



**Beyond the Princess, the Priestess and the
Galactic Kitchen Sink:
Reformulation of Feminine Roles in Certain
Works of Lois McMaster Bujold.**

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine the Science Fiction and Fantasy works of Lois McMaster Bujold in the *Vorkosigan Series* and *Chalion Series*, in particular the way she reformulates women's roles and identities in society through the characters presented in these novels. I use the term Speculative Fiction as an umbrella term that encompasses both Science Fiction and Fantasy as modes of speculation, in that they both rely on extrapolation and estrangement as narrative features. My main proposition is that Bujold is an important transitional figure in speculative fiction between second and third wave feminist thinking. Although her work mimics some distinctive features of speculative fiction that utilise patriarchal structures and traditional gender norms, it is not limited by them. As a result, Bujold conveys a more complex and insightful understanding of gender.

The research method of this thesis is the close reading of a range of sample texts from Bujold's *Vorkosigan Series* and *Chalion Series* which feature female protagonists. I seek to explore the discussion of gender relations and reformulation that occurs within them in the context of both speculative and feminist criticism. Bujold's exploration of the identities and social roles of women in these fictional worlds is complex and challenging, using a range of approaches from simple reversal, to hybridity of gender, to more complex partial positions. This thesis argues that she takes an implicitly feminist approach, focussing on female experiences and examining the modes of social control and exercise of power within patriarchal social structures as they impact on women.

Science Fiction and Fantasy often seem to reiterate traditional patriarchal hierarchies. Validating gender norms that conform to social expectations rather than challenging them. Bujold is presented in this thesis as utilising established norms and tropes such that her texts are easily identified as examples of Science Fiction and Fantasy, but in other ways her reformulations present radical challenges to cultural expectations of gender. This thesis reveals that social critique and reformulation of gender roles is possible and powerful in both Science Fiction and Fantasy by examining the work of a significant author whose work has lacked critical attention until recently. Although numerous studies have examined the way gender has been treated in Science Fiction and Fantasy, the unique contribution of this thesis is to examine an author previously under-studied and to consider the patterns of these reformulations as expressed in Bujold's works.

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For

Ursula Le Guin,

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
 But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.
 Walt Whitman

Helen Taylor, who first introduced me to the world of SF and Fantasy
for which I am forever grateful

and

Lois McMaster Bujold, without whom, none of this.

Beyond the Princess, the Priestess and the Galactic Kitchen Sink: Reformulation of Feminine Roles in Certain Works of Lois McMaster Bujold.	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	11
Scope and Sequence	16
Normative Gender Roles and the Importance of Deviation	19
Traditional Norms of Femininity	20
Traditional Norms of Masculinity	27
SF Criticism	31
Feminist SF criticism	38
Fantasy Criticism	42
Reformulation Strategies	48
Thesis Structure	52
Chapter 2: A History of Speculative Fiction by Women	55
A Brief History of Women Writing SF	57
Pre 1920s	57
The 1920s to the 1960s	60
1960 and 1970s, the emergence of consciously feminist SF	68
1980s	76
1990s and beyond	83
A Brief History of Feminist Fantasy	85
Pre 1920s	86
The 1920's to the 1960s	88
1960's and 1970's, the impact of the second wave	90
1980s	91
1990s and beyond	93
Chapter 3: Bujold's Early SF and Space Opera	96
Patterns of Gender Reformulation	100
Focus – the interpolation of female subjectivity into Space Opera	102
Desire & Sexuality	105
Marriage	109
Domestication	113
Violence against women	119
Reproductive Technologies	125
Death and War	129
Reversal	132
Chapter 4: Hybridity and Complication in Bujold's Early SF	140
Hybridity	140
Masculine Tropes and Cordelia	142
Scientist	142
Leader	145
Warrior	153
Explorer	159
Feminine Tropes and Cordelia	163

Princess Tropes	166
Priestess	166
Maternal	169
Complication	177
Chapter 5: Bujold's Later SF	182
Focus	186
Ekaterin	186
Complications	196
Bujold's "third place to stand"	196
Hybridity	203
Reversal	206
Chapter 6: Focus and Reversal in Bujold's Fantasy	210
Focus	211
Reversal	221
Marriage Proposals	224
The Sleeping Beauty	227
Domestication and Marriage	228
Ista – Reclaiming the Self	233
Chapter 7: Hybridity and Complication in Bujold's Fantasy	236
Complication	244
Fara	244
Joen and Catti - Reclaiming villainy, the Bad Witches	246
Hallana - Reclaiming the sexuality of the Good Nun	252
Hybridity	255
Ijada and Ingrey	255
Chapter 8: Conclusion	264
Reformulating the Norms	270
Scope for Further Research	271
Bibliography	274
Bujold's works (alphabetical)	284
Appendix 1	285

BUJOLD TEXTS and ABBREVIATIONS

Series	VORKOSIGAN SERIES (IN ORDER OF PUBLICATION)
WA	<i>The Warrior's Apprentice</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1986) <i>The Warrior's Apprentice</i> (Framingham, Massachusetts: NESFA Press, 2001)
SH	<i>Shards of Honor</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1986) <i>Test of Honor</i> (New York: Nelson Doubleday/Science Fiction Book Club, 1987)
EA	<i>Ethan of Athos</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1986)
FF	<i>Falling Free</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1988)
BA	<i>Brothers in Arms</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1989)
BI	<i>Borders of Infinity</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1989) Stories first appeared as "The Mountains of Mourning" (May 1989 <i>Analog</i>), "Labyrinth" (August 1989 <i>Analog</i>) and "The Borders of Infinity" (<i>in Free Lancers</i> , anth 1987, ed Elizabeth Mitchell)
VG	<i>The Vor Game</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1990) <i>Vorkosigan's Game</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1990) <i>Young Miles</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1997)
B	<i>Barrayar</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1991)
CH	<i>Cordelia's Honor</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1996)
MD	<i>Mirror Dance</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1994) <i>Miles Errant</i> (New York: Baen Books, 2002)
C	<i>Cetaganda</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1996) <i>Miles, Mystery & Mayhem</i> (New York: Baen Books, 2003)
M	<i>Memory</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1996) <i>Dreamweaver's Dilemma</i> (Framingham, Massachusetts: The NESFA Press, 1996)
K	<i>Komarr</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1998)
ACC	<i>A Civil Campaign: A Comedy of Biology and Manners</i> (New York: Baen Books, 1999) <i>Miles in Love</i> (New York: Baen Books, 2008)
DI	<i>Diplomatic Immunity</i> (New York: Baen Books, 2003) <i>Miles, Mutants & Microbes</i> (New York: Baen Books, 2007) <i>The Mountains of Mourning</i> (New York: Baen Free Library, 2009) <i>The Mountains of Mourning</i> (Rockville, Maryland: Arc Manor (Phoenix Pick), 2014)
Cr	<i>Cryoburn</i> (New York: Baen Books, 2010)
CVA	<i>Captain Vorpatril's Alliance</i> (New York: Baen Books, 2012)
GJ	<i>Gentleman Jole and the Red Queen</i> (New York: Baen Books, 2015) <i>Gentleman Jole and the Red Queen</i> (New York: Baen Books, 2016)
FV	"The Flowers of Vashnoi" (New York: Spectrum, 2018)

WORLD OF THE FIVE GODS: CHALION

- CC *The Curse of Chalion* (New York: HarperCollins/Eos, 2001)
 PS *Paladin of Souls* (New York: HarperCollins/Eos, 2003)
 HH *The Hallowed Hunt* (New York: HarperCollins/Eos, 2005)

THE SHARING KNIFE

- The Sharing Knife: Beguilement* (New York: HarperCollins/Eos, 2006)
The Sharing Knife: Legacy (New York: HarperCollins/Eos, 2007)
The Sharing Knife (New York: Science Fiction Book Club, 2008)
The Sharing Knife: Passage (New York: HarperCollins/Eos, 2008)
The Sharing Knife: Horizon (New York: HarperCollins/Eos, 2009)

WORLD OF THE FIVE GODS: PENRIC

- Penric's Demon* (New York: Spectrum Literary Agency, 2015)
Penric and the Shaman (New York: Spectrum Literary Agency, 2016)
Penric's Mission (New York: Spectrum Literary Agency, 2016)
Mira's Last Dance (New York: Spectrum Literary Agency, 2017)
Penric's Fox (New York: Spectrum Literary Agency, 2017)
Prisoner of Limnos (New York: Spectrum Literary Agency, 2017)
Orphans of Raspay (New York: Spectrum Literary Agency, 2019)

INDIVIDUAL TITLES

- The Spirit Ring* (New York: Baen Books, 1992)

WORKS AS EDITOR

- Women at War* (New York: Tor, 1995) with Roland J Green and Martin H Greenberg

Chapter 1: Introduction

Science fiction and fantasy... allow one to imagine and write about worlds where strong independent women *are* the rule, or to construct a society whose features can illuminate the workings of our own. (Sargent et al *Frontiers* 62)

One of the many problems women face in the search for equality in society at large is the lack of recognition of their abilities and prejudicial stereotypes that pre-suppose weakness or other limitations. This can be expressed as doubts about their physical strength, their emotional control, their intellect and financial sense, their authority and bodily autonomy, even their skill at driving, and is matched by the expectation that women are universally maternal, readily available for the sexual gratification of men, and satisfied by a limited domestic existence. Although expectations in Western societies have shifted over the past half-century, some stereotypes still underpin many common conceptions about what it is to be a woman or to be feminine. Narratives of all kinds have upheld and promoted these views, to the detriment of women trying to break free of their limitations. Although many Science Fiction narratives imagine futuristic places and cultures, these naturalised (or subconscious) values are still frequently reproduced, even in contemporary fictions. But Science Fiction (hereafter SF) and Fantasy narratives are more varied than they seem and while Mary Badami could claim in 1976 that “Women have *not* been important as characters in sf; women have *not* been important as fans of sf; women have *not* been important as writers of sf” (Badami 6), more recent scholarship is challenging this perception. Lois McMaster Bujold is one of many women writers of SF and Fantasy, who started as a fan, and has written a great number of unconventional female characters who challenge conventional expectations of women (Bacon-Smith 122; James *LMB* 137). Analysis of how speculative texts may help to reimagine gender roles for women are the main focus of this thesis. This optimistic view of the potential for speculative fiction to provide new ways of thinking about the real world is not unique; critics such as Brian Stableford have similarly argued:

The opportunity to explore others [possible worlds] in the imagination can only increase the possibility that we might find better ways to exist as individuals in the actual world, and perhaps the possibility that we might find better ways collectively to change the actual world in ways that will improve it. (Stableford *A-Z* lxvi-lxvii)

This potential for change in the primary world is enabled by the contrast between the world of the reader and the world contained in the text, and the estrangement which allows cultural mores to be altered within the narrative in fundamental ways.

There are certain key terms in a study of this kind that must be defined in order to make the arguments clear. Following Judith Merril, I use speculative fiction as an umbrella term to encompass the many modes of fiction that utilise extrapolation and estrangement.

Speculative fiction: stories whose objective is to explore, to discover, to *learn*, by means of projection, extrapolation, analogue, hypothesis-and-paper-experimentation, something about the nature of the universe, of man, or 'reality' ... to examine some postulated approximation of reality, by introducing a given set of changes – imaginary or inventive – into the common background of 'known facts', creating an environment in which the responses and perceptions of the characters will reveal something about the inventions, the characters, or both. (Merril 30)

Although there was a time when SF and Fantasy were defined by their differences, recent work on genres has expanded these uses to be more collaborative. While speculative fiction can include Horror, Gothic and various punk and slipstream fictions, I will be concentrating here on SF and Fantasy as these are the modes in which Bujold writes. Bujold's Vorkosigan books belong to the SF subgenre of Space Opera, which has been known for its celebration of traditional masculine behaviours (Attebery *Decoding* 116-117), where the spacefaring male hero is cast as Explorer, Scientist, Leader and/or Warrior (with a fair degree of conqueror and lover included in the mix). David Hartwell's work on the reclamation of Space Opera, notes that "The new space opera of the

past twenty years is arguably the literary cutting edge of SF now.” (Hartwell and Cramer “Space Opera Redefined” 265). He also named Bujold as one of the “queens of space opera” alongside C. J. Cherryh (Hartwell *Nine Ways Part I* 20) and has discussed the significance of their renovation of speculative writing:

nearly all media fans that entered SF after 1975 have never understood the origin of space opera as a pejorative ... henceforth, “space opera” meant and still generally means, colourful, dramatic, large-scale science fiction adventure, competently and sometimes beautifully written, usually focussed on a sympathetic, heroic central character and plot action, and usually set in the relatively distant future and in space or on other worlds, characteristically optimistic in tone. (Hartwell & Cramer, “Space Opera Redefined” 264)

Bujold describes her own work as Space Opera, noting that reception of her work sometimes suffers as a result of its apparently conventional features:

[!]n the framework of space opera, ... while I am pushing the envelope, I am pushing it in the opposite direction. I am not pushing outward, I’m not distorting the form; I’m pushing inward, I’m creating depth of character, which is, supposedly, not done in space opera....”. (qtd in Bacon-Smith 122)

In this thesis, I contrast the traditional gender roles of Space Opera with Bujold’s reformulations, emphasising the ways in which Bujold’s female characters often blur the boundaries between stereotypically “feminine” and “masculine” behaviours.

Like Space Opera, Fantasy writing often presents traditional (and perhaps longer standing) social expectations of gender. As a mode of speculation, Fantasy encompasses mythology, folklore and fairy tale, medieval and historical romances, as well as both high, low and modern or urban variations. Many of these categories are differentiated by the relationships between the primary world of the reader and the secondary world that they depict, as well as the degree to which they do

or do not contain magical and supernatural elements. Mendlesohn describes five narrative patterns in Fantasy that can appear in any of these categories; the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, the liminal, and the irregular (Mendlesohn *Rhetorics* xviii). The portal-quest fantasy explores the potential of communication between the primary and secondary worlds, while the intrusive fantasy tells of the arrival of people or events from another world into the primary world replicated in the text. In the portal-quest, travel between the worlds occurs (sometimes in both directions) and the narrative is defined by a search for resolution. The intrusive fantasy is often horrific or comedic, as the unfamiliar and often supernatural elements of the secondary world create conflict in the world of the protagonist. Liminal fantasies hover on the boundary between these categories, neither entirely accepting nor denying the fantastic exists, and hesitating (Todorov 4) between the two. Exponential growth of the Fantasy genre in recent years means that purely secondary, immersive worlds are no longer the dominant form. Modern or urban fantasies, dark fantasy and horror, as well as other intrusive or liminal variations now form a significant proportion of Fantasy publishing. Bujold writes “immersive” fantasy (Mendlesohn *Rhetorics* xx-xxi), where the action of the narrative is largely chronological and takes place entirely within a secondary world distinct from the world of the reader (known as the primary world) (Tolkien 15). “The immersive fantasy is a fantasy of thinning ... Where the portal-quest fantasies emphasized recognition and healing, the restoration of previous days, the immersive fantasies are overwhelmingly concerned with the entropy of the world.” (Mendlesohn *Rhetorics* 60-61). Not only does this draw the reader into an unusual experience of the narrative, where the reader is entirely absorbed into events but the protagonist also “ironizes” and “explains” the world to the reader and to themselves (Mendlesohn *Rhetorics* 67). This enables social critique of the primary world by inviting the reader to compare their own society with that of the estranged secondary world (Hume 23).

