

“Ella,” A Novel: Exegesis of “Ella,” A Novel.

by

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Abstract

This study explores the stages of the hero's journey in *Ella* by Laura Danielle Laughlin MacDonald using Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory as well as the role of gender using Judith Butler's theories on gender and gender performance. The study seeks to determine whether or not a female hero performing predominantly feminine gender roles can successfully complete the stages of a traditionally male-oriented hero's journey. A literary analysis of *Ella* proves that the predominantly feminine gender performance of the hero, Ella, in no way interferes with her success as a hero proving that the traditional structure of the hero's journey is unnecessarily gendered. The only stages not present in *Ella* are missing due to the structure of the fantasy world or the nature of the quest and not the hero's gender.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, Laura Danielle Laughlin MacDonald. It is the academic portion *only* of a hybrid creative/academic thesis. The creative portion consists of a middle-grade fantasy novel, *Ella*, also by Laura Danielle Laughlin MacDonald.

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for Mom and Dad

Chapter 1: Introduction

Margery Hourihan states that “the hero story has dominated children’s and young adult literature, passing on [...] traditional values to each new generation” (Hourihan 3). Hourihan also cites Ursula Le Guin and her claim that heroes are “traditionally male and the hero myth inscribes male dominance and the primacy of male enterprises” (68). In short, Hourihan makes it clear that heroism is gendered (68). If these statements are taken to be true, then it can be inferred that the “traditional values” being passed to children through literature are gendered as well.

This thesis sets out to examine the possibility of the successful implementation of Joseph Campbell’s traditionally male-oriented monomyth structure to the female hero’s journey of *Ella*, middle-grade fantasy novel making up the creative portion of this hybrid creative/academic thesis. Judith Butler’s theories on gender performativity will be applied to determine whether a female hero can successfully be a hero when performing femininity.

1.1 Motivation

The motivation for this project came as a result of doing research for what was going to be a solely academic thesis on the evolution of hero narratives through the lens of gender representation. What I found in my initial research, while unsurprising, was overwhelmingly discouraging. Not only are girls underrepresented in literature (a fact that I expected to find) but this lack of representation leads to feelings of disempowerment and invisibility (a fact that I probably should have expected, but didn’t).

The study that affected me the most was Susan Lehr’s “The Hidden Curriculum: Are We Teaching Young Girls to Wait for the Prince?” (2001). This study examines literature as a tool for socialization in classroom settings and claims that books read as part of classroom curriculum

“perpetuate and maintain” the stratification of gendered roles for boys and girls – thus ensuring a continuance of existing social structures (2). In particular, Lehr cites a study that was performed in the late 1990s that showed girls felt disempowered and suffered from low-self esteem because they so rarely saw themselves represented in the literature read in classrooms. It occurred to me that I was a girl in elementary school in the late 1990s and early 2000s who was forced to read books with male protagonists like *Copper Sunrise*, *Hatchet*, *Holes*, *The Giver*, and *The Outsiders*. I was also a girl who spent her high school years feeling disempowered and invisible with incredibly low self-esteem; while this may not necessarily be linked, the study really resonated with me.

After reading Lehr’s study I knew that I didn’t want to be just another academic writing another paper about the disempowering effects of unequal gender representation in literature. Instead, I wanted to help make a change at the ground level. So I switched into the creative stream in order to try my hand at writing a novel featuring a female hero that is empowering for young girl readers in a way that wasn’t also inherently disempowering to young male readers. *Ella*, a middle grade fantasy novel, is the result of that. This academic portion of the thesis serves to examine whether or not I have been successful in my creative endeavour.

1.2 Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Given the inescapable masculinity of Joseph Campbell’s traditionally male-oriented framework for the hero’s journey, can the hero be female?
2. How do gender traits (male/female) impact the female hero’s journey?

1.3 Summary of *Ella*

When eleven-year-old Ella ventures into the forbidden forest in her grandmother's back yard she does not anticipate the adventure that awaits her. After hitting her head on a tree branch, Ella wakes up not in her grandmother's forest but in a field of grass she has never seen before. Here she meets a fairy named Marissa who takes her to the Kingdom of Illuster that Ella discovers is populated by characters (*imaginings*) from all of her imaginary games.

Ella soon learns that Illuster is plagued with rainstorms caused by something the imaginings call The Menace. When Ella agrees to go on a quest to defeat The Menace she learns that there is more to the story. Theo, the talking poodle/guard of Illuster (though not one of Ella's imaginings) explains to Ella that she is descended from a line of women (called Daughters) who also possess the power of *Imaginatio* which brings the imaginings to life, making Illuster only one of eight kingdoms in a place called the Land of Crescent Kingdoms. Ella is the Seventh, and final, Daughter of Crescent meaning that she must succeed in defeating The Menace where the other Daughters have failed.

