

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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\_\_\_\_\_ DYNAMIC DRAGONS: AN EXPLORATION OF ROLE REVERSAL \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ IN THE YOUNG ADULT ADVENTURE CYCLE \_\_\_\_\_

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Dragons have long been a staple character in literary traditions all around the globe. From ancient Babylonian myth to modern young adult (YA) fiction, the dragon is well-represented within literature as a powerful and mysterious entity. Western culture, in particular, deems the dragon an evil enemy that must be overcome by a hero, while in Eastern cultures the dragon represents a much more natural and benevolent creature that generously bestows wisdom and wealth on worthy subjects. In recent years the stark character contrasts between the dragons of East and West have merged within the realm of Western YA literature to create a new kind of hero, one that still follows the path described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* but challenges traditional perceptions of good and evil, especially where humanity is concerned.

Young readers looking for answers to questions about their own identities within YA novels now have the opportunity to explore identity and human nature through the very eyes of the creature they were once taught to fear. Utilizing as a framework Campbell's adventure cycle and goals found in modern YA literature, this thesis examines two YA novels that cast a dragon as the hero – Cornelia Funke's *Dragon Rider*

and Rachel Hartman's *Seraphina* – and seeks to answer the following questions regarding this recent literary trend: (1) If the dragon is cast as the hero of the story, who or what, then, embodies the evil to be overcome?; (2) Who assumes the dragon's role as guardian of the threshold in the creature's stead?; (3) Do traditional characteristics with the menacing dragon still apply? If so, which characteristics? If not, what characteristics does the dragon gain or lose?; and (4) How is the perception of humanity affected if a human no longer functions as the story's protagonist?

Keywords: dragons, young adult literature, YAL, Joseph Campbell, adventure cycle, hero

DYNAMIC DRAGONS:  
AN EXPLORATION OF ROLE REVERSAL  
IN THE YOUNG ADULT ADVENTURE CYCLE

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DYNAMIC DRAGONS:  
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Introduction

The dragon has been a staple character in stories for millennia, and while this powerful creature is more or less a universal symbol, its characteristics vary from culture to culture. In most cases, but certainly not all, the dragon is an enemy. Dragon combat is a common motif in many Western heroic epics and tales in which the creature, as a physical being, is wise but fierce and must eventually be slain by the story's hero to protect a town, rescue a damsel, or obtain a treasure of some kind. Dragons have also been traditionally cast as the metaphorical representation of evil, darkness, and seemingly impossible tasks, usually undertaken by heroes out to prove themselves. However, the typical role of the dragon has recently been undergoing some significant changes, particularly in the area of young adult literature. A trend has arisen in which dragons no longer carry the connotation of evil or darkness. Their typical role as obstacle and intelligent menace is instead being written in a number of benevolent roles including mentor, companion to the hero, and even hero. A large pool of continually expanding young adult fiction has embraced the idea of the benevolent dragon. Some of the first novels to incorporate benevolent dragons – the *Harper Hall Trilogy* and the *Dragon Riders of Pern Trilogy* – were written by Anne McCaffrey. This pool later included books like *On Wings of a Dragon* by Cora Taylor, *Dragon's Bait* by Vivian Vande Velde, *Zac and the Valley of the Dragons* by Michael R. Mennenga, or *Dragon Magic and Dragon Mage* by Andre Norton. In addition, there are several other series, many

written within the last decade, containing three or more installments of novels with nontraditional dragons. These include, but are certainly not limited to the following titles: *The Pit Dragon Chronicles* by Jane Yolen, Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon* series, *Dragons in Our Midst* by Bryan Davis, *The Inheritance Cycle* by Christopher Paolini, *Dragon Keepers Chronicles* by Donita K. Paul, Jeff Smith's *Bone*, *The Girl who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making* by Catherynne M. Valente, *The Enchanted Forest Chronicles* by Patricia C. Wrede, Jessica Day George's *Dragon Adventures*, and the *Dragonback Adventure Series* by Timothy Zahn. These series for young readers along with other individual novels, such as Cornelia Funke's *Dragon Rider* and Rachel Hartman's *Seraphina*, challenge the typical portrayal of this mythical force and recast the dragon in a new light.

This role reversal poses an interesting set of questions for modern readers who hail from a Western context and have been indoctrinated since their infancy with tales that paint dragons as the foreboding representation of evil, bent on challenging and destroying the story's hero protagonist. If the dragon is cast as the hero of the story, as is the case in many recent young adult novels, who or what, then, embodies the evil to be overcome? Who assumes the dragon's role as guardian of the threshold in the creature's stead? Do the traditional characteristics associated with the menacing dragon still apply? If so, which characteristics? If not, what characteristics does the dragon gain or lose? How is the perception of humanity affected if a human no longer functions as the story's protagonist? Joseph Campbell's cycle for the adventure of the hero, described in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, will serve as the framework through which the young adult novels *Dragon Rider* by Cornelia Funke and *Seraphina* by Rachel Hartman

will be examined and the questions mentioned will be explored. Together these two young adult novels cover the entire age demographic intended for young adult literature. They also explore the dragon's role reversal and adventure cycle at varying complexities through unique and dynamic characters that appeal to a variety of readers. *Dragon Rider* focuses on an external journey using a young, adolescent male dragon as the protagonist of a story geared toward a younger readership about seven to twelve years of age, while *Seraphina* tells a story for an older audience, aged twelve or older, through the eyes of a sixteen-year-old female protagonist as she moves through a more internalized hero cycle. Both of these texts engage the stages of Campbell's adventure cycle as the hero in each novel works to establish and understand his or her own identity. While the stages of Campbell's adventure cycle remain consistent throughout these novels, the change in traditional character roles provides a new avenue for the exploration of identity in the young adult novel, connecting Campbell's exploration of identity through myth with modern young adult readers as they explore their own identities.

Both Cornelia Funke and Rachel Hartman have written dragons as their hero protagonists resulting in a shift of typical characteristics and traits expected of a dragon in a Western story. Furthermore, both novels juxtapose dragons to the human race by placing humanity in the role of menace once traditionally held by the dragon. This contrast in character roles offers some thought-provoking insights into the external perceptions and implications of humanity as it functions in an anti-heroic role as well as an opportunity to contemplate the internal wrestling of a character who may still be considered by society as inherently evil though his or her actions may prove otherwise. The authors' choices regarding character function allow their audience, young adults who

often have similar struggles with society as an external enemy while battling with their own nature internally, to examine and cope with their own experiences in a more imaginative and positive context.

## Literature Review: Current Scholarship on Literary Portrayals of Dragons

The dragon's traditional role in Western myth is to function as the guardian of a threshold that must be crossed by the hero should he wish to continue his journey in the cycle of the hero's adventure. It may function as the final obstacle to be overcome or one of the many trials along the way, but never the hero or primary focus of the story. This image of the dragon as enemy and obstacle has persisted in Western literature with little change as to the dragon's significance as enemy or obstacle until recently, within the last century. James M. Reitter explores the sinister nature of the modern dragon in Western thought in his thesis *Modern Dragons: The Crocodilian in the Western Mind*. He argues that Western culture now views the archetype of the dragon through a more crocodilian physical lens, but that the character maintains its negative traits as a result of its dualistic, alien nature: living between land and water, cold blooded, and lacking varied facial expressions (1-2). Reitter suggests that the crocodilian's dualistic nature has become, "For the Western world, [...] imagined as part of the Self – the evil twin – as well as the alien/reptilian Other" (2). The crocodilian, then, functions as a ruler by which humanity may measure and define its perceptions of its own nature (3). Reitter examines this relationship in Western literature from Beowulf to Batman and focuses specifically on altercations with and observations of this modern dragon, but he does not examine the dragon, or crocodilian's, role within literature that has been intended for a younger audience.

In contrast, Hope Shastri explores the archetype of the dragon as it is represented in children's literature, specifically picture books, from 1950 to 1992 (vi). Shastri's

content analysis of 151 children's books revealed some significant changes regarding the dragon and how it is presented to children:

[W]ith the exception of fire breathing, most dragons do not follow the conventions of dragon lore. Oriental dragons follow conventions more closely than Western dragons. Most genial dragons do not fly. Dragons seldom pick fights and even less seldom are killed. The friendlier the dragons become, the more likely they will be in a subservient position. Few stories are about heroic conquest and one in two dragons is denatured. More than forty percent deal with problems and sometimes cry. The dragon is closely tied to the main character either as a problem to be overcome or as a creation of the imagination. The picture book dragon is no longer the evil pillaging creature of the Middle Ages, nor the earth-encircling world-creating dragon of the ancients. (vi-vii)

This non-threatening child's dragon and Reitter's reptilian anti-hero represent a stark contrast in the way that dragons have developed in their representation. However, while both of these dissertations present valid arguments, they fail to take into account the dragon's role in the modern young adult novel and the potential for influencing an impressionable teenage audience. Lucia Owen's essay, "Dragons in the Classroom," posits that high quality fantasy literature for today's teenagers is "valuable, appropriate, even essential" (76) because it has the potential to exercise the imagination, allow the reader to clearly view himself, generate hope, and facilitate escape (76). The fantasy novel geared toward the young adult reader has reinvented the dragon's purpose and position within story beyond a change in physicality or a trivialization of tradition, and

gives its readers a new framework in which they may examine humanity on a societal scale, compare themselves to societal standards, and explore their own humanity on an internal level.

Sandra Unerman explains in “Dragons in Twentieth-Century Fiction” that in addition to the traditional archetype, modern dragons have assumed new roles and characteristics, occasionally commandeered from other areas of folklore. This shift represents the changing relationship between writers, readers, and how they each react to literary tradition, especially where the dragon is concerned. “They show how folklore material can be used to express changes in social attitudes and ideas, not merely reflect the past” (94). Retellings of classic myths and folklore, such as Kenneth Grahame’s “The Reluctant Dragon,” which relates a less sinister telling of the St. George and the dragon tale (Unerman 95), demonstrate the beginnings of a shift in the dragon’s archetypal role. Unerman lists and discusses several other works that illustrate the evolution of the dragon’s character throughout the twentieth century from Edith Nesbit’s *The Book of Dragons*, a collection of children’s stories featuring heroic children and their adversary dragons, published around 1900, to Tolkien’s classic Western representation of the dragon with Smaug in *The Hobbit*, originally published in 1937, to *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, published in 2000 and part of a young adult series that pits the hero against a dragon – the first task in the Tri-Wizard Tournament (Unerman 95-7). Many of these dragons fulfill the traditional Western archetype or assume new roles borrowed from other folklore and myth archetypes such as Shastri describes, but Unerman’s list offers no source featuring a dragon as the story’s hero until she discusses R.A. MacAvoy’s *Tea with the Black Dragon*, published in 1987. However, Mayland Long, the

Chinese imperial dragon turned human, is clearly an Eastern archetype, associated with wisdom and long life but still dangerous (97). It is at this point that the devourer of modern fantasy begins to see a connection between Eastern and Western dragons, and it is this connection that seems to have informed the development of the heroic dragon in young adult fantasy.

With this shift in the typical role of the Western dragon, especially in the area of young adult literature, dragons are no longer the obstacle that must be overcome or the hideous beast that must be slain so the hero might save the day and prove himself. Dragons in Western literature are, in fact, fulfilling much more dynamic roles as they function more like their Eastern counterparts in character. Many authors have maintained the typical physical description of the Western dragons but their character qualities are more like those of the Eastern dragon; they play the parts of mentors, heroes, companions, and friends. Cornelia Funke's *Dragon Rider* and Rachel Hartman's *Seraphina* are two of the many examples displaying how contemporary young adult literature has re-envisioned this staple character of Campbell's adventure cycle, placing the dragon in the hero's role at the center of the story, as an opportunity for exploring common themes primarily examined in the genre, namely the question of identity. Casting dragons in the role of hero allows for a fantastic approach to the question, "Who am I, and what am I going to do about it?" while examining universal dichotomies such as "good vs. evil" in a way that invites young readers to participate and explore these themes for themselves. Of course, this trend did not transpire without cause. In both Eastern and Western cultures dragons have been involved in rich and varied literary histories that have converged to bring about this shift.

## Chapter 1: Dragons – West and East:

Some of the earliest recorded stories involve a dragon-like creature of some kind. The Babylonian poem the *Enuma Elish* is an example of Mesopotamian creation myth. Written before 1100 BC, this poem features “the viper, the dragon” (Heidel 31), who is “sharp of tooth and not sparing the fang” (31), a member of the goddess Tiamat’s army as she attempts to destroy younger gods (30-31). Early Greek hymns tell of the god Apollo and his encounter at Delphi with the serpent Python as he searched for a place to build a temple for himself. Apollo’s battle with Python is a Greek form of dragon combat (Evelyn-White 349-51). Dragons appear in Old Norse, Near East, African, Asian, Native American, Mesoamerican, and European myths. According to Qiguang Zhao in his book *A Study of Dragons, East and West*, “The dragon is as old as the sensitivity and imagination of humankind” (13). To see how the dragon has continued on into modern literature, one needs only to look at a brief development of the two most commonly encountered types of dragon – Western and Eastern.