Bujold’s *Vorkosigan Series* and *Five Gods Series* share similar narrative arcs, where romantic heterosexual bonds form between key characters who undertake to resolve various political and military conspiracies. Great historical battles loom over the action of both series and the scope of

the conspiracies in each is far-reaching, with moral as well as practical implications. In addition, both series feature protagonists who act as observers and bring external perspectives to bear on the societies through which they travel. Bujold's Fantasy novels also employ protagonists who offer an unusual perspective on their social context, but in this case as a result of their supernatural powers rather than through cultural differentiation as in the *Vorkosigan Series*. These protagonists direct the narrative focus of the reader, while their insightful commentaries on their cultures are conveyed directly to the reader through internal dialogue.

Although SF criticism since the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s has discussed the ways in which SF has reinforced or challenged contemporary norms of femininity (as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3), consideration of Fantasy texts from the same feminist viewpoint has not been as prolific. Some of the most recognised critics of Fantasy such as Brian Attebery, Christine Brooke-Rose, Farah Mendlesohn, Eric Rabkin, Roger Schlobin, Robert Scholes, Brian Stableford, and Ann Swinfen have largely been defining and framing the field. Some key texts that have engaged with gender include Lucie Armitt's *Theorising the Fantastic* (1996), Marleen Barr's *Feminist Fabulation* (1992) and her other texts, Anne Cranny-Francis' *Feminist Fiction* (1990), Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), Sarah Lefanu's *In the Chinks of the World Machine* (1988), as well as Ursula Le Guin's *The Language of the Night* (1979) and her many other critical works. A close reading of the selected Bujold texts is intended as a model for expanding scholarly consideration of the capacity for Fantasy works to conduct social critique and experimentation with gender roles, as has already been established occurs in SF. To date, critical discussion of gender in Fantasy has often been conducted as part of text production, for example, as introductions to collections of stories (Green and Lefanu; Larbalestier *Daughters*; Sargent *Women of Wonder*; Sturgis). While there are some apparent differences in the two different modes of thought experiment between SF and Fantasy, I focus on the continuity between them, particularly in their similar use of estrangement and extrapolation to pose unique solutions to familiar social dilemmas.

In this thesis, I examine both SF and Fantasy writing in relation to cultural attitudes towards gender. These attitudes were changing during Bujold's career between the second wave of feminism and 2005 when *The Hallowed Hunt* was published. This thesis will discuss developments in feminist thinking as a useful context for Bujold's narratives. Many recent feminist and reader-response approaches to speculative writing encompass similar ideas of reading texts as a bridge between the primary world of the reader and the secondary world within the narrative (de Lauretis 9; Le Guin *Gender Redux* 19; Wolfe 122-123). From this perspective both the writer and the reader bring their experiences of the primary world to bear on the creation and interpretation of the text (Hume 23), and thus narratives often encode the predominant social standards of the societies in which they are written and read. My interest lies in the performance of gender roles within those societies, both real and imagined. I will be using the narrative arcs of key female characters to discuss the pervasive gender norms usually presented in conformative speculative texts and the ways in which Bujold modifies and resists these constructions. Much of the reformulation is achieved through female characters' resistance to socially constructed gender stereotypes that are also common in the primary world, as well as in the gendered conventions of SF and Fantasy writing. Following Susan Wood, I suggest that these largely consist of the passive roles of "Princess, Priestess and ... Galactic Kitchen Sink" (Wood 18); the romantic Princess who is both reward and sign of power for her hero, the Maternal Roles which are usually elided from narratives, and the more complex depictions of women with both independence and power, Priestess figures, in positive and negative depictions. I suggest that the differences between these stereotypical positions reflects a fundamental social unease about the connection between women holding authority and their sexuality.

Scope and Sequence

This thesis will explore the ways Lois McMaster Bujold reformulates female gender roles in select SF novels of the *Vorkosigan Series* - *Shards of Honor* (1986), *Barrayar* (1991), *Komarr* (1998) and *A Civil Campaign* (1999) - and the Fantasy novels of the *Five Gods Series* - *The Curse of Chalion* (2001), *Paladin of Souls* (2003) and *The Hallowed Hunt* (2005). I have selected these four *Vorkosigan*

novels because they are largely told from the female point of view, Cordelia Vorkosigan and Ekaterin Vorsoisson Vorkosigan, the mother and wife of Miles, protagonist of the majority of the *Vorkosigan Saga*. Similarly, the three *Five Gods* novels all contain significant and unconventional female characters. The main female SF characters of Cordelia and Ekaterin Vorkosigan make excellent counterpoints to their Fantasy cousins, Ista, Hallana, Joen and Cattilara. The limitation of this study to seven novels allows me to balance detailed discussion and insight within the space permitted.

Although I would have liked to comment on all of Bujold's novels, such as the *Penric* novellas, *The Sharing Knife series* (2006-2020), and *The Spirit Ring* (1992), there is limited space in a thesis to consider all of the works of such a prolific author. As a result, I have concentrated on the most successful and commended novels which form the backbone of Bujold's output. *The Spirit Ring* is both a stand-alone novel and much earlier than her other Fantasy writing, and while some themes and interests of Bujold begin to appear, they are more fully realised in the later *Five Gods* material. I have excluded the *Penric* novellas (2016-2019), although set in the same *Five Gods* universe, as they are still being published, so that I look forward to considering them in future work when the narrative is completed. *The Sharing Knife* was excluded from this study, partially because (like *Penric*) it was written later in Bujold's career. My main reason was that although it depicts challenges to gender roles it has not been as recognised with awards. Awards are not the only measure of critical or popular success but, for the purposes of selecting from an author's body of work, they can be a useful delimiting factor.

I have chosen Bujold's work as a focus for this thesis, because she works in both SF and Fantasy modes and resists traditional patterns of gender representation in each. Furthermore, Bujold has been acknowledged as one of the most significant writers of speculative fiction of the last four decades, being one of the rare few authors to win all three major awards, the Hugo, Nebula and Locus, for a single Fantasy novel, *Paladin of Souls*. She has also won four Hugos for Best Novel and three Nebulas in total, as well as other major awards including the Mythopoeic, Skylark, Forry and,

most recently, the Damon Knight Grand Master Award for 2019. It can be suggested that Bujold has won more Hugos than any other writer as she has also collected one for a novella, as well as the inaugural Hugo for Best Series in both 2017 for the *Vorkosigan series* and again in 2018 for the *Five Gods series* (matching Heinlein's two Retro Hugos). However, her works have received limited critical attention to date with only four books dedicated to analysis of her works (Croft *LMB*; James *LMB*; Kelso *Three Observations*; Lee and McCormack), and those mainly published in the last decade. This is a significant difference from writers like Ursula Le Guin, C. J. Cherryh, and Octavia Butler, who also work across modes, but who have received extensive critical attention. Although the focus of this thesis is on Bujold and her works, there are many important and noteworthy female writers of SF and Fantasy.

This thesis was begun at a time when there was only a handful of journal articles in print about Bujold and, while I am very pleased to see academic discussion broaden significantly, there remains a lack of parity in the attention given to Bujold. A great number of critical theses and volumes about earlier (canonical) feminist writers, such as Le Guin, Sargent, Russ and Tiptree, exist and some about Bujold's contemporaries have already been published (such as works about Butler, Cherryh, and Tepper), so I determined to make a contribution to discussing Bujold and the particular strategies she uses to present diverse and complex female characters that subvert conventional gender roles that have dominated SF and Fantasy. I was also keen to provide a much more detailed discussion of a single author's work, across the two main modes of speculation.

Both Bujold and key texts like the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* identify the *Vorkosigan series* as Space Opera, a subgenre of SF which some suggest contains many of the core features of SF (*SFE*; Pringle). They are vivid, interplanetary romances which engage with profound questions about the human condition and our relationship with technology within a highly adventuresome framework. As Pringle has noted (albeit as a criticism), Space Opera contains both "realism and a respect for facts deriving from the novel, exoticism and psychological excitement deriving from the romance" (Pringle 43). While Bujold's work certainly contains these elements, unlike Pringle, I do not see them

as problematic but as features of her style. Though magic rather than technology abounds in Bujold's Fantasy novels, both modes display the same characteristic features of Bujold's writing: the distinctive use of fast-paced narrative, the inclusion of psychological complexity, multiple character perspectives, and juxtapositions of conventional elements (of gender and genre) with unconventional ones (James *LMB* 16-18; *SFE*). Bujold's reformulation of gender roles is most clearly seen in the insightful re-use of established tropes and stereotypical depictions, while her practice of applying unexpected gender tropes to her characters is one of the main ways in which she hybridises these roles and identities in her novels.

Normative Gender Roles and the Importance of Deviation

The predictability and frequency of gender conventions in many SF and Fantasy works makes them something more than a series of artistic choices. The pervasive nature of these images suggests they are reflective of cultural gender norms in contemporary Western society. SF and Fantasy have traditionally reinforced a gender binary by validating idealised versions of masculinity as the active and dominant presence in the text (and by extension, society also). The role of women in speculative fiction has, as in many other genres, been the secondary one, passive and responsive to men. Women have been framed as the "Other" (Lefanu 2) and defined in relation to the needs and benefit of the dominant gender. Indeed, Le Guin has even suggested that the difference between SF written by men and women is the "hostility toward the alien expressed through the stereotypes of male representation, as opposed to the identification established by female authors who endow the national, racial, or planetary outsider with interiority" (cited in Gubar 16). Thus, women in speculative fiction have often appeared as romantic interests, as sexually deviant threats, or as caregivers, rather than active protagonists. The recent rise of the warrior woman trope is a reflection of interest in alternative roles for women within narrative, but as Robin Reid notes when she dubs this character the "shero" (Reid 179), this trope often limits them to imitating and appropriating masculine roles (Godard; Onciul-Omelus; Polster; Ventura). I suggest that the warrior woman or "shero" is, in fact, a gender reversed variation of masculine models that does not validate

feminine qualities but acknowledges that some women can meet masculine standards of social success. The traits and qualities traditionally associated with femininity are still demonstrably secondary, and over-emphasis on the woman's physical and sexual presence reinforces the primacy of masculinity by reiterating that a woman's value is grounded in her beauty, availability, and appeal to male appetites, pandering to the male gaze rather than supposing a gender-neutral audience. In the following sections, I will outline and define the key tropes and traditional norms of feminine behaviour, as well as masculine ones, in order to facilitate later discussion of Bujold's deviations and reformulations of them.

Traditional Norms of Femininity

As noted above, conservative models of feminine behaviour are common in speculative fiction and often result in the sidelining of women to passive, inferior roles. Russ observed in 1971 that although "There are plenty of images of women in science fiction. There are hardly any women" (Russ *Image* 91), an idea amplified by Susan Wood's response the next year:

Woman as heroine, woman as hero, woman as alien: we do have plenty of images of women in SF. Many of them, however, are degrading to all people, and most of them are one dimensional, the lowest common denominator of social stereotypes that are already passé. (Wood 17)

While this conversation was published a number of decades ago, it is lamentably still relevant; as noted by Armitt (2012), Lerbalestier (2002), Bacon-Smith (2000), and Yaszek (2008). In speculative fiction, women are often secondary and Othered, a passive object for reflecting and rewarding masculine desires and objectives. Wood also observes that, "Those princesses and housewives ... have a disconcerting way of lurking in the typewriter, ready to leap out at the slightest failure of the imagination" (11), in much the same way as male stereotypes. Often it is far easier for a writer to produce a narrative that conforms to their own naturalised "cultural script" (Croft *LMB* 105). Indeed, as Croft suggests, it is enormously difficult for writers to avoid this, so that it becomes more

necessary to closely observe those writers who *do* present alternative visions of gender in their speculative narratives.

Any understanding of how Bujold reformulates gender roles relies on a clear conception of the traditional tropes against which she is writing. Therefore, traditional gender norms will be referred to frequently throughout the thesis, in both their masculine and feminine forms. Suzy McKee Charnas has described gender as “split into male roles (everything active, intelligent, brave and muscular) and feminine roles (everything passive, intuitive, shrinking and soft)” (qtd in Attebery *Decoding* 113). As will be discussed later, the masculine tropes emphasise authority, intellect, competition and reward within a hierarchy (Attebery *Decoding* 112-114; Wight 5), while the feminine tropes reflect patriarchal concerns about women’s sexuality, their autonomy and potential for power over others. This becomes clear in the Priestess trope which encompasses both negative and positive (but highly constrained) models of women’s power. This constraint is repeated in the limited spheres of influence allowed to women who fall within the other female stereotypes: the Princess and the Maternal.

One of the earliest and most thorough descriptions of the common representations and expectations for female characters in speculative fiction is Russ’s “The Image of Women in Science Fiction”. In “What Can A Heroine Do?” Russ notes that these depictions are the “dramatic embodiments of what a culture believes to be true – or what it would like to be true – or what it is mortally afraid may be true” (Russ *Heroine* 81). It is remarkable to note how relevant her comments remain, and how often the stereotypes she discusses continue to appear in contemporary speculation. In this seminal essay she provides a comprehensive list of qualities common to SF heroines, most of which revolve around passive and receptive social roles. Russ suggests that women are usually positioned as “supernaturally beautiful” prizes (83), the static but highly desirable goal of male characters’ striving for success. Active women (particularly sexually active women) are negatively positioned as evil and transgressive of social norms (aggression and lesbianism are commonly used as negative traits in all modes of traditional speculation), and any

powers they do possess are generally endowed, innate, or inherited rather than learned. Similarly, these powers are often limited or passive rather than being an active tool for the heroine to effect or interact with the plot. In short, wherever possible women are positioned as either weak or absent from the text and are not “the real focus of interest” (83). Or, as Russ notes later, “masculinity equals power and femininity equals powerlessness” (84). Of all the discussions of women and feminism in SF, this is the clearest delineation of the cultural normalisation of patriarchal values regarding women as they are encoded into speculative writing. It remains relevant more than forty years later, with critics like Attebery, Tax, and Rawls still grappling with the same issues regarding the depiction of women. Attebery echoes Russ when he observes that there was “no place in SF’s sleek vessel for such feminine stowaways as family ties, overt desire, domestic arrangements, and psychological complexity” (*Decoding* 181). He also suggests that there was pressure for early female fans to appear “ungendered” which is really “masculine (masculine being the unmarked case here, as in many aspects of culture)” (Attebery *Decoding* 181). SF not only validated the scientific and the rational alongside imagination, it validated the masculine as the gender most associated with those elements of the culture. The relative absence of these concerns from the earliest SF reflects a certain amount of cultural blindness towards the issue. Their increasing emergence in modern speculative fiction coincides with the consciousness raising about gender inequality that occurred as the second wave feminist movement gained popularity and recognition in the primary world.

In 1973, Wood described the most common feminine stereotypes as “the Princess, the Priestess and the Galactic Kitchen Sink” (18), mainly as part of an effort to encourage writers to move beyond their limitations. Although she does allow that the pulp stories to which she refers “all present woman as heroine” (13), the women’s impact on narrative events remains limited to the narrow confines outlined by Russ – beautiful, passive, talented, but secondary. Meredith Tax suggests that “traditionally there are only four possible roles for women ... absent beloved, evil witch, damsel in distress and girl warrior” (31). Even writers who have since been celebrated as pioneers of feminist speculative fiction are not exempt from such critique. Ursula K. Le Guin

famously revised and expanded her *Earthsea* series¹ and her criticism of speculative writing (Le Guin “Gender” and “Gender Redux”) in light of changes to her understanding of female characters in speculation. Tax writes that she asked Le Guin why she “suddenly wrote a sequel” after eighteen years, “She said she had to tell what happened to Tenar. She had tried to earlier but couldn’t: she was too caught in the tradition of heroic male fantasy to be able to figure out what would happen to a woman in a Tolkien world.” Le Guin is cited by Tax as saying that she “had to write this fourth volume [*Tehanu*] because I changed, I had to show the other side” (31). In 2008, Melanie Rawls identified these problematic female stereotypes in *Earthsea* as “witch”, “temptress”, “Princess”, “trophy wife”, “maiden”, “priestess” and “prisoner” (130). Such tropes continue to appear in speculative fiction, resulting in women often remaining in secondary positions within their narratives, their purpose still to magnify the heroes’ qualities through recognition and reward or temporary challenge. In this thesis, I adopt Wood’s terms as they simplify these female character types reflecting the complex interaction between their authority and sexuality, revealing the cultural expectations underlying the construction of these stereotypes.

