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THESIS/NOVEL: *Never Talk To Dragons*

35,000 words

EXEGESIS: *Finding Fantasy in Fiction*

5,000 words

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

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Juanita McConnachie

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ABSTRACT

Never Talk to Dragons, a 35,000 word fairytale fantasy for children, and its companion 5,000 word exegesis, *Finding Fantasy in Fiction*, are duel components of a Masters of Creative Writing thesis.

When a dragon lands on thirteen-year-old Princess Annamaria's balcony, all she wants to do is say hello. Being kidnapped and whisked away to fantastical lands with carnivorous unicorns and talking trees is *not* on her agenda. But when Annamaria's prince is transformed into a mouse while trying to save her from a fiery death, she must find a way to break the spell, rescue her prince, and find her very own happily ever after.

Finding Fantasy in Fiction frames the novel within the fantasy genre by considering what makes up the genre. It reflects on a novel's ability to be a unique text while still sitting firmly within the genre, using multiple fantasy novels, and *Never Talk to Dragons*, as examples.

EXEGESIS: FINDING FANTASY IN FICTION

INTRODUCTION

Genre is not merely important to fantasy, genre *makes* fantasy. It spreads through it like the roots of trees, stretching out, entwining and interconnecting with every part of the fantasy world: plot and structure, characters, setting, style and beyond.

Unfortunately, it is the very genre itself that many critics have used to claim that fantasy is childish. As a result, "more often than not, fantasy writers of the past had to defend themselves before a doubting world, to explain why it could possibly make sense for grown persons to spend years creating stories about impossible wizards, witches, dragons and trolls" (Marcus, 2006).

Even in my own experience, I have come across this prejudice towards fantasy. I run a writing blog, and am therefore an active member of the online writing community, but I have noticed that many writers consider fantasy a 'lesser' form of writing. I've been asked if I've ever considered writing a 'real' novel, and been posed the question 'aren't you a little old for make-believe?' When I mention that I not only write fantasy, but write fantasy for *children*, the story worsens. 'Oh, that sounds easy,' they say. 'I could write a children's book too, but I want *my* book to teach them something.' Of course, many fantasy writers have morals and lessons threaded through their novels, whether they are aimed at children or not.

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series has often been considered a work that offers a critical opinion on religion, but Pullman (as cited in Turner, 2004) says that he does not consider it the duty of a writer to do this. Instead, he says that the duty of writing "is best expressed in the words of Dr Johnson: 'The only aim of writing is to help the reader better to enjoy life, or better to endure it.'" I am of this opinion myself,

and believe that if a fantasy work is to address issues, even ones of human relationships, it is my opinion that it is best done at a symbolic level, for it is all the more powerful. I have attempted to follow through with this in my thesis, *Never Talk to Dragons,* a fantasy novel aimed at 'tweens' (children between the ages of eleven and twelve). The novel may address issues in its subtext, but its primary aim is to entertain.

One of the challenges I faced in writing *Never Talk to Dragons* was how to set the text firmly within the genre, while creating a piece of work that was still unique and able to entertain.

Genre is a way of defining novels. Just as moviegoers would be irritated at going to what appeared to be an action film, only to find that it was a romance, readers too expect certain fulfilments from genres. While I dislike the idea of forcing a story to fit within the confines of a genre, I didn't want to purposely set out to avoid genre conventions either. Essentially, my aim for *Never Talk to Dragons* was simply to let the story find its own path as I wrote it, using conventions as necessary but not relying on them.

In order to explore the concepts of the fantasy genre, what it means for *Never Talk to Dragons*, and the methodology used to write the novel, this exegesis investigates the origins of the fantasy genre, and how aspects, including plot structure, characters, setting, and style are used within the genre.

FANTASY'S FAIRY TALE ROOTS

Storytelling has roots as old as human culture itself, from exaggerated retellings of heroic events, to myths that explained the world, and to children's bedtime tales, stories have been told and passed down through generations.