Ella, along with Marissa and Theo, ventures out of Illuster and into Crescent where she visits two other kingdoms, meets the imaginings of other Daughters, and learns more about the terror caused by The Menace. When she eventually ends up in Miles Port where Theo and the other guard dogs are trained, Ella meets The Scribe, an imagining of Crescent's creator, Isla. The Scribe shares with Ella the history of Crescent, including the creation of The Menace (a rogue imagining created by the Second Daughter, Amelia). Meeting with The Scribe helps Ella realize what she can do to defeat The Menace and restore peace to Crescent.

1.4 Significant Terms

Gender: Is a social construct of “attributes that a culture ascribes separately to human females and males that prescribe appropriate ways of feeling and behaving” (Lott and Maluso 537).

Gender Performativity: Judith Butler’s theory positing that gender is an “act” which is “a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (Butler xv).

Gender Roles: The separate, designated behaviours expected of men and women, both how they *should* and how they *do* behave (Kite 561).

Gender Stereotypes: The “organized, consensual beliefs and opinions about the characteristics of women and men and the purported qualities of masculinity and femininity” (Kite 561).

Hero: For the purposes of this study, I have rejected the traditional notion of the hero as privileged, white, and male (Hourihan 1997; Pearson and Pope 1981) in favour of the idea that a hero is the protagonist (male or female) of a hero’s journey and/or quest narrative.

Monomyth: Joseph Campbell’s term for “the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero” (Campbell 23). The term “monomyth” is borrowed from James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and is interchangeable with “hero’s journey” or “hero’s quest.”

Chapter 2: A Literary Analysis of *Ella*

The following section identifies two theoretical frames, which will be used to analyze *Ella*, a middle-grade fantasy novel, with the goal of answering the two research questions stated above.

Part 1 (section 2.1) applies Joseph Campbell's monomyth as a lens to determine whether a female hero, in this case Ella, can successfully undertake and complete a hero's journey. Part 2 (section 2.2) applies Butler's theory of gender performativity to determine whether traits (performance) associated with femininity and masculinity impact the hero's journey.

2.1 *Ella* and The Hero's Journey

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949) explores the stages of the "mythological adventure hero" in a structure Campbell refers to as the monomyth (23). The monomyth outlines "the universal adventure" narrative by first recognizing three main stages: departure, initiation, and return (28). Each stage is then broken down into subcategories (explored in detail below), for a total of seventeen subcategories.

Campbell uses psychoanalysis to examine various myths and fairytales from around the world in order to reveal similarities in narrative structure. Revealing these similarities allows for the development of a "vast and amazingly constant statement of the basic truths" (xiii). Though the monomyth is meant to serve as a basic framework for hero narratives, Campbell states that tales are subject to "damage and obstruction" of the outline (212). Some tales may isolate and focus on one or two elements, while others may eliminate or subdue out-dated traits (212). This is the case with my original creative piece, *Ella*. While many elements of Campbell's monomyth are present in the narrative, some have been eliminated or revised.

The following analysis is divided into three parts: In Part 1 Campbell's first main stage of the hero's journey, Departure (section **2.1.1**), is explored by outlining the ways in which *Ella* reflects the five sub-categories of this stage of the hero's journey. Part 2 addresses the second stage, Initiation (section **2.1.2**), in which only five of the six sub-categories in this stage are identified in *Ella*. The sixth stage, "Woman as Temptress," is missing, its absence is discussed. Part 3 deals with Campbell's final main stage, the Return (section **2.1.3**), in which four of the six sub-categories are present. The absence of "Refusal of the Return" and "The Magic Flight" is discussed.

2.1.1 Departure

The Call to Adventure

The hero's journey begins with a call to adventure that signifies a summoning of destiny for the hero (48). Often a "herald" figure appears to initiate this call to adventure. In the case of *Ella*, the call to adventure comes in two parts.

The first comes when the protagonist, Ella Riley, is watching a midnight meteor shower in her grandmother's backyard and one particularly bright meteor falls to the ground somewhere in her grandmother's forest. When the forest begins to glow, Ella decides to investigate. She ventures into the forest, walking until she collides headfirst into a tree branch and is knocked unconscious. When Ella awakes after her collision she finds herself not on the floor of the forest as expected, but instead in a field of grass with half a dozen trees and a gray stone wall in the distance. It is in this field that Ella meets the fairy Marissa and her adventure begins.

This is Ella's entrance into the story's secondary world, The Land of Crescent Kingdoms (or Crescent for short), where her hero's journey takes place. In this instance the meteor could be

considered the herald figure, or the “announcer of the adventure” (44). However, Marissa could *also* be considered a herald figure as she is the one who invites Ella beyond the gray stone wall where the true nature of Ella’s adventure is revealed.