The roles of “Princess”, “maiden” and “trophy wife” described by Rawls share the important characteristics of passivity, beauty, and controlled sexuality. The desirability of these women is constructed through the lens of the male gaze and masculine approval and the woman-as-object is only attainable by the hero/husband who successfully quests for her. Arwyn and Eowyn from *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), Irulan from *Dune* (1965), and Sansa from *The Game of Thrones* (1996) epitomise this role of women who represent authority without being able to direct it and for whom the main expectation is they marry well. They may change category by getting married or resisting these limitations, as Eowyn does when she goes to war and Sansa does when she becomes Queen in the North independently. Into this category I would fold the familiar “damsel in distress” and

¹ The *Earthsea* series comprises six books and seven short stories; beginning with *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), and continuing with *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971), *The Farthest Shore* (1972), and, after a significant delay, *Tehanu* (1990), *Tales of Earthsea* (2001) and *The Other Wind* (2001).

“prisoner” tropes which both function as objectified sexual rewards for the hero’s socially approved behaviour. Irulan is Paul Atreides’ reward for defeating the Emperor and a token of power exchange. She remains trapped in this role throughout her life, never bearing him children or escaping the confines of the loveless royal marriage. On the other hand, Paul’s concubine Chani is more like a traditional wife, taking on the role of raising Paul’s children and disappearing into the domestic margins of the narrative. Women who fall into Maternal roles or the “Galactic Kitchen Sink” are usually matured Princesses who have moved beyond the chase of romance to a position as the fountain of caregiving. Their beauty is frequently still noted but their role as sexual object is now muted by fidelity and age, and their participation in the narrative is limited to the necessary but socially devalued domestic sphere. Any greater action on their part tends to move them into the Priestess roles, where, although they can assert their sexuality and take on more active roles in the narrative, they still suffer from being valued according to restrictive and conventional gender biases. Jessica Atreides and Galadriel from *The Lord of the Rings* are strong examples of women who have shifted from other categories all the way into Priestesses. At first the sexual and romantic partner of Leto, Jessica takes on the role of the Maternal, becoming his wife and the mother of his son against the orders of her superiors. By showing her loyalty in this manner, she earns his protection and his name. After his death, however, Jessica must rely on her own skills once more and drinks the water of life to become the Fremen Reverend Mother, expanding the scope of her actions and influence when she gains supernatural powers. Women can pass through these categories of the Princess and the Maternal as they develop and mature, but they can also be trapped in them, remaining limited by the social expectations these tropes encode in the narrative.

Priestess characters are the female characters most likely to be actively involved in the plot and come in two varieties, depending on their sexuality and the nature of their actions – the Good Nun and Bad Witch tropes. If they are active in socially conformative and acceptable ways, for example, as helper to the male protagonist, their sexuality tends to be muted by age or celibate disinterest and their behaviour can be presented in a positive light. If not, their sexuality is

presented as dangerous and self-determined, and their actions are seen as inimical to the interests of male protagonists, they turn into “evil witches” and “temptresses” (Rawls 130) whose motives are suspect and run counter to social cohesion and stability. These women are often identified by their negative presentation – excessive beauty or ugliness, lesbianism, and discordant force (whether sexual or political). This dichotomy is presented clearly in the attitudes towards Jessica Atreides and the Reverend Mother Mohiam in *Dune*, and even Galadriel has to negotiate the challenges of exercising her authority and meeting social expectations. Galadriel, in particular, faces this challenge directly when she resists the One Ring’s temptation to selfishness and sexual power over others.

Most importantly, although Priestesses have some kind of agency not available to the other women, it is surprising how often it is a curiously passive kind of power these women wield. As Russ notes:

If female characters are given abilities, these are often innate abilities which cannot be developed or controlled, eg clairvoyance, telepathy, hysterical strength, unconscious psi power, eidetic memory, perfect pitch, lightning calculation, or (more baldly) magic. The power is somehow *in* the woman, but she does not really possess it. (Russ “Image” 83)

Particularly in early and mid century SF, women who work for their skill set, who train and educate themselves, are hardly shown in conventional speculative narratives and many schools of engineering and magic are created as male-only or severely gender limited spaces across both modes, such as the school on Roke in *Earthsea*, or the Infantry training school in *Starship Troopers*². In speculative fiction, there has been a frequent contrast between the rational and structured formal education received by males and the informal or apprentice style of training that is offered to both

² Although girls are not prohibited from Battle School, the most notable females who are mentioned in connection with it are rejected for their compassion (Valentine, Ender’s sister) and Wu consistently refuses promotion to “Toon Leader”. In the militaristic and hierarchical context of Battle School the absence of significant females, particularly from the male hero-protagonists “jeesh” or crew is suggestive. Likewise, the elision of women from the military environments of *Starship Troopers* and their role as pilots rather than ground troops.

genders. Most notable examples of formalised women's education have historically been contained within monastic or religious frameworks, such as the Bene Gesserit in Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), who are some of the most famous examples of educated women in either mode. The trope of females cross-dressing in order to obtain more formal training is occasionally presented in speculation but is not particularly common; such as Alanna in Tamora Pierce's *The Song of the Lioness Quartet* (1983) or in Lynne Flewelling's *Bone Doll Trilogy* (2001) (Croft "Education" 129). Female characters have been more usually depicted receiving informal training which leads to an overall perception of women's learning as suspect and less vigorous while institutionalised learning has been validated with authority and purpose. For example, Ged's aunt and her unwritten goat magic are paired with the Gontish sayings "Weak as woman's magic" and "Wicked as woman's magic" (Le Guin *Earthsea* 16). Even where women do receive formal education, such as with the Bene Gesserit, they are treated with a wary respect that barely masks deep social distrust (McNelly and Herbert 388). In a genre which emphasises intellectual accomplishment as a mark of power and prestige the lack of education women receive, and the lack of respect given to that education, is indicative of wider attitudes to women's work and interests.

Rowling's depictions of Hermione and Hogwarts are atypical in their description of egalitarian magical education. Hermione's significant role in the long battle against Voldemort can be seen as a shift towards valuing women's ability to develop skills via formal education rather than just being magically 'gifted'. However, this reading is slightly undercut by the frequency of references to Hermione being "the cleverest witch of her age" (Rowling *Azkaban* 253) implying a natural talent separate from the training she receives. Furthermore, the plethora of aged, childless, magical women depicted as members of staff at Hogwarts (indeed the general aura of celibacy amongst all the staff at Hogwarts) is reminiscent of the monastic roots of Western educational structures and the patriarchal values which infuse their foundations. The roster of these women includes Professors McGonagall, Hooch, Sprout, Pomfrey, and Trelawney who uniformly adhere to the Good Nun trope; even dark magic characters like Umbridge and Bellatrix conform to type – Umbridge is sexlessly pink

and conformatively feminine while Bellatrix is sexualised and framed in euphemistic terms as Voldemort's occasional girlfriend. This relationship was made explicit with the inclusion of Voldemort and Bellatrix's daughter, Delphi, in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (Rowling 307). Similarly, Queen Cersei and other powerful magic users like Melisandre in *The Game of Thrones* series (1996) are presented as sexually active (if not aggressive) and negative. The persistence of elements of these historically dominant tropes in arguably the most widely read fantasy series of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries demonstrates

Since the early 1970s, however, writers of speculative fiction like Bujold have sought to directly address the limitations of these tropes (see Chapter 2). Rawls notes that in the original *Earthsea* novels, female characters are "relatively weak women, whose influence on their world is negligible and suspect" (129) and of the third volume, she notes, "no women at all who are relevant to the plot" (131). That these positions are later "undermined and changed, re-visited and revised" (Rawls 131) by subsequent books in the series is a persuasive example of the kind of changes that have occurred in cultural, publishing, and authorial circles in the primary world during the intervening years (Rawls 135). This thesis argues that Bujold's work can be read as similarly contesting, revising and reformulating female gender norms. She, and other writers like Le Guin, responded to the absence of women and the elision of their contribution to narrative events that, until recently, had been the most common unifying features of female characters in speculative fiction.

Traditional Norms of Masculinity

Since masculinity is the universal identity against which the feminine Other has traditionally been constructed, I also examine the most common presentations of male characters in both SF and Fantasy modes of speculative writing. Bujold's frequent use of gender Hybridity makes this discussion a necessary benchmark for discussing her reformulation of gender roles. The masculine ideals common in Space Opera are among the most conventional in SF (Hartwell 45; Pringle 36). These conventions can be distilled into four predominant and recurring tropes of hegemonic

masculinity: the Warrior, the Leader, the Scientist, and the Explorer, each of which emphasises one or more of a limited range of preferred masculine behaviours. Attebery describes these in detail, noting that readers, publishers and editors of pulp SF magazines historically preferred:

... heroes who were more attractive, more capable versions of the average reader ... [having] adventures in exotic settings. [The story] had to compensate for readers' insecurities by demonstrating that their technical know-how could, under the right circumstances, bring them riches, respect and sexual gratification. At the same time, it had to suggest that these rewards were the natural result of scientific principles and that by attaining the necessary knowledge the hero was benefitting not only himself but also humanity. (Attebery *Decoding* 40)

The variation between these ideals often revolves around characters' problem-solving processes and their active intervention in the narrative: Warriors seek and prefer physically active resolutions to conflict, while Leaders emphasise authoritative delegation of tasks, sometimes basing their decisions on the advice of a range of underlings whose presence serves to further underline the Leader's importance. Scientists collate existing knowledge or discover new information through research to design solutions to problems. Finally, Explorers seek out challenges in unusual locations and employ aspects of the other tropes in order to resolve the problems they encounter. Explorers reinforce the desirability of freedom and self-determining authority as a marker of manhood, and their competence in all the other categories evokes further the sense of superiority of the masculine. In practice, each of these tropes often draws on elements of the others, as with the Warrior who is also the Leader of his army, or the Scientist whose intellectual curiosity compels his Exploration of the unknown reaches of the physical universe. In Fantasy, a slight change to the names of these tropes becomes necessary due to the substitution of magic or supernatural power for science but few changes to the roles themselves or the rewards with which they are validated are required. Attebery describes some common features of "male-centered SF" as:

the young misunderstood genius, the uncovering of hidden truths about the world, jockeying for status in a quasi-military organisation, conflicts between social convention and science, and fights that result in apparent enemies becoming allies. ... [and] a son's quest to find an absent father. (*Decoding* 116-117)

This description articulates the narrative overlap between the tropes of Scientific genius and ingenuity, the Explorer's search for hidden truths (which are often also the hidden truths of science), the Warrior's struggle for Leadership within a militaristic hierarchy, the domination of culture by masculine and scientific prerogatives, and conflict resolution through the Warrior's standard of combat or other forceful means such as superiority of intellect.

These tropes have been pervasive as speculative fiction has readily absorbed conservative constructions of male gender roles, so that the ideals of masculinity represented reflect and reinforce readers' and writers' shared expectations of masculinity and contribute to the "culturally exalted" nature of these roles (Connell and Messerschmidt 77). Other "complicit masculinities" (Connell and Messerschmidt 79), such as the trusty sidekick and the non-threatening gay male, surround and reinforce the authority of these patriarchal ideals by conforming incompletely to dominant tropes or fulfilling narrower constructions of masculinity (Crosby 127; Villani 23). However, I concentrate here on those masculine tropes that have been most celebrated and idealised in speculative fiction as it is women's elision from active, dominant roles (and thus also the elision of women's interests from speculative narrative) that is most relevant to this thesis.

The attribution of rewards (wealth, social status, and sexual access to females) to characters who display these behaviours, as well as the narrative success of their plans and decisions, reinforces the positive valence of these norms. Not all masculine characters conform, or conform entirely, to these tropes but these are the most frequent and hegemonic amongst pivotal hero characters. 'Hegemonic' is a key term here, as it suggests not only of dominance, but also cultural approval and an expectation of conformity to its models. As Connell has noted:

Hegemonic Masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue. ... Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense ... But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honoured ways of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. ... *Hegemony did not mean violence ... it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion.* (Connell and Messerschmidt 832 *my emphasis*)

The "idealised constructions" of these masculine tropes share a number of basic qualities which appear consistently in the hegemonic masculinities of speculative fiction such as "violence, physical strength, lack of emotion, rationality and sexual virility" (Wight 4), qualities that are common in primary world constructions of masculinity as well. "Desire, power, and knowledge" (Wight 4) are not only gendered as masculine qualities through their close association with these tropes (as rewards for adherence to the tropes) but their importance as an aspirational goal is underlined by their repetition across a range of narratives, so that they also become "fundamental operations of the SF code" (Attebery *Decoding* 9). Equally important are the social relationships that form the basis of these learned behaviours and performances. Segal proposes that masculinity is "defined through a series of hierarchical relations: rejection and suppression of femininity and homosexual desire, command and control over [others]" (205). These attributes are shared by all four tropes to varying degrees, and the popularity of speculative fiction as a cultural medium perhaps rests on its ability to encompass so many of the dominant ideations of masculine behaviour at once.

There is a strong emphasis in all of these roles on the superiority of masculine thinking and the unassailability of masculine authority. Supposedly dispassionate masculine intellects are depicted as most suited to making decisions and the deference given to masculine characters reinforces this assumption and becomes an overt expression of masculine superiority. Attebery

suggests that the power of perception is an important aspect of this collocation, that aside from imagery which underlines the physical aspects of masculine strength, SF contains even more imagery which emphasises the greater capacity and scope of masculine perception, tools and abilities that emphasise the “acuity, focus and force” of the masculine gaze (49). This is particularly obvious in SF where telescopes, microscopes, computer screens, lenses, cyber enhancements, heads up displays, and other viewing apparatus significantly increase and improve the knowledge available to such characters, thus increasing the accuracy and success of their intervention in the narrative. This is clearly a “gendered distinction between the one who sees and the one who is seen.” (Attebery *Decoding* 49). These enhancements also appear as scrying devices in Fantasy writing, but those heroes seem to rely less on artificial supports; the power of the inner eye or prior knowledge from long forgotten texts are more frequently invoked as signs of this mental authority³. Fantasy often accentuates the ‘fated’ nature of the hero, a man who is somehow more suited than most others to the pursuit of the quest, while SF emphasises the success of the everyman implying that *any* man can become the hero of his own narrative. The significance of these norms for this thesis is that they are the framework which Bujold uses and alters, working “both within and against popular tradition” (Attebery *Decoding* 48) to depict women in society differently than they usually appear in the world of the reader.

SF Criticism

Science fiction and fantasy serve as important vehicles for feminist thought, particularly as bridges between theory and practice. No other genres so actively invite representations of the ultimate goals of feminism: worlds free of sexism, worlds in which women's contributions (to science) are recognized and valued, worlds that explore the diversity of women's desire and sexuality, and worlds that move beyond gender. (Helford 291)

³ Although wands, staffs and swords frequently appear as tools and phallic substitutes.

