas after he inherits the powers of the elves’ former masters, the Valheru. Laura Quilter and Liz Henry discuss in their essay “Intersections of Age and Gender” the need for fantasy heroines and love interests to stay young and beautiful, as well as the implications of immortality in fantasy. In *Magician*, Tomas and Aglaranna’s age difference is swept aside by the knowledge he gains from his

powers, and his newly gained immortality. Both will remain forever young and beautiful, which is the highest achievement Aglaranna is granted (Quilter and Henry 216).

Tomas is the hero who saves the Queen and her kingdom from total destruction, while previously the elves (and Aglaranna) seemed to be able to defend themselves from the invaders without outside help. To Tomas, Aglaranna is his reward for his efforts, the end of his quest to become a great warrior and gain her admiration. According to Mains et al. in “Heroes or Sheroes”, this is a reoccurring problem in fantasy literature (Mains et al. 180). The relationship between Tomas and Aglaranna has huge power imbalances and carries hints of domestic abuse, with implications of Aglaranna controlled or otherwise coerced into the relationship.

“Since surrendering to Tomas’s desire, and her own, she had lost the ability to command him, or to resist his commands. He was now lord over her, and she felt shame. It was a joyless union, not the return of lost happiness she had hoped for. But there was a will-sapping compulsion, a need to be with him, to belong to him, that stripped away her defenses. Tomas was dynamic, powerful, and sometimes cruel. She corrected herself: not cruel, just so removed from any other being, no comparison could be made. He was not indifferent to her needs; he simply was unaware she had any. As she approached Elvandar, the soft fairy lights reflected in the shimmering tears that touched her cheeks.” (*Magician* 553)

After Tomas comes back to himself, Aglaranna forgives him without question. They seemingly live happily ever after, with Tomas as the Queen’s consort and renouncing any claim on the throne.

While this seems to be generous, he could easily take over if he wanted to. The power imbalance seems removed, but it is still present. This is apparent in later novels in the series, where Tomas acts as military leader and makes many decisions Aglaranna made previously.

Katala is introduced in the second part of *Magician*, as a fellow slave working alongside Pug. Katala's attraction to Pug is mostly informed through other characters, while the reader is as clueless as Pug until they sleep together and the narrator describes their love.

As with most female characters in *Magician*, Katala requires saving from an attack. Pug defends her and saves her life from raiding barbarians. Katala belongs to a nomadic, 'inferior' culture, the Thuril, who are routinely at war with the Imperial Japan-based Tsurani. Pug is from a medieval west-European culture. Even though the Thuril are proud to be independent and unique, she decides to give her son with Pug a Western name and upbringing. Pug does not offer Katala's culture the same courtesy, and makes no effort to learn about it.

"In the garden Katala was playing a word game with William, she had insisted they should both learn the language of her husband's homeland." (*Magician* 602)

This colonialist view of the hero's culture in comparison to other foreign cultures shows that Feist, at least in the 1980s, did not consider the implications of such a binary view of the 'Other'. Today, it is criticized much more harshly, as is shown in "Writers of Colour" by Nnedi Okorafor (188).

Silverthorn (1985) – Anita, Carline

Carline is introduced in *Silverthorn* with the sentence "In a most unladylike fashion" (*Silverthorn* 17). She discusses her marriage prospects and desirability. The book makes clear that she is 'already' 26 years old, and "[...] most women my age are eight, nine years married. Would you have me die a spinster?" (18). Quilter and Henry observe that in fantasy fiction, women in their late twenties and older are often already presented as less interesting and less sexual: "even women in their thirties may be read as "older" women by other characters, authors, and readers alike" (209). In *Magician*, Carline has gone from being the object of the hero's fascination to being almost too

old to be of interest to the reader. While her concern about her age is historically accurate, as Searle proves in “Women and Marriage in Medieval Society” (19), the fact that she speaks about her problems to a low-born lover would be more scandalous than her perceived old age. By the end of the novel, she is engaged to a simple travelling minstrel. Carline herself is a duchess and her children are in line for the throne. So on one hand Carline worries about being too old to marry, but on the other hand she is perfectly happy to cause a scandal by marrying someone who would be of the lowest class in medieval society. This is then quite literally hand-waved by the king granting the minstrel a duchy.

With a laugh and a wave, as he walked away, Lyam said, “Of course, didn’t she tell you? I can’t have my sister married to a commoner. I’m naming you Duke of Salador.” (*Silverthorn* 327)

Princess Anita is the catalyst of *Silverthorn*. Anita is introduced only through her memory of her late father, Erland, the events of *Magician* and her love for her betrothed, Arutha. When Arutha arrives to meet her, the perspective immediately changes to him.