Fantasy literature is merely one branch of this storytelling history, but many believe that its origins lie in some of the first stories—folklore and fairytales. Tuttle, (2005) says, "Even the most inventive and original fantasy tends to look back to an earlier epic tradition" (p.25), and indeed, fantasy novels often have a familiar ring to them. The elaborate, flourished prose of epic fantasy echoes with the musical stories and epic poems of medieval bards. Tales of heroic knights clearly take source from the tales of King Arthur. Spooky forests and gothic castles litter fantasy settings, reminiscent of the Brothers Grimm's retelling of German folklore and fairy tales.

D'Ammassa (2006) agrees, saying, "Early 20th-century fantasy stories often bore considerable resemblance to fairy tales in that they compressed many events into very short sequences and featured characters who were little more than a name and a type" (p.119-120). Fantasy has moved on since then, as I doubt that many would accuse authors like Phillip Pullman, Neil Gaiman, Terry Brooks, and many other authors located within my bibliography of wider reading, of portraying flat characters, but early fantasy novels do make it obvious where fantasy stemmed from. It does seem that for fantasy to *be* fantasy, it must take in some of these old tales, and allow itself to be influenced by them, for, as Tuttle (2005) says, fantasy is "less concerned with novelty and innovation, and more concerned with old stories, retold" (p.25). Of course, fantasy needn't take on all the aspects of traditional tales. "Modern fantasy tends to be primarily adventure fiction," according to D'Ammassa (2006, p.80), and indeed, when one looks at some of fantasy fiction's most influential texts, J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and C.S Lewis's *Narnia Chronicles*, the 'tale of adventure' novel can easily be applied.

But fantasy is a genre that draws from multiple sources, so it is impossible to be 'just fantasy'. Romance, with knights rescuing princesses, horror, with monsters that appear after dark to frighten children, mystery with a puzzle to solve—fantasy seems to take much from other genres. However, what makes fantasy, fantasy, is what makes fairy tales fairy tales. Fantasy suspends belief, with dragons and magic, much in the same way as fairy tales suspend belief with talking animals and cannibalistic witches. It is this completely believable, believability that is the reason so many love (and, conversely, others hate) fantasy fiction.

Teehan (2006) says that fairy tales were so popular because they focussed on "simple people, just trying to survive in a world that held a lot of mystery and terror, not too much of a stretch considering everyday life for peasants in medieval Northern Europe" (p.16). The world may or may not be so frightening now, but perhaps it is still the 'ordinary' person facing extraordinary events that still holds readers captivated by fantasy tales. Whether the protagonist is a princess, a talking cat, or a boy who lives in a cupboard under the stairs, they all have ordinary dreams and wishes, and they are most often thrust into a world that is not ordinary for them.

Princess Annamaria, the protagonist of *Never Talk to Dragons*, is thrust from an ordinary world (although it is not an ordinary world that readers may recognise, it is still ordinary for her), into an extraordinary one. Traditional fairy tales further influence the novel because in the Four Kingdoms, the world Annamaria lives in, fairy tales are not just stories. Annamaria has been brought up believing in the *Disney* version of fairy tales, but, as she discovers on her adventure, the world is more akin to the Brother's Grimm stories. This is important to the character of Annamaria, as the contrast between the two types of fairy tales is much like the difference between a child's innocence and an adult's scepticism. Annamaria must grow up, of course—this is no Peter Pan tale—but by learning about the 'real' world, she does so on her own terms.
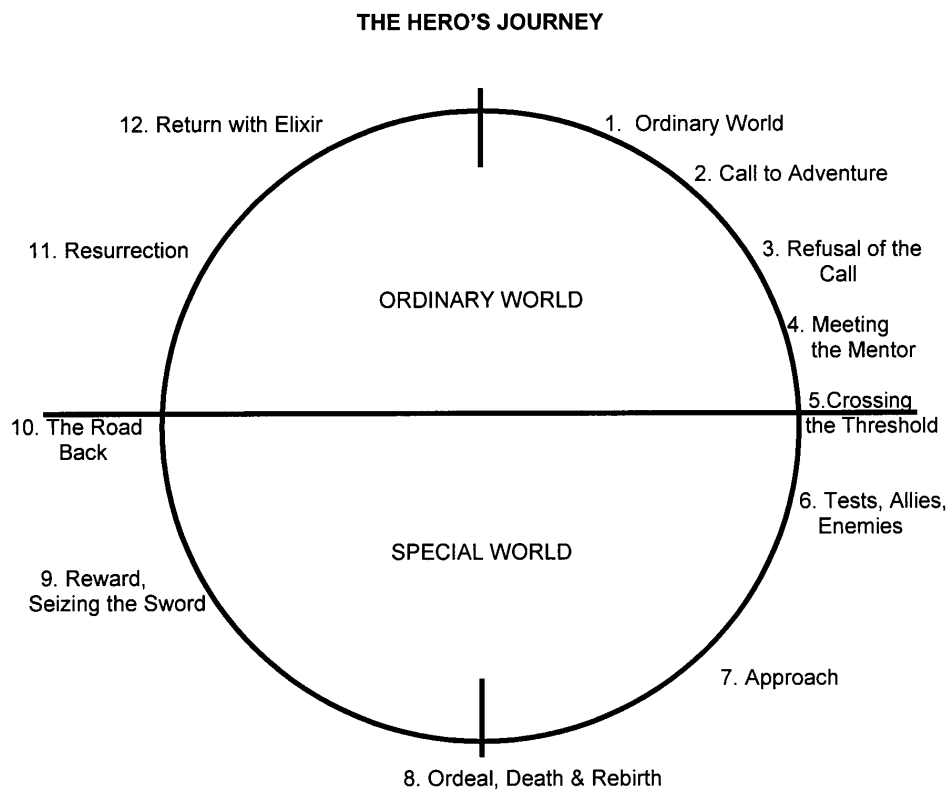
A HOUSE OF BRICKS OR STRAW