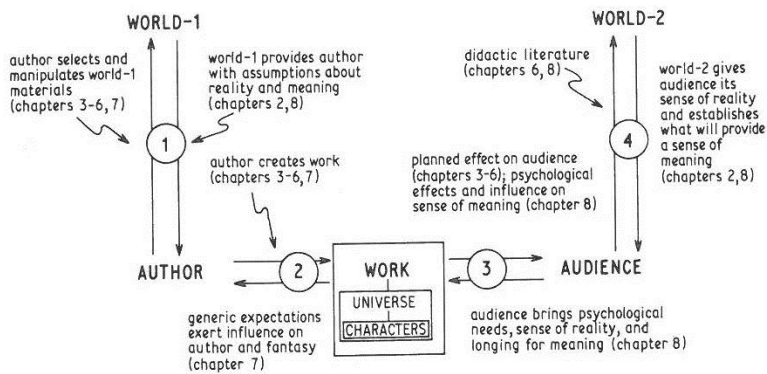
Criticism of SF as a genre has lagged behind its development as a genre. Although there were some early non-professional attempts to describe and catalogue SF writing, they were not fully realised academic and literary discussions. In 1917, Dorothy Scarborough included a brief acknowledgement of “scientific supernaturalism” in her thesis *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction (SFE)*. Later, Clyde F. Beck collected critical essays from fanzines into *Hammer and Tongs* (1937). This kind of layperson’s discussion continues to be a prolific and insightful source of analysis for the genre and some who begin as amateurs later become serious critics. Speculative fiction also has an unusually high cross-over of writers acting as commentators and critics of their own work and the field, for example Aldiss, Samuel Delany, Damon Knight and Le Guin. Kingsley Amis’ *New Maps of Hell* (1960) is typical of this trend, but however insightful and wittily presented, it provides little academic support for his arguments (most likely due to the scarcity of material!). *Pilgrims Through Space and Time: Trends and Patterns in Scientific and Utopian Fiction* (1947) by J. O. Bailey was the first “important” or academic study of SF (SFE; Hassler 214; Tymn 42). This was followed by the era of critical journals and essay length works, beginning in 1959 with the founding of *Extrapolation*, followed closely by *Foundation* in the UK (1972) and *Science Fiction Studies* (1973) and much later the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* (1988). Sam Moskowitz, Damon Knight and James Blish were important editors and writers of SF in magazines and anthologies during the 1960s and 70s who began developing critical frameworks to examine SF through essays published alongside the short fiction. Though still produced without scholarly referencing, this tradition of critical introductions to collections of fiction is still a common form of presentation.

As the gulf between SF and mainstream literature began closing in the 1970s, and as cultural studies and mass media expanded their presence in universities, production of academic SF criticism rose dramatically. Many important works and significant figures appeared in the 1970s, a great many of whom are still publishing today: Todorov, Aldiss, Scholes, Gunn, Nicholls, Panshin, Rabkin, Suvin, Knight, Delany, Le Guin, Parrinder, Clute, Wolfe. Critics were still developing arguments for science fiction as rational extensions of existing societies or “cognitively plausible futures and their spatial

equivalents" (Suvin "Genealogical" 64). Although, as Brian Aldiss noted in *Billion Year Spree* (1973), "Good SF does not necessarily traffic in reality; but it makes reality clearer to us" (148)⁴. Aldiss identified Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the "original" science fiction novel (3) and noted the introduction of the emotional aspects traditionally associated with more feminine, Gothic perspectives to the factual style of writers (Aldiss *Billion* 23). His comments revealed a strong masculinist bias, typical of the prevailing attitudes of the time, both in criticism, in the manner in which female writers were acknowledged as well as the content of contemporary texts. This is the kind of unconscious sexism that "colonizes" (Lefanu 9) speculative writing and criticism before second wave feminism and even sometimes after it (Aldiss & Wingrove, 168).

One of the most important of these is Suvin's seminal 1977 work *Metamorphoses*, which included three key new terms – estrangement, cognition and novum – as part of his work to define and describe SF. Bertolt Brecht's 1948 term *Verfremdungseffekt* "A representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time make it seem unfamiliar" (Suvin 374) is used by Suvin to describe the process of 'defamiliarisation' that lies at the heart of speculation about alternative (secondary) worlds. Of the three, this is perhaps the most essential for understanding the relationship between the reader and the secondary world contained within a speculative text. Estrangement is an essential element in the communication of social critique through comparison and narrative conflict between conventional and unconventional elements. Kathryn Hume's summary of this relationship, *Fantasy and Mimesis* (1984), notes that the text acts as the point of cultural contact between the two world views of the users (reader and writer). This relationship is critical for understanding speculative texts as tools for examining cultural values as well as expressing them (Hume, 23).

⁴ Updated in 1986 to *Trillion Year Spree* with David Wingrove.



This is an important development in conceptualising estrangement, because it introduces knowledge of the primary world and the impact of a readers' cultural context into the process of reading SF. Speculative texts can act as way of communicating new ideas from the author to the reader about the operation of gender in the primary world through its transformation and representation in the secondary world of the text. And as Marleen Barr has noted, speculative texts are a particularly useful medium "if you want to show people how to achieve cognitive estrangement from patriarchy" (46).

The second of Suvin's key terms is 'cognition', referring to the intellectual engagement of the reader with the ideas contained in the text. This term is often paired with 'estrangement' or 'dissonance' to convey the sense of contrast and adjustment required by the reader as they integrate the differences between the secondary and primary worlds. Eric Rabkin has described these processes as narratives that "ask us to consider social forces with both intellectual discipline [cognition] and imaginative freedom [estrangement]." (Rabkin "Mapping SF" 22); while McHale has described this "rhetoric of contrastive banality" as "the characters' failure to be amazed by paranormal happenings [which] serves to heighten *our* [readers'] amazement." (McHale 76). Most critics of the speculative have engaged with Suvin's terms, including Farah Mendlesohn who captures the many aspects of this complex term best, when she remarks that

Cognitive estrangement is intrinsic to science fiction, but it is generated not simply by the presence of the dissonant, but by the cohesion of the dissonant world, and the relationship of the protagonists or point of view characters to that dissonance. (Mendlesohn 287-288)

In Suvin's case, he framed this understanding almost entirely as a positivist scientific process, where speculation is based on the scientific methods of observation, theorization and experiment. The unique appeal of SF to his academic interest was its ability to engage users' interest in science at the same time as their powers of speculation. However, he disparages Fantasy in this writing and doubts its ability to engage users at the same level because it has no apparent scientific element (Suvin "Poetics" 63, "Genealogical" 24-25; Parrinder 38-39). I question the underlying assumption of scientific superiority that seems to influence this perspective on speculative texts, mainly as it also seems to reflect the unacknowledged influence of a socially constructed and gendered valuation of scientific thinking.

The third of Suvin's terms, *novum*, has also been a topic of much debate. The *SFE* notes that

Such new textual worlds are set off from ours chiefly by means of a drastic disruption, an anomalous breach in accepted verities; in short, an intrusive novelty so strange, and at first inexplicable, that it deserves a category of its own: the *novum*. (*SFE*)

For many critics, the absence of a familiar 'object' to categorise as the *novum*, which adheres to existing cultural values and attaches prestige to the masculine and scientific, creates a breach between 'hard' and 'soft' SF. Le Guin's works shifted the focus of the SF novel from a "pseudo objective listing of marvels and wonders and horrors" (Le Guin *Language* 117) to a more "character centered" narrative "exploring subjectivity" (Landon, 134). But

In offering a view of SF not centered on some kind of *novum*, Le Guin both opened herself to criticism from SF traditionalists and opened the genre to new conceptions of its nature and purpose. (Landon 134)

It is by no means a coincidence that the most frequently cited evidence of Bujold's 'hard' science are the uterine replicators which appear frequently in the *Vorkosigan series*. While some critics disparage them as a recycled older idea or as the lone example of science in her books⁵, others use them to champion her entry into the canon of "real" and "hard SF" (Hartwell 20, *SFE*). In an earlier edition of the *SFE* it was rather pointedly noted that "the ideas content in her work is generally low" (*SFE* 2nd Ed), a reflection I think of the close relationship between the prestige accorded to hard SF and masculinity in society. The *SFE* has recently been amended by Peter Nicholls to highlight the scientific content of Bujold's works more positively (*SFE*). Bujold readily acknowledges her re-use of uterine replicators, one of the oldest SF tropes, saying in interview with Camille Bacon-Smith

The idea of the uterine replicator was used in *Brave New World*, which was written in 1930. But I looked at it and I said, "No, Huxley did it wrong. If we had this technology, that's not what would happen, this is what would happen." So it really is hard science fiction. ... [and] extrapolation ... (123)

Bacon-Smith compares the use of uterine replicating technology by both Cherryh and Bujold, noting that

Many readers ... continue to make the distinction that Cherryh questions, between fiction of the emotion and "nuts-and-bolts *science* fiction". To these readers, the factory system of Cherryh's reproductive technology is "hard science fiction", whereas the use of the same technology to assist a mother to bring her child to term [as Bujold does] is not. (123)

The unfamiliarity of feminine perspectives and technology not directly related to the traditional tropes of SF (such as war, planetary conquest, scientific exploration) can make Bujold's writing seem

⁵ "Purists have complained that, for a variety of reasons, including the insufficiency of their science and their lack of originality at the plot level, the books do not deserve their three best novel Hugos." (Bacon-Smith 122)

unsatisfactory. Brooks Landon observes that SF is “a doubly oppositional literature” that challenges both the “patriarchal mindset of the culture at large” and the “patriarchal assumptions and traditions of the genre” (Landon 121). These “assumptions and traditions” are now being questioned at all levels of use within the speculative genre and Bujold’s work is a distinct example of these changes at work. After Suvin, traditional literary studies continued to appear, but alongside more feminist, Marxist and other thematic, symbolic and interpretive criticism.

By the 1980s there was a long enough history of SF writing for the arrival of significant encyclopedias and overviews of the field. The most important of these was *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1979) edited by Nicholls, revised with Clute in 1993 and again in 2011 with David Langford and Graham Sleight. Hassler suggests that 1979 was a kind of breakwater for SF studies, where enough “academic complexity” had been achieved to establish SF as an independent field of study (Hassler 226). This complexity is clear in Delany’s essential volume of essays on reading science fiction, titled *The Jewel Hinged Jaw* (1979), which contains a number of ground-breaking studies of the different ways speculative readers engage with text. He notes that

To read an SF text, we have to indulge a much more fluid and speculative kind of game. With each sentence we have to ask what in the world of the tale would have to be different from our world for such a sentence to be uttered – and thus, as the sentences build up, we build up a world in specific dialogue, in a specific tension with our present concept of the real. (Delany, “Science Fiction and Literature”, 104).

This was an important move away from validating SF through its relationship with other literature to engaging positively with the differences that defined the genre, such as differences in the use of language and differences in the reader’s reception of a text. The similarities in speculative use of “cognitive dissonance” (McHale, 76) by both SF and fantasy modes will be an important element of this thesis’ discussion.

Carl Freedman's *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000) is one of most detailed and explicit applications of literary theory to science fictional texts; "The science-fictional world is not only one different in time or place from our own, but one whose chief interest is precisely the difference that such a difference makes." (Freedman, xvi). His relationship to Suvin and other traditional critics is made clear when he comments that

[SF] is also a world whose difference is concretized within a cognitive continuum with the actual – thus sharply distinguishing science fiction from the irrationalist estrangements of fantasy or Gothic literature. (Freedman xvii)

While allowing social critique to exist within speculative fictions, he limits this (as many other critics have done) to the 'cognitive' mode of SF. His is a particularly Marxist perspective, although he notes explicitly that engagement with economic and political class struggles does not necessarily mean engagement with gender issues. Freedman engages with feminist concerns of self-conscious empowerment but also positions himself within the history of science fiction criticism, relying on patriarchal hierarchies to support his interest and privileging certain texts (or kinds of texts) over others.

Feminist SF criticism

Unlike the time lag that occurred between the beginnings of SF storytelling and academic criticism of SF, feminist ideas appeared in both narrative and critical writing relatively simultaneously. The second wave of feminism instigated the inclusion of feminist studies in universities across the West and the development of new SF narratives encouraged new forms of criticism to emerge alongside critical reconsideration of significant texts in the speculative genre. Key feminist writers like Russ, Le Guin, and Sargent produced important critical essays alongside their fictional output for many years; Le Guin *Dancing*, "Gender Redux", *Language*; Russ "Image", "Heroine", *How to Suppress, Write like a Woman*, Sargent "Women in Science Fiction". Over the following decades, key collections of feminist SF accompanied by critical essays include Sargent's

Women of Wonder (1975) and its sequels; Green and Lefanu's *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind* (1985); Sturgis's *Memories and Visions* (1989) and its sequel; Frank, Stine and Ackerman's *New Eves* (1999); and Larbalestier's *Daughters of Earth* (2006).

Susan Wood, while less well known for her fiction, was part of the earliest resistance of stereotypical patterns that emerged in SF writing, and she began editing magazines and writing feminist essays as early as 1973. Mary Badami was another early critic, producing one of the earliest single authored volumes, *A Feminist Critique of Science Fiction* (1976). This was quickly followed by Le Guin's first collection of essays, edited by Wood, *The Language of the Night* (1979) and Marleen Barr's first multi-author collection of essays, *Future Females: A Critical Anthology* (1981) which "marks the first major critical enterprise devoted to the work of women sf writers." (Hollinger 252-253). Natalie Rosinsky is another early writer but one whose insightful criticism, *Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction* (1984), is much less familiar to many.

Barr continued to write in the field prolifically, including *Alien to Femininity* (1987) and *Feminist Fabulation* in (1992), however as Hollinger notes this last title was less convincing in its argument that feminist SF should be considered its own subgenre of mainstream literature rather than a type of SF (254). This seems a significant issue to me because it perpetuates traditional (patriarchal and hierarchical) systems of canon formation rather than challenging the values at their foundation. The underlying assumption of masculine superiority that appears in many conformative speculative texts reflects naturalised ideals of a socially constructed and gendered valuation of scientific thinking. Cranny-Francis contextualised the double impact of the naturalisation of these values on SF and Fantasy, when she observes that "The mass culture, against which modernism antagonistically defined itself, was accordingly characterised as feminine" (Cranny-Francis 4). She also connects this with Huyssen's observation of "the persistent gendering as feminine of that which is devalued" (53). Where science is gendered masculine and socially privileged and then attached to a particular group of texts (SF), the contrast and devaluation of other texts (such as Fantasy) becomes likewise gendered, particularly where oppositional binaries like these are used. This is also

noticeable in the different attitudes shown to literary and popular genre fictions, sometimes labelled 'high' and 'low' (Larbalestier *Battle* 169-172). While Suvin's contribution to academic study of SF is considerable, it seems that his unconscious bias regarding the two modes of speculation were positively received because they accorded with wider cultural values of gender and scientific prestige that already permeated the SF community.

Shortly after Barr, Donna Haraway, Sarah Lefanu and Robin Roberts present some of the most enduring and impactful studies of feminist SF; *The Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), *In the Chinks of the World Machine* (1988) by Lefanu, and Roberts' *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction* (1993). Haraway's essay was not intended as SF criticism, but the impact of her ideas on feminism in general and her use of overtly SFnal imagery to describe the challenges she made to second wave feminism were pivotal and pre-empted the third wave. Haraway critiqued the "antagonistic dualisms" that "have all been systematic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals... all [those] constituted as others." in Western discourse (Haraway 177). Lefanu and Roberts' discussions show the benefit of a mature body of feminist scholarship as the need to first justify a feminist approach is less dominant. Whereas previously feminist critique had tended to revise understanding of texts and contexts written by men, now there was a significant body of feminist and female authored SF being acknowledged and explored on its own merits. Lefanu's work showed how feminist criticism provided new avenues of discussion through a detailed application of these methods to some of the texts now considered key in the feminist SF canon; namely Tiptree, Le Guin, Charnas, and Russ.