Dragons exist in the stories of most cultures and are usually presented, except in Eastern cultures, as an enemy to be overcome. It is difficult to determine a specific, physical description of what might be called the prototypical dragon. They have been given so many forms that they could essentially be best described as a serpent-like creature that appears in several varieties much as dogs are divided into breeds (Lippincott 3). A fair description of a dragon might begin with a large exotic snake possessing any number of added features including, but not limited to, wings, claws, horns, and fangs. Modern depictions of Western dragons generally include all of these physical characteristics and leave little room for addition of more characteristics in their physical description; however, prior to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, dragons were described using many

different combinations of physical attributes like those listed above as “each race has naturally drawn on the part of the animal world with which it is familiar in putting this composite beast together” (Cavendish 630). Also, it is evident that before this time, Eastern cultures had had some influence on the Western understanding of these creatures. During his travels in China, Marco Polo came across what modern scholars suspect was a crocodile, but his description of this unfamiliar creature led artists of the age to create a rather fearsome beast that does not entirely resemble what has come to be known as the Western dragon (Lippincott 3-4). Marco Polo’s description of this creature is as follows:

They are loathsome creatures to behold. Let me tell you just how big they are. You may take it for a fact that there are some of them ten paces in length that are as thick as a stout cask: for their girth runs to about ten palms. These are the biggest. They have two squat legs in front near the head, which have no feet but simply three claws...like the claws of a falcon or a lion. They have enormous heads and eyes so bulging that they are bigger than loaves, their mouth is big enough to swallow a man at one gulp [...].

(158-59)

While this description is rather vague in certain respects, it provided at least a temporary, Eastern-derived foundation for the image of the creature known as the dragon in Western culture.

Despite its physical inconsistencies, for early Christians around the twelfth and thirteenth centuries “the dragon had one more extremely important characteristic: it was

dangerous to man” (Lippincott 3). The Western dragon is often seen as something evil and associated with wisdom and wealth. Additionally, while the Western dragon is most often associated with fire, its original or primeval association is with water of all types, and this is what sets it apart from other mythical hybrids (Cavendish 630). Were it more than an imaginary creature, it would indeed be a formidable foe. According to Beryl Rowland in *Animals with Human Faces*, the early Christians equated the dragon with the Devil (16). This is not surprising given the story of Eve and the serpent in Genesis 3:1-15 along with the description of a particularly dragon-like creature known as the Leviathan in the book of Job:

Who can strip off his outer covering?

Who can penetrate his double layer of armor?

Who can open his jaws,  
surrounded by those terrifying teeth?

His pride is in his rows of scales,  
closely sealed together.

One scale is so close to another  
that no air can pass between them.

They are joined to one another,  
so closely connected they cannot be separated.

His snorting flashes with light,  
while his eyes are like the rays of dawn.

Flaming torches shoot from his mouth;  
fiery sparks fly out!

Smoke billows from his nostrils  
as from a boiling pot or burning reeds.  
His breath sets coals ablaze,  
and flames pour out of his mouth.  
Strength resides in his neck,  
and dismay dances before him.  
The folds of his flesh are joined together,  
solid as metal and immovable. (41:13-23)

*The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts*, originally written in Latin during the twelfth century and later translated by T. H. White, details the dragon's distaste for the perindeus tree where its enemy the dove (a representation of the Holy Ghost) resides (159-60). The author bids his readers look to the tree in order to receive the Holy Ghost. "Look to it lest the Dragon destroy you, i.e. the Devil" (161). The author advises the reader to remain in the Catholic Church as his refuge and gives this final warning: "Take as much care as you can not to be caught outside the doors of your refuge. Take care lest that Dragon, the serpent of old, should seize you and gobble you up like Judas [...]" (161). Additionally, a large, pagan compendium of facts concerning animals written sometime between the third and fourth centuries A.D. and known as *The Physiologus*, was "adopted by Christian moralists who tagged didactic messages onto the pagan tales" around the thirteenth century and contributed to the understanding of dragons during this time (Lippincott 3). In surviving editions of *The Physiologus*, following its Christian adaptation, dragons are compared to devils and they are similar in their appearance in possessing combs – protrusions, probably of bone, running from the top of the head down

the spine of the creature –, flying, and using their tails to capture the unwary (3). Also, in Europe and the Near East this creature was most often portrayed as an evil, winged beast who steals, destroys by fire, or guards treasure (Lum 96). The typical description of a European or Near Eastern dragon includes a lizard-like shape of enormous size, scaly body – like that of a snake – and vertically set wings (96). In addition to physical description, the wisdom that is associated with dragons in these particular regions functions as nothing more than a tool which dragons use to plot against humans instead of benefit them. He hoards wealth instead of bestowing it, and he abuses his innate power over water to obtain human sacrifice (98). Furthermore, the trope of the dragon demanding a royal, virginal sacrifice potentially stems from the Greek myth of Andromeda (Cavendish 633), whose life must be forfeited to a sea creature as payment to the sea-nymphs for her mother’s pride and insolence (Powell 359). This European and Near Eastern idea of dragon characteristics has had the most influence on literature through the ages and is responsible for the extremely popular Western image of the dragon most often seen today.

The portrayal of the “the biblical image of the dragon as a godforsaken creature, while concurrently presenting him as a danger to human life and salvation” influenced the general Western view of dragons following the late thirteenth century (Lippincott 3), and it is inevitable that the evil characteristics such as sin, death, and damnation attributed to dragons by the early Christians would have an effect on later European literature. This particular type of dragon finally takes something of a permanent shape in the early fourteenth century (Evans 29) and is the dragon often described in tales of dragon-slayers, such as the fictionalized life of St. George, a soldier during the Crusades

(Newman 79-84). The stories of St. George were the most popular dragon-slayer narratives of the Middle Ages and contained plots similar to the one Northrop Fry summarizes: “[A] land ruled by a helpless old king is laid waste by a sea-monster, to whom one young person after another is offered to be devoured, until the lot falls on the king’s daughter: at that point the hero arrives, kills the dragon, marries the daughter, and succeeds to the kingdom” (Evans 43). This basic plot summary best shows the metaphorical role that the dragon plays as the feared obstacle, the impossible task that must be completed before the hero can prove himself and receive his reward. This image of the dragon had been maintained in Western culture as the most popular literary depiction of the creature for centuries.

The other common type of dragon, the “Eastern dragon” (Lum 111), stems mostly from China and Japan. While it maintains the same associations with water, wisdom, and wealth, Eastern dragons play a more dualistic role in traditional myth. Martin Burnham also points out that while Eastern and Western dragons have some significant characteristics in common, “[Eastern dragons] should not be confused with the winged medieval dragons of Europe which guarded treasures, polluted the air with their fiery breath, and demanded human sacrifices until slain by a St. George, a Perseus, a Siegfried, or the laurel-crowned Apollo of Ancient Delphi” (34). Eastern dragons are both malevolent and benign as is water in all its moods: from gentle rain and rivers to typhoons and storms (Lum 111-12). Ingersoll quotes Lao Tzu who puts the dragon’s association with water into perspective,

‘Water is the weakest and softest of things, yet it overcomes the strongest and the hardest.’ It penetrates everywhere subtly, without noise, without

effort. ‘So it becomes typical of the spirit, which is able to pass out into all other existences of the world and resume its own form in man; and, associated with the power of fluidity, the dragon becomes the symbol of the infinite.’ (62)

“The Eastern dragon is not the gruesome monster of medieval imagination, but the genius of strength and goodness” (Zhao 28). In China, dragons share their wisdom as companions and teachers to sages and kings and are believed to be immensely generous with their vast stores of wealth (Lum 112). The Chinese *Book of Rites* names the dragon as one of the four benevolent spiritual animals in addition to the tortoise, unicorn, and phoenix (Cavendish 633). Chinese dragons bestow laws and swords, provide instruction in the arts of magic and painting and are capable of bestowing periods of blessing as well as periods of destruction by means of events such as droughts should they be offended or disturbed (634). War, floods, drought, volcanic activity, and other natural disasters were also thought to be the result of altercations between dragons, and should one ever fall and perish it would be considered an ill omen (Burnham 33; Ingersoll 63).

This dynamic creature differs much in physical appearance from its Western counterpart in that it is more often shown without wings, and its body is longer and more snake-like. Physical descriptions of these creatures often resemble a menagerie of several animals combined in a piecemeal fashion:

Wang Fu says: “The people paint the dragon’s shape with a horse’s head and a snake’s tale. Further, there are expressions as ‘three joints’ and ‘nine resemblances’ (of the dragon), to wit: from head to shoulder, from shoulder to breast, from breast to tail. These are the joints; as to the nine

resemblances, they are the following: his horns resemble those of a stag, his head that of a camel, his eyes those of a demon, his neck that of a snake, his belly that of a clam (*shen*), his scales those of a carp, his claws those of an eagle, his soles those of a tiger, his ears those of a cow. Upon his head he has a thing like a broad eminence (a big lump), called *ch'ih muh*. If a dragon has no *ch'ih muh*, he cannot ascend to the sky. (Visser 70)

It breathes clouds that bring rain instead of destructive fire, and its “voice is pleasantly described as being like the jingling of copper pans” (Lum 114). The Chinese dragon’s origin is fabled to be the Bay de Halong, and a diverse variety of the species includes the *lung*, who dwell in the sky; the *kiau*, who live wingless in the marshes; and the *li* who make their home in the sea. Amber found in the earth was once dragon’s blood, and many other items such as perfume were supposedly manufactured from other dragon remnants, including the saliva (Burnham 33-34). In addition to its physical characteristics and capabilities, the Eastern dragon’s physical appearance serves as a visual representation of what it is meant to symbolize in Eastern cultures.

Ernest Ingersoll states in *Dragons and Dragon Lore* that to someone from an Asian background, especially Chinese, the dragon “is an embodiment of all the significance of natural history and ancient philosophy – the natural and supreme symbol of their race and culture” (51). The dragon is associated with the very birth of Chinese civilization (52); this creature is so intimately connected to the foundations of Chinese culture that its very being functions as a manifestation of the underlying philosophical Chinese principles of *yang* (good influences) and *yin* (bad influences). These two

contrary terms represent the Chinese philosophical concept of balance in the very fabric of the world: “light versus darkness, the constructive as opposed to the destructive, goodwill contrasted with badheartedness” (Ingersoll 64). Wang Fu describes the dragon in further physical detail as having one-hundred seventeen total scales, eighty-one of which represent *yang* and thirty-six of which represent *yin*, making the dragon both preserver and destroyer. Its *yang* composition also makes the dragon predominantly male and consequently associated with the Chinese emperor, especially during the Manchu dynasty from 1644-1912 (Visser 70-71; Cavendish 634). The Chinese emperor was known as the True Dragon (Burnham 33), and the connections between dragons and the emperor have naturally resulted in tales of interactions between the emperor and dragons or dragon-like creatures. For example, it was told that the emperor during the Chow Dynasty, Muh, supposedly “drove around the world in a carriage drawn by eight winged dragon-horses” (Ingersoll 53). Eastern myths such as these stem from 2853-2738 B.C.E. when the sage Fu His described the “dragon horse” he saw rising from the Lo river (52), and it has been occasionally reported by ancient authors that a horse may be impregnated and birth winged dragon-horses (the same creatures used to pull the emperor’s carriage) as a result of drinking water from a river – the dragon’s domain (Burnham 33). Associations with male royalty and power certainly serve to strengthen the Chinese emperor’s authority, but dragons have not strictly been associated with the male gender in Eastern lore.

Prominent associations between dragons and women also exist, especially in Japanese myth and legend in the form of the snake woman. “The snake who appears in shape-changed form as a woman, and who lives for years in the human community with

her true nature unrecognized [...]” (Blacker 113). This character similarly represents extremes of both good and evil, and she is a potential bringer of life through her associations with water in the form of seas, lakes, or pools. Though the snake woman in other cultures, especially Western cultures, often represents extremes of evil, “Here the dragon is not the monstrous destroyer found in our own [Western] tradition, but a majestic and benevolent beast, whose close association with the element of water turns [her] into a dispenser of fertility in a wet rice growing community. [She] becomes a potential source of disaster, through flood and storm, only when wrongly treated” (114). The snake woman is often the daughter of the Dragon King, who dwells in the depths of his watery palace, and she serves as a benefactor bestowing wealth and power upon guests, usually wayfaring fishermen and woodcutters whom she cares for and eventually marries (114).

As Yi-Fu Tuan explains, “[T]he dragon can be a symbol not only of evil but also of all that is highest. [...] the dragon is portrayed as the creator and maintainer of the cosmos and stands for all that is noble and spiritual” (Tuan 154). Lung Wang, recognized as the leader of dragons is “still regarded as a spirit of peace and prosperity on whose good will the needed rains depend” (Burnham 33). Ingersoll further explains that the Eastern dragon is “a creature engendered between inward fear and outward peril” that embodies “the underlying principle of all morality – the eternal contrast between Good and Evil, typified by the incessant struggle of man with the forces of nature and with his twofold self” (13). Okakura Kakuzo suggests,

The dragon is the spirit of change, therefore of life itself...taking new forms according to its surroundings, yet never seen in final shape. It is the

great mystery itself. Hidden in the caverns of inaccessible mountains, or coiled in the unfathomed depth of the sea, he awaits the time when he slowly arouses himself into activity. He unfolds himself in the storm-cloud, he washes his mane in the darkness of the seething whirlpools. His claws are the fork of the lightning.... His voice is heard in the hurricane.... The dragon reveals himself only to vanish. (Qtd. in Ingersoll 66)

While there can be no single, direct link between the depiction of Eastern and Western dragons, certain events under the umbrella of globalization may have had an effect on the transfer and spread of these ideas. According to Edwin Reischauer and John Fairbank's *East Asia: The Great Tradition*, in the mid thirteenth century, men such as Marco Polo were permitted to pass safely through Mongol territory to North China, particularly Cathay, for the purpose of trade. For a century, 1240-1340, Western Europe maintained "direct, though not extensive, contact" (280) with North China. Results of this contact, however minimal, become apparent with the introduction and development of the formula for gun powder and firearms. The formula for gun powder can be found in Chinese texts as early as 1044, but do not appear in European texts until about 1285 (Gernet 311) from which time the development of projectile weapons has had a lasting impact on European history and development. "The repercussions which the development of firearms in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were to have on the evolution of European history are well known – it contributed to the downfall of the warrior aristocracies of the Middle Ages. On the other hand, the invention of these new weapons could exert no influence on the political and social organization of the Chinese world

[...]” (312). This spread of industrial ideas suggests a plausibility for the spread of others between East and West. Since the thirteenth century, Western Europe and China have had a long, though not necessarily intimate, history. However, one might assume that based on these relations, the subject of benevolent dragons might have transferred from East to West much sooner than it seems to have done. Additionally, it would be natural for Western traditions to spread to the East as well. There are several factors that may have contributed to hindering the sharing of ideas from one culture to another. Perhaps the most prevalent reason is that “among all the great civilizations rising in the Old World, the East Asian was the most isolated and distinctive” (Reischauer and Fairbank 3), so ideas were more restricted and did not transfer as easily, and as Gernet has suggested, China is not an easily affected nation politically and socially.