After meeting the talking guard dog, Theodore, Ella and Marissa are admitted into the Kingdom of Illuster. Ella quickly discovers Illuster is populated by familiar characters; “you’ve all come from my imagination” she says, “the games I play – you’re the characters” (MacDonald 16). When Ella questions Marissa to learn more about where she is and why, Marissa tells her that the kingdom has been experiencing increasingly severe rainstorms caused by The Menace – an unidentified something living in the clouds (later revealed to be a rogue imagining). When Ella asks what that has to do with her, Marissa states, “We hoped that while you were here you could help us by getting rid of The Menace” (34). With this statement Marissa reveals the nature of the quest to come and truly calls Ella to adventure.

Refusal of the Call

Ella is hesitant in her acceptance of the call to adventure; “You’re kidding, right? I’m not brave enough for something like that! [...] Knights and heroes go on journeys and save kingdoms, not eleven-year-old girls!” (34). When Theo, the guard dog and the only inhabitant of the kingdom who is not one of Ella’s imaginings, responds with “who says an eleven-year-old girl can’t be a hero?” Ella agrees to think about it (34). After a visit to the library – where the books that hold the stories of all of Ella’s imaginings are kept – Ella realizes that none of the books contain stories where Ella herself is the main character. She then wanders through the marketplace observing all of her imaginings going about their business and interacting with each other. The next time she sees Marissa she agrees to help them.

Before embarking on the journey, Theo reveals to Ella that she is descended from a line of women (called Daughters) who also possess the power of *Imaginatio* (which brings the imaginings to life) and that Illuster is only one of eight kingdoms in a place called the Land of Crescent Kingdoms. The Daughters are all directly descended from the creator of Crescent, Isla – making them all the ‘daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter’ (39). Ella is the Seventh, and final, Daughter of Crescent meaning that she must succeed in defeating The Menace where the other Daughters have failed.

Ella later admits to Theo, “It was the library, all those books, full of my stories and my imaginings [...] I’m very good at making up adventures, but I’m not very good at making them up for myself. I wanted to change that” (61). Ella may initially be considered a reluctant hero due to her hesitation, but she never refuses the call. A hero who refuses the call to adventure never has an adventure, bringing an end to the would-be hero’s journey. Ella, ultimately, does not fall into this category.

Supernatural Aid

Once a hero has accepted their call to adventure, they encounter a “protective figure” and are provided with “amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (Campbell 57). For Ella, this figure is Tilly the Sorceress. Ella meets Tilly on her first day in Illuster and reads her story when she visits the library, but it is when Ella (along with her companions Marissa and Theo) is about to embark on her quest that Tilly acts as the protective figure.

Pulling Ella aside, Tilly hands her a silver skeleton key. Tilly tells Ella that it will work only once, and only for Ella when she needs it the most. While Tilly’s key does not act as a

protective force through the journey as a whole, it proves to be essential in Ella's success at the end of the journey.

The Crossing of the First Threshold

The first threshold stands between the hero and "the regions of the unknown" where the next stage of the adventure is going to take place (Campbell 65). When the hero reaches the threshold they encounter a "threshold guardian" standing between them and the unknown (64). According to Campbell, the threshold guardian is a monster of some sort whom the hero has to fight in order to proceed. In *Ella*, the threshold guardian comes in the form of a fifteen foot high stone wall. While the wall is not alive, it still provides an obstacle that has to be overcome in order for Ella to proceed in her quest.

By crossing over the wall Ella and her companions leave the known-world of Illuster and enter into the unknown. Marissa can fly over the wall and carry Theo with her, but Ella has to "defeat" this threshold guardian by climbing over it. Marissa secures a rope made out of vine and Ella uses it to climb up and over the wall – successfully surpassing the threshold guardian.

The Belly of the Whale

"The belly of the whale" is the unknown that the hero enters into once they have crossed the first threshold. Entering into this unknown signifies the hero's willingness to move forward with the journey and undergo inner-change. When Ella moves away from the base of the "threshold guardian" wall into the forest she enters the belly of the whale – plunging into the unknown. Her willingness to take the lead signifies the beginning of her inner-change as it

demonstrates the already growing confidence of a girl who said eleven-year-old girls can't be heroes.

2.1.2 Initiation

The Road of Trials

The stage of Initiation makes up the bulk of the journey as the hero moves into the heart of the quest and faces various “difficult tasks” along the way (Campbell 81). The first sub-category, “The Road of Trials,” is where the difficult tasks and trials begin.

The first major trial Ella and her companions face comes when they discover that they are without drinking water after more than a day of travelling. When Marissa suggests Ella try imagining water for them Ella is unable to. In this moment, Ella discovers that whatever powers she used to create the imaginings in Illuster aren't working now. Theo then explains that every Daughter possesses some degree of magic when they are in Crescent – the Second Daughter Amelia used it to create The Menace, and other Daughters used it in an attempt to fight against The Menace – but, the magic is different than the power of *Imaginatio* Ella unknowingly used in her own world. Theo does not know why this “other magic” isn't working for Ella (MacDonald 52).