Feminism questions a given order in political terms, while science fiction questions it in imaginative terms...If science fiction demands our acceptance of a relativistic universe, then feminism demands, no less, our acceptance of a relativistic social order. Nothing, in these terms, is natural, least of all the cultural notions of 'woman' and 'man' (Lefanu 100)

Roberts, on the other hand, explored the relationship between the world of science and its expression through SF writing. Neither critic is any less radical in their examination of women's place in SF and the need for equality, but both seemed to avoid the criticism that was suffered by earlier feminist critics like Russ and Barr.

The increasing use of these kinds of post-modern approaches in mainstream literature are transferred to feminist and SF criticism during the 1990s and mirror the development of third wave feminism and intersectional approaches. Jenny Wolmark, Jane Donawerth, and Cranny-Francis are added to the list of significant feminist critics in this decade. As Wolmark suggests, there are many "shared theoretical moments" (20) between feminism, post-modernism, and race studies, which are now increasingly using intersectional and multifaceted approaches as the foundation of their analysis. Wolmark and Donawerth produce three key texts in this decade: *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (1994), *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference* (1994) with Carol Kolmerten, and *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* (1997). Cranny-Francis' work was a more traditional study of generic fiction as "a site for the allegorical description of social injustices displaced in time and/or place from the reader's own society, but still clearly recognizable as a critique of that society." (Cranny-Francis 9). *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (1990) not only examined the feminist potential of SF, utopian and Fantasy, but also detective and romance fictions as well. This work is one of the first to clearly articulate genre fiction as a "significant contribution to feminist political practice" (Cranny Francis 205) and to argue against the "dominance of patriarchal discourse by challenging its control of ... generic writing" (Cranny-Francis 17).

Since then, the field of feminist SF studies has expanded and diversified greatly. Academics like Helen Merrick (2000, 2009) and Bacon-Smith (2000) pursued the contribution of women as writers and fans of SF, while Yaszek's *Galactic Suburbia: recovering women's science fiction* (2008) examined the mid-century SF written by women and its often domestic themes. Justine Larbalestier produces a detailed examination of single sex worlds and gender relations in SF (*Battle* 2002), as well

as an anthology of women's SF (*Daughters* 2006). *Battle of the Sexes* also engages with the role of women in SF communities, suggesting that many of the mid-century pulp stories were in dialogue with each other as writers (and fans in letters columns and conventions) engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of appropriate gender behaviour (43-51). There was also an increasing engagement by male critics with feminist thinking in the early 2000s. Attebery's excellent (and essential) text *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* (2002) includes comments that are typical of the broader shift in critical interest towards gender issues, noting his purpose to "demonstrate sf's ability to investigate the key role of gender in constructing models of self, society, and universe" (*Decoding* 61). Eric Davin is another man who contributed greatly to the study of women writing SF before 1960 in *Partners in Wonder* (2006), excavating the names and writing histories of many previously forgotten authors from the pulp era.

Fantasy Criticism

Part of the complexity in any history of Fantasy is due to contention over definitional issues and whether certain sub-strands of Fantasy are independent or part of the greater whole, and about the degree of influence they have had on the whole. George MacDonald is one of the earliest to define Fantasy as taking place in a secondary world, suggesting that "The natural world has its laws, [which] themselves may suggest laws of other kinds, and man may, if he pleases, invent a little world of his own, with its own laws." (McDonald 65). An idea reiterated by Tolkien in 1947 in his seminal essay "On Fairy Tales" (Tolkien 15). In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997), it is described as "a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible *in its terms*" (Clute FE). The line between what writers from older times understood to be possible and what modern writers and audiences know to be possible has shifted dramatically, so that the "division between realism and the fantastical" before the 1600s is very difficult to be sure about, and even into the late nineteenth century there is room to doubt the intention of the

author regarding this line between mimesis and imagination. For feminist scholars, this ability to reproduce worlds that do not (and cannot) exist in the primary world is an important thought experiment to pursue.

Tolkien's "On Fairy Tales" sets out some of the fundamental principles of his writing, particularly his thoughts on world building and the purpose of fantastical settings. C. S. Lewis was, famously, one of his companions but collections of his essays from the 1950s and 1960s weren't collected until 1982 *On Stories and Other Essays in Literature* and then 1984's *Of This and Other Worlds*. A number of individual essays appear in SF magazines around this time that refer to Fantasy writing but the first significant, academic volume is Robert Scholes' *Fabulators* (1967), followed by *Structural Fabulation* (1975), which was one of the first texts to argue for the unification of SF and Fantasy under the name 'fabulation'. Mark Hillegas' collection of essays, *Shadows of Imagination* (1979) collated some early and significant responses to the works of Lewis, Tolkien and Charles Williams. As in SF criticism, the 1970s proved to be a fertile period where the critical analysis of Fantasy writing was established in earnest. Le Guin's essay "In Defense of Fantasy" appeared in 1973 and was followed by her first collection in 1979, *The Language of the Night*, and was one of many examinations of her writing and the genre written during her lifetime. Tzvetan Todorov was an early voice investigating the structural and definitional features of Fantasy writing, adding the key concept of 'hesitation' to the lexicon of SF critics. Although his definition was rather limiting and excluded both the marvellous and the uncanny from the core of fantastic texts, later scholars have greatly benefited from these early attempts to map the genre. Colin Manlove's *Modern Fantasy* (1975) was another early descriptive volume which attempted to define the genre (somewhat narrowly; Hume 286) and provide commentary on key Fantasy authors. Manlove would continue to produce key texts in the following decades *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature* (1983) and *The Fantasy Literature of England* (1999). Eric Rabkin also began writing in this decade, *The Fantastic in Literature* (1976).

The 1980's saw many of the key texts of Fantasy criticism, and many of the key critics, appear for the first time. Attebery's 1980 work *Fantasy Traditions* provides a strong foundation for analysing

Fantasy and he has continued to produce a major work in every decade since (*Strategies* 1994, *Decoding* 2002, *Stories* 2014). Christine Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of the Unreal* (1981) was published in the same year as Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, while Hume's *Fantasy and Mimesis* was published in 1984 alongside Ann Swinfen's *In Defense of Fantasy*. It is interesting to note that both of these texts attempt to define Fantasy through its relationship with the primary (or 'real') world but come to different conclusions about those relationships. Basney argues that where Hume is using reader-reception theories of meaning making she positions the experience of the reader as Fantasy "or" Mimesis, Swinfen's discussion is more traditional where "Fantasy does the same thing realism does, with the proviso that it creates other worlds to make its point" (Basney 850). This difficulty in defining Fantasy and pinpointing the interaction of text and reader continues to challenge academics and the unresolved nature of this question is one of the many reasons there is a dialogic unease at the heart of the Fantasy reading experience.

Rosemary Jackson's seminal work *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) contends that "The fantastic exists as the inside, or underside, of realism" and therefore gives "utterance to precisely those elements which are known only through their absence within a dominant 'realistic' order" (25). In other words, the known primary world of the reader (the real) exists in dialectical tension with the "existential anxiety and unease" (Jackson 26) produced by the fantastic secondary world, and the reader's experience of success in this uneasy balance between the two is both the purpose and the reward of reading such literature (Jackson 27; Todorov 27). In its original manifestation, Tolkien's term "eucatastrophe" (Tolkien 15) meant "the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears" (Carpenter and Tolkien 100). Attebery notes that fantasists often seem to "start with the idea of such a resolution and then to qualify it, finding every hidden cost in the victory" (*Strategies* 15), sharing this conception of resolution in Fantasy as inclusive of "ambivalence and ambiguity" (Sedlmayr and Waller 5). Manlove calls the reader response to this disjunction between the primary and secondary worlds, perhaps more broadly, a sense of "wonder" (Manlove 1; Attebery "Fantasy as Mode" 308). Whilst understanding of Tolkien's

eucatastrophe has most often focused on the weight of the 'happy ending' in the term, it also carries a culturally encoded understanding of success that includes hierarchical and patriarchal values. For myself and many others (Le Guin, Armit, Cranny-Francis, Lefanu), there is a direct correlation between the separation of Fantasy from reality, its ability to make visible the invisible (Jackson 25; Lefanu 23), and feminism's need to redefine and reorder the real social world. Lefanu notes that fantasy releases writers (especially women) "from the constraints of realism":

The social and sexual hierarchies of the contemporary world can be examined through the process of 'estrangement', thus challenging normative ideas of gender roles (Lefanu 22)

When the primary or real world is restrictive and prejudiced, the un-real (or fantastic) world is a source of solace and invention. Solutions to oppressive and problematic gender roles and expectations may be predicated on entirely different (non-patriarchal) social values in the imaginary world that would be quashed and ridiculed in the real one. As Cranny-Francis suggests, "Fantasists are bound by no such demand for rationalization; their secondary worlds simply are" (78). In SF the question of 'what if' exists in the future, a hopeful imaginative space, for even if the setting is dystopic, the speculative narrative arc lends itself to resolution or repair on some level. But in a Fantastic world, the 'what if' usually exists in a closed loop of the past which is already 'complete' in a sense. The narrative can diverge to explain why things are no longer the way they were (as *The Lord of the Rings* does when Frodo and the rings leave Middle Earth) or must exist in a parallel universe if the non-patriarchal values persist and is, therefore, clearly not the primary world of the reader (as in Tepper's *Gate to Women's Country* and Charnas' *Holdfast Chronicles*). An apocalyptic event can be used therefore to break with the limited reality of the primary world to present radical alternatives as possibilities. In her essay "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" Le Guin suggests that Fantasy can be used to discover the nature of the contemporary real, in the process of defining and creating an imagined secondary world reality (Le Guin 44); while Cranny-Francis suggests that "Fantasy reveals the existence and sometimes the nature, of oppositional ideologies and the subject positions they construct." (76) In this thesis I suggest that (similar to SF) there is a fundamentally

comparative function operating in Fantasy, where the symbiotic relationship of the real and the fantastic exist in parallel, balanced between “what is and what is not (yet, or in this world)” (Lefanu 22). It is within the interstitial spaces of disjoint and overlap between the real and the fantastic that the reader’s critical capacity to examine the gendered binaries and expectations of their lived experience is enabled. Ray Bradbury once suggested, “Science-fiction balances you on the cliff. Fantasy shoves you off.” (xi). I take this to mean that although SF asks readers to consider alternate possibilities exist (and are even likely), readers of Fantasy must accept the contrast and find joy in its improbability.

Readers who seek relief from the “tyranny of the real” (Cranny-Francis 76) through estrangement create their own ‘shell’ within which to examine these issues. Cranny-Francis notes that in realist fiction, the “remarkable woman” is presented as “some kind of aberration, rather than as the potential (fulfilled) of most women” (83). In a patriarchal society, she suggests, women are “actively prevented from becoming exceptional, accomplished or heroic” under threat of being labelled “dangerous” or “clearly a threat” to the social order (Cranny-Francis 83). In narrative, particularly conformative genre literature:

This situation is most commonly represented fictionally by the emotional fulfilment of the heroine who accepts a subordinate or somehow circumscribed role and the downfall, usually emotionally and then financially and/or physically and/or intellectually of the female character who is presented in an oppositional stance. Good girls get their man; bad girls are thrown out into the cold. (Cranny-Francis 84)

But Fantasy also has the potential to allow alternatives to these dominant patriarchal paradigms to be brought to life, at least in the reader’s mind. By examining the work of an author who has created critically acclaimed and popular series in both modes, I hope to show that Bujold achieves this realisation of alternatives and that feminist Fantasy exists as a category of social critique, utilising the dialogic unease that sits at the heart of Fantasy writing.

Attebery's *Strategies of Fantasy* (1994) and Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) are the two most important texts in the description and framing of Fantasy writing. *Strategies* carefully articulates the differences between the writer's strategies for creating Fantasy and the reader's strategies for interpreting these narratives. It is here that Attebery introduces the term "fuzzy set" to describe the overlap between various styles and modes of speculation, noting that although core texts are easy to identify, it is the outlying texts which challenge and expand the genre's potential. Although he suggests that Fantasy is less useful for presenting "wholesale transformations of society" because it "usually focuses on the development of the exceptional individual rather than the reformation of culture" he does allow that it "can call certain assumptions into question" (*Strategies* 103). His later work in *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* (2002) is more categorical about the potential for speculation to reframe social conventions but the awareness that Fantasy is built on older models of narrative and carries naturalised cultural elements is important. Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics* (2008) is a more deliberately structural approach to Fantasy, attempting to map various narrative arcs as described in Chapter 1. Not only is this a valuable tool for comparative analysis of texts within the genre, but also contributes to critical understanding of reading strategies by refining and categorising our understanding of narrative purpose and features in Fantasy texts.

Modern criticism of Fantasy has continued to expand and diversify with several important strands, although many are less relevant to a study of Bujold. The field of children's literature frequently engages with fantastic themes and styles, and this field of criticism has been spearheaded by Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), Jack Zipes *Breaking the Magic Spell* (1986) *Don't Bet on the Prince* (1986), *Art of Subversion* (2011), Marina Warner *From the Beast to the Blonde* (94), and, most recently, Maria Nikolajeva in *Fantasy and Feminism* (1995) and "Fairy Tale and Fantasy" (2003), as well as Mendlesohn's *Intergalactic Playground* (2009). Likewise, utopian studies, as well as genre studies, where discussions of narrowing the divide between SF and Fantasy and other modes of speculation are conducted by George Slusser in *Genre at the Crossroads* (2003) and Gary K. Wolfe in *Evaporating Genres* (2011). A number of significant reference works also

appeared in the early 2000s, such as Gary Westfahl's *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2005), *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2009) edited by Robin Reid, *The A-Z of Fantasy* (2009) by Brian Stableford, and the electronic third edition of the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (2011), all of which reflected the development of intersectional and critical approaches in Fantasy scholarship. Edward James and Mendlesohn's *Cambridge Companions* are also essential references with the Science Fiction volume published in 2003 and the Fantasy in 2011, and their *Short History of Fantasy* in 2009.

Reformulation Strategies

In this thesis I will be utilising the terms Focus, Reversal, Hybridity and Complication as organisational categories to frame my discussion of Bujold's work, arguing that these are the main interventions she employs to challenge conventional depictions of women in both SF and Fantasy. Bujold is by no means the only author (of any gender) to utilise these strategies and I shall discuss these further in Chapter 2, but this is a useful framework with which to examine the wide range of alternative depictions and unconventional behaviours Bujold presents in her works. The term Focus is used to indicate the higher degree of interest in women's lives, women's experiences, and their understanding of the worlds they move through than has been common in conformative speculation. Issues like pregnancy, marriage, sex, domestic duties, and childrearing are not frequently examined in detail in speculative fictions (least of all from a female perspective) but Bujold goes beyond simply mentioning them to making them integral to both plot and character development. Further discussion of other female speculative writers who prioritise such issues will be undertaken in Chapter Two. Reversal is another strategy employed by speculative writers where traditional boundaries between gendered behaviour are crossed, most usually shown as women occupying narrative spaces and engaging in actions usually reserved for male characters. Such characters have been described by Reid as "sheroes" to differentiate them from the traditional male hero who is "noble or elite ... a notable warrior ... isolated ... and although he may rescue the 'heroine', his narrative rarely focuses on his marriage or family life" (179). While such a Reversal was

an important development in the depiction of women as equally capable to men, and many women have written powerful characters in this way, overall, there is an aspect of this strategy which entrenches the devaluation of traits considered feminine by only validating a small number of female characters who can meet the higher, masculine standard of heroism and behaviour.