As Reischauer and Fairbank point out, “The Ming period from 1368 to 1644 is one of the greatest eras of orderly government and social stability in human history” (290), and “so stable was the political and social order of the Ming that it persisted, basically unaltered, under the alien Ch’ing Dynasty for another 267 years from 1644 to 1912” (290). The Ming dynasty, founded under Chu Yuan-chang’s rule, resulted in “a long era of domestic peace and prosperity” restoring China to the glory similar to that of its T’ang dynasty (Hucker 286). The persistence of this stability meant that during these centuries China had no real situational counterpart to the transformations taking place in the West: “the Renaissance, the Reformation, the growth of national states, their expansion into the New World and over the earth, followed by the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution” (Reischauer and Fairbank 291). Hucker explains, “While Ming China had been basking in its inward-oriented self-satisfaction and remained supremely confident of

its cultural superiority over all 'barbarian' peoples, the states of Western Europe were embarking on their great age of exploration, colonization, and imperialism" (293). Subsequently, this unprogressive line of thought carried over into the Ch'ing dynasty as the Manchus claimed rule over China. Though the Chinese throne was essentially taken by force, the Manchus still "honored and perpetuated the Ming ideology, governmental patterns, and social organization [...]" (295). The result of such stability in the East during these times of such rapid change and expansion in the West caused East Asian civilization to be viewed as backward or underdeveloped in comparison with Western thought and standards (Reischaur and Fairbank 291). In addition, Chinese resentment toward Mongol rule in the thirteenth century resulted in a widespread resentment of all things alien; thus, resentment turned into a lack of interest in anything outside East Asian civilization. Reischaur and Fairbank suggest that the last few maritime expeditions that took place in the early fifteenth century "were to be almost the last overt signs of serious Chinese interest in the outside world" (292). This state of isolation continued until the nineteenth century. Up until that point, "most Chinese simply took for granted that the benighted 'barbarian' might come to seek culture in China, if he wished" (292), but they were not going to endeavor to spread their own culture outside the realm of Eastern Asia.

This perception of "backwardness" and the long period of self-imposed isolation served to hinder the transfer of cultural ideas from East to West and "has been a primary cause of East Asian efforts to 'modernize'" (Reischauer and Fairbank 291). These efforts "still affect the stability of international relations" (291) and thus, affect the transfer of cultural ideas. While China's more recent efforts to "modernize" paired with the effects of globalization has certainly aided the spread of information and ideas between Eastern

and Western cultures through increased contact and communication, the authors of these volumes must also point out that “the growth of contact made possible by modern technology seems to have [also] increased rather than diminished international friction” (3). The more friction that exists between cultures, the less likely one culture will be to accept various differences and ideas unless it is for the means of adapting those ideas to suit their own needs (i.e., propaganda).

Factors such as China’s Open Door Policy in the late 1800s, which allowed trade with many different nations (Reischaur and Fairbank 470), may have enhanced the spreading of ideas including benevolent dragons, but this spread was undoubtedly hindered by several events. For example, the intrusion of Western European troops during what historians refer to as the “Second Opium War” did nothing to increase diplomacy between East and West (Gernet 575), and discrimination from America toward China halted trade for a few months between those nations in the early 1900s. However, in the years following, America and China remained on relatively good terms, while Japan’s alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy during World War II (Reischaur and Fairbank 606) would have undoubtedly caused nations like America and Great Britain to refuse the spread of ideas from that particular East Asian country. China remained an ally of the West during this time, and the defeat and resulting occupation of Japan following World War II in 1945 (McNelly 158), coupled with America’s support of the cause Free China prior to the end of the war (Reischauer and Fairbank 714), probably helped to continue the transfer of cultural ideas between Eastern and Western nations. The most recent factor, and possibly one of the largest, to hinder the transfer of ideas would be differing views toward the effects of Communism in China. While

Communism is generally looked upon unfavorably by Western nations, efforts at peace have brought modern governments far enough that a difference of political opinion has not been a cause to sever contact (McNelly 244). Thus, the sharing of ideas has not been ended, but a difference of opinion tends to cause hesitation in the area of accepting new ideas.

While it would be difficult to establish a direct causal link between interactions of Eastern and Western cultures and the roles that dragons play in these cultures, it is evident that there are many themes and motifs connected specifically with dragons that span cultures and time. From greedily guarding treasure to causing rain showers and typhoons, dragons have persistently been used in stories of both oral and written tradition and are still used frequently in modern literature. Dragons are a timeless element in storytelling from ancient tales to the most recent young adult novels, especially those that incorporate the heroic adventure cycle.

## Chapter 2: Campbell's Heroic Tradition and Modern YAL

### Campbell's Heroic Tradition

The fantastic found its footing, long before many of today's other recognized literary genres, in the myths and stories as old as time itself. While these myths originated in many different cultures and developed their own peculiarities and explanations, Joseph Campbell argues in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* that they really all represent the same story, the monomyth (1). "[I]t will always be the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story that we find, together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told" (1). The central figure in all of these stories along with the universal truths he embodies is the hero, encompassing both male and female figures, (2), representing a unique but unifying force through whom all beings connect and live (or die) vicariously. Campbell's Jungian and Freudian perspectives dub the modern psychologist the shepherd of modern myth, but for today's young adult readers, it is the YA author who becomes "the modern master of the mythological realm, the knower of all the secret ways and words of potency" (6). They carry the hero through their change-inducing tribulations, provide the tonics and magic swords, the treasures and boons of victory, and the words that will send the heroes back to reality on their return journey (6). In myths and stories, the problems faced by the hero represent all human struggle. While each reader may connect with the written hero differently, the fact that each person plays the hero in his or her own life creates a universal bond of shared experience (6). "The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms" (6). Young readers today, eager to find their place in their

larger societal context, need only “to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where [they] had thought to find an abomination, [they] shall find a god; where [they] had thought to slay another, [they] shall slay [themselves]; where [they] had thought to travel outward, [they] shall come to the center of [their] own existence; where [they] had thought to be alone, [they] shall be with all the world” (18).

The hero’s adventure is a well-worn path from which the hero does not usually stray, but it also carries with it the constant potential for new twists and turns as modern literature shifts with each new generation. Joseph Campbell delineates the hero’s journey as a cyclical series of stages and sub-stages that often ends where it began and may be repeated as many times as necessary. Campbell labels the three main stages of this formula separation, initiation, and return; together they are the “nuclear unit of the monomyth” (23). Essentially, these stages play out in the hero’s leaving his home in the known world to venture into the unknown where he encounters supernatural forces or seemingly insurmountable odds. The hero overcomes these odds with aid from companions and/or magical devices or tools, and then he returns home with new knowledge or wisdom, wealth, or other elixirs with which to aid society (23). While the hero’s journey typically follows this basic pattern, Campbell breaks the primary stages down into further sub-stages that manifest themselves in one way or another as the hero moves through the adventure. These stages and sub-stages remain relatively consistent, yet they are not set in stone. One or more of the sub-stage elements of the monomyth may be altered in some way or removed entirely from the tale – though in such cases it is often still implied somehow within the story (30). Writers and readers will not find themselves bound to a concrete formula and are at liberty to reinterpret the details of the monomyth.

As Christopher Vogler states, “Every storyteller bends the mythic pattern to his or her own purpose or needs of a particular culture” (7). However, it should be noted that a complete hero cycle “varies little in essential plan” (Campbell 30) – that plan being the nuclear unit of the monomyth.

All journeys must begin somewhere, even if at the end of a different adventure. They may be internal or external in nature. More often than not, internal journeys parallel external circumstances. In many cases, journeys begin with a clear call to adventure; a point at which “the hero is presented with a problem, challenge, or adventure to undertake” (Vogler 10). The call may be the presentation of a quest, the result of a blunder, or a charge from a “herald” whose “summons may be to live, as in the present instance, or, at a later moment of the biography to die. It may sound the call to some high historical undertaking. Or it may mark the dawn of religious illumination” (42). Essentially, the hero becomes aware (though perhaps not fully) of his own capacity to effect change within his society and must decide what to do about it. Destiny has beckoned the hero into an undiscovered realm and left him with a choice: go willingly or by force (Campbell 48). He must move forward or abandon his charge.

In many journeys the hero’s initial response is refusal. This refusal may be a blatant negative response to Destiny’s summons, and in some cases may simply be a hesitation to comply out of fear of the known and unknown dangers that lay ahead. At this point the hero is not yet bound to the adventure and may turn back, requiring an outside force to move the hero forward (Vogler 11). “The refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one’s own interest. The future is regarded not in terms of an unremitting series of deaths and births, but as though one’s present system of ideals,

virtues, goals, and advantages were to be fixed and made secure” (Campbell 49). It is a refusal of growth and change, a hesitation to stretch and sacrifice one’s own desires for the greater common interest or good. The refusal cannot stand, of course, if there is to be an adventure, and when the call is finally accepted, the hero does not work alone. “For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (57). Vogler describes this generous character as a mentor to the hero (12), and Campbell explains that figures such as fairy godmothers or patron saints represent Destiny’s protective hand over the hero (59). Danger accompanies this character as he prepares the hero to enter “realms of trial” (60), but ultimately, this character represents the hopeful promise that the hero’s efforts will result in success and the hero will return unharmed.

Once equipped with amulets and advice from the mentor figure, the hero must approach and attempt to cross the first threshold. “With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the ‘threshold guardian’ at the entrance to the zone of magnified power” (64). At this point, the hero has fully committed himself to the adventure and its consequences (Vogler 12), and he must move forward or fail. To cross the first threshold, the hero must challenge the threshold guardian, which will result in either life or death for the hero and passage into the next stage of the journey. Should the hero fail in his attempt to cross the first threshold, Destiny has merely presented the hero with the opportunity for rebirth and self-annihilation. In doing so the hero learns that he no longer has anything to fear. The dragon that stands as guardian of the threshold is demystified and placed within the realm

of possibility (Campbell 78). Once the threshold guardian has been conquered or the hero undergoes his rebirth out of the ashes of defeat, he moves on to other tasks and trials of varying degrees of difficulty that continue to challenge and shape his character both inwardly and outwardly.

As the hero progresses into the initiation stage of the monomyth, he retains his supernatural aid in addition to increased wisdom and abilities learned from his first threshold encounter. Thus equipped, the hero embarks on the road of various trials and the purification of his character. On this road the hero learns about his own shortcomings and flaws and is confronted with his opposite self, whom he must choose to succumb to or overcome:

The hero, whether god or goddess, man or woman, the figure in a myth or the dreamer of a dream, discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed. One by one the resistances are broken. He must put aside his pride, his virtue, beauty, and life, and bow or submit to the absolutely intolerable. Then he finds that he and his opposite are not differing species, but one flesh. (89)

The hero is faced with the darkness of his own nature, in addition to a series of new companions, enemies, and puzzles (Vogler 13). The road of trials is long and winding. “Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed – again, again, and again” (Campbell 90). While this road eventually ends, the details of each hero’s story play out differently, and the length of the road often depends on the worthiness and persistence of the hero.

At some point along the hero's road of trials, there is often an encounter with one or more significant female figures; if the hero is female herself, then she may fulfill this role (99). These figures often represent a mother or temptress figure and promise relief or embody the hero's present conflict – either internal or external (91-5). “She is the womb and the tomb [...]. Thus, she unites the ‘good’ and the ‘bad,’ exhibiting the two modes of the remembered mother, not as personal only, but as universal” (95). This meeting gives the hero the opportunity to weigh the good and bad with equal consideration as part of the nature of existence and allows him to move beyond childish biases and misunderstandings (95), in addition to serving as the final trial for the hero to gain an understanding of charitable love (99). Furthermore, this may be the moment in which the hero comes face to face with the base desires of his own flesh and is often repulsed by his own weakness (101-05). The hero now has the potential for a complete understanding beyond himself, and can see his society with a greater understanding than his own limited perspective previously allowed. At this point the hero becomes aware that innocence and purity may no longer be an option if he gives in to his own desires rather than pursue the greater goal.