Next, Ella visits more Daughters' kingdoms, meaning that she has to climb more gray stone walls. When she is climbing into the Fifth Daughter's Kingdom, The Menace sends a rainstorm causing Ella to slip and fall. She survives the fall thanks to Marissa and they take refuge from the storm with help from the Fifth Daughter's imaginings.

Once Ella and her companions leave the Fifth Daughter's Kingdom and are headed for Miles Port – where they will be able to get on a ship and cross to the mountains in order to reach

The Menace – the next major trial occurs. While Ella and Theo are asleep, Agents of The Menace kidnap Marissa. Ella and Theo wake up in time to see Marissa being carried off in the clutches of a dragon. After a moment of shock, Ella says to Theo, “If The Menace has got Marissa I don’t want to waste any more time” and they continue on to Miles Port (114).

The next trial comes with the crossing of the sea. In Miles Port, Ella and Theo are provided with a ship and a crew of Miles Dogs (relatives of Theo’s), but while they are crossing the sea The Menace sends another storm that causes trouble for the ship. Heavy rain and waves wash over the ship and the main sail comes loose. Ella climbs the mast and manages to secure the sail back in place and the ship and crew make it through the rest of the storm unharmed.

After several days of travel, the ship reaches the base of the mountains and Ella’s next trial starts: climbing the mountain. By this point, Ella’s “other magic” has appeared, though she has trouble mastering it. Fortunately, the magic comes through and Ella is able to magic herself a rope to help her climb the mountain. Initially, all goes well for Ella. But when she stops to rest on a rock ledge her rope is cut loose and the dragon that kidnapped Marissa plucks Ella from the mountainside.

The final trial for Ella is facing The Menace. The dragon, Bhaltair, reveals himself to be an ally and helps Ella into the castle where The Menace lives. Earlier, while in Miles Port Ella met with The Scribe (an imagining of Isla the Creator) and found out that The Menace, like every other imagining, has a book with her story written in it. Once inside the castle, Ella sets out to find the book since destroying it means destroying The Menace. She locates the book (and is able to access it thanks to the silver key given to her by her supernatural aid, Tilly), but before she can destroy the book The Menace herself appears. Ella and The Menace face off, with Ella dodging an assault of angry magical sparks from The Menace and ultimately outsmarting The

Menace and burning the book with one of The Menace's sparks and therefore defeating The Menace.

The Meeting with the Goddess

The meeting with the Goddess comes after "all the barriers and ogres have been overcome" (Campbell 91). It is the final trial of the hero and occurs as a "test of the talent of the hero to win the boon of love" (99). Campbell portrays this stage as a sort of conquest ending in marriage for the hero. If the "boon of love" to be won can only be in the context of marriage, this stage does not exist in *Ella*. However, if it is interpreted as simply finding the one that the hero loves the most, then it could be said to exist in Ella's reunion with Marissa. Once The Menace has been defeated, Ella's first concern is finding Marissa who is being held captive in The Menace's dungeon. As Marissa was Ella's first imagining, Ella's love for her is unparalleled.

Woman as Temptress

In this stage the hero is tempted to stray from their quest. Campbell uses woman as temptress in what could be a metaphor for physical or material goods. However, despite Campbell's claim that "the whole sense of the ubiquitous myth of the hero's passage is that is shall serve as a general pattern for the men and women [...] formulated in the broadest terms" (101), this stage is still explicitly labelled "Woman as Temptress." This suggests that the hero is implied male and he will be tempted by lust. The hero in *Ella* is female and therefore proves that women are capable of serving purposes other than lustful temptation to the male hero. No matter the interpretation, this stage is not present in *Ella*.

Atonement with the Father

This stage involves confrontation with the source of ultimate power. According to Campbell, this is often a father, father figure, or god-like figure to the hero. In *Ella* the “father figure” comes in the form of Isla, the creator of Crescent. Rather than a father/son relationship Isla and Ella fit the pattern under the titles of mother and daughter.

When Ella defeats The Menace she fulfils the prophecy set by Isla nearly five-hundred years earlier (“A reign of terror will exist in this world as the greed of one Daughter threatens to ruin all. Only at the hand of the final Daughter will peace prevail, try as others might” [MacDonald 130]) and restores peace to Crescent. Isla and Ella cannot meet face to face, so atonement could be said to come from Bhaltair, an imagining of Isla, when he says “thank you, for all that you’ve done for Crescent and the imaginings. I don’t believe Isla herself could have done better” (171).

Apotheosis

This is a stage of enlightenment or epiphany. Earlier in her journey, Ella observes that in Crescent “While the imaginings had stagnant immortality, the Miles dogs had lives of unfulfilled duty [...] They had no idea what was missing” (122). Her epiphany comes in figuring out how to help break these cycles, implied by the statement that “there was one last thing she wanted to see The Scribe about” (170).