Fantasy tales often have a particular structure that readers recognise. They often tend to be some sort of quest put upon the hero, and are often cyclic. Part of the cyclic nature of fantasy structure is the leaving of and return to home. In many fantasy novels, particularly children's and young adult's novels, home is based in the 'real' world. The protagonist usually enters a fantasy world by some kind of portal, like *Narnia's* wardrobe (Lewis, 1998), *Coroline's* little door (Gaiman, 2002), or *Alice's* rabbit hole (Carroll, 1999). The purpose of this not to provide a contrast between 'real' and 'fantasy', but instead to provide a parallel, for, as LeGuin (as cited in Hunt & Lenz, 2004) says, "For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true" (p.6). That is to say, all fantasy stories are based in reality, and reflect this. This is why in the opening 'real world' chapter(s), characters often face an ordinary problem (eg a school bully), and learn to face a parallel fantasy issue (eg an evil monster), thus learning skills to face their original problem.

Of course, every individual determines the term 'fantasy' differently. What is fantasy for one person is normal for another (Hunt & Lenz, 2004), and my thesis takes this into account. In *Never Talk to Dragons*, Annamaria starts in a fantasy world, and enters into an even more fantastical world when she starts her adventure. Instead of being a parallel to the fantasy world, Annamaria's Swynwall is purposely described sketchily as a "perfect land" to act as a contrast between 'reality' and 'fantasy'. In this case, the home, Swynwall, is the fantasy, because Annamaria's sheltered life as a princess has left her unaware of the realities of the world. The fantasy world Annamaria journeys through, is a reality she must discover.

Below details Joseph Campbell's hero's journey (as cited in Vogler, 2011).

Fig 1.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

12. Return with Elixir

1. Ordinary World

2. Call to Adventure

11. Resurrection

3. Refusal of the Call

ORDINARY WORLD

4. Meeting the Mentor

5. Crossing the Threshold

10. The Road Back

6. Tests, Allies, Enemies

SPECIAL WORLD

9. Reward, Seizing the Sword

7. Approach

8. Ordeal, Death & Rebirth

While writing *Never Talk to Dragons*, I did not specifically aim to follow this structure, but it can be seen that there was a natural inclination to do so regardless. Annamaria's "ordinary world" may be different from the readers, but it is ordinary for her never the less. She experiences both a call to adventure, and a reluctance to leave. Annamaria is what Fancovic (2002) calls the reluctant hero, where "some schmuck either has special powers that he didn't want in the first place, or is just in the right place at the right time." Despite her unwillingness, Annamaria crosses the threshold to set out on the adventure when the stakes are raised.