The hero may also encounter a male figure that either literally or figuratively represents the father. Campbell clarifies that the father, often seen in an adversarial light, represents the hero's own inner struggles with himself, and that in order to experience atonement (at-one-ment) with the father the hero must abandon “that self-generated monster – the dragon thought to be God and the dragon thought to be Sin” (107, 110). The hero must trust and rely on the father's mercy to rid himself of the divisions that taint the relationship between the father and child as well as between the hero and himself

(110). With these tasks accomplished, the hero is able to experience the stages of apotheosis and acquiring the ultimate boon.

At this point in his journey, the hero has moved beyond the “last terrors of ignorance” and attained a sort of divine state of being. He has become fearless and unchangeable in a state of worthiness that allows him the capacity to obtain the ultimate boon or elixir (Campbell 127). The ultimate boon functions as a representation of life, usually in the form of a potion, advice, or wisdom on how life is to be lived, or the simple understanding that life is sacred, precious, and fleeting, so it must be cherished. Once the hero has obtained the boon he must go back to the starting point to share his prize with society. Thus begins the final stage of the nuclear monomyth, the return.

The quest has been completed, but “the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing [whatever he gained] back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds” (167). Some heroes may encounter resistance or hesitate to return, while others fail to fulfill their return journey. While myths that end in failure impress upon the audience the tragedies of life, the myths of success seem only to impress the audience with their own impossibility. “And yet, if the monomyth is to fulfill its promise, not human failure or superhuman success but human success is what we shall have to be shown” (178). The hope that success is within the realm of possibility for the everyday hero imparts courage and propels the adventure cycle.

Upon arriving once again at the start of his quest, the hero crosses the return threshold, leaving the fantastic unknown to rejoin the common man. Assuming the hero

fulfills his responsibilities upon his return, he will distribute the boon in the manner that will best benefit society. Unfortunately, these boons rarely have the desired lasting effect among the common people, and soon another call to adventure is taken up and the cycle revisited (188):

There must always remain, however, from the standpoint of normal waking consciousness, a certain baffling inconsistency between the wisdom brought forth from the deep, and the prudence usually found to be effective in the light world. Hence the common divorce of opportunism from virtue and the resultant degeneration of human institutions, and these cannot be left to grow like lilies of the field [...]. The boon brought from the transcendent deep becomes quickly rationalized into nonentity, and the need becomes great for another hero to refresh the word. (188)

The task of maintaining the sacred boon within the mundane society balances with the equally difficult challenge the hero faces in accepting the realities of life after returning from his supernatural experiences (189). “The returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world” (194). Because he now belongs to both, he must blend his two worlds together and understand that “the reality of the deep is not belied by that of common day” (196).

The hero capable of joining his two worlds becomes master of both and has the ability to move freely between them. The talent of such a masterful hero lies “not in contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other” (196). In this way, the hero reaches a final sense of “at-one-ment” and obtains the freedom to live (204-05). The hero becomes the

representative of the future. “He does not mistake apparent changelessness in time for the permanence of Being, nor is he fearful of the next moment (or of the ‘other thing’), as destroying the permanent with its change” (209). The hero becomes part of the natural and continual process of renewal that perpetuates the cyclical, ever and never changing, monomyth.

The dynamic nature of the hero-path means that no one can embark on a hero’s journey and expect to return in the same manner and condition as when they departed. With the hero’s trials faced and lessons learned, the reader must contemplate his or her connection with the hero and reflect on the boon they have gained by participating in the hero’s journey. The hero in many myths and popular folklore tales is human with weaknesses and struggles common to the human condition, making a connection between hero and reader easy to forge. However, what happens when the characters are recast and the villain and hero switch places? This is the current trend among many young adult fantasy novels, in which the dragon, Campbell’s timeless and fierce threshold guardian, now plays the story’s hero and humanity as a whole takes on a more sinister role. These new roles generate the need for new interpretations of the monomyth and its implications on a modern, global society with a growing young adult readership that faces its own unique trials and tribulations.

## Modern YAL

Young adult literature remains difficult to define explicitly, but many researchers agree on several essential qualities and characteristics that remain unique to this field and its audience. Ernest Bond defines YA (Young Adult) literature as having four basic qualities: Written for young adults, read by young adults, teenage protagonist, and young adult perspective (4). Historically, characteristics that define YA literature include teenage protagonists, events revolving around the protagonists and their struggles to resolve conflict, stories told from the viewpoint and in the voice of young adults, stories written by and for young adults as well as marketed to young adults, stories that avoid cliché “happily-ever-after” endings common in children’s literature, parents who are noticeably absent or at odds with the young protagonists, coming of age issues, and books that typically have fewer than 300 pages (Cole 49). Other similar lists have been compiled, but as the genre has developed some of these characteristics have become more complex or are no longer applicable. Because this genre is so changeable as it adapts and reshapes itself to meet the needs of its ever-fluctuating audience, authors like Pam B. Cole argue that “Reliance upon a laundry list of characteristics, however, results in a narrow and misleading definition of young adult literature” (49). Young adult writers have branched out to include other genres beyond traditional problem novels, and constantly challenge any box they might be forced into in order to meet the needs of their readers. Perhaps a better method of defining this literary field, then, would be to examine how YA literature affects its primary readers and how those readers employ young adult literature in their own lives.

The target audience for modern young adult writers encompasses a relatively small age range, approximately twelve to eighteen years of age (Nilsen et al. 3), but the diversity of developmental stages available within this readership makes young adult readers a multifaceted audience with several needs to be met. However, one question, stated succinctly by Patty Campbell in her column in *Horn Book Magazine*, consistently surfaces for the majority of readers in their formative years: “Who am I and what am I going to do about it?” (485). This question is central to most Young Adult fiction and “No matter what events are going on in the book, accomplishing that task is really what the book is about, and in the climactic moment the resolution of the external conflict is linked to a realization for the protagonist that helps shape an adult identity” (485-86). Reading a piece of YA literature is ultimately a journey of self-exploration. Young readers are at a stage in life where they are actively trying to determine where they belong in a larger society that does not revolve around their needs or desires, and young adult literature is a means by which these readers can examine their individual identities compared to that larger society.

In their book *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, Nilsen, Blasingame, Donelson, and Nilsen discuss the following stages of literary appreciation as they express the readers' motivations for picking up a book: Level 1: Understanding that pleasure and profit come from literature; Level 2: Learning to read; Level 3: Losing oneself in a story; Level 4: Finding oneself in a story; Level 5: Venturing beyond themselves; and Levels 6 and 7: Aesthetic appreciation (10-13). Levels 4 and 5 of these stages particularly pertain to young adult readers as they move between reading for pleasure and developing a sense of aesthetic appreciation. The authors explain that good readers develop a more critical

eye toward the literature they read at about the same time they are physically and mentally transitioning from childhood to adolescence. For these readers, the practice of losing themselves in a good book reaches beyond the desire simply to escape from reality for a brief span. Instead, these readers are searching for complexity and a logical development beyond a simple plot or stereotypes.

They want characters controlled by believable human motives because now their reading has a real purpose to it. They are reading to find out about themselves [...]. They may read dozens of contemporary teenage novels, looking for lives as much like their own as possible. [...] They are also curious about other sides of life, and so they seek out books that present lives totally different from their own. They look for anything bizarre, unbelievable, weird, or grotesque [...]. When they are working at the highest level of their capability, however, their purpose is largely one of finding themselves and their places in society. (Nilsen et al. 12)

As young adult readers progress in their development of literary appreciation, emotions, physicality, and intellect, they eventually move out of the realm of egocentrism and are introduced, through the literature they read, to the larger society (13). Readers learn to compare their own experiences with the characters and situations presented in the books they read, while simultaneously dealing with the “tremendous responsibility of assessing the world around them and deciding where they fit in” (13). As these young readers determine how their own needs fit into the larger context of society, they discover a more efficient sense of self, and “such readers come back from spending a few hours in the imagined society with new ideas about their own society” (13). Katherine Bucher and

KaaVonnia Hinton caution, however, that young adult literature should not be considered a means to a literary end. Rather than limit YA literature to serve as a gateway into more sophisticated classical literature, “Young adult literature should be appreciated and enjoyed ‘in and of itself,’ [...]. Young adult literature should not be considered merely a stepping-stone to ‘better’ literature or a ‘holding ground’ until readers are ready for adult literature” (11). While young adult literature can certainly aid adolescents in the transition from children’s literature to adult literature, it is still important to recognize the lasting quality and impact that well-written young adult literature can have on its readers. Thus, Nilsen and her co-authors have created a list of defining characteristics that are in some ways similar to those mentioned above but also allow room for change and growth within the larger genre of young adult literature.

First, Nilsen and her co-authors explain that “young adult authors write from the viewpoint of young people” and often, though not always, to entice readers and keep them engaged, YA authors will write in first-person. This allows emotions to be explored while fostering a context where both “Literary devices and psychological insights emerge from the honest telling of a story” (28-29). Cole remarks that young adult readers choose books based on the connections that they make either with the author, the character(s), the situation, etc. She describes young adult characters as “user friendly” because they are accessible and relatable as they often face similar challenges to those of today’s teens (41). Second in this list of characteristics is that the parents or guardian authority figures are usually removed from the picture, allowing the young protagonist the opportunity to “take the credit for his or her own accomplishments” (30). Boarding schools, summer camps, and tragic accidents all set the stage for a story bereft of adult supervision. A twist

as simple as running away, as in June Rae Wood's *A Share of Freedom*, gives the young protagonist autonomy. Though adults may occasionally be involved to provide guidance or serve as the villain, the young protagonist is ultimately free from adult authority to solve puzzles, explore, and become the story's hero. Third, "young adult books are basically optimistic with characters making worthy accomplishments. For teenagers to feel proud of their accomplishments, they have to have felt truly challenged and to feel that they have made progress in their own right" (31). According to YA editor Steven Roxburgh, "the defining literary characteristic of young adult books is that the first-person narrator starts out as unreliable and then by the end of the book evolves into a reliable narrator, which means that he or she has truly learned something" (qtd. in Nilsen et al. 31). As the story of the protagonist develops and learns, so too does the reader who has participated in the same journey.

Fourth, "young adult literature is faced-paced, containing narrative hooks, secrecy, surprise, and tension," (32) essentially, a pace to match that of the world in which young readers are growing up. Stories like *Fat Kid Rules the World* by K. L. Going are also often set in the same modern-world context as their adolescent audience. Vogles describes YA plots as concise and usually taking place within two months or less in addition to focusing on the present and the future rather than past experiences (qtd. in Bucher and Hinton 10). With other contenders for young adults' limited attention such as the Internet, television, social networking, and smartphones, young adult literature has to be capable of distributing information in an attention-grabbing manner as quickly as possible if it is to have any sort of lasting effect on its readers. Fifth, "young adult literature includes a variety of genres, subjects, and levels of sophistication" (Nilsen et al.

34). It prompts readers to think, question, and challenge their social contexts. The topics broached in YA literature are relevant to the readers and allow them to examine their reactions and beliefs regarding real-world struggles on a cognitive level within a safe, but thought-provoking, context. Bucher and Hinton remark, “There is no doubt among scholars that ‘today’s young adult literature is sophisticated, complex, and powerful...’” (10). Novels such as John Green’s *Looking for Alaska*, which honestly depicts the intensity of adolescence and coming-of age, are described as “deeply philosophical and richly textured” by Cole (57). Books like this invite readers to wrestle with the real-world complexities that they may very well already be facing.

Sixth, “The body of work includes stories about characters from many different ethnic and cultural groups not often found in the literary canon” (35). Rather than representing middle class, suburban stereotypes like the books written for teens in the 40s and 50s, YA literature from the mid- to the late 60s and on has challenged social taboos such as “profanity, divorce, sexuality, drinking, racial unrest, abortion, pregnancy, and drugs” (35). With these issues no longer censored, authors have the freedom to “set their stories in realistic, rather than romanticized, neighborhoods and to explore the experiences of characters whose stories had not been told before” (35). For instance, Sharon Draper’s *Copper Sun* explores the American south during the pre-civil war era from the viewpoints of a young African girl kidnapped and sold into slavery in America and a young girl serving out the rest of her deceased parents’ indenture. Many authors even opt to downplay race and focus the attention of their stories on other equally important social issues such as poverty, human trafficking, and political unrest.

Finally, Nilsen and her co-authors explain that “series books are an increasingly important part of teenagers’ reading” (37). With J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, Suzanne Collins’s *Hunger Games*, and Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson* series comes the undeniable proof that young readers are interested in series, even those containing installments of significantly more than 300 pages. Many of the most well written and widely read YA novels today are part of larger series that take the reader through a much larger contextual structure presenting more than just a single, external problem to be solved. These series easily represent the same cyclical adventure described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and allow a more thorough development of the protagonist(s) with whom young readers can grow.

As Bucher and Hinton show, young adult literature fulfills a variety of purposes as it

- Teaches adolescents about diverse peoples and the world beyond their community
- Provides pleasure reading
- Demonstrates the range of human emotions and allows adolescents to experience them as a result of reading quality literature
- Reveals the realities of life
- Provides vicarious experiences
- Focuses on ‘essentials’ that make order out of chaos
- Depicts the functions of institutions of society
- Allows readers to escape into the realms of fantasy

- Introduces readers to excellent writers and writing
- Increases literacy and the ability to analyze literature. (10-11)

Young adult authors actively attempt to satisfy the emotional and intellectual needs of their young readers by writing about the realities that today's teen readership faces. YA literature "offers a window through which teens can examine their lives and the world in which they live. [...] Young adult literature addresses modern-day issues – peer pressure, family relationships, sexuality, bigotry, and racism, and it connects teens with the pop culture world in which they live" (Cole 61). In addition to a variety of common and uncommon characters and themes, young adult writers are unlimited in categorical scope. By writing in virtually every literary genre from science fiction and fantasy to biography and nonfiction to graphic novels and poetry (Bucher and Hinton 13-14), authors can adapt characteristics of those genres to fulfill the needs of their young readers in whichever context they most enjoy.