The Ultimate Boon

The “ultimate boon” is a gift or a treasure for the hero, generally provided by a powerful figure. The powerful figure in *Ella* is The Scribe, an imagining of Isla who records the stories

that fill the libraries in the Daughters' kingdoms. Before returning to Illuster, Ella returns to Miles Port to visit The Scribe where Ella is given the power to finish writing her own story. This serves as both the ultimate boon and the vehicle for fulfillment of her epiphany.

2.1.3 Return

Rescue from Without

Sometimes the hero has to receive "assistance from without" in order to return to their regular life (178). Though Ella leaves The Land of Crescent Kingdoms willingly because she recognizes her role is done, her exit is aided "from without." When all is said and done, Ella exits the Kingdom of Illuster through the wooden door she entered through initially and is back in the clearing she woke up in that first day. The clearing is the same save for the swing hanging from the tree Marissa had fallen out of at their first meeting. Ella recognizes the swing as the one from Grandma's backyard. Ella closes her eyes and swings until she is high enough to jump off and when she lands she is in Grandma's backyard again.

The stage of the Return could also begin with "Refusal of the Return" where the hero refuses to return to "the kingdom of humanity" to share their newfound knowledge/ultimate book (167); or with "The Magic Flight" in which a hero who has completed their journey in opposition to the powers of the world has to flee from said powers. Neither of these stages is present in *Ella*.

The Crossing of the Return Threshold

When the hero returns to their own world, it is with new knowledge gained from the journey. Crossing the return threshold with new knowledge or a "convincing talisman" allows the hero to retain "self-assurance in the face of every sobering disillusionment" (194). When Ella

returns to her own world the new knowledge she brings with her is the story of defeating The Menace and restoring peace to Crescent.

Master of Two Worlds

In the case of *Ella* the “master of two worlds” stage is tied very closely with the successful crossing of the return threshold. Ella returns with a story she knows that Grandma will believe. When Ella greets her grandmother she addresses her as “Sixth Daughter Sophie” and then says, “The Menace has been defeated, Grandma! Her reign of terror is over. Everyone in Crescent is safe again!” (174). Just saying the words “Sixth Daughter” “Crescent” and “The Menace” are enough to validate the experience because she knows that Grandma understands and believes her. Ella can now go forward as master of two worlds: existing in her own and validated in her experience of Crescent.

Freedom to Live

Campbell states that at the end of the journey the hero is “champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he is [become]” (209). Since the hero has “become” they can feel free to live in the moment, or without fear of death. If there is an example of this in *Ella* it is implied in the Epilogue when Ella returns to Crescent after “many, many years” (MacDonald 175). The implication being that Ella clearly goes on to live and grow up so that she is able to revisit Crescent later in life.

2.1.4 Summary

Campbell's stage of Departure is wholly present in *Ella*. Ella accepts her call to adventure receives supernatural aid in the form of a magical key, conquers the "threshold guardian" stonewall to cross the first threshold and enter into the unknown world of Crescent. The stage of Initiation is present in *Ella* with one notable omission. Ella faces a road of many trials, reunites with her most loved imagining, finds atonement with Isla through Bhaltair, figures out a way to help the imaginings of Crescent break away from a change-less existence, and receives the ultimate gift from The Scribe. The sub-category in this stage that is not present is "Woman as Temptress" as there is nothing physical or material present to tempt Ella away from her quest. A quest she manages to navigate successfully as a female. The final stage of the Return in *Ella* skips over the stages of "Refusal of Return" and "The Magic Flight" and instead begins with the "Rescue from Without" when Ella finds the swing from Grandma's backyard has appeared to help bring her home. Ella crosses back into her own world with new knowledge and a story to share with her grandmother that will validate her experience and leave her free to live in her own world again.

2.2 *Ella* and Gender Performance

Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, draws a distinction between sex and gender stating that "whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed" (9-10). The idea that gender is constructed correlates with Butler's theory that gender is also performative. Butler considers gender an "act" which is "both intentional and performative, where '*performative*' suggests a dramatic and contingent

construction of meaning” (177). Gender then becomes a “strategy of survival within compulsory systems,” where the acts of gender create the very idea of gender (178).

Thus, according to Butler, if it is true that gender is performative, then it is also true that the very nature of gender has no tangible status without the acts, gestures, and enactments performed to constitute its reality (173). This statement correlates with ideological notions of masculinity and femininity as a binary of defining characteristics, or stereotypes, displayed by men and women. Gender stereotypes often are part of “a broader gender belief system that influences perceptions of the sexes” (Kite 561).

In *Ella*, Ella’s gender performance is predominantly feminine based on the traits and cognitive abilities provided by Mary E. Kite (563), explored in detail below. When considering Butler’s theory that gender is a conscious and intentional performance, then it could be said that Ella is consciously performing in her role as female and her role as hero. Campbell’s monomyth implies that being female and being the hero are somehow mutually exclusive, this is not the case for Ella.

2.2.1 Feminine Stereotypes

Traits

Ella shows that she is both “able to devote self to others” and “helpful to others” when she agrees to go on the quest to defeat The Menace. As she is not from Crescent, her only motivation in defeating The Menace is in helping the imaginings who do live there.