An assassination attempt on Prince Arutha accidentally strikes Anita, and she is hit with a poisoned arrow. Only the plant silverthorn can save her life. Anita serves as a reason for the protagonist Arutha to go on a dangerous quest to save her life. The female love interest of the hero being the reason for him to go on his quest is a common occurrence in Feist’s novels, and, as W.A. Senior argues in “Quest Fantasy”, a staple trope of that sub-genre (199).

Everyone else looked at Anita, who was cradled in Arutha’s arms as he knelt upon the stones. Her veils and gown were spread out around her and she seemed to sleep while he held her. She was a vision in pristine white in the late afternoon light, except for the rapidly expanding crimson stain upon her back. (*Silverthorn* 117)

The way Anita is described in the scene in which she is shot by the poisoned arrow makes clear how the reader is meant to see her. She is perfect, innocent, and angelic. All female characters in *Silverthorn* and *Magician* are described as striking and beautiful, which is frequently mentioned, while male characters rarely get any acknowledgement of physical attractiveness. The beauty of female characters is also reflected in their class (nobility or royalty) and morality (good). As Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz explain in “The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales”, this closely resembles fairy tale characters who emphasize femininity, passiveness and beauty (722).

Chapter 3: An analysis of *Shadow of a Dark Queen* (1994) and *Kronador: the Betrayal* (1998)

Shadow of a Dark Queen (1994) - Rosalyn, Miranda, The Emerald Queen

Rosalyn is the catalyst of the story, and the reason the main character of the novel, Erik von Darkmoor, goes on his quest. As the person who is closest to him, almost like a sister, she is raped to hurt him. He kills her rapist and is sentenced to death (*Queen* 136), which kicks off the plot properly. Rosalyn is not given much characterization beyond being beautiful and in distress – her last name is not even revealed – but Erik does mention her a few more times, wondering what she would think of him now that he is no longer a simple smith's apprentice. His thoughts about her across the novel vary widely: from “He had thoughts of Rosalyn, and found them strangely neutral” (208) to “He thought of Rosalyn and found himself both fascinated and disturbed by remembering her without her clothing” (337). These inconsistent thoughts do not encourage the reader to form a clear image about her character and Erik's intentions towards her, and indicate Erik does not care for her besides her appearance.

Miranda is the closest the novel – and the entire *Riftwar Cycle* – gets to a female hero. First introduced as an ugly, possibly dangerous witch, she soon turns out to be a force for good who is on par with the best magicians. Because of her good morality, she is generally seen as beautiful, but to keep some ambiguity, she is also described as cold: “Roo got a good look at the woman and thought she was beautiful, but something very offputting in her manner made him view it as a distant, unobtainable sort of beauty” (*Queen* 75). Miranda plays an active role in the plot, by bringing the group of heroes together to visiting oracles to prepare for the future. She saves an elven woman and her children by bringing them to Elvandar, which shows she is willing to put her life at risk for others (*Queen* 109).

The Emerald Queen, Lady Clovis, is the main antagonist of the story. She is the first female antagonist of the *Cycle*, and with most female villains, is an enchantress who lures men in with promises of gold, power and sex (Mains 64). This is a common depiction of female villains in fantasy novels, as Christine Mains explains in “Fantasy, 1960–2005: Novels and Short Fiction”. In later novels, however, Clovis is unceremoniously upstaged and puppeted by a male demon, taking her own agency away. This lessens a lot of the impact Clovis’s actions have in this first novel. Tellingly, she is never seen up close, with almost no physical description. While the appearance of good female characters is often described, hers is not. This is an important distinction between good and evil characters. Clovis’s motivations are further explained by her ex-lover, the magician Nakor. He claims she has always been hungry for power, until she made a deal with evil forces. This is a classic villain origin story, which could have been given twists to raise this antagonist above other, similar ones.

Krondor: the Betrayal (1998) – Ugyne, Aglaranna

There is such a focus on male characters in this novel, that the points of interest of female characters are few and far between. As seen in chapter 1, the amount female dialogue reaches an all-time low in this novel. Nonetheless, there are a few situations that deserve attention.