Fantasy remains an exceptionally popular genre as it stimulates the unbridled imagination of young readers. Fantasy also allows for a juxtaposition of worlds (the fantastic and the reader's reality) through which readers can examine themes, such as those mentioned by Cole, within a realm of infinite possibility. They are given the opportunity to overcome representations of the challenges they face in reality and are often given the hope of a happy ending. Nilsen and her co-authors posit,

Fantasy allows us – even forces us – to become greater than we are, greater than we could hope to be. It confronts us with the major ambiguities and dualities of life – good and evil, light and dark, innocence and guilt, reality and appearance, heroism and cowardice, hard work and

indolence, determination and vacillation, and order and anarchy. Fantasy presents all these, and it provides the means through which readers can consider both polarities and the shadings in between. (144)

While other genres of speculative fiction, such as science fiction, require certain reasons or limitations initially based on legitimate universal laws, fantasy simply requires belief (Martin 23), and belief comes relatively naturally to young readers. “Fantasy for [young readers] is as natural as the air, which they cannot see and likely do not understand but breath in and out nonetheless” (23). This means that fantasy authors are not required to describe why or how to their audiences; they have the freedom to explore without the burden of explanation. Philip Martin states, “As speculative fiction, fantasy takes one giant step inward. It is rooted in inner beliefs and values, in a sense of wonder. Fantasy is about good and bad, right and wrong” (23). Young adults are on the cusp of determining their own beliefs and values – what they deem good or bad, right or wrong – and young adult novels help to guide them through this process while connecting with readers through similar situational experiences. “Fantasy is unmistakably metaphor – even to a child” (Marting 24). Therefore, young adult fiction may utilize the fantasy and magic inherent in the nature of something like a dragon to reach an actively imaginative audience that does not require a hero similar in dress or appearance but in circumstance. Cornelia Funke and Rachel Hartman both take advantage of the fantastic to produce magical but equally challenging contexts in which young adult readers can compare themselves to a dragon protagonist and explore relevant questions regarding these universal dichotomies, humanity, and of course, their own identities as heroes.

## The Heroic Transition

Joseph Campbell describes the typical hero of the monomyth as either “frequently honored by his society” or “frequently unrecognized or disdained” (29). For the modern young adult hero, it is usually the latter, and “He and/or the world in which he finds himself suffers from a symbolical deficiency” (29-30). “Modern literature is devoted, in great measure, to a courageous open-eyed observation of the sickeningly broken figurations that abound before us, around us, and within” (20). As the hero’s journey developed, mankind sought to fix the brokenness before and around itself, but it seems those things that are broken outwardly cannot be fixed because they are not the source of the brokenness. In the final chapter of his book, Campbell describes the endpoint in the progression of the hero’s journey, the final shard left to be examined and repaired. He states:

The descent of the Occidental sciences from the heavens to the earth (from seventeenth-century astronomy to nineteenth-century biology), and their concentration today, at last, on man himself (in twentieth-century anthropology and psychology), mark the path of a prodigious transfer of the focal point of human wonder. Not the animal world, not the plant world, not the miracle of the spheres, but man himself is now the crucial mystery. Man is the alien presence with whom the forces of egoism must come to terms, through whom the ego is to be crucified and resurrected, and in whose image society is to be reformed. (337)

Modern young adult fantasy consistently presents a “courageous, open-eyed observation” of those “broken figurations” within by utilizing the juxtaposition between

the human and the nonhuman. YA authors like Hartman and Funke, who cast dragons as the heroes of their stories, focus specifically on the broken figurations that stem from a misplaced identity as a result of the universal conflict between good and evil. Despite a protagonist that does not always resemble a human, readers still make a connection with the story's hero because they recognize the struggle to understand and establish a unique identity as similar to their own. As Campbell concludes, "It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal – carries the cross of the redeemer – not in the brightest moment of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair" (337). As characteristics from Western dragons that typically embody evil combine with those of Eastern dragons that in many ways embody good, readers are given the opportunity to identify with the protagonists on a level that reaches deeper than surface features. Through the dragon protagonists like those in Cornelia Funke's *Dragon Rider* and Rachel Hartman's *Seraphina*, young adult readers can examine their own conscience and the potential outcomes of their decisions as well as receive reassurance in knowing that they are not alone in their struggles. Someone else understands the same pain, fear, or embarrassment, and the hero's ability to survive their trials, having changed for the better, provides hope that the reader may do the same.

### Chapter 3: Funke's Conversation Starter

In Cornelia Funke's *Dragon Rider*, Firedrake, the dragon protagonist, plays the hero of the quest that falls under the guidelines for Campbell's traditional adventure cycle. He must save his race from being discovered and destroyed by the imminent human invasion of the valley where the silver dragons have been hiding for the past several centuries. To save his colony from humanity's industrialization and expansion, Firedrake sets out with his friend Sorrel and an orphaned boy named Ben to find the Rim of Heaven – a place of peace and safety for dragons that may not even exist. Together Firedrake, Ben, and Sorrel search for the Rim of Heaven while avoiding greedy, destructive humans as well as the dangerous Nettlebrand who has been ceaselessly hunting the silver dragons since before they went into hiding. Firedrake's journey gives him a new perspective of the world, humanity, and the way he views himself as he grows in his understanding of responsibility and the importance of facing his fears.

Firedrake's call to adventure begins with a rat that plays the initial herald, warning the dragons that the human population is moving closer and the dragons are in danger of being discovered. Firedrake's refusal of this call is brief as he questions rat's information (5), and he officially accepts the call to adventure from a second herald, Slatebeard the dragon. As the entire dragon colony receives the news of the dangerous group of humans swiftly moving in the dragons' direction, a council is called and only two options presented: the dragons may stay where they currently reside and hope to remain hidden, or someone can search for the Rim of Heaven, the paradise where the dragons originated and where they will be safe from the human race (14). Firedrake willingly accepts the older dragon's call, eager to be off and accomplish something of value for his colony and establish his own importance within his society. This is a similar

sentiment that many young adult readers identify with as they make the transition from child to adult in a way that signifies to themselves and their social groups that they have changed. Firedrake explains his position to his colony: “[...] I’m tired of hiding, never flying outside this valley. [...] Let us look for the Rim of Heaven. Come on, let’s set out today. The moon is waxing. There’ll be no better night for us” (15). Regardless of the others protestations, even Slatebeard himself who heralded the call (16-17), Firedrake commits to his cause and receives supernatural aid in several forms.

Much of the aid that Firedrake initially receives is not supernatural in the traditional sense, likely because the dragon himself is a supernatural being, but the supernatural nature of the aid increases as the adventure progresses and the hero’s tasks increase in difficulty. First, Firedrake receives guidance from Slatebeard, who briefly plays the mentor in addition to herald, because Slatebeard is the only living dragon in the colony with any memory of the Rim of Heaven: “You must fly to the highest mountain range in the whole world. It lies far away in the East. And when you get there you must find the Rim of Heaven. Look for a chain of snow covered peaks encircling a valley like a ring of stone” (20-1). In addition to these directions, Firedrake also receives a cryptic warning to “beware of the Golden One” (21). With this, Firedrake sets off with his small, furry brownie friend, Sorrel, who provides supernatural aid herself in the form of brownie spit (316; 460). They gather additional aid in the form of a young human boy named Ben and an exceptional map of the world created by a rat (65; 44-49). Together these three form the core group of adventurers working to fulfill Firedrake’s quest. They acquire further aid throughout their long journey from an archeology professor (125-523), a djinn (214-18), a homunculus (224-523), a sea serpent (232-59), a dracologist (268-523), a

male brownie (396-523), a rat with an airplane (361-523), a group of monks (376-523), a reluctant, shrewd dwarf (466-523), and another dragon like Firedrake, named Maia, whom they meet once they reach the Rim of Heaven (441-523). While all of these creatures assist Firedrake and his friends at various times throughout the adventure, it is only Firedrake who fulfills the entire quest from the call to adventure to the freedom to live following his return home. He alone comes to a realization of himself and his place within the larger societal context, something that each reader must do for himself as well.

As his adventure progresses, Firedrake crosses the first threshold after a bad storm causes him to drift off course and land in Egypt, where he finds himself alone in a cave. Rather than a dragon, the threshold guardian appears in the form of a Basilisk, which “looked like a giant cockerel with yellow feathers and broad, spiky wings. The monster’s staring eyes were bloodred, and it wore a circlet of pale spines like a crown on its horrible head. Its tail coiled like the scaly body of a snake and ended in a claw [...]” (123-24). Firedrake, at this encounter, also enters into the next stage of the adventure cycle, the belly of the whale. He locks eyes with the basilisk and is trapped, transfixed by the deadly gaze. The dragon is rescued only when the archeology professor Barnabas Greenbloom comes to his aid (124-26). However, Firedrake gives himself over to the death experience for a brief moment and so enters the belly of the whale (Campbell 74-79). This near-death experience allows Firedrake to examine and understand his own limitations, and his survival of the first threshold guardian and death allows him to move from the departure phase of his journey into Campbell’s second phase of initiation.

With the initiation phase of Firedrake’s journey comes the road of trials. Firedrake must complete several tasks along with his friends that will allow him to reach

his intended destination. These trials include finding a djinn and interpreting his riddles (Funke 218), lacking the moonlight necessary for flying (229-30), rescuing his friend from a hungry roc (340-49), enduring additional harsh weather conditions (420-22), and all while avoiding Nettlebrand the Golden One and his spies. With the aid of his friends and his own formidable powers, Firedrake overcomes each obstacle and makes his way to “the goddess,” who takes the form of Zubeida Ghalib, a dracologist. She knows all that there is to be known regarding the silver dragons and the prophecy surrounding their quest (313-21). She even equips the dragon with an elixir – moon dew – that provides him with the ability to fly without moonlight (321). After receiving everything from the dracologist that he possibly can, Firedrake presses on to find the Rim of Heaven itself.

The next two stages of the journey detailed by Campbell are not explicitly apparent in Funke’s story. The woman as temptress and atonement with the father are themes that are perhaps too intense or inappropriate for the young pre-teen audience for which this story is intended. Rather than a specific character providing the gateway to these stages, the situations Firedrake finds himself in near the end of his quest provide the opportunity for the author to imply these stages. The knowledge provided at one point by the dwarf Gravelbeard that Nettlebrand may be dead in the desert tempts the hero to be less alert and wary of his foe (326-29); likewise, when the truth that Nettlebrand really lives is confirmed, Firedrake finally solidifies his resolve to confront and permanently overcome his fears and foe (412). He recognizes the damage caused by hiding who he is and realizes that, whether he is capable of overcoming Nettlebrand or not, the growth he has experienced within his own character can no longer allow him to run away from his fears. It is also at this point that Firedrake reaches apotheosis and no longer fears the

terrors of the unknown. He forges ahead in his quest and receives the ultimate boon: knowledge of the whereabouts of the Rim of Heaven and the joy of being reunited with his fellow dragons. Of course, in order to receive this boon and know for certain that his colony will be safe in the Rim of Heaven, Firedrake must defeat Nettlebrand and secure their safety. With a mixture of brownie spit and dragon-fire (another sort of elixir) to break the spell over Nettlebrand (460), Firedrake defeats Nettlebrand and permanently removes his threat over the silver dragons (478-88). With Nettlebrand destroyed and the Rim of Heaven safe for the silver dragons once more, Firedrake is faced with the final phase of his journey, the return.

Firedrake initially refuses to return to Europe for the remaining dragons as he hesitates to leave, contemplating the possible reactions from his colony. Much like young adults nervous to present themselves as capable to those they once held in authority, the hero, unsure of where he stands with his own colony, worries that his social group may find him foolish and his story unbelievable (505-06). This initial hesitation does not last long, however. Instead of remaining in the Rim of Heaven and waiting for Gravelbeard to unearth the petrified dragons, Firedrake proceeds homeward on his magic flight, not as an object of pursuit, but accompanied by two brownies and his fellow silver dragon Maia, who serves as the rescue for Firedrake in his return adventure by providing living proof to corroborate his story and giving him the courage to complete his return journey (517-18). The final three stages outlined out by Campbell are assumed in Funke's story as the last chapter is told from Ben's point of view. News of a large group of unusual, flying creatures seen leaving Europe where Firedrake's colony had been reaches Ben and his new family (the archeology professor, his wife, and their daughter). Ben confirms that the

strange flock was seen heading south and that “Firedrake really did manage to convince the others” (521). This report provides enough information for the reader to know that Firedrake has successfully crossed the return threshold with his boon. He has established his own identity as well as his role within his social context. He has also become master of the two worlds with his ability to navigate between the human’s world and the Rim of Heaven, and now, along with his fellow dragons, has the freedom to live.