In moments when Ella can tell that Marissa is getting tired in the forest, or that Theo is excited to reach Miles Port, she is proving to be “aware of others feelings” and does her best to

accommodate them – assuring Marissa they are almost there, and quickening her pace to create a path through the snow for Theo.

Ella's most "emotional" moment comes when she wakes up to find Marissa has vanished and ultimately discovers that The Menace's agents have kidnapped her. Ella is distraught and depends on Theo to be the rational one in that moment.

Her disposition proves to be "kind, "gentle," and "warm" when she interacts with both Simon and Amandine for the first time. Simon is terrified of Ella, mistaking her for The Menace, but once he has been calmed down by his friends Ella apologizes for scaring him and then apologetically approaches the topic of The Menace. After watching Amandine sink into a snow bank, Ella rushes to help her out. Ella approaches Amandine carefully and asks permission before lifting her out of the snow.

Ella's greatest moment of understanding comes in her decision to trust Bhaltair. Even though she knows he has been working for The Menace, she believes him when he says that he had no choice and now he wants to help Ella make things right.

Cognitive Abilities

By virtue of being a Daughter of Crescent it is a given that Ella is "artistic," "creative," and "imaginative." These traits are demonstrated, however, by the imaginings of Illuster and the bits of story Ella reads in the Illuster library.

Ella's ability to be "expressive" is exhibited when she shares her fears about not being able to do defeat The Menace and be a hero.

Ella is "intuitive" primarily in her ability to sense when they are approaching a new kingdom, or when she knows that visiting the Fifth Daughter's kingdom is the right thing to do.

Ella's "perceptive"-ness primarily coincides with her ability to be "aware of others feelings" – she is perceptive to the feelings of those around her and acts accordingly (as discussed above).

There are a variety of interpretations of what it means to be "tasteful." One example for Ella comes from her continuing acceptance of tea when it is offered to her, despite her distaste for it. This is her attempt to be polite and refined in a social setting.

Ella proves herself to be "verbally skilled" when she faces The Menace. Her powers do not help her, but her ability to hold a conversation and buy herself enough time to figure out how to destroy the little red book ultimately helps her defeat The Menace.

2.2.2 Masculine Stereotypes

Traits

By virtue of agreeing to go on the quest in the first place Ella proves herself to be "active," as opposed to refusing the call to adventure and remaining passive.

Ella also "never gives up easily" which is seen in her journey through the road of trials – among other things, she finds a way to climb the kingdom walls, continues the journey after Marissa is kidnapped, and finds a way to climb the mountains.

Ella "can make decisions easily" sometimes, this is a trait she grows into; just as she learns to be "self-confident." She hesitates initially before making the decision to defeat The Menace, but after that she grows more confident in herself and the decisions she makes, even when they go against the wishes of other like Theo and Edward.

Ella proves to be "independent" towards the end of the journey when she tells Theo she needs to climb the mountain to defeat The Menace on her own.

Ella never notably “feels superior” or has reason to be “competitive.” While she could easily feel superior to the imaginings of Crescent, particularly her own imaginings in the Kingdom of Illuster, she never does. More than feeling a sense of power in being a creator and god-like figure in Crescent she is amazed at the mere existence of the world and wishes to be accepted as a visitor. There is never a call for Ella to be competitive in this story as she is not competing against anything or anyone; she is working with others to defeat The Menace.

Cognitive Abilities

Ella frequently asks questions and makes internal observations about Illuster and Crescent as a whole, proving she has an “analytical” nature. She is curious about why she has shown up in this secondary world and then how things in Crescent, like the existence of the imaginings and the Daughters’ magic, work.

She proves to be “good at problem solving” in the same way that she “never gives up easily” – when faced with a literal mountain to climb, she uses magic to give herself a rope and climbs it.

Ella could be said to be “good at abstractions” in her interactions with The Scribe where she comes to understand the nature of the creation of Crescent and the idea of the residual magic left behind by Isla that allowed Amelia to create The Menace. She is also “good with reasoning” in this scene when she deduces that if The Menace is merely an imagining then she can be defeated the same way any other imagining is destroyed: through the destruction of the book with her story in it.

Ella is not portrayed to be “good at numbers,” “mathematical,” or “quantitatively skilled” in the story because there are no instances that call for that particular skill set. She is also not

shown to be particularly “exact” in any of her actions. She states openly that she doesn’t have a plan when she sets out on her quest and then makes decisions as she goes based on instinct. Even in her final showdown with The Menace Ella instinctively defeats her adversary.

2.2.3 Summary

Based on the gender stereotypes examined, it is clear that while Ella predominately performs feminine stereotypes, she also performs some of the masculine ones. Thus, in *Ella* gender as an act is fluid, rather than absolute. The feminine stereotypes come easily to Ella, and she performs them all with ease. The masculine stereotypes she performs, however, come primarily when circumstance calls for them. It is easy for Ella to be kind or creative or intuitive, but it is not always easy for her to be self-confident. It is important to note, however, that Ella’s tendency to perform feminine gender roles is in no way a hindrance to her experience as a hero.