After a series of adventures, she crosses back into the 'ordinary world' where she faces a resurrection of her original problem. In Annamaria's case, she must face her impending marriage, and uses what she has learned in her adventures to do this.

FROM "ONCE UPON A TIME" TO "HAPPILY EVER AFTER"

When placing a novel within a fantasy genre, the novel's opening is the first chance the writer has to achieve this for the reader, and to set the reader on the same path as the character, but hinting at what sort of book they will be reading.

Kress (1993) says that all openings of novels must make some sort of promise to the reader, "one emotional, and one intellectual" (p.7). An emotional promise gives a hint at how the reader will feel *while* reading, be it scared in a horror, amused in a comedy, or perhaps merely entertained. In the case of *Never Talk to Dragons*, it was my hope that the reading will give hints that the reader may feel light-hearted, and ready to go on a fantastical journey. An intellectual promise is what the reader will feel once they have put the book down. It may be a promise to view the world differently, confirm what the world is already like, or learn about a new world. *Never Talk to Dragons* aims to give the reader a chance to learn about a new world, but as in most fantasies, one can expect to also find reflections on the 'real' world. It is only natural after all, a writer is influenced by the real world, and it is impossible not to let some of that seep into the setting, characters, and even plot of a novel.

The first line of *Never Talk to Dragons*, "On my thirteenth birthday, a dragon landed on my balcony", conveys in that one sentence the promise of a light hearted fantasy that will guide the reader through a new world. Without this promise, the reader cannot know what to expect, so setting it up early is important. If I replace "dragon" with "bluebird", however, the obvious fantasy element is taken away from the opening, creating a different promise altogether.

Fantasy openings are often drawn from myths or fairytales, with the classic "once upon a time" or "in a kingdom far, far away" immediately invoking a fantasy feel. J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* (1966) begins with a lengthy

prologue explaining the history of the world and "Hobbit lore" (p.7). This prologue talks to the reader as a teacher would to a student, and immediately lets the reader know that this is a fantasy, even though Tolkien writes as though Hobbits are fact.

Often, fantasy openings can be laboriously long, as is *Fellowship of the Ring* (1966). This may be done as a way of easing the reader into the novel, lulling them into a sense of security, then thrusting them straight into an adventure of epic proportions, along with the protagonist. This long beginning may or may not be in the form of a prologue, but, in order to avoid the feeling of boredom settling in for the reader, many fantasy authors choose to open with a prologue which "acts as a sort of 'teaser' to the reader, especially if the first chapter is a quiet one and it is going to take a while for the adventure to really get underway" (Tuttle, 2005, p.74).

Ignoring the prologue, the first line of *Fellowship of the Ring* (1966) is:

"When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with a party of special magnificence, there was much talk and excitement in Hobbiton." (p.24)

The formal tone imitates the language of a formal invitation, as if Tolkien is inviting the reader to Bilbo's birthday, but cues like "eleventy-first" and "Hobbiton" immediately set the story in fantasy.

However, first lines of fantasy novels often do much more that set the scene. They can also reflect the cyclic structure of fantasy. For this example, I will look at the first and last lines of *The Golden Compass*, by Phillip Pullman (1996):

First line:

"Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen" (p.5).

Last line:

> "So Lyra and her daemon turned away from the world they were
>
> born in, and looked toward the sun, and walked into the sky"
>
> (p.255)

The last line of The Golden Compass reflects the first, with the same subject at the beginning, "Lyra and her daemon", and similar sentence structure. They are different however, and not just in wording, but in tone. The opposing imagery of "darkening" and "sun" reveal that while the first line is dark and secretive, the last is light, with an echo of hope.

If the cyclic structure of fantasy novels is considered further, then it is said that the beginning must start at home, as all journeys do. *Fellowship of the Ring* (Tolkien, 1966) begins in Hobbiton, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997) at Harry's home with the Dursleys, and Shiver (Stiefvater, 2009) begins in the woods behind Grace's house.

Starting at home in a fantasy can be in the 'real' world, or what is simply the 'real' world for the character. Annamaria's home in *Never Talk to Dragons* is still within the fantasy world of the Four Kingdoms, but Swynwall, the kingdom in which she resides, is from her point of view, a picture-perfect "utopia" and the world she is thrust in to is frightening, with a definite sense of "other".