One of the most frequent strategies employed by Bujold to create more complex and nuanced female characters is Hybridity, where not only are female characters depicted as meeting the benchmarks of heroic behaviour and enjoying masculine freedoms (such as the freedom of movement and speech), but their femininity is simultaneously emphasised. Rather than adhering to simplistic, either-or expectations of gender as can occur with Reversal, Hybridity asserts the potential for humans to present a more varied range of gendered behaviours from both sides of the spectrum. Some second wave writers (Charnas, Gearhart, Sargent, Slonczewski, Tepper) explore the potential for female characters to display the full range of human behaviours by setting their narratives in separatist communities. Bujold uses Hybridity to depict complex women in societies peopled by men and women. She often employs the same strategies when creating masculine characters, presenting them with Othered traits that challenge traditional, hegemonic understandings of masculinity (for example, Bothari's mental health issues, Koudelka and Miles' physical disabilities and Aral's bisexuality, which are all deviations from the conventional heroic masculinity presented in speculation). Unfortunately, a detailed discussion of this interesting line of inquiry is outside the scope of this thesis, but I intend to pursue this further in other publications.

The final category is labelled Complication to encompass the women from Bujold's narratives that resist easy categorisation. If Focus can be summarised as a focus on women's priorities and experiences Reversal as the exchange of feminine qualities for masculine ones (or vice versa), and Hybridity as a more fluid interchange between the two traditional categories of gender, Complications encompass female characters which do not fit into any of the previous strategies entirely, and it is often in these examples that the most insightful and radical alterations to conventional speculative tropes are presented by Bujold. One of the reasons for this interest is that

such women often start in a conformative role but develop over the course of the narrative, combining these conformative behaviours and roles with alternatives to conventional norms.

The four reformulation strategies outlined above allow Bujold to interrogate the conventional gender roles that have historically dominated in speculative fiction, while retaining some of the key features of the modes in which she is writing. Attebery has noted that “As the genre [SF] moved into the Campbell era and beyond, it matured not by jettisoning early SF’s characteristic plot devices but by complicating and examining them” (*Decoding* 61). In Bujold’s work, juxtaposition of the foreign perspective of the outsider protagonist with the established political and cultural structures of the various societies encountered encourages such examination. By constructing divergent viewpoints, as well as offering multiple perspectives from a broad range of female characters, who are more fully realised than prevailing stereotypes, Bujold is able to dramatically renovate both Space Opera and Fantasy.

The societies presented in Bujold’s Fantasy novels, *The Curse of Chalion*, *Paladin of Souls* and *The Hallowed Hunt*, are conservative in nature, situated in a quasi-historical context that resembles medieval Spain and North Africa, or the early Germanic nations in the case of *The Hallowed Hunt*; just as *Barrayar*, despite its techno-futuristic setting, takes cues from Russian history and other imperial patriarchies. This combination of historical and fantastic elements has become a frequent feature of Fantasy; Tolkien famously engaged in this kind of detailed linguistic and cultural appropriation of British and Germanic cultural traditions in *The Lord of The Rings* (1954). Superficially, the characters in Bujold’s Fantasy works would seem more constrained by traditional gender norms than those on *Barrayar*, as the Chalioneses operate within pseudo-medieval cultures. As I will show later, reformulation of gender roles is seemingly more overt in the futuristic setting of *Barrayar*, where increased social, political and economic powers provide female characters with greater scope to act. Despite the futuristic setting, however, imperial and patriarchal hierarchies create equally gendered and socially normative constraints for female characters. The arrival on *Barrayar* of a radicalising force with alternate moral and political views (in the person of Cordelia

Naismith) is what instigates reconsideration of social mores in Bujold's SF. Through Cordelia's living example of unconventional femininity and the depiction of generational change across the thirty-year span of the *Vorkosigan Series*, Bujold examines the ways such social change might be enacted. The core group of Fantasy protagonists under discussion in this thesis is smaller in number, but they present similar, significant challenges to the roles and identities constructed for them, as well as challenging traditional representations of women in speculative fiction as a whole. Agency to promote change in the Fantasy world is made possible through direct intervention of the gods and the granting of supernatural gifts. The female characters depicted also utilise their domestic and spiritual authority to intervene in the narrative, complicating the relationship of women to political authority. By identifying with characters who resist social norms (as they are encouraged to do by Bujold's sympathetic rendering), readers are able to critique the gender norms of the imagined worlds and, perhaps more importantly, are able to reflect on contemporary Western ones, as well as to imagine how a world with less restrictive gender ideals might operate.

Though Suvin was not thinking of Fantasy writing but SF, he describes exactly this process when he positions social critique as an important feature of speculative writing:

[A]n alternative locus (in space, time, etc) that shares the material and causal verisimilitude of the writer's world is used to articulate different possible solutions of societal problems, those problems being of sufficient importance to require an alteration in the overall history of the narrated world... (qtd in Gunn "Toward" 188)

This reader position has been identified as "double estrangement" by Westfahl (237) and is also a key component of Mendlesohn's discussion of immersive fantasy (*Rhetorics* 59). It is this dual position of understanding the cognitive dissonance between the experiential primary world of the reader and the imagined secondary world of the text, which enables the kind of social criticism in speculative writing that I will be discussing in this thesis. To position women as both powerful and positive is unusual in genres so often associated with passive, virtuous princesses or evil, highly

sexualised witches and queens (Russ "To Write" 183). Even Bujold's adversarial female characters are represented with complexity, with Bujold exploring the reasons for their behaviour. Bujold's humanism validates each person's right to make choices – whether good or bad – and to accept the consequences of their actions, leading to the construction of more challenging and complex female characters. In these ways, I show that Bujold problematizes both gender and genre, so that her work overcomes the limitations of previously dominant representations of women in speculative fiction.

Thesis Structure

Examining similarities and differences in the ways these responses and relationships with gender are enacted in SF and Fantasy encompasses a broader discussion of the ways in which speculative fiction of both kinds can provide a forum for social critique. In this chapter, I have established the key terms and scope of this thesis and described the reformulation strategies discussed in this thesis to organise the renegotiation and reconstruction of gender roles Bujold undertakes: Focus, Reversal, Hybridity and Complexity. The second chapter examines female authored SF and Fantasy and its development, particularly Bujold's role in the continuum of feminist SF and the fundamental challenges she and other female writers of speculative fiction pose to patriarchal assumptions about both males and females.

Following this overview, Bujold's approach to these issues will be examined in both her SF (divided into early and later periods of Barrayaran history in Chapters Three and Four) and then her Fantasy works (in Chapter Five), noting the similarities in construction of individual characters, and continuing the examination of social context as well as secondary characters to broaden and complicate alternative depictions of gender roles. Speculative texts such as Bujold's where alternatives are posited and contested, move away from an understanding of gender as an innate, biological constant to the view that gender roles are enculturated by the context of an individual.

Chapters Three and Four explore the first two SF texts of the *Vorkosigan Series* - *Shards of Honor* and *Barrayar* - which detail Cordelia's arrival on Barrayar and her relationships with (and

impact on) particular Barrayaran men and women. Chapter Three examines the Focus on feminine perspectives and women's life patterns evident in Bujold's early SF texts, including marriage, desire, domestic duties, reproduction, and women's engagement in war. Bujold's Reversal of gender roles is also examined, mainly through the character of Ludmilla Droushnakovi, Barrayar's first active female soldier who acts as Cordelia's personal bodyguard. The intrusion of feminine concerns into masculine spaces and models of behaviour is both the sign and method of Bujold's extensive reformulation but, as mentioned earlier, it is a remarkable act of writing skill that she is able to do so without "pushing the envelope" of genre identification into unrecognisable shapes (qtd in Bacon-Smith 122). This is one of the purposes of *Reversal*, to challenge readers' assumptions about gender roles through the substitution of a feminine body. However, unlike most reversed representations, Bujold develops these patterns into Hybrid ones by introducing aspects of both genders in her. This Hybridity is the focus of Chapter Four, in particular the development of the main characters, Cordelia Naismith, who both display elements of all these traditional tropes of gender. This chapter concludes with further discussion of other important secondary characters, such as Lady Alys Vorpatril and Princess Kareen Vorbarra, whose roles shift and expand during the progress of the novels, their Complexity challenging the simplicity of a neat system of tropes.

Chapter Five continues the discussion of Bujold's SF novels, picking up the story thirty years later and examining the ongoing influence of Cordelia's liberated Betan ideals on Barrayaran society, mainly through the story of her son Miles' wife, Ekaterin Vorsoisson (later Vorkosigan). The SF novels, *Komarr* and *A Civil Campaign*, are the key texts in this chapter and the same structures of Focus (through discussion of Ekaterin's experience of domestic abuse), Reversal (through Lady Donna Vorrutyer's sex-change) and Hybridity of gender roles and behaviours are considered in detail. The Complexity of these female characters is much greater than in the earlier novels, which is perhaps a sign of Bujold's increasing skill and confidence with using and resisting tropes simultaneously. Lady Alys Vorpatril is reconsidered in light of significant developments in her

character during the intervening thirty years, a luxury of revisitation afforded by Bujold's serialised narratives.

The final two chapters shift focus to Bujold's Fantasy writing, in particular the three selected novels of the *World of the Five Gods Series: The Curse of Chalion, Paladin of Souls* and *The Hallowed Hunt*. Chapter Six traces Ista's journey from madness to sainthood and her subjective experiences within the highly patriarchal context of a quasi-medieval society. The same structures of Focus and Reversal are utilised, especially Bujold's Focus on marriage and domesticity from a feminine perspective, as well as the ways in which she Reverses the tropes of marriage proposal and the Sleeping Beauty. Chapter Seven engages with the more Complex depictions of Princess Fara, the villainesses Joen and Catti, and the redoubtable Learned Hallana. Fara because she is an unusual Princess who asserts her agency at a crucial moment; Joen and Catti because they represent two aspects of the Bad Witch (the dangerous Maternal and uncontrollable Princess); and Hallana because she resists the celibacy required of a Good Nun. Like many of Bujold's Hybridised and Complex protagonists in romantic relationships, Ijada is evenly matched and complemented by her partner, but as with Cordelia, her emotional and practical fulfilment of traditional gender tropes is unconventional.

As this thesis will show, Bujold's work makes a significant contribution to the reformulation of traditional depictions of women in speculative fiction by recombining s existing habits and features of speculative writing into new patterns that focus on female characters and validate their subjective experience of the worlds they move through. Using estrangement to reveal naturalised gender norms to readers and extrapolation to imagine alternative solutions for the problems faced by women in patriarchal societies, Bujold extends the potential of speculation to critique dominant socio-cultural ideals. Viewing these texts through a feminist lens allows me to draw attention to the subtle and complex changes Bujold makes to how gender is portrayed in SF and Fantasy narratives.

Chapter 2: A History of Speculative Fiction by Women

In the wings, rarely centre stage, women have acted essentially as foils to their male counterparts, as enemies, appendages, victims or obscure objects of desire, perennially as the Other. You don't need green skin, a pointed head and two antennae to be treated as deviant by the white middle class male population in general, and the science fiction establishment in particular. You need merely to be, for example, homosexual, non-white, old, working-class or female. (Green and Lefanu 2)

There are three overlapping areas of interest when discussing women in speculative fiction: female characters, female writers, and feminist criticism. The depiction of female characters has varied widely and is not always connected with feminist ideals or aspirations, regardless of the gender of the author. As Patrick Murphy comments:

An author need not be a feminist to write a work that points out the oppression of women and the gender biases of the dominant cultural ideology that pervades the society from within which the fiction is written. (82)

Similarly, Crosby argues that a writer can be feminist without labelling themselves as such:

I have chosen to consider [writers] as a feminist if their writing challenges patriarchal gender constructs. While overly broad, I find this to be an acceptable critical practice that avoids a proscriptive feminism that is exclusive rather than inclusive. (Crosby 83-84)

In this chapter I will provide an historically organised overview of women's writing in both SF and Fantasy modes of speculation, there will necessarily be some contrast between women whose writing is something of a feminist act without necessarily containing overtly feminist ideas and those who are more avowedly feminist authors. My purpose here is to provide some sense of context for

Bujold's writing, both as a female author and as a writer who is engaging with and challenging gender roles. I seek to reiterate that there is a long tradition of women writing all sorts of speculative fiction and that women's writing does not need to be radically feminist in order to expand readers' understanding of gender. As Bujold writes in two modes of speculation I have presented these overviews in separate timelines.

The *SFE* describes the "central impulses of Genre SF" as "to solve problems, to penetrate barriers, to gain control" (*SFE*) which is a very masculine understanding of SF's "impulses" that largely excludes traditional feminine perspectives, but it is not an uncommon approach. Attebery notes this instinct to define, claim and own planets as a metaphor for women (Attebery *Decoding* 51). The measurement of women's writing against male writing often reflects similarly flawed logic, by validating and defining SF in ways that consciously or unconsciously reflect naturalised patriarchal social expectations, women's writing is easily dismissed as not meeting those expectations. Control, penetration and the pursuit of knowledge are all ways of experiencing SF that are coloured by social expectations of masculinity and stereotypes about which qualities are masculine (Attebery *Decoding* 46-49). The inverse is also true, however, many of these qualities are socially valuable precisely *because of* their association with masculinity, a barrier which many women writers have struggled to overcome so that the prevailing conception of SF is that there is still a "crusty male resentment towards feminine invasion of yet another masculine sanctum sanctorum" (Sam Merwin qtd in Larbalestier *Battle* 165-167)

However, challenges to socially expected gender roles can be identified in the earliest of women's speculative writings (such as Margaret Cavendish's 1666 work *The Blazing World*, or Christine de Pizan's 1405 polemic *The Book of the City of Ladies*) and more women were writing SF before the 1960s than is often assumed. Brian Aldiss's discussion of the history of SF, for instance, suggests that prior to the 1970s SF was a "kind of juvenile men's club", implying that it was only in this decade that female SF writers were "beginning to speak out" (Aldiss 465). Eric Lief Davin suggests that between 1926 and 1960, at least 203 female writers contributed over 1000 stories to a

range of science fiction magazines, making them around 10-15% of contributors (3-5). Davin's qualitative study not only records and examines women's writing between 1920 and 1960, but also challenges the common notion that women wrote under gender neutral names or initials in order to disguise their gender (131). (He does note that there are potential absences due to some writers' gender being unverifiable, some gaps in records, and some moments of general uncertainty due to the time distance; Davin, 20). Although explicitly feminist criticism of speculative texts became prominent in academia during the 1970s with the rise of second wave feminism, critics of all genders still did not always acknowledge the contribution of these earlier women. Instead, significant writers such as Le Guin, Butler, Russ, Charnas, Tiptree, and others from the 1960s and 1970s are now considered the core of the feminist SF canon.

Therefore, in this review of women's Science Fiction and Fantasy, I am emphasizing the writing of women that is either deliberately feminist or at least consciously questioning and examining the role of women in the societies where they are depicted. Cranny-Francis describes this as a "feminist reading position" that is "a reading position in which the deconstruction of patriarchal discourse is a fundamental strategy" (79). Although there are some men writing similar fiction, particularly in more recent times, this chapter will focus on the history of women writing speculative fiction and on the feminist context that predates and surrounds Bujold's works, reserving discussion and analysis of female characterization in Bujold's work for later chapters examining key women who appear in the *Vorkosigan* and *Five Gods* series. It is important to contextualize Bujold as part of a continuum of women engaging with speculative fictions to provide an informed analysis of the extent to which Bujold's depiction of women builds upon and extends earlier trends in female-authored speculative fiction, before examining her depictions of female characters from a feminist standpoint.