Another way in which Ella performs gender is through her appearance, which is traditionally feminine. She has long hair – adorned with a flower crown courtesy of Marissa – and wears a dress the entire journey. At the beginning of the story, Ella *chooses* to wear her favourite sundress, leading to a conscious feminine gender performance. Later, when Ella is about to embark on the journey across the sea to the mountains, The Scribe suggests that Ella change into “something more fitting to the journey [...] some trousers perhaps” (MacDonald 142). Ella rejects this notion saying, “I like this dress. It’s gotten me this far, hasn’t it?” (142). Ella’s refusal to change out of her dress (traditionally feminine attire) and into trousers (traditionally masculine attire) is symbolic of a refusal to reject her femininity in order to complete the quest. She is a girl and there is no shame in that, it is not a burden or a barrier, just a facet of who she is. She finishes her journey in the same dress.

Chapter 3: Summary and Findings

Having completed a close reading of *Ella*, a middle-grade fantasy novel, through the lens of Campbell's monomyth and Butler's concept of gender performativity, I return to my initial research questions.

1. Given the inescapable masculinity of Joseph Campbell's traditionally male-oriented framework for the hero's journey, can the hero be female?

Fourteen out of Campbell's seventeen sub-categories can be successfully applied to *Ella*. The formula, at its most basic level, works. The biggest problem is not Ella's gender but rather Campbell's gendered language. The most notable instance of this comes in the stage Campbell calls "Atonement with The Father." For Ella, the atonement comes not with a father figure but a mother figure. The father can be either a literal father or a divine "father-like" figure; Isla fits this role as she is the creator of Crescent, aligning her with the divine, though she is female rather than male.

Campbell posits that atonement with the father comes when the child outgrows the "mother breast" and becomes an adult, entering into "the sphere of the father" (Campbell 115). Campbell then states that the father becomes for his son "the sign of the future task" and for his daughter "[the sign] of the future husband" (115). Ella, in her role as the hero, fits into the category of the son rather than the daughter in this instance. Ella's "future task" is to rewrite the structure of Crescent to give the imaginings and the Miles dogs more fulfilling lives. By doing this, Ella is taking on the task of creator previously held by Isla, "the father."

Isla's role in the story matches Campbell's concept of who "the father" is and Ella fits into the role of the son because she is the hero. Ella and Isla both successfully match Campbell's

concept of father/son atonement, despite being female, which proves that Campbell's structure is unnecessarily gendered.

The three sub-categories that do not exist in *Ella* are excluded only by the nature of the secondary world and *Ella*'s quest. There is no source of temptation threatening to distract *Ella* from her quest, woman or otherwise. *Ella* does not refuse return because she recognizes the end of her quest and accepts the fact that she must return to her own world. There is no magical flight because her quest does not go against the powers of the world so she has no reason to flee. This shows that any discrepancies with Campbell's formula are not related to *Ella*'s gender, meaning that Campbell's monomyth can be applied to a female hero without changing the basic structure of the monomyth to make allowances for gender. In short, *Ella* illustrates that a female hero can successfully undertake the hero's journey.

2. How do gender traits (male/female) impact the female hero's journey?

Hourihan states that "the inference readers are likely to draw from [female hero stories] is that, if they wish their lives and deeds to be worthy of notice, women must strive to behave as much like men as possible" (Hourihan 206). This is something that *Ella* disproves. *Ella* does not have to behave like a man or sacrifice femininity in any way to become the hero of her story. She openly performs feminine stereotypes the entire journey, and while she does take on *some* masculine stereotypes she predominantly performs femininity. This shows that *Ella*'s gender performance is in no way detrimental to her completion of the traditional hero's journey structure.

It is important to note, however, that while *Ella* is a successful female hero's journey it is not a parody of traditional hero narratives. With Hourihan's suggestion that there is a negative take away for readers of female heroes who take on men's behaviour, there is an implication that

to remedy this we must subvert tradition. This falls into the category of parody which Anna E. Altman states “merely inverts or reverses feminine and masculine gender roles as its main joke, and leaves us still trapped in a hierarchal structure of power relations” (Altman 179). This means that parody, even feminist parody, ultimately reinforces the hierarchal patriarchal gender binary. Parody is also problematic when it subverts expected gender roles in a manner that disempowers boy readers. In books like Robert Munsch’s *The Paper Bag Princess* (1980) and Patricia Wrede’s *Dealing With Dragons* (1990), the princess becomes a hero by discrediting the prince, reducing him to a “laughing-stock” (183). This is the opposite of progress; we cannot lift up female readers by bringing down male readers.