For the cyclic structure to be complete, the characters must also experience a return to home at the end. Frodo eventually returns to Hobbitton, Harry must always return to the Dursleys, and *Shiver* ends back in the woods. This end however, is different to the beginning. There is a significant shift in mood or tone, and most definitely a change in the characters so that the way they viewed home when they left it is changed. For Grace, who begins in Shiver in the woods being attacked by a wolf, and then is subsequently rescued by one, she ends in the woods again, but this time the mood is one of hope.

In addition to the return to home, Kress (1993, p.104.), who talked about setting up a promise in beginnings of novels, says that the end is where this promise needs to be delivered. Often in the beginning, a character will be introduced to some problem, and the expectation is that by the end, this problem will be solved.

Other than the main conflict of the story, there is often another promise of resolution, which links to the return to home. This is illustrated in Gidwitz's *A Tale Dark and Grimm* (2010), where Hansel and Gretel run away from home because they don't trust their parents (which, after their father chopped off the heads, isn't surprising), but their journey comes in full circle, and Hansel and Gretel are forced to face their parents again after the major climax of the novel.

In Annamaria's return to home in *Never Talk to Dragons*, she faces the prospect of marriage again. After spending her journey attempting to rescue a prince (or two), she not only refuses to marry the prince, she says, "I cannot choose a husband, because I don't want one." It may seem as though this ending is a way of saying that a princess doesn't need a prince if she has confidence in herself, but when I wrote it, that was not my intention. Instead, I asked myself the question that Kress (1993) asks in her writing on endings: "If my protagonist were a radically different person, would this story still end the same way?" (p.109). The answer of course needs to be 'no', and in the case of *Never Talk to Dragons*, I can say that it is because of the changes Annamaria makes within herself during her journey that this ending is appropriate. I felt that it was right for the character, and necessary to show, or prove her growth.

NOBLE PRINCES AND DAMSELS IN DISTRESS

Genre fiction is one that relies on conventions to tell a story, and archetypal characters are an important part of this. However, in order to create unique, relatable characters, archetypes are tools to be used warily, because their overuse has meant that fantasy is a genre "plagued with delicate, frail vestal virgins chained in a dungeon somewhere, hoping beyond despair that her valiant knight will rescue her from harm" (Morris, 2002, p. 43-44). From fairy tale princesses like Rapunzel (Grimm, 2010), who are awaiting rescue, to more the modern fantasy character of Edward in Meyer's *Twilight* (2005), who must rescue his 'princess' from harm at every page turn, archetypes have been well used.

Lauren Kate's Luce, from *Fallen* (2009), is stuck in a reincarnation curse, where she dies before her sixteenth birthday, and it is up to the angel Daniel, to save her each time. At the climax of the novel, again Daniel must do the rescuing: "Not dead then, but saved. By angels. Daniel had come for her" (p.418).

Tuttle (2005) says that archetypes needn't be feared however, and says that when archetypal characters are handled well, "these familiar characters have a ring of truth about them, and seem both familiar and yet original" (p.26). It is this familiarity of characters in the fantasy genre that readers want to see, so a complete rejection of these archetypes is not possible. However, many authors have succeeded in creating characters based on these archetypes, while still ensuring that they are original.

Tamora Pierce is an author who has been hugely successful in using archetypes, while making them original, within the fantasy genre. In her novel, *Alanna: The first adventure* (1983), the protagonist, Alanna, is anything but a timid girl, awaiting rescue. She disguises herself as a boy and begins training as a knight. She is in no need of rescuing at any time, and while Pierce keeps her believable, by showing Alanna's

physical struggles with keeping up with boys, and dealing with bullies, while giving Alanna the chance to dispatch her enemies on her own. "It had taken weeks of training in secret to beat Ralon. The long hours, the bruises and her constant exhaustion were fresh in her mind" (p.131). Hardy's protagonist, Nya, from *The pain merchants. The healing wars: Book one* (2009), is another female character in fantasy that manages to defy archetypes but remain within the fantasy genre. Nya is an orphan who must survive on her own wits to provide for herself and her sister. She struggles with stereotypes placed on her, due to her status as both a girl, and a poor orphan. "'Filthy 'Veg. Don't you be bothering my customers.' She swept me down the walk like dust and shoved me into the street" (p.34). However, in the climax of the novel, it is Nya, and Nya alone who 'saves the day' by using her powers to free herself and kill the enemy, Zertanik, therefore saving her sister and several others.