A Brief History of Women Writing SF

Pre 1920s

While many follow Aldiss in identifying Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as the progenitor of modern SF (Aldiss 23), there are earlier texts that can also be proposed, such as Margaret Cavendish's *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy. To Which Is Added, The Description of a New World Called The Blazing World* (1666). Dale Spender suggests that not only is *Blazing World* an even earlier SF taproot text, but that it is also a strongly feminist text, imagining an alternative world where women rule and act independently (Spender 43). As the title suggests, the text is half science treatise, half fiction, and has been noted for challenging "seventeenth century concepts of identity and gender" (Pohl 2). Pringle would likely classify this work as a "planetary romance" for its interstellar aspects, while according to Mendlesohn's Fantasy taxonomy it could be categorized as a "portal-quest" tale, describing as it does two-way travel between an alternate version of the primary world of the reader and the secondary world of Cavendish's imagination (Pringle 38; Mendlesohn xvii).

But for feminist critics such as Donawerth, there are more female-specific areas of concern in Shelley's narrative that also permeate much of the science fiction writing that follows, especially that authored by women. "Finding a voice in a male world" is one of these concerns, along with the search for an identity, whether within that world or as outsider (alien) to that world (Donawerth xviii). The third concern that Donawerth identifies is the "making [of] a science that does not exclude women" (xviii), which she describes as challenging the underlying purpose of science as well as the manner in which it is conducted. Understanding who benefits from scientific developments and how they benefit is an important way of considering scientific knowledge and society's responses to that knowledge that has historically been used to disempower women and distance them from the masculine world of work and the mind. All three of these issues are connected and enduring in women's science fiction.

Another significant writer of early women's SF is Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose 1899 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" and 1915 utopian novel *Herland* are considered essential texts of early feminist SF writing (Reid 145-146; Tuttle 126-127). *Herland* is particularly interesting for its depiction

of a single sex utopia into which familiar masculine adventurers intrude. The clash of gender expectations and perspectives offers a critique of both the primary world of the reader and the secondary world of *Herland* (Westfahl 237). A number of narrative strategies and preoccupations that appear in these texts are also evident in works by later feminist SF writers. The motif of male adventurers arriving in female utopias is seen in Stone's "The Conquest of Gola" (1931), Russ' "When It Changed" (1972) and Tiptree's "Houston, Houston Do You Read?" (1976) and is also reflected in the utopian idealisation of separatist societies that appears in Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) and Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988). All of these texts show the understanding that reproduction and domestic duties in a patriarchal context are often significant hurdles to female independence, as shown in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and *Left Hand of Darkness* (1964). While *Frankenstein* is more widely known and acknowledged as Proto SF, both *The Blazing World* and *Herland* are included here as they are not only major works of early SF but also remarkable in their feminist questioning of dominant patriarchal systems and for their use of the estrangement available in speculative writing to question the terms and boundaries of that domination.

These early female-authored utopias enable exploration of alternative social organisations, whether through depiction of positive alternatives (often futuristic) or through contrast with the negative aspects of a patriarchal dystopia. This is pronounced enough to have earned its own title, "femtopia" (Relf 132), and to be the subject of a number of significant studies in 19th century women's writing by Carol Kessler, Jean Pfaelzer, Nan Bowman Albinski, and especially in Carol Kolmerten and Jane Donawerth's *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference* (1994). Jane Webb Loudon's *The Mummy! Or a Tale of the Twenty Second Century* (1827), like Shelley's *Frankenstein*, is a more dystopian tale, which proposes electricity as a means of revivification. Loudon presents a number of fascinating predictions (many of them correct) about future technology but, like Shelley, emphasises the emotional disconnection caused by technology, as well as concern for the future of humanity in the conclusion of her story. Later stories by Mary Griffith, such as *Three Hundred Years Hence* (1836) and Jane Sophia Appleton's "Vision of Bangor in

the Twentieth Century" (1848) and its sequel, were more positive in tone and present futuristic utopian societies with greater social parity for women (Davin 58). Mary Bradley's *Mizora* appears much later (1880-1881) in serialised form and contains more problematic aspects for modern readers. The utopia she presents is a single sex subterranean world which promotes strongly eugenic ideals of blonde racial purity. Men have been removed from the society by a series of civil wars and cloning replaces sex with the removal of reproduction rights being applied as a form of social control, mainly on women of colour, criminals and others deemed undesirable by the polity. Like the other women's utopias, there is a recurring trope of technology making lives easier and the relief of women's domestic duties improving their opportunities and social participation. This frequent idealisation during the nineteenth century suggests criticism of the primary world by women writers was not an isolated phenomenon, and it is a tradition that Bujold continues in her futuristic worlds where she presents a range of political, economic, social, and domestic alternatives to patriarchal patterns.

Somewhat unsurprisingly, post-World War I SF by women tends back towards the dark and dystopian. Gertrude Barrows Bennett (writing as Francis Stevens) was a prolific writer both before and after the Great War and her most famous work, *The Citadel of Fear* (1918), is a decidedly dystopian lost world tale that may have been influential on Lovecraft (Hoppenstand xxi; Reid 290). *The Heads of Cerberus* (1919) was her most science fictional work and is a dystopian tale which Anderson argues was "probably" the first use of a parallel world narrative (Reid 290), while her short story "Friend Island" (1918) is an overtly feminist tale of women who pilot futuristic airships that presents another utopia under threat from "rather boorish" males (Hoppenstand xxi). From the beginning of women's SF writing, then, a recognition of patriarchal restraints and desire to escape them are clear. These early writers' efforts to imagine a future where women are both powerful and independent set a precedent for later female SF writers including Bujold.

The 1920s to the 1960s

Women's experimentation with the power of SF to challenge and examine socially constructed ideals of gender continued into the pulp era, also known as the Gernsback era which begins around 1926. The pulps were magazines produced quickly and cheaply for mass consumption, which appeared during an era of widespread social changes, including the first wave of women's suffragist movements which reached their peak with the achievement of votes for women in the 1920s. Just sixteen months after Gernsback founded *Amazing Stories*, the first story by a woman was published in June of 1927, penned by Clare Winger Harris (Davin 385). Davin's survey of women's writing during the pulp fiction era (between 1926-1960) challenges the "amnesia" of many science fiction critics and readers about women's participation in the field during this time (385). He is not the only critic to have explored this apparent vacuum (Attebery, Merrick, Lacey, Larbalestier, Sargent, Gubar, Roberts, Donawerth, Kolmerten) but his approach is grounded in the quantification of women's publishing during this era rather than a thematic approach, making his work useful for a chronological contextualising of Bujold's writing.

At least six women were writing frequently for the pulps after 1927 (see below), and women's participation increased significantly over subsequent decades: 25 women were published in the 1930s, 47 in the 1940s, and 154 during the 1950s (Davin 5). Other women were being published in Europe and Britain during this time, such as Thea von Harbou who wrote the novel *Metropolis* (1926) and the script for the film of the same name, directed by her husband Fritz Lang in 1927. However, the much smaller number of speculative magazines and publishing outlets in the genre outside America, and the same record keeping issues that hinder discussion of early SF within America, make them harder to identify or quantify in the same manner. Part of the amnesia about women writers of SF arose from the transitory nature of pulp magazine production and consumption, but the role of anthology editors in the 1950s who collected and reprinted stories from earlier decades was also critical as they largely elided women's early contributions "because of the nature of a creative system designed by a sexist society to connect men to the wider world while simultaneously disconnecting women to that same world" (Davin 49). These anthologies will be

examined in more detail below. Elaine Showalter observes in her sweeping history of American women's writing that "In the 1920s, American women writers were demoted and denigrated by a nation taking pride in its military victory... [and] in the years following the armistice, women writers were gradually but systematically eliminated from the canon of American literature as it was anthologized, studied, and taught." (Showalter 294; see also Lutes 422-445)

The six women who were frequently published during the 1920s were Harris, Leslie Stone, L. Taylor Hansen, Lee Hawkins Garby, Minna Odell (as Minna Irving) and Mary Wright (as Lilith Lorraine) (Davin 317-324). Of these, the most enduring names are Leslie Stone and L. Taylor Hansen, who both continued to publish into the late 1940s. Hansen provided a number of featured cover stories but also diversified into writing science and history articles for *Amazing Stories* (Davin 319). Stone was the most notable writer to emerge from this period, her most famous and reprinted story is "The Conquest of Gola" (1931) which depicts men from Earth attempting to colonise and overthrow the matriarchal power structures on Gola (Venus) where gender roles are significantly reversed from the primary world (women are political and social leaders while men are kept as house slaves, for example). Stone also featured many social and political issues pertinent to the era in her stories, including discussion of eugenics, international war and politics, as well as the character of a "Great Dictator" in a number of stories. Weinbaum claims that Asimov was inspired to write by her 1934 tale "Rape of the Solar System" (Reid 292). Although producing a number of short fictions between 1927 and 1951, Stone also wrote two novels, mainly in the planetary romance and space opera styles popular at the time (*SFE*; Reid 285-287).

This trend of women writing speculative fictions for the popular magazines of the day increased significantly over the following decades. The 1930s saw the participation of women quadruple and a number of new, significant names appear, such as C. L. Moore and Amelia Reynolds Long. Long wrote mainly for *Weird Tales* but had shifted focus to writing detective fictions by the end of the thirties, while Moore began a significant speculative fiction career that continued until 1958 and the death of her husband and frequent writing partner Henry Kuttner (*SFE*; Davin 391,

396-397). Prior to her marriage, Moore had a prolific and highly respected individual career; her debut story "Shambleau" (1933) was published in *Weird Tales* and is still considered an essential text in science fiction studies (SFE; Davin 396-397; Reid 230). While maintaining the masculine point of view of her protagonist, Northwest Smith, Moore rewrote the Medusa myth in science fictional terms as the story of a seductive female alien (Moore). In 1934, Moore introduced a female protagonist to her output when she published the first of a series about Jirel of Jory, "the first series of sword-and-sorcery stories to feature a female protagonist" (Davin 396). These stories range from Science Fantasy to more straight SF, setting the scene for later writers, including Bujold, who have created a wide range of strong female protagonists. After her marriage to Kuttner in 1940, she continued to write prolifically with him under more than a dozen pseudonyms.

Despite the claims of Jean Frank, Janrae Stein and Forrest J Ackerman who suggest in *New Eyes: Science Fiction about the Extraordinary Women of Today and Tomorrow* (1999) that Helen Weinbaum was the "only" woman writing in the 1930s, there were at least 25 female SF writers publishing during this era, including Dorothy Quick, a prolific writer whose career flourished between 1934 and 1954 (SFE). Even Helen Weinbaum's SF, such as her debut "Tidal Moon" (1938), lacked much critical attention until recent decades; as the sister of prominent SF author Stanley G. Weinbaum she was more often name checked than her writing was examined (Davin 412; Larbalestier 165-167). Lilith Lorraine is one of the most overtly feminist writers of the thirties. Both of her early tales "The Brain of the Planet" (1929) and "Into the 28th Century" (1930) depicted feminist socialist utopias and were published by Gernsback, which supports the notion that he was committed to publishing stories that met his criteria for quality regardless of the author's gender. The absence of reprints of these early women's writing means that many of the titles are no longer readily called to mind by modern readers nor are they a frequent inclusion in academic arguments. As Davin suggests "the real hurdle early women SF writers faced was not alleged bigotry in the science fiction community, but the buried bias of sexism in society at large"(33).

Women's fiction often presented a wider range of social roles for women than SF written by men, including queens (Moore "Judgement Night", Stone "Gola", Vinge "Eyes of Amber"), scientists (MacLean "And Be Merry", "Contagion", Merrill "Stormy Weather") and pilots (McCaffrey "Ship Who Sang"), most emphasising the women's personal agency or usefulness. Whereas, in men's writing of the era women largely appeared as daughters, wives and mothers with the occasional Witch Queen as antagonist (Attebery 45-46). This is not to claim that radical departures from conventional gender roles are frequent in women's SF before 1960, however, it does become increasingly clear, the closer one looks, that "the genre never 'changed' to allow the entrance of women" (Davin 57) but that they had always been present, though overlooked by many.

The contributions of female SF editors has likewise largely been overlooked. Although some women had enjoyed brief careers as editors earlier, such as Miriam Bourne who was at *Amazing Stories* from 1928-1932, the 1940s saw the emergence of two significant figures with much more substantial and long standing careers: Dorothy McIlwraith, who began as Assistant Editor at *Weird Tales* in 1938 and would remain Editor until 1954, and Catherine Kay Tarrant who worked for *Astounding* and *Analog* from 1942 until 1972 (Davin 345-346). In the 1940s key figures like Hansen, Moore and Quick also continued their most productive period of writing, while other female authors began to be published such as Frances Deegan, Dorothy de Courcy, Mona Farnsworth, E(dna) Mayne Hull, Jane Rice, Margaret St Clair, Leigh Brackett, Katherine MacLean, and Judith Merrill. Brackett, MacLean and Merrill continued to have significant involvement and impact on the SF community in the following decades through editing, writing, reviewing, and conference attendance. In this era, however, many female writers wrote in collaboration with husbands; for others marriage forestalled further writing. For example, de Camp, de Courcy, Hull, MacLean, Merrill, and Moore, all wrote with their husbands. Hull noted:

The great problem [with writing SF] was my almost total lack of scientific knowledge. To overcome this handicap, my husband and I figured out a story pattern which would bypass the need to show a science explanation. (Hull qtd in Davin 387)

This comment reveals one of the fundamental issues for women writing SF - the cultural discouragement of women's education, particularly in the sciences, that leads to criticism of their SF writing for not meeting genre standards that are inherently gendered (Attebery *Decoding* 41; Russ *How to Suppress*).

Some women writers responded to such criticisms by avoiding scientific descriptions, while others introduced issues and experiences more familiar and pertinent to women. Zenna Henderson's 'Subcommittee' (1962) tells of a woman who prevents disaster during a first contact meeting by communicating with the other diplomats' wives over traditional women's skills like cooking and knitting (Mendlesohn 1994). Judith Merrill's debut story "That Only A Mother" (1948) is a domestically focused narrative that describes the relationship between a woman and her seriously disabled child. The context is futuristic but the emotional tone and dissonance between the wife and her husband is incredibly authentic. Both Henderson and Merrill's stories prioritise a female point of view and validate this perspective over the male one. This focus on a female point of view has the potential to subvert conventional attitudes to gender which might dismiss such perspectives, as in Bujold's work where her frequent use of female experiences and perspectives drives the narrative.

Other women being published in the 1940s and 1950s wrote SF featuring male protagonists in planetary romances and space opera; Leigh Brackett's "swashbuckling but literate Planetary Romances, usually set on ...Mars" (SFE) were particularly well received. The most famous of these are *The Sword of Rhiannon* (1953) and the Eric John Stark series of Mars stories (1951 – 1967), but these are merely highlights of a prolific and prestigious writing career that culminated in a posthumous Hugo award for the preliminary script for *Empire Strikes Back* in 1980. Davin quotes a fan letter from a female reader in 1951 praising her "adventure style" while another fan (Lin Carter, later a writer and critic himself) describes her as "a talented and imaginative authoress... [who] knows the secret of poignant emotion, rich description, convincing action, and above all, a tremendous sense of atmosphere and lavish, excellent use of the English Language." (Carter qtd in Davin 106). This quote reflects a common perception that women's writing has been valued, as least

in part, for its emotionality and insight rather than the “ineluctably masculine” (Silverberg xii) qualities such as those Silverberg used to describe Tiptree’s writing before her true gender was revealed. In contrast to female SF writers whose gender was known at the time they were writing, James Tiptree Jr. garnered widespread praise in the 1950s and 1960s for the supposedly masculine strengths of her writing (Silverberg xii), before her identity as Alice Sheldon was revealed in 1977 after the death of her mother (Reid 300-301). This decision to conceal her identity is usually attributed to career needs as she worked for a range of government agencies including the CIA and the Pentagon (Reid 299) or to perceptions of prejudice (Davin 154-155).