In order to avoid this, Altman favours what she calls “poesis,” or stories that “offer a new and wider world of meaning through reconfigured events and characters directly” (180). I believe that *Ella* falls into this category. While there may not be significant male representation in my story, it is important to note that Ella is the hero in her own right. She succeeds on her own terms without discrediting male (or female) characters to get there. This works because, as Altman says, the role of the hero is not “fundamentally male or female at the basic level of the narrative,” despite the fact that readers are ideologically conditioned to “see a particular function or relation to the events of the narrative as necessarily masculine or feminine (that is, as gendered)” (185). Ultimately, Ella is a successful hero regardless of her gender.

Chapter 4: Creative Writing Process and Personal Reflection

As mentioned in **Chapter 1: Introduction**, the motivation for the creative writing component of this thesis stemmed from a desire to create a piece of children's literature that would be empowering to girl readers. Ella's story started as somewhat of a different beast that first came together for the creative writing course I took with Maggie de Vries in Winter Term 2 of my first year in the MACL program. Originally, Ella was thirteen and her quest to save her imaginings from *The Menace* was going to be a metaphoric coming of age where she unknowingly battled with her inner anxieties. I received a lot of excellent feedback from Maggie and my peers of CRWR 403 who saw more potential for the story than I ever had. They helped me realize that a true hero's journey has to be bigger than the hero her(or him)self. I hadn't set out to write an epic fantasy, but I'd somehow set myself up for one anyway.

Ella changed from thirteen-years-old to eleven – a much more magical age both in literature (à la *Harry Potter*) and in reality – and the secondary world she travels into expanded so that instead of holding just Ella's imaginings it became *The Land of Crescent Kingdoms*. Initially, I didn't know exactly what that meant, but I liked the sound of it. I spent a lot of time saying things like “there are more kingdoms, and they have imaginings that don't belong to Ella, but I don't know who they belong too.” What I finally settled on was the idea of the kingdoms belonging to women in Ella's family. I liked the idea of an epic lineage of women with Ella as the chosen one at the end because that kind of storyline is often reserved for men. I quickly realized, however, that creating an epic lineage of women is more complicated than creating an epic lineage of men because men get to trace their family back through their last name, women (generally) do not.

The concept of the “daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter...” comes in here. Because the story starts off in the contemporary real world, I kept with the patriarchal norm of children taking on their father’s last name. Thus, Ella is a Riley, but Grandma Sophie, the Sixth Daughter, was born a James and became a Miller through marriage. The only way for each Daughter to descend from Isla was to trace back through her mother’s lineage, making them all a daughter of a daughter of a daughter and so on, of Isla.

I decided on seven kingdoms because seven is a traditionally magical number in literature (again, à la *Harry Potter*). With the number seven in mind, I remembered the literary trope of the “seventh son of the seventh son,” found in works such as Susan Cooper’s *The Dark is Rising* (1973). With this trope, the seventh son born to a father who is also a seventh son finds himself in the possession of great or special powers. I’ve taken the liberty of loosely rewriting this trope to fit my own purposes. Ella is known as the Seventh Daughter, though she is not literally a seventh daughter, in fact, she is an only child. But she is the Seventh Daughter of The Land of Crescent Kingdoms. And as the Seventh, and final, Daughter Ella is destined to defeat The Menace and fulfil the prophecy set by Isla, the Mother. This makes Ella the most powerful Daughter by default, but she is not the most powerful in the expected way. Amelia, the Second Daughter and creator of The Menace, is actually the most powerful when it comes to literal magical powers. Ella is powerful in her own way; in the end she defeats The Menace by outsmarting her. This was important to me, because it is a take away that Ella can bring back into her own world, magical powers like the one Amelia masters while in Crescent, are something Ella would have to leave behind.

Another thing I spent a long time saying was “The Menace is an evil force that is menacing the world, but I don’t know exactly what The Menace is.” In my original conception of

the story, The Menace was meant to be a literal embodiment of the anxieties Ella was facing in her transition from elementary school to high school. But once the quest grew bigger than Ella, that idea didn't work anymore. I needed an antagonist that made sense for all the kingdoms. For almost the entirety of writing the first draft The Menace remained a vague dark figure in the back of my mind. Eventually it dawned on me that The Menace should be a rogue imagining of some sort created by a jaded Daughter intent on ruining the fun for everyone else. Once I finally figured out who and what exactly The Menace was, everything fell into place for the rest of the story – for example, how Ella was going to defeat The Menace. Since The Menace is a rogue imagining, that means she can be defeated in the same way that any other imagining can be destroyed: the destruction of the book containing her story. Though, of course, with a twist as her book cannot be retrieved from the Second Daughter's Kingdom.

Overall, I am pleased with the story I have written. Ella is a successful female hero on her own terms. Young female readers can feel empowered, though not at the expense of young male readers. While this is probably a story that will primarily appeal to female readers, I feel that male readers can enjoy it also.

This is not the book I intended to write, but I think its better.

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