The key to these characters is their believability. Despite having elements that have been seen in characters since stories first began, they are all characters one could meet in their own life. Kelly (1991) suggests that a way to increase believability is to increase a character's moral ambiguity. "Nobody takes seriously a story in which the good guys are all saints and the bad guys are the spawn of hell. Saints can have their bad days and even monsters love their moms" (p.39).

However, sometimes the antagonist can be completely evil, with very little moral ambiguity, but thrive in their 'evilness'. Valentine, from Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* series, is one example of this. He is openly cruel, leading Clary and Jace, the protagonists of the novel, to falsely believe they are brother and sister even though they are in love, and he murders without conscience (Clare, 2007, 2008, 2009). Clare offers the reader no moral ambiguity with this character, instead using Valentine as a character to contrast his "son", Jace, who believes himself to have evil blood running through him, but is revealed on all occasions to be nothing like Valentine. This use of

the evil sorcerer archetype is successful in this case.

Voldemort from Harry Potter, is another example of a purely evil character. Flashes of his childhood as an orphan are given, as a direct comparison to Harry Potter himself, but Rowling fails to create any sympathy for Voldemort, since Harry came out of a similar, and arguably even worse situation, without a psychopathic nature. It does not matter however, for Voldemort's evil nature is what makes him so ultimately terrifying. That such a creature (for he is portrayed as more snake than human) might actually exist is reminiscent of nightmarish childhood memories of monsters under the bed, and creatures of the night. Rowling allows Voldemort to be pure evil, and lets the reader relish in it. Her character of Snape, on the other hand, is a character built on complexity. It is not even until the final book in the series that the reader is allowed to know whether Snape is actually good. However, even while Rowling misleads the reader into thinking Snape is Voldemort's henchman, she succeeds in creating sympathy for him, by revealing both his love for Harry's mother, and his hatred for Harry's father (Rowling, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007).

Casamire, from my thesis, *Never talk to dragons*, is a particularly archetypal character. She is partially influenced by Disney's *Snow White and the seven dwarfs (1937)*, in that she is portrayed as having a similar aura of evil, with her beauty being tainted with her cruelty: "The smile twisted onto her ruby lips was captivating, and I felt my own mouth hang open at the sight of her. But the corners of the woman's mouth were too sharp, her eyes lacking the crinkles that revealed a smile's true beauty." She even makes a vague reference to a magic mirror, when, with a spell to give her complete beauty, she says, "I'm beautiful now; I don't need a mirror to tell me."

Tuttle (2005) says that "in myths and folktales, characters tend to represent one particular facet of the self, and are not complex, many-sided individuals" and fairytales represent internal struggles by splitting the 'self' into multiple characters – an evil

witch, a helpless maiden and a hero are all the same person, represented in parts (p.67). In *Never Talk to Dragons*, it could be said that Casamire is a flatter representation of, and is portrayed in complete contrast to, her sister, Annamaria, while having parallel desires. Caramire wants everything that Annamaria has (but, consequently, doesn't realise she has). She wants to be beautiful, but ultimately wants the power she thinks comes with it, but chooses a path to gain this that Annamaria would never have even considered. Annamaria on the other hand, doesn't know that she has the power to meet her own desires, and it takes a journey through the Four Kingdoms for her to realise that she must find it for herself instead of waiting for a prince to do all the hard work for her.

Casamire is a cruel character, and while she has motivation for her actions (she's sick of being the lesser sister, and wants to be beautiful), Casamire is a character without a lot of depth. Instead, her cruelty is what contrasts with Annamaria's need to help others. Annamaria is driven to defeat Casamire because she wants her prince turned back into a human, but on another level it is because she knows that Markoff and Octavian need her help, despite the fact she is a princess, and it is the princess who is normally in need of assistance. When Casamire is revealed to be Annamaria's sister, it is easy to make observation that they are characters that not only contrast one another, they parallel each other as well, with Casamire acting as a doppelganger to Annamaria.