Funke describes Firedrake and the rest of the silver dragons as having the typical physical characteristics associated with the traditional Western dragon, but their remaining character traits resemble those of an Eastern dragon. The initial description of Firedrake reveals that he has a “long tail with a spiny crest” and scales (3), and he is capable of breathing fire (6). Further images depict Firedrake and the other silver dragons with wings, claws, and horns (7-9), and they are described as being large, silvery, and intelligent (13; 87). No indication is given that these silver dragons hoard gold, silver, or jewels, but associations are drawn between dragons and treasure when a group of dwarves, under the impression that “dragons can scent treasure” (78), ask Firedrake to smell for treasure on their mountain (93). Despite his Western physical characteristics, Firedrake embodies the Eastern dragon mentality and does not prove very helpful to the dwarves because his senses are more attuned to moonlight. The silver dragons of Funke’s novel are especially Eastern oriented in this particular trait that “they live entirely on moonlight” (137). They do not require any other food source and definitely do not have a taste for distressed damsels or sacrificial virgins. Firedrake states, “Moonlight is all we need. Our strength waxes and wanes with the moon itself” (137). All of the silver dragons require moonlight for survival, and the lack of adequate moonlight for those dragons in

hiding from Nettlebrand has extremely ill effects. As Maia explains once Firedrake finds the cave in the Rim of Heaven filled with dragons petrified into rocks, “They stopped flying in the moonlight. And very slowly they changed. [F]orgetting the moon is more dangerous than the golden dragon[,] they became tired, sluggish, bad tempered” (443). The dragons’ association with the moon, which affects the tides, in this novel also connects them to water as they take on more Eastern traits.

Funke draws even more connections between the silver dragons and Eastern character traits by explaining that the silver dragons actually originated in the East and lived in harmony with human beings. The Rim of Heaven, where Slatebeard claims he was born (14), is located in the Himalayas, and stories are told, in a small village in India near the Indus river, that dragons bring luck and are not creatures to be feared (280; 318). In fact, when Firedrake arrives in the village on his journey to the Rim of Heaven, he receives a warm welcome from the villagers who have passed down stories from generation to generation about dragons and people living in harmony. “Creatures of [this] kind calm the anger that human beings always carry with them. Dragons banish their sorrow. That’s why they believe [dragons] bring good luck” (236). The only instance in Funke’s novel of an unlucky, dangerous dragon is Nettlebrand the evil Golden One, who fulfills the Western dragon archetype.

Nettlebrand is “wild and savage, more ferocious than a chained dog, and so bad-tempered that he had long ago eaten most of his servants” (81). His sole purpose in life is to hunt down and kill silver dragons, but he has no qualms about destroying anything else that gets in his way, including human beings (187-97; 224; 302). He induces fear wherever he goes and enjoys doing so (282). “His eyes were like the dying moon, full of

murderous greed” (236). Nettlebrand also uses water to communicate with his spies, and it gives him the power to travel from one place to another instantly; “He is lord of the water” (303). Contrary to his ability to manipulate and move easily through water, Nettlebrand’s physical structure hinders his capabilities in several ways. “Nettlebrand’s own scales still shone like pure gold. His claws were sharper than splinters of glass, his teeth had a keen cutting edge, and he was mightier than any other living creature” (80). The monster’s heavy golden scales and large size – he is significantly larger than any of the silver dragons (236) – render him flightless and unable to move swiftly on land (90). This dragon proves a dangerous and challenging foe to overcome, but humanity in many subtle ways still poses the ultimate threat throughout the story.

Despite his particularly dragon-like nature, Nettlebrand is not what he appears to be. “He’s not a real dragon! He just looks like one. He hunts dragons because that’s what he was made to do. Like a cat that’s born to catch mice” (298). Nettlebrand was created by an alchemist – a human being – to catch silver dragons so the alchemist could use their horns for his experiments. The alchemist used another creature to create Nettlebrand and provided him with an indestructible, metallic hide in the shape of a dragon to give the hunter the ability to get closer to his prey (298-99). “[The alchemist] made it from a creature whose name no one knows, and he added fire and water, gold and iron, hard stone and the dew that falls on the leaves of the lady’s mantle. Then he took the power of lightning and with it he breathed life into his creation, and he named his great work *Nettlebrand*” (84). It is later revealed that the creature the alchemist used is a toad kept inside a golden casket that floated around in the monster’s stomach functioning as his heart (448; 491). Nettlebrand the dragon was never truly alive. The alchemist “couldn’t

give him life, because he couldn't really create life. He could only borrow it from some other living creature" and project his own characteristics onto his creation (490). The toad, Nettlebrand's heart, is just a regular toad with no evil capacity. Thus, Nettlebrand is not the true danger to the hero. Instead, it is the human who created him. "Nettlebrand's wickedness came from [his] creator, not the toad itself" (491). The alchemist behind his sinister creation coupled with rest of the ever-expanding, destructive portions of the human race become the embodiment of evil and depravity that once was attributed to the Western dragon.

From the very first chapter of Funke's novel, humans are accused of insatiable greed by the non-human characters (6; 10). Sorrel the brownie remarks that modern humans no longer hunt dragons like the knights of old tales, but "they're still dangerous. More dangerous than anything else in the world" (11). Human beings are capable of doing equally wonderful and terrible things, and the dragons, particularly Slatebeard, are resolved that it would be impossible to live harmoniously with them (12-13). According to the rats, humans are at war with each other (41; 45) and do not hesitate to destroy anything different or potentially threatening (13). Towards the beginning of the journey, many of the hero's encounters with humans involve hiding, destruction, or cages (53-57; 104; 111). After Firedrake meets Ben, though, he begins to question the sinister nature of the entirety of humanity (57). If there are other humans like Ben, the entire human race may not be so bad. As his adventure continues, Firedrake's question is answered when he meets Professor Greenbloom and his family, the dracologist Zubeida Ghalib, the other villagers who live near the Indus river, and the monks who live in the temple on a mountain in the Himalayas. The farther East the dragon and his friends travel, the more

they are introduced to people who harbor no ill will for the silver dragons and would welcome a harmonious coexistence. While this enlightening knowledge allows some hope for the decency of the human race, Firedrake must still consider the evil, greedy side of humanity and find a refuge for his colony “that doesn’t belong to humankind” (306). The silver dragon is, of course, able to accomplish this by convincing his fellow dragons in Europe to follow him to the Rim of Heaven, and they leave as discreetly as possible to avoid the attention of the less friendly portions of the human race.

Cornelia Funke’s novel is written for a young adult audience that is just beginning to work out their place in their larger societal context. Funke’s novel serves as a sort of warning or guidance to encourage readers to explore their identity rather than give in to societal pressures. Firedrake’s trials are fairly straightforward and center on his reactions to his environment and the external factors that challenge his identity. Until the threat of discovery calls him to adventure, Firedrake contentedly hides in the valley with the rest of his colony; as danger looms before him, though, he realizes that he is tired of hiding and wants to be free to leave the valley where he once felt safe (15). He also faces the reality that much of humanity perceives him as a dangerous threat, so he must be careful about whom he chooses to reveal himself (13-14).

As a result of the identity projected upon him by his external circumstances, Firedrake finds himself hiding throughout much of his journey, especially from Nettlebrand. However, after successfully facing a series of increasingly difficult trials and growing in the knowledge of his own true nature and responsibility, Firedrake understands that hiding is no longer an option and he chooses to never do so again (412). He learns that there are members of the human race who understand his true nature (269).

He also recognizes the dangers of rejecting how he is meant to live as Bur-Bur-Chan describes the dragons that never leave their hidden cave in the Rim of Heaven:

“[T]hey’ve turned into pathetic, sniveling, cowardly weaklings. [...] When I last saw them, they were limp as withered leaves for want of moonlight. Their eyes were cloudy as puddles because of the darkness, their wings were dusty for lack of use, and they had fat bellies from eating lichen instead of drinking moonlight” (399). Firedrake later discovers that their conditions have worsened to the point of being petrified into rock “motionless and lifeless” (445). Firedrake rescues the dragons from the threat that had caused them to abandon their true identities and returns home to share what he has learned and restore the rest of his colony. In doing this, Firedrake establishes his own identity in the larger context of his society. He is a silver dragon, free to live and fly under the moonlight as he pleases without the need to fear other dragons or humans.

In *Dragon Rider*, Funke presents humankind as being either essentially good or evil. This seems rather simplistic at first, but the pre-teen and younger teenage audience for which this story is intended may not yet be ready for in-depth thematic studies on the nature of good and evil. However, this does not mean that the subject should be wholly disregarded. Funke takes her audience’s age and development into consideration as she broaches this subject and subtly introduces a story that juxtaposes a non-human hero, Firedrake the dragon, with several different representations of humanity to provide her readers with the opportunity to begin asking questions about their own nature. The duality with which humanity is depicted and the evil nature projected upon the dragon Nettlebrand by his human creator lends a complexity to the human race that delves somewhat deeper into the true nature of people rather than simply labeling each character

either good or evil. Thus, a timeless conversation has been initiated between a text and its reader about the reader's own nature and identity and how that fits into the larger societal context. Rachel Hartman's novel *Seraphina* continues this conversation by probing even deeper into the dualistic nature of humanity and examining the complexity of good and evil in a single character's internal struggle with her own identity.

#### Chapter 4: Hartman's Anomaly

Rahcel Harman's novel *Seraphina*, geared toward an older young adult audience, opens *in medias res* at a funeral for the recently murdered Prince Rufus of Goredd. The prince's executioner remains unknown, though the manner in which he was beheaded suggests a dragon was involved (13). This circumstantially jarring beginning sets up the politically charged backdrop and external conflict for Seraphina's adventure cycle, which is mostly psychological as she works to understand her own nature and identity and how she fits into the larger, external sociopolitical context. Seraphina is half human and half dragon; her very existence befuddles most people in her world and disgusts the rest (103), leaving her with a negative understanding of her own character. She is the product of an illegal union between her unknowing human father and free-spirited dragon mother (45), who, like other dragons, has the ability to take on a human form called a saarantras, or saar for short (462). The dragons' ability to transform into saarantrai along with a complex forty-year-old treaty between the previously warring species has created a delicate coexistence in which most dragons and humans merely tolerate each other at best. They live and work together in Goredd, but the old human order of knighthood with its drachomachia – martial art of dragon fighting (460) – has been banished from the realm, and dragons are not permitted to take their true shape within a certain distance of the city. Romantic relationships between the species are forbidden, and the only dragons exempt from wearing the bell identifying their true natures are scholars who study and teach at the university (16). Additionally, the quigutl, a significantly smaller species of dragons incapable of changing their form, are permitted to live within the city and reside in a sort of ghetto called Quighole along with many of the saarantrai (74-75). Despite

their mutual dislike for each other and difficulty understanding each other's differences, humans and dragons in Hartman's novel have created a relatively peaceful and smoothly functioning society.

Apart from body structure, Hartman's two primary species differ significantly in their emotional and mental capacities. Dragons are logical creatures with a cognitive bent toward "history, philosophy, physiology, [and] higher mathematics (as close as they came to a religion)" (50). The draconian concept of "ard," meaning "roughly 'order' or 'correctness'" (50), is the foundation of their philosophy, which has no place for unstructured, unpredictable, messy human emotions. According to draconian philosophy, "Ard was the way the world should be, the imposition of order upon chaos, an ethical and physical rightness" (51). "Dragons found the human condition confusing and often overwhelming, and they had developed strategies over the years for keeping their heads 'in ard' while they took human form" (50). "Emotions, which the saar found uncomfortable and overpowering, were locked away securely [within the mind] and never permitted to leak out" (51). Seraphina's dualistic nature means that she has inherited both her mother's draconian notion of ard and her father's emotional capacity. These combine to give Seraphina an exceptional talent for music, which to be exceptional requires a harmonization of mathematical and emotional elements. Regardless of her talent, however, her socially unacceptable roots mean that she must do all she can to preserve her own anonymity and remain a secret, "even among dragons" (52), a situation with which most young adult readers can identify. If their true natures can be kept from the world, they will be less likely to experience the pain that comes with exposure. At the beginning of the story, the only others who share Seraphina's secret are her father; Orma,

her mother's brother and a scholar at the university; her stepmother; and the censors, a draconian agency responsible for policing the emotional state of dragons who take on a human form and excising the memories of those who have been emotionally compromised. Though her mother died giving birth to her and her father, a lawyer and expert on the treaty, diligently covers over the truth out of fear for his life and the shame of his own illegal actions, Seraphina's secret proves difficult to contain as she becomes entangled in political intrigue and adventure and finds herself helping to solve the prince's murder.

Seraphina initially receives her call to her adventure of self-discovery by stumbling upon her own realization of her true identity as a child. Her mother serves as the herald by leaving her a cognitive inheritance of her own memories – dragons pass on memories from mother to child (33). The first of these memories bombards Seraphina as an eleven year old when she sees her uncle, who also heralds the call, in his true dragon form for the first time at a parade through the city. She collapses into a fit much like a seizure and sees the mind-pearl her mother left for her. The memory shows Seraphina's mother pregnant and speaking to Orma about her unborn child. It also reveals that Orma is Seraphina's uncle and a dragon, causing Seraphina to come to the only logical conclusion about her ancestry (41-42). Once she is home again, Seraphina also experiences another vision, though not one of her mother's memories, of a boy, a bagpiper, and a fussy old woman, all of whom she later learns she has a mental connection with (43-44). At this point, Seraphina's body begins to change and she takes on a few physical dragon characteristics. For a week, Seraphina endures more visions of grotesque figures along with a painful rash on her stomach and left forearm. She

describes the results of her pains as she states, “By the end of the week, the angry mangle on my skin had hardened and begun to flake off, revealing a band of pale rounded scales, still soft as a baby snake’s, running from the inside of my wrist to the outside of my elbow. A broader band encircled my waist, like a girdle” (44). She refuses her call, though there is nothing she can do to deny it, when she views her scales and sobs until she makes herself ill (44). She finally accepts her call by accepting the unchangeable nature of her own physical makeup, and receives supernatural aid over the next several years from Orma (50), her mentor and teacher. Orma provides aid through dragon constructions that allow Seraphina to immediately communicate with Orma over long distances (48-49; 190). He answers Seraphina’s questions about dragons and provides further instruction on those subjects most important to dragons. He also helps her to put her “mind back in order” and control the visions of the people she calls her grotesques by teaching her to construct and maintain a mental garden (51-53). By regularly tending to the garden and its inhabitants, Seraphina is able to keep the overwhelming visions at bay, at least until they start coming to her in the flesh.