Ugyne is the cousin of Owyn, one of the heroes of the novel. She is eighteen years old and described as vivacious. She provides most of the female dialogue in *Krondor*, to tell the heroes about a rich man who has been courting her. She is not interested in him, and claims he stares at her in odd ways. Nevertheless: “If I can’t marry nobility, Father will settle for wealth” (*Betrayal* 141). Ugyne has no say in the matter, as the daughter of a baron. Later on, it is revealed that the man who is courting her is seeking revenge against her father. Following the trope of damsels in distress, the man holds her at sword-point and the heroes save her life.

Elf Queen Aglaranna acts as a redeeming, motherly and softening factor in this story. When the heroes arrive in Elvandar, they are greeted warmly, even the dark elf who is traditionally an enemy of the elves. Gorath, the dark elf, is absolved of his sins and given a place in what he calls heaven (*Betrayal* 235). Gorath's story is a redemption story, and Aglaranna is the one who redeems him. The way in which this happens is reminiscent of a baptism. She tells him his journey is not yet fulfilled, but when he is done he may return and take a new name, starting a new life. These clear religious undertones are a rarity in Feist's novels, where religion is mostly used as an outlet of fanaticism or a straw-man for the superiority of magic. Graham Sleight explores 'fantasies of religion' in "Fantasies of History and Religion", explaining the term as a text that depicts or makes use of commonly understood religious tropes, but which recasts them in the context of additional fantastic narrative elements (248). Having this kind of imagery appear in the novel, such as the image of Aglaranna as an angelic redeemer, is unique. It once again depicts the moral standards Aglaranna and other heroines are held to in *The Riftwar Cycle*, this time applying clear Christian standards as well.

Chapter 4: An analysis of *Talon of the Silver Hawk* (2002) and *Flight of the Nighthawks* (2005)

Talon of the Silver Hawk (2002) – Lela, Meggie, Alysandra

Talon of the Silver Hawk follows the general pattern of quest fantasy, the stepped journey. A boy's village is burned down, and he wants revenge. For that, he must train and become stronger, until he is ready to confront his enemies (Senior 190). Along the way, there are several women he becomes romantically entangled with, who symbolize his growth and development.

Lela is the girl who helps Talon recover from his wounds after his village is destroyed. She is a few years older than him, comes from a different culture, and has different ideas about sexuality and propriety. He expects her to settle down with him after they sleep together, but she does not see herself as bound to him. He comes from a culture where marriages are arranged and people stay together until death, whereas she does not want to marry, and is happy seeking out men when she wants to.

Some science fiction writers experiment with alternate rules for sexual identities and relationships, as a part of different cultural norms (Garrison 222). Feist shows different attitudes towards relationships in the clash between Lela and Talon. However, instead of showing their cultural norms as merely different and letting the reader draw their own conclusion, Talon calls Lela a whore:

“Talon looked as if his world was falling in on him.

“Is she ... what is that word?”

“What word?”

“A woman who lies with men for money.”

“A whore,” supplied Caleb. “No, my young friend, she is not. But she is a healthy girl who likes men, and she’s from a land where people don’t think twice about lying with one another for amusement.”

Talon felt an empty pit form in his stomach. “It’s not right,” he muttered” (*Talon* 85-86).

Since the reader is encouraged to empathize with Talon, it is clear that Lela is not meant to be seen in a positive light.

Heartbroken by Lela, Talon moves on from her by sleeping with a girl named Meggie. All of his earlier hesitations about having sex before marriage seem to have disappeared, as he does not object at all when Meggie initiates the encounter. They only spend one night together before Talon leaves her tavern.

A bit further into his training, after Talon has reached a new place of study, he falls in love with a fellow student, Alysandra: “Any memory he had of Lela or Meggie vanished before the beauty of this young woman and suddenly an ache sprung up in his stomach” (*Talon* 125). She is clearly meant to be his love interest for this part of the story, but there are complications. Talon is warned multiple times she has no interest in courting and boys, but he pursues her anyway. Despite her earlier reservations, she agrees to a date and they have a summer relationship that lasts a few months. Talon expects too much of Alysandra and wishes to talk about the future, but she refuses, until he keeps insisting.

Talon, you’re a sweet boy and I had fun this summer, but love had nothing to do with what passed between us. I like men and enjoy the games of men and women. I think I’ve improved your education quite a bit, but if you think it’s because I love you, you’re mistaken. Sadly mistaken (*Talon* 160).

Alysandra was used as a lesson for Talon, to keep his guard up and not let love or lust distract him.

This puts Alysandra in a villainous role, because she is cruel to him to save his life at a later date.