Annamaria is everything that Casamire wants to be. She is beautiful, has princes desperate to marry her, and on the surface seems perfectly happy. Casamire wants that, but what she, or even Annamaria realize, is that Annamaria wants to be more like Casamire. She doesn't care about being beautiful, but she wants the freedom to do what she wants, and knows that as a princess, when she marries she will be under the control of her husband, no matter who that might be. In the end, both sister get what they want. Casamire is beautiful, but trapped forever, and Annamaria rejects her status as a princess, and the notion of a husband, and escapes Swynwall to be free.

<u>A MATTER OF STYLE</u>

Fantasy fiction's roots in myths and legends, and its epic oral traditions, mean that the language used in fantasy novels often takes on an archaic tone. Complex descriptions of setting and characters, combined with an authorial tone that reflects a "God" voice, regardless of whether or not omniscient POV is used, have created a language style that often seen as 'traditional fantasy'.

According to Tuttle (2005), "The majority of popular, successful fantasy and SF novels are written using modified omniscience" (p.83). Even within the young adult and children's subgenres, some form of omniscience is used, or at the very least, a third person perspective is achieved. Philip Pullman says (as cited in Turner, 2004) that he uses third person frequently, and as a result, the narrator takes on its own character that is "young and old, and wise and silly, and sceptical and credulous, and innocent and experienced, all at once. Narrators are not even human – they're sprites."

One issue with attempting to navigate away from the traditional fantasy writing style is that it may make the novel seem less 'fantasy'. "Certain kinds of stories seem to set their own agendas as far as style is concerned… If you write a story about princesses, dragons and magic rings in the style of Ernest Hemingway, for example, you may have an interesting story, but it is unlikely to feel much like fantasy" (Tuttle, 2005, p.88). However, when beginning to write *Never Talk to Dragons*, I found that this traditional style was both restrictive, and not the style I wanted to use when writing for children. Laurence Anholt (as cited in Turner, 2004) suggest that when writing for children, one needs to "Write in an easy-going, natural style as if you are speaking confidently or telling an anecdote" (p.50). This anecdotal style is one that I wanted to achieve, since the tone of the novel is light hearted, and I felt that an oppressive omniscient narrator would take this away from it. By using first person perspective I

was able to pull away from this language style, and achieve my light hearted tone. Tuttle (2005) says that "First person can be a good choice when you want the reader to come to a gradual understanding, having an experience in tandem with the main character" (p.79), and I wanted to pull the reader into the story with Annamaria.

In addition, "A distancing effect can be used to emphasise that this world is not our world, and that the people who inhabit it are different from our neighbours. Distance and difference are invoked in language, by the style in which the story is told" (Tuttle, 2005, p.89). However, when considering style for *Never Talk to Dragons*, I wanted the reader to feel like they could belong in the fantasy world themselves. By choosing a first person narrative that was only slightly more distant than a diary-style, I hoped to allow the reader to experience the Four Kingdoms and the journey through Annamaria's eyes, as if they were flying away on Octavian with her.

<u>CONCLUSION</u>

The fantasy genre is one that is clearly defined by a set of conventions that have been integrated into most fantasy texts since fantasy's early days. It is virtually impossible to escape them, and by looking at these conventions, I found myself asking, can one have a fantasy story without them?

It seems that these conventions can be twisted to some extent, and the lines between genres are often blurred, but regardless, the story still needs to be recognisable as fantasy, and conventions are what make the genre. *Never Talk to Dragons* may look at certain conventions from a slightly different angle, but they are conventions nonetheless, and they are used as such.

The characters in the novel are fantasy characters – they use magic, belong to a medieval hierarchy, and face dangerous creatures. There is a clear definition between good and evil, and while the lines may be slightly blurred with some characters, by the end of the novel they all sit on one side or the other. This is, of course, what fantasy readers expect, as conventions give readers a clear understanding of what sort of novel they will be delving into.

Never Talk to Dragons may be, in part at least, a commentary of fantasy conventions, but in the end, it is a novel for children, and its main aim is to entertain. Therefore, while the model of fantasy conventions can be somewhat reformed, it must still come from the same mould.

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