At the age of sixteen, Seraphina obtains a highly coveted position as the assistant to Viridius, the court composer, and crosses the first threshold of her journey of self-discovery. Seraphina reveals her musical prowess to the public as she tries to establish her place in society without revealing her true nature. She proves herself worthy of the position by beating twenty-seven master musicians and troubadours for the position (10). However, this respected standing at court and her new affiliation with Princess Glisselda, to whom she gives harpsichord lessons, puts Seraphina in the public eye more often than she wishes. Furthermore, it connects her with Prince Lucian Kiggs, a bastard member of

the royal family and the captain of the guard currently working out the case of his uncle's murder. These two form a strong attachment with one another because of their socially unwelcomed natures, even though they have little control over their own circumstances. As a bastard, Kiggs is viewed as incomplete or evil by the human society because he does not have a wholly legitimate parentage. As half human and half dragon, Seraphina is viewed as incomplete and evil by both dragon and human societies because she does not wholly belong to either. Neither character is born with a socially acceptable identity. They must therefore construct their own and determine how they fit into their larger social context.

As the plot progresses, Seraphina finds herself on the way to Quighole, the belly of the whale (Campbell 74-79), where she has a significant near death experience. Seraphina is stopped by a quigutl begging for money on her way to meet Orma to discuss a potential suspect – Orma's father and her grandfather – for the murder of Prince Rufus. Seraphina trades a coin for an intricately made figurine before the quigutl is scared off by two brothers passing by (Hartman 76-78). Once she has been "rescued," Seraphina begins to have a vision and collapses. She wakes later under the watch of the two men and their sister who conduct her back to the palace. Seraphina learns that one of the men called Thomas is not as caring as he appears. He finds the figurine in her purse and believes she has had an inappropriate relationship with the quigutl. He explains that he almost killed her during her fit. After a warning to repent and a threat on her life, Seraphina is left to ponder her near-death experience. "I had thought them kind, despite their prejudices, but Thomas had been tempted to dash my head against the cobblestones, just for carrying a quigutl figurine" (84). This experience reveals to Seraphina, as well as to Hartman's

young adult audience, that a person's (or dragon's) identity cannot simply be judged based on outward appearances or behavior. Readers must look deeper if they wish to better understand who people are at their core. After contemplating this for a bit, Seraphina retreats into the palace to tend her mind-garden and moves into her initiation, Campbell's next adventure cycle phase.

Seraphina's initiation comes with additional threats, more seizure-inducing memories from her mother, a complicated love interest, assassination plots, and deep self-hatred and disgust of her own nature. Her road of trials begins as Ardmagar (General) Comonot – the dragon leader and co-author of the treaty – intends to visit the queen in ten days to celebrate the fortieth year of the treaty (25), and the grotesques of Seraphina's visions start showing up in the flesh. Seraphina learns that the young boy, the bagpiper, and the fussy old woman of her very first vision are all real people; they are also half dragons just like her (98-112). While they prove to be helpful later in the story, they first unsettle Seraphina who was under the impression that she was the only one of her kind (112). The trials continue as she seeks the murderer of Prince Rufus with Lucian Kiggs (228-66). They discover Seraphina's grandfather, Imlann, in hiding near the murder scene, banished from the dragon's society (261). Seraphina also falls in love with Kiggs, who is betrothed to Glisselda, her friend (276). In the midst of this, Kiggs catches Seraphina in a web of lies and learns that she is somehow associated with the dragons under suspicion (268). Seraphina's internal battle rages as she feels compelled to tell lie after lie and hide who she is from those who have become so close to her. As the trials continue, Seraphina comes to a better understanding of herself by meeting with the goddess in another memory left to her by her mother.

The ultimate memory left to Seraphina is of the last encounter between Linn, her mother, and Imlann. Linn has been torn between her human emotions for Claude, the man she loves, and her duty as a dragon to uphold the honor of her family. Linn believes in the Comonot's dream of a treaty between dragons and humans, and finally chooses love and humanity over her father's stubborn pride. She escapes Imlann after trapping him in under an avalanche of snow and ice and returns as a saar to marry Claude and hide in her human form (292-97). Through this last memory, Seraphina finally understands the choice her mother made. She no longer hates her mother for selfishness but loves her for her bravery. She explains, "I felt her struggle this time, felt echoes of my own. She had chosen Papa over family, country, her own kind, everything she'd grown up with. [...] As for the ringing emptiness at the very heart of her, that was only too familiar" (297). By growing up as a dragon and embracing humanity fully as a saar, Seraphina's mother is knowledgeable in both worlds and transmits all that she knows to her daughter. Seraphina also finds acceptance from others in society such as Viridius, who has always known of her parentage, but kept her secret (307). With this knowledge and her own understanding of what she is, Seraphina can move on toward the truth with more confidence in herself. First, though, she must overcome temptation.

As Seraphina waits to give the princess her harpsichord lesson, she receives a note stating that the princess wants to meet with her in the laundry room. Lured by the note to the passages beneath the palace, Seraphina is surprised to find not the princess but Lady Corongi, who is actually Imlann in disguise (310-11). The purpose of this ruse is to bleed Seraphina to prove whether she had the silver blood of a dragon as Lady Corongi had suspected. This turns out to be false as the blood from the cut made on Seraphina's hand

runs red and Seraphina is rescued with her secret intact (312-15). After the attack, Seraphina is doctored and sent home with her father (322), giving her the chance for reconciliation and the stage of atonement. As they ride home together and Seraphina slips in and out of consciousness as a result of medicinal alcohol, she confesses what she believes to be her shortcomings as best she can: "I'm sorry Papa. I tried to keep to myself; I didn't mean to go wrong, [...]. But their sending Orma away, which is my fault, and I played my flute so beautifully that I fell in love with everyone and now I want everything. And I can't have it. And I'm ashamed to be running away" (323). She also confesses that she fell in love with what she cannot have, specifically Lucian Kiggs (324). Her father graciously listens, and then makes a confession of his own: "I am no longer afraid. I am sickened that you inherited her collapsing house of deceit, and that instead of tearing it down, I shored it up with more deceit. What price must be paid is mine to pay. If you are afraid on your own behalf, fair enough, but do not fear for me" (324). This atonement and reconciliation is further corroborated in a letter from her father that she receives the next day, and through public display as Seraphina's father declares to several highly ranked officials, including Lucian Kiggs and Princess Glisselda, "I married a dragon. My daughter, whom I love, is half dragon" (424).

The atonement between father and daughter encourages Seraphina. By gaining a fuller understanding of her parents choices and how they affected her, Seraphina now has a better understanding of herself and how she can live within her external context. This moves her into the stage of apotheosis as she confronts and overcomes several of her fears: Ardmagar Comonots disbelief of any attempts against his life or authority (341; 386), protecting General Comonot and the royal family from assassination attempts (341-

45; 387-99), confronting her grandfather with the accusation that he is a murderer (402-04), and finally telling the truth about her own identity to everyone and accepting it within herself (402-03; 408; 424). The truth of who she is becomes the ultimate boon that Seraphina gains, one that she can share with her family and friends, especially those who are also half-dragons.

For a brief moment, the truth hangs in the air not fully comprehended by those she has told, particularly Kiggs. Seraphina has an opportunity to refuse to return with the elixir by pretending that she made up the story to confuse and stall Imlann. Young adults are all faced with this same choice. They may embrace who they really are and share that with the world, or they may hide behind a façade that the world deems more appropriate and comfortable. Though she hesitates for a moment, she decides she must move on. “[Kiggs] was offering me an easy way back to normal, and I was sorely tempted. It would have been so simple not to correct him, to let it go. It would have been effortless. But I had kissed him, and I had told the truth, and I was changed” (408). No other option remains but for Seraphina to continue on her journey of self-revelation. She does so in her magic flight back to the reality of the political situation at hand.

A coup led by Imlann had been staged to overthrow Ardmagar Comonot, and a council has been gathered to determine how to proceed. As the integrity of the treaty hangs by a thread, in the queen’s council room, the other diplomats demand to know what right and authority an assistant musician has to speak upon such matters. Seraphina is rescued from without by her father’s declaration of the truth and the acceptance she receives from her friends, especially the princess (424; 439). Rescue also comes from the

Ardmagar as he brings the focus back to matters of war and explains the full gravity of their situation:

Can you not see that it's no longer a question of dragon versus human?

The division now is between those who think this peace is worth preserving and those who would keep us at war until one side or the other is destroyed. [...] Something we dragons have learned from [humans] is that we are stronger together. We need not take on the entire world alone.

Let us stand together now for the peace. (425)

With this the decision is made to seek peace by means of war (425), and they must all prepare themselves for whatever the future may hold. Seraphina does so as she crosses the return threshold to reveal the full truth of herself to Kiggs and come to an understanding of their feelings for each other and their relationship. Seraphina also moves through the final stages of her journey and comes to a complete understanding of her own identity.

As Seraphina approaches Kiggs in the privacy of the balcony connected to his rooms, they are able to openly share their truths with one another. Seraphina embodies truth in that moment and bares everything she can about her own identity while Kiggs explains his understanding of his own feelings toward her: "I always saw truth in you, however much you prevaricated, even as you lied right to my face. I glimpsed the very heart of you, clear as sunlight, and it was something extraordinary" (447). They reciprocate their love for one another while recognizing that they cannot immediately act on it. The state of the realm must be dealt with first (440-50). Lucian leaves Seraphina to her thoughts and she becomes master of her two worlds. In addition to learning to control

her once volatile cognitive state and learning to accept herself for who and what she is (403), Seraphina no longer has any reason to conceal herself from the public eye (450). Though her freedom to live in the larger sociopolitical context will not be fully determined until the outcome of the war has been decided, her freedom to live within herself is realized and she is complete. Hartman ends her novel with Seraphina's triumphant declaration regarding her own unshakeable identity: "The future would come, full of war and uncertainty, but I would not be facing it alone. I had love and work, friends and a people. I had a place to stand" (451).

Hartman describes her dragons using traditional Western characteristics, and in many ways the character traits of the dragons, such as Imlann, are maintained. The dragons are described as having horns and wings (37), spiny heads, and arched snakelike heads (261). Dragons' scales are subtly colorful in under hues ranging from gold to purple and they are enormous (37-38). They are keen-eyed (124), shrewd, calculating creatures who hoard massive quantities of gold and place special significance on their hoards (125; 292-93). They have the ability to breath fire – Kiggs specifically refers to Imlann as a "double ton of fire and brimstone" with fangs and teeth that may as well be swords – but they themselves are extremely flammable (165). As an old knight explains, "Dragons are flammable. They developed their flame for use against each other. [...] They fear no other beast – or didn't, until [humans] learned to fight. Their hide is tough but it burns, given enough heat for enough time; their insides are volatile, which is how they flame in the first place" (254). The associations with long life and wisdom persist as one dragon generation lasts for about 200 years (90). Dragons hold the role of teacher in the highest regard, but deem emotions unstable and dangerous (126; 129). Most people

firmly believe that “dragons have no souls” (61), which is why Viridius claims that dragons may reach technical perfection but never master or understand the emotion behind a piece of music (61). The human race has no love for these creatures in their natural shapes, calling them insults such as “worms,” “gasbags,” or “Hell-beasts” (39). However, as dragons take on their human shapes, relations between the species are significantly more peaceful, though not necessarily at ease.

As the dragons change into their human saarantrai forms, they also take on more Eastern dragon qualities and shed many of their Western dragon character traits. In their natural form, dragons cannot feel emotions; however, as a saar, a dragon is exposed to the full range of human emotion and must learn to control each one (293). This creates a stronger connection between dragons and humans, but it also poses a potential problem for dragons as a species. The onslaught of human emotion often leads many saarantrai to commit self-harm rather than deal with emotional pain (278), and love can be especially detrimental. Ardmagar Comonot says, “Love requires extreme correction. It’s the emotional state we teach our students to guard against most carefully. It presents an actual danger to a saar because, you see, our scholars who fall in love don’t want to come back. They don’t want to be dragons anymore” (360). In their human forms, dragons lose their fire breathing abilities and other obvious Western physical characteristics, though they maintain their shrewdness and calculative thought processes. Treasure hoards become something of the past and knowledge takes priority instead. “Dragons no longer hoarded gold; Comonot’s reforms had outlawed it. For Orma and his generation, knowledge was treasure. As dragons through the ages had done, he gathered it, and then he sat on it” (124), developing an obsession for stacks of books over piles of jewels or

precious metals (94). The younger generation of dragons prefers peace to war (425), and this generation of scholars is called upon to help remove the threat of archaic dragon greed and destruction.