Even though an attempt is made to put a positive spin on it, she is still put in the role of the uncaring seductress which appears often in sword and sorcery fantasy (Mains 64).

Flight of the Nighthawks (2005) – Marie

Mothers are rarely seen in Feist's novels. The mother of the hero is dead, unknown, or in such a way present yet absent that she might as well not be there. *Flight of the Nighthawks*, however, offers an exception. Marie, mother of protagonists Tad and Zane, is present throughout the novel, and plays an active role in the start of their adventures. She asks her lover, Caleb, to take them with him to learn a trade (*Nighthawks* 30). Her relationship with Caleb is treated as very natural. Halfway through the novel she marries him and he adopts her sons, but the plot disturbs their honeymoon. Marie stays behind while her new husband and her sons rush off to solve a murder. Despite her strong characterization, Marie is still presented as passive and helpful towards the real heroes of the story. She possesses no properties that would make her unsuitable for motherhood (Mains et al. 184). What is meant by this is that she shows no assertiveness, overt bravery or traditionally masculine elements that would 'interfere' with feminine motherhood.

Caleb's and Marie's relationship is overtly sexual in a way Feist not often shows in his novels. Many of their conversations take place right before or after lovemaking, and it gives greater insight in their personalities and humanizes both characters. In a series where most sexually active characters are either adolescents or immortals appearing young, two grown adults having a sexual relationship is a rarity, especially if they are together but not yet married. Laura Quilter and Liz Henry explain in "Intersections of Age and Gender" that sex is generally the domain of the young (211-212). Caleb and Marie subvert this expectation.

Chapter 5: An analysis of *A Kingdom Besieged* (2011) and *A Crown Imperilled* (2012)

A Kingdom Besieged (2011) – Child, Bethany

Child is a uniquely situated viewpoint character, because of her inhumanity. She is a female demon, who gains strength and knowledge by devouring others. Child survives on her own after her mother dies. Despite her casual talk of eating others, the reader still empathizes with her because she is so young. Quilter and Henry explain that child protagonists or viewpoint characters are rare (212), instead portraying them as secondary characters or plot points. The meanings Quilter and Henry name for these characters (innocence, wildness, uncontrollable energy, chaos) are the ones used directly in *A Kingdom Besieged* though the use of a demonic character.

Child quickly finds a mentor and protector, the older, male, demon Belog. She brings him food in exchange for knowledge. While transmissions of knowledge traditionally occur from man to man and female to female (Quilter and Henry 219). In *The Riftwar Cycle*, transmission of knowledge and power is often gendered. However, in *A Kingdom Besieged*, Child is the one in power, demanding knowledge and receiving it from the male Belog. Because she is strongest, she is the one in command of her followers, and she controls who gets what food, who mates with her and where they are going. She is on a quest to leave her plane of existence before it is destroyed by darkness, and she succeeds in the next novel.

Lady Bethany of Crydee is the many times granddaughter of Carline in the first novels, but behaves much like her ancestor. As the only child of the earl of Carse, she grows up free and is trained in archery. “Raised in a household of men, she had developed a combative nature” (*Kingdom* 18). She is a spunky sidekick to her male friends Brendan and Martin. This characterization aligns her with more ‘masculine’ attributes in the novel. Another way in which she is typified as ‘masculine’ is her length; she is described as standing six feet tall. Her appearance,

skill with weapons and her entrance into the story (killing a wyvern) introduce her as a masculine heroic character (Mains et al. 184). While she may appear to break the binary between male heroes and female damsels, it is still intact.

Bethany falls in love with Martin, who is the son of the duke of Crydee, even though there is an informal arrangement for her to marry another nobleman's son. Martin asks her to marry him instead after the war, after they are no longer under siege. Martin is responsible for the defence of the castle, but Bethany, instead of putting her archery skills to good use, is sent to hide inside the castle and wait out the siege, even though she could make a difference in battle (*Kingdom* 141-42). While Bethany was set up to be a combative character, she is quickly relegated to more feminine types of jobs such as taking care of the wounded. She serves as support for her love interest Martin, bolstering him and comforting him through the siege.

A Crown Imperilled (2012) – Sandreena, Miranda

The being known in the previous novel as Child has regained all of her memories, and remembers being Miranda, a powerful sorceress. Having returned from the dead in this way, Miranda strives to find her husband Pug and explain what happened. She still has a demon's body, however, and is stronger and faster than any human. Compared to earlier novels in which she made an appearance, she still has a strong protective streak, for example when protecting a serving woman from aggressive patrons in a tavern. (*Crown* 48) Furthermore, her strength is shown when she single-handedly disposes of a powerful enemy. However, when Miranda hikes up her skirt for better mobility, her companion has only this to say: "I always thought she had wonderful legs" (*Crown* 120), marginalizing her efforts completely. It also reinforces the binary of heroines needing to be feminine in order to be taken seriously as women, which is observed in other characters as well.