The quigutl, too, are given Eastern dragon character traits, though they cannot take on a human form, and physically resemble the Western dragon on a smaller scale. Quigutl can breathe fire and they have a “slick scaly skin, spiky crest like [an] iguana, [and] bulging conical eyeholes that swiveled independently of each other” (74). They survive on refuse, have bad breath, and use an extra set of arms “to build intricate, minuscule devices, such as the earrings the saarantrai all wore” as tracking and communication devices (75). They even created artistic pieces out of metal and glass, heating the materials with their breath; they just don’t have the capacity to appreciate it (186-87). They desired money not because of its monetary value but because they used the metal to make their wares (76). The quigutl propensity towards creation and art is reminiscent of Eastern dragon characteristics, but these creatures cannot completely embody Eastern traits as they fail to consistently recognize the intrinsic value present in their artistic creations. This may have the potential to change, though, as the human and dragon societies continue to coexist. Though some of these Eastern characteristics may be currently explained as the forced result of the treaty, the more the dragons choose to embrace humanity for the good it offers – much like the choice Seraphina’s mother makes – the more they adopt the traditional attributes of Eastern Dragons.

The good represented in human nature stems from the emotions and the capacity to create something that they hold of value beyond monetary gain. While dragons value the beauty of order and logic, humanity has the understanding and capability of valuing

beauty or art for its own sake. These differences are examined as Hartman juxtaposes Seraphina's understanding of human nature against dragon and quigutl values. During Seraphina's discussion with Orma in Quighole, she watches as several quigutl spun heated glass into a hollow egg figurine. Seraphina remarks that "Quigs make art," but, "How is it that you saar don't understand art" (186)? Orma explains that the quig creation is not art because the quigutl place no value on it like humans do, and the structures they create have no meaning to them (186). As Orma was speaking "One of the quigs had climbed onto the table and was attempting to sit on the glass egg. It shattered into a thousand shards," proving Orma's point (186-87). Seraphina disagrees with Orma and feels a certain connection to the Quip figurine she carries with her (187); however, this may be a result of her human emotions and her capacity to appreciate art by forming a shared experience or emotional connection with something.

The draconian understanding of human emotion and art is further examined in a memory from Seraphina's mother as Ardmagar Comonot lectures on the dangers of human emotions. The Ardmagar states, "Emotions are addictive! They have no meaning: they are antithetical to reason. They fly toward illogical, non-draconian moralities" (201). Linn argues that emotions lead to the creation of art, but Ardmagar Comonot rebuts that art is simply another human creation that has yet to be perfected by being ordered in a draconian manner. He states: "Art gleams before us all, a hoard ungathered. [...] But we study art. We fly over it from every direction, from a sane, safe distance. Someday we will comprehend its power. We will put it in ard. We will learn to hatch it, and why it's worth hatching" (201). This approach would prove unproductive, though, because art is emotive; to remove the emotion behind art is to remove its purpose and meaning, its

humanity. This is why Viridius argues that dragons will never out-perform humans musically (61). This is why Seraphina's flute performance during Prince Rufus's funeral is so moving, even though she makes some technical mistakes.

Seraphina's human half understands "about sorrow and about music as sorrow's surest balm" (9). She instinctively realizes that "There are melodies that speak as eloquently as words, that flow logically and inevitably from a single, pure emotion" (9). Her performance declares to the audience, "Here is what it means to lose someone" because she can empathize with the emotional experience (10). Comonot begins to realize this as he scrutinizes Seraphina and explains how all of these juxtapositions merge in Seraphina because of her unique makeup. "You have a foot in both worlds: if you have maternal memories, you've seen what it is to be a dragon, contrasted with what it's like to be a saarantras, contrasted yet again with what it's like to be human – or nearly so" (359). "There were things [Seraphina's] eyes – and the human mind behind them – could discern that [a dragon's] never could" (124). While the value of humanity's messy but beautiful emotional understanding is lost on all dragons but those who choose to embrace them, it will not be lost on Hartman's readers. Her reader will also recognize that Hartman draws no clear distinction between the good and evil present in humanity. Instead each human is flawed and responsible for his own choices. This reflects the very nature of humanity that Hartman's young adult readers must struggle with. As they examine their own identities, young adults must realize that there is no simple dichotomy between good and evil. Each person has the capacity for both good and evil and must struggle with their own dualistic nature just as Seraphina struggles with hers.

As in reality, each character within Hartman's novel acts upon his beliefs regarding what he feels is best for the common good. Thomas threatens Seraphina with her life and later attempts to stab her under the conviction that interspecies relationships are an abomination and a threat to a decent moral society (83-84; 341-42). Josef, an acquaintance of Seraphina's at court and half-brother to the half-human, half-dragon bagpiper, kills his own father to protect his brother's life (437), yet he despises his brother's condition and all dragon-kind (146; 436). His hatred for dragons compels him to join an extremist hate group call the "Sons of St. Ogdo" in an attempt to help remove the treaty and the dragons from human society (436). The organization's "Malediction Against the Worm" states: "Eye of Heaven, seek out the saar. Let him not lurk among us, but reveal him in his unholiness. His soulless inhumanity flies like a banner before the discerning eyes of the righteous. We will cleanse the world of him!" (337). The Sons of St. Ogdo lead several protests throughout the course of the story that often result in unprovoked attacks on dragons and other unnecessary acts of violence. This kind of mob mentality along with the perceived instability of human emotions feeds into the draconian perception of humanity's ignorance. Dragons such as Ardmagar Comonot use insults such as "monkey mind" (282), "wet brain," and "meaty brain" to refer to the dangers of the lesser human mental state (201). Humans scare easily or form angry mobs at the slightest provocation and fear that with which they are unfamiliar (142). Yet they are easily pacified by something as simple as a catchy song (142-44), making it easy for groups like the Sons of St. Ogdo to manipulate them for their own political gain.

Some of the author's human characters, Glisselda and Kiggs for instance, have convictions about what is morally correct, contrary to popular opinion, and strive to

uphold those convictions for the good of both species. Though Kiggs's label of "bastard" might traditionally mark him as evil and suggest that he cannot serve the greater good unselfishly, he chooses to overcome this stigma and behave in a way that defies his expected nature (443-44). They even reform their own personal views regarding interactions between humans and dragons in order to serve a greater purpose than their own comfort (424-25; 442-50). No character in *Seraphina*, including the hero, is inherently good or evil. Each character fulfills a role in the larger context of the story based on the choices they make. Each character is also held responsible for the consequences of those choices. Rather than embodying good or evil by design, each character's identity, especially Seraphina's, is shaped as a result of how she chooses to act and react and how she chooses to perceive herself. These choices are at the heart of the purpose behind young adult literature as it helps readers answer the question, "Who am I and what am I going to do about it?" Cornelia Funke and Rachel Hartman give their audience heroes in the midst of their own identity struggles. The fact that these heroes are dragons simply allows the authors to focus specifically on the internal and external struggles between good and evil and how that influences identity.

In Rachel Hartman's novel, Seraphina's primary conflict, which stems from being half human and half dragon, is a bit more complex than Firedrake's. It is largely internal, though external conflicts certainly run throughout the novel, and these conflicts are a reflection of those often faced by an older young adult audience. In addition to being unsure about her own identity and whether she is good or evil, Seraphina struggles with loneliness, self-hatred, and the desire to be accepted and belong in her social context. Learning that her mother was a dragon removed all assurance of her self-perceived

identity. She reflects on how “Everything had been stripped away: my human mother, my own humanity, and any hope I had of leaving my father’s house. I saw the void beneath the surface of the world; it threatened to pull me under” (47). The very concept of someone with her unique parentage is unfathomable to both humans and dragons. She is considered an evil abomination, and out of self-preservation she must keep her genetic makeup a secret.

Seraphina is not even allowed the relief of retreating into her own mind for solace because there she must tend a mental garden full of other “grotesques” (52-53). The loneliness of harboring such a secret is curbed when she learns that these grotesques are actually other half-dragons and she has the ability to connect with them (112). Suddenly Seraphina is “at the hub of this enormous wheel” (117) and she has a purpose outside of herself that affects others for the good: “[She] could bring [them] together” (117). Seraphina continues to find her footing as the truth of her parents’ relationship unfolds (382), and she discovers further value and belonging through her music as she performs for the court and they respond with acceptance and applause (383). In some cases, Seraphina struggles with exclusion from society even though her dragon nature is unknown. She laments the feeling that the entire cosmos seems to be working against her as she states, “I scrupulously hide every legitimate reason for people to hate me, and then it turns out they don’t need legitimate reasons. Heaven has fashioned a knife of irony to stab me with” (124). Society in and of itself can often be cruel, and believing that one has unacceptable differences magnifies that cruelty, but as Seraphina moves through each stage of her journey she changes (408), and the growth she experiences with each new

trial overcome brings her to a better understanding of her internal self as well as her external role within society.

Seraphina often describes herself using self-deprecating terms such as “grotesque,” “utterly disgusting,” “abnormal,” and “monstrous” (5; 227; 415; 442). She lives in constant fear that those closest to her who do not know her secret will one day learn it and reject her (205) and she questions the world’s fairness in making her the way she is. “How dare the world be beautiful when I was so horrifying?” (276). She remembers her mother’s statement, “I cannot perch among those who think that I am broken” and dwells upon her own brokenness (206). Everything Seraphina desires seems impossible to reach and she hates herself entirely, even to the point of self-harm. She does not believe she can live hating herself so much and, in a moment of desperation at her lowest point, she rips one of her own scales out of her arm (278). However, not everyone sees Seraphina as the monster she perceives herself to be. Her dragon uncle experiences a moment of humanity as he shares that he “values [Seraphina’s] continued existence” (285). Kiggs, in particular, recognizes her worth and this gives her hope. Astonished, she realizes, “He believed me good, believed me worth taking seriously, and his belief, for one vertiginous moment, made me want to be better than I was” (174). As she chooses to accept who she is and establishes her place among her peers, Seraphina does not allow herself to be defined by external pressures or circumstances. Instead, she solidifies a new identity for herself and understands her own intrinsic value. “The world inside [herself] is vaster and richer than this paltry plane, peopled with mere galaxies and gods” (442). She recognizes that her complexities and capabilities reach far beyond a

simple categorization of good or evil and that her choices are the reflection of her inner character, not skin or scales.

The heroes in *Dragon Rider* and *Seraphina* connect with a young adult audience seeking the answer to who they are and where they fit. They grapple with their nature and who the world says they should be. They struggle to overcome negative stigmas and stereotypes and seek to give something back of value to their society. The desire to understand their own identities and grow into something greater than who they once were or succeed beyond society's crippling limitations draws readers to characters that embody themselves and their struggles. As the young adult reader draws a parallel between himself and the hero, he finds that he has become part of the adventure. He learns from the hero's mistakes, gets humbled by the hero's failures and flaws so like his own, and triumphs in the hero's successes. Through characters who are, at their very core, real and powerful, young adult literature meets its readers where they are and guides them forward as they discover how to be the heroes of their own stories.

## Conclusion

Whether this literary trend regarding the dynamic nature of the dragon is a result of the transfer of cultural ideas through the effects of globalization is difficult to prove specifically, but evidence suggests that Eastern ideas concerning dragons have certainly influenced Western ideas over the years. Dragons are no longer confined to their Western role as malicious beings, but instead are taking on the responsibilities of the hero as they make their way internally and externally through the adventure cycle detailed by Joseph Campbell. It is also evident that these dragon protagonists maintain Western-style physical qualities while their emotional and psychological character traits resemble the more benevolent dragons of the Eastern literary tradition. This makes these non-human heroes more relatable as authors like Cornelia Funke and Rachel Hartman utilize the fantastic to create circumstantial environments where the development of one's identity and how that fits into a larger social context may be explored.

As the dragons within young adult fantasy novels change roles and take on additional Eastern characteristics, they represent the duality found within human nature. Where both good and evil are present there must always be conflict, and as Western dragons, inherently evil, take on the characteristics of Eastern dragons, predominantly good, this conflict is fleshed out for further study by readers who deeply identify with the uncertainty and struggle of dealing with such a challenging, dualistic nature. As both of these characters initially feel they must hide their true natures from others in their larger social context, so, too, are young adult readers tempted to hide their true identities from their own peers. Identifying and progressing with a character through his or her trials and triumphs allows the reader a sense of accomplishment and hope beyond the harsh realities of defeat and despair. As these readers peruse each of these texts to find out

about themselves through the protagonist, they grow with the hero in their understanding of the damage that hiding their true nature causes. This change of roles also places humanity in the role of threshold guardian where the dragon once typically stood, allowing young readers a chance to distance themselves and examine humanity – their own nature – through an outside lens. Thus, the young adult audience is also given the opportunity to gain an awareness of humanity’s dangerous potential for evil while simultaneously leaving readers with a charge, as members of the human race, to flesh out and act upon their incredible potential for good. By the end of each novel, readers may come to a realization that freedom lies within the revelation and establishment of their own identities both in and outside of themselves.

This literary trend is still fairly recent, and as the role of the dragon in young adult literature is still currently in transition, it appears that the dragon can be used to fill any number of literary roles from evil guardian to brave and noble protagonist. The dragon also seems to be appearing in other significant roles within the hero’s journey such as mentor or companion to the hero. Of course, the change in the typical usage of the character of the dragon does not necessarily mean that it no longer symbolizes what it once did in traditional Western myth and folklore; it merely means that the dragon is no longer bound to that single role. It always had the potential to be used in any role in just as meaningful a way as any other character – creature or human – might be used, but it is not until recently that its potential has reached any sort of realization. Young adult literature has helped to make that possible while fostering a new avenue in which readers may continue to explore the pervasive identity puzzle of who they are and what they are going to do about it.

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