The reunion between Miranda and her husband is not a happy one. Pug had to watch his wife die, but now a demon claims to be her. He does not trust her at first, but when she reveals information only they would know, and shows genuine emotion at the sight of him, he accepts her. They do, however, agree not to start another relationship, because being a person with the memories of another is not the same as being that person.

In “Medievalism and the Fantasy Heroine,” Jane Tolmie describes that “[m]otifs of rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage and other forms of gender-based oppression and violence are markedly interlaced within contemporary fantasy novels” (148). While this is true to some extent for most female characters in Feist’s novels, it is especially true for the character Sandreena. As a holy knight, she is an expert in the destruction of demons and is a heroic character. Fighting together with magicians, she is the one who takes the brunt of attacks and shields them. However, the focus does not lie on her martial prowess, but on her past. Before becoming a knight, she was raped and left for dead. This part of her past is repeated many times, because she has to work with the men who hurt her. Other characters keep reminding her – and therefore the reader – of the fact that she was abused. This reduces Sandreena, who is more than just her rape, to nothing more than a victim who deserves pity. To put this in a broader perspective, Robin E. Field explains in her entry on ‘rape culture’ in the *Encyclopedia of Rape* that using rape as a plot device like this will sensationalise it, which lessens its impact and normalises violence against women (174-75).

Another way in which Sandreena is reminded of her past, is the way she is treated by her ex-lover, Amirantha. He is a demon summoner who seduced her, then declined to keep their relationship exclusive. Sandreena is still upset about that, and wants to discuss it with him again. Amirantha’s thoughts make it seem as if she is unreasonably emotional: “it appeared she wasn’t as far past it as he had thought” (*Crown* 245). The reader is encouraged to view Sandreena in the same way, because he is the one with more life experience and the person who is framed as ‘right’. The

situation exposes an interesting double standard, however, because Lela from *Talon of the Silver Hawk* was vilified for the exact same behaviour (See Chapter 4). This traditional ‘men are supposed to be lustful, women are supposed to be chaste’ trope in fiction is often subverted in fantasy literature, as John Garrison explains in “Speculating Sexual Identities” (229), but in *The Riftwar Cycle*, the trope is played completely straight.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The fantasy series *The Riftwar Cycle* by Raymond E. Feist consists of thirty novels, written in a thirty-year period. Across the years, his novels have followed multiple generations of characters, built up an engaging world and told many stories about heroes saving the world day after day. From a feminist point of view, however, *The Riftwar Cycle* lacks diversity. In 2000, Feist himself answered a question about the lack of female magicians, stating: “It's a male domination thing, certainly. We never explored the historical reasons behind it, just set it in place as a social "norm.”” (Feist, official website). His reaction shows the lack of thought he has put into the diversity of his novels.

Throughout the eight novels that have been analysed, female characters are in the minority. They have less speaking time than male characters and are outnumbered five to one. Only in the latest two novels, *A Kingdom Besieged* (2011) and *A Crown Imperilled* (2012), women are put in more active roles and have more importance within the plot, to a certain extent. Women are still outnumbered – 70% of characters is still male – and do not have as much dialogue as men. Especially Sandreena and Miranda fit the role of female hero best, but they are merely one in a group of otherwise male heroes, not the protagonist of their novels. Other characters, like Carline or Bethany, play a much more supportive role. They merely exist to be saved or to comfort the male hero, while they have skills that could serve outside of these enforced gender roles.

Another strong difference between male and female characters in *The Riftwar Cycle* is their physical description. Men can be handsome, plain or ugly, while women are almost always described as beautiful. This corresponds to the stereotypes that fantasy literature often employs, in which good is beautiful and evil is hideous, just like in fairy tales (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 722).

The worlds of *The Riftwar Cycle* have a lot more to offer academically. Since most of the cultures within this universe are based on real-life ones, it would be interesting to analyse how Feist handles the questions and complications of culture, race, ethnicity and colonization this approach raises. Another point of interest is the large time frame the novels span. In the century that passes in the novels, are there any societal or social changes? How are these implied or discussed? Further research is needed to answer these questions.

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