Katherine MacLean is another significant writer of SF whose career spans decades. Contemporary critics and audiences received her stories with praise and delight but as with many earlier women writers, current audiences have little direct experience of her writing. She did not write many stories that overtly challenged gender norms but focussed on scientific advances in genetics and, increasingly, telepathy and psionics. Her debut story “Defense Mechanism” (1949) pursued these themes through the spontaneous genetic evolution of a father and son’s empathic bond with each other and the world. One of her most significant challenges to gender in Sf was the depiction of women making significant discoveries, as in “And Be Merry” (1950) where a woman discovers a way to become immortal but then develops an exaggerated fear of accidental death. These ideas remain central to MacLean’s writing, in 1995 she published “The Kidnapping of Baroness 5” where a female scientist infiltrates a feudal type society in an attempt to remediate the genetic illness that causes the people there to regress with each succeeding generation. Similar to Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend* (1954), the responsible scientist is trying to cure the problem they have caused but MacLean offers a collaborative, clandestine solution rather than the confrontational and aggressive one presented in Matheson’s version of the story. MacLean’s more oblique recognition of women’s skill and ingenuity is perhaps best expressed in “The Snowball Effect” (1952) where the women of a small sewing charity group adopt a membership strategy reminiscent of multi-level marketing schemes and seem destined to take over the world as a result. Although the story is told

by two male characters who hardly interact with the women's group, like Moore and Tiptree's work, the novum of the story is very much grounded in a reassessment of women's capabilities, ambition and potential.

This is also the beginning of an era when critics (usually men) began commenting on women's writing, often in terms that would now be resisted as misogynistic. Frederik Pohl declared in 1976 that Maclean "came into science fiction on her own terms – as a person who happened to be female, *but asked no favours* and accepted no penalties because of that" (Pohl 49). This is remarkably similar to the comments about women's writing noted earlier, they may have been more familiar and present in SF communities but their writing is still described in relation to their gender. The *SFE* declares that;

it would be neither desirable nor possible to read her [MacLean's] stories as "women's" sf: in a field which was, in 1950, markedly male-chauvinist she competed on equal terms, not restricting herself to "feminine" themes or protagonists, and not generally using a male pseudonym. (*SFE*)

This comment is typical of discussions where speakers devalue 'feminine' qualities in writing by comparing them with more socially validated masculine ones (science, rationality and control). This description of MacLean's value is not based on her writing or independence of thought or imagery, but in her rejection of feminine qualities and her ability to successfully meet masculine standards as a shero does within the narrative. Women from this era seem to be increasingly noted in isolation and as exceptional examples of their kind rather than as valued members of a continuous community. Prior to the 1950s (and the ascendance to positions of influence by critics who disparaged women, such as Asimov, or the editors of the anthologies who excluded women's stories) there seems to have been a more accepting tone. It is in the 50s that women's writing both increases in volume and draws more negative attention (Davin 307-309). Speculation about the reasons for this is beyond the ability of this thesis to discuss in detail, but there does seem to be a

connection between rising social conservatism after World War II and attempts to confine the increased work and life freedoms women had experienced during the war. Just as there was after World War I, when the extreme loss of population during the war provided more opportunities for women to work outside the home (and, indeed, the loss of a large number of able bodied men required women to join the workforce in greater numbers) but also because they were less able to marry and be financially supported by a husband (Merrick 40-41). Major conflicts have always had long standing social consequences, and the increased representation of women in publishing (and other areas of employment) is one of the more visible of those effects, and one which has had far reaching impacts.

1960 and 1970s, the emergence of consciously feminist SF

Just as the numbers of women editors began to rise in the 1950s, so too did recognition of women writing SF, rising to a kind of critical mass in the 1960s alongside awareness of women's issues and other social changes (like the American civil rights and pride movements) during a period of widespread social change (Davidson 32). It is about this point that most critics start to talk of women writing SF and a number of notable careers of women writing SF are founded. While Greenberg (*Science Fiction of the Fifties* 9) and Gunn (*Road to Science Fiction* 108-109) locate the "sudden" (Davin 412) arrival of women writers in the 1950s, Platt suggests the 1960s (192), and Bainbridge delays their arrival until the 1980s (180). Feminist critics like Badami and Lefanu, and others like Aldiss, Asimov, McCarthy, Sturgis, and Ellison, locate this arrival in the 1970s. Davin notes wryly that "The date of 'When It Changed' seems to be a moving target" (Davin 250) and ends his consideration with the 1960s. This is largely because of Shawna McCarthy's blanket statement that there were "no women" in science fiction before then (McCarthy 9) but also because the transition away from poorly preserved pulp magazine stock to more regular publishing (and more consistent record keeping of women's achievements) means that there is a wider range of critical discussion available about material that appears after this date. However, feminist SF critic Mary Kenny Badami could still propose in 1976 "to illustrate three theses about the non-role of women in science fiction"

noted above (6). As with any chronological survey, there is some overlap, of course, and some of the women whose early careers in pulps during the 1950s were obscured became more readily accessible or more prominent during the 1960s (Emshwiller, May, McCaffrey, Norton, Russ, Tiptree, Zimmer Bradley for example).

Some women in the 1960s continued in the tradition of the pulp SF era, focusing on short stories where women were still often secondary characters or, as protagonists, experience limited successes. Typical of this type of story is Zenna Henderson's "Subcommittee" (1962) where the female protagonist is constrained by the conservative and patriarchal values around her but succeeds nevertheless (Mendlesohn "Zenna Henderson" 120). This was an important development, however, as the feminine qualities and skills of the character (and their opposition to the masculine qualities of the society and people around her) are directly responsible for her success. This is quite similar to other stories such as Tiptree's "The Women Men Don't See" (1973) where the disconnection between a male perspective and a female perspective is critically important to the plot. The difference is that Tiptree more often uses the male perspective and ironizes it, while Henderson shifts the reader's perspective to a strong female lead character. The *SFE* observes of Henderson that "her portrayal of women in unchallenged positions of authority was noted early" (*SFE*). Other writers had been expanding the portrayal of women into heroic protagonist roles but this appears more often in Fantasy texts, such as C. L. Moore's Jirel of Jory series (written from 1934–1939 and reprinted as a collection in 1969) and Joanna Russ's cross-mode Alyx stories (*Picnic on Paradise* 1968, collected with supporting short stories in *Alyx* 1976). Alyx is one of the earliest strong female characters whose "liberating effect ... has been pervasive, and the ease with which later writers now use active female protagonists in adventure roles, without having to argue the case, owes much to this example" (*SFE*). But Russ was not alone in experimenting with giving female leads more agency during the 1960s; Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) where the entire race is hermaphroditic and (although often identified as male) can bear children, and Mary from

Naomi Mitchison's *Memoirs of a Space Woman* (1962) were also significant contributions to this expansion.

Sarah Boyle in Pamela Zoline's extraordinary "Heat Death of the Universe" (1967) is considered "an Icon of New Wave sensibility" (SFE) by many and Zoline began a strong tradition of post-modern, nonlinear feminist SF (Wolmark 74). Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985) repeated the encyclopaedic, multi textual style of "Heat Death" to create a narrative through the use of collected documents, short fictional pieces and a wide range of female narrators, while Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (75) and Sheri Tepper's *The Margarets* (2007) both anticipate intersectional approaches more common after the third wave arrives, utilising several perspectives and narrators to create multi layered and complex narratives. Bujold does not usually pursue post-modern strategies like this, preferring more chronological narratives, however there is room to consider the multiple personalities of Penric and Desdemona as a flirtation with these narrative strategies.

Women were not only more prominent as characters in novels, as writers they were also building more prominent careers, and more long-standing ones. The 1960s saw the consolidation of some very significant names in both modes of speculation, such as Andre Norton (debut 1934), Julian May (debut 1951), Anne McCaffrey (debut 1953), and the inimitable Ursula Le Guin (debut 1959). The same pattern flows into the 1970s; where Tiptree appears for the first time in 1967 and Joanna Russ debuts in 1968, both are best known for works in the mid to late 70s. Many of the recurring themes that came to dominate feminist SF in the 1970s were already appearing in the 1960s; psychic abilities appear frequently (*Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Ship Who Sang*) and a rising concern with ecological and post holocaust narratives, as in St Clair's *Sign of the Labrys* (1963), *The Dolphins of Altair* (1967), and Anna Kavan's *Ice* (1967). Increasingly during the 1970s, the socially constructed expectation that women could not be successful leaders is being widely challenged and illustrated with varied and complex depictions of alternatives. Authors such as Jayge Carr, Sally Miller Gearhart, Vonda McIntyre, Kate Wilhelm and Tiptree in the "Last Flight of Doctor Ain" (1969) engaged strongly with the social consequences of environmental damage generally, as well as with

the specific gender implications of mass disaster. Ecological dystopias were frequently used in these and similar feminist SF of the era as a source of upheaval significant enough to explain the kind of large scale social changes required for entrenched gender roles to be overturned.

Rather than significantly altering the tropes and strategies used in speculative writing, these writers begin adapting them to new purposes as the second wave movement made speaking overtly and critically about patriarchy more widespread. Exploration of radically different types of social organisation emerge with matriarchies, separatist communities and genderless races appearing more frequently. The same themes of post-apocalyptic utopias and dystopias, of alien contact, and of examining gendered power structures appear in the stories of this generation, but now the outcomes are more frequently tilted in favour of the women or more overtly critical of the males in the story. Davin describes this decade as the origin of “self-consciously politicized feminist SF” (Davin 57). Instead of occasional stories, like “Shambleau” or “The Conquest of Gola”, a whole subgenre with many strands appears.

One of the most significant tropes to emerge in the fiction of this era is the sympathetic portrayal of matriarchal societies. Previously, matriarchal societies appeared (*Mizora*, *Herland*) but particularly in male-authored early pulp fictions were often something to be overcome or managed rather than praised; see for example, Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Coming Race* (1871), Walter Besant’s *The Revolt of Man* (1882), Poul Anderson’s *Virgin Planet* (1957) and John Norman’s *Tarnsmen of Gor* (1966) or any of the other Gor novels, and Norman Spinrad’s *A World Between* (1979). Attebery observes that these earlier matriarchal dystopias “may have opened the way for some of its most influential feminist texts” (*Decoding* 13), such as Russ’s “When It Changed” (1972) which ruthlessly critiques these stereotypes. At first glance, the title is simply an observation of facts about a world where the assumption of authority by men has been challenged on fundamental levels. The single gendered society of *Whileaway* depicts women who do not pine for males (sexually or intellectually) and have established a sustainable community that Russ uses to explore how a world without men would change women’s entire experience of living. Reproduction, parenting,

working, clothing, and relationships are all subtly changed to show expanded possibilities for women. The title becomes ominous as it becomes apparent that the men, while sharing the obtuse ignorance of women's needs displayed by Fenton in Tiptree's "The Women Men Don't See", are not as easy to shake off. Peter Fitting noted of the feminist SF of the 70s that "it was easier to imagine an end to the sex/gender system by eliminating men than to try and 'rewrite' them" (108) and on *Whileaway* the return of masculine ego is presented as worse than mere violence. These women do not live in a passionless, violence free society (as some earlier matriarchies were presented) but the idea that they can live happily without men is presented as a real possibility rather than an extraordinary flight of fantasy.

Whileaway is presented as a separatist matriarchy, where women are universally in same sex relationships and in positions of authority, however, a number of alternative solutions have been proposed with varying depictions of women and men living in groups. Some of these solutions include the removal of gender altogether through physical androgyny, as in Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* (1969); the development of gender with puberty as in Elisabeth Mann Borgese's *My Own Utopia* (1961) where children are genderless, adults are female and a small number become men later in life; or Marge Piercy's *Woman On The Edge of Time* (1976) where gender neutrality is socially constructed with great detail and effort. Many matriarchal societies depicted in SF seem to be framed as a dramatic but necessary solution to the complex and perennial issues of domestic violence and rape as endemic social ills. The separatist tales of the 1970s often show a violent division between the sexes as a necessary action to prevent sexual violence and domestic servitude for women, such as in Suzy McKee Charnas's Holdfast novels *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1978). Resistance of male tyranny is a frequent theme in feminist SF and the radical solutions of Charnas and Russ's consciousness raising anger re-appear in the 1980s in the work of Margaret Atwood, Joan Slonczewski, Pamela Sargent, and Sheri Tepper.

The idea of removing gender altogether is a particularly appealing extrapolation for feminist writers seeking resolution of the problems of patriarchy and there is an ongoing discussion in this

kind of fiction about the source of socio-sexual violence; many writers seem to be grappling with whether sexual violence is the result of natural desires unchecked or negative cultural nurturing. By neutralizing gender as a force either biologically or consciously (as in *Left Hand* and *Woman on the Edge*) and downplaying its connection to behaviour, a writer is more able to suggest other sources and solutions for these violent impulses, or even to examine these behaviours as social interactions rather than biological imperatives. In Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness*, part of the solution to gender inequality lies in the distribution of domestic chores between members of a society and the voluntary nature of "kemmer" onset. Much like the anarcho-syndicalist community of Annares depicted in *The Dispossessed* (1974), the community distributes work equally amongst all its members. Le Guin seems to be experimenting with a range of solutions to overcome gendered division of labour where domestic chores and child rearing responsibilities fall disproportionately upon the females. On both Gethen and Annares, members of society can become child bearers or child rearers, but neither role is dependent upon the other, and no one is forced to become either. Borgese and Mary Gentle (later in *The Golden Witchbreed*, 1983) depict similarly biological solutions while Piercy uses technology and overt cultural practices to free women of domestic drudgery in the future world of Mattapoisett. In the worlds of Borgese and Gentle people begin as neutrally gendered but develop sexual characteristics and socially divergent behaviours at puberty. The connection to the equality experienced during childhood is clear and while Piercy's equal world of the future is clearly a constructed thing, it shares the same awareness of early nurturing and social expectation as a solution for inequality.

The use of pronouns in these worlds is a particularly interesting feature of this strand of the subgenre. For example, Le Guin's contentious use of the pronoun "he" for her ambisexual Gethenians in 1969 precedes a number of alternative pronoun solutions. Le Guin discussed this issue directly in "Is Gender Necessary?" in 1976, revising her opinion in the 1986 "Redux" version of the same essay. Although she depicts two sexes, Marge Piercy introduces the alternative "per" (short for person) in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) to indicate both the classless and genderless nature of

personhood in the futuristic Mattapoisett; while Mary Gentle uses “ke” for the prepubescent neuters in *Golden Witchbreed* (1983). The recent increase in gender neutral pronoun use in the primary world is an interesting parallel to this extrapolation by SF writers who continue to experiment with alternative pronoun use. However, these are not the only solutions that address the causes of gendered violence, and while modifying the society and its pronouns is a very useful thought experiment about what would need to change in order for females to be truly accepted as fully validated members of society, there are other issues that women writers examine as well in SF.

Separatism is often presented as a preventative measure or as the last option for women trying to escape masculine tyranny, many are positioned in a post-apocalyptic environment where the familiar structures of the primary world are presented as the pre-apocalyptic state. However, there are a number of dystopias which present other kinds of communities, with varying degrees of patriarchy and tyranny. I use patriarchy and tyranny differently here to indicate the differences between political, social and economic control of women from the systemic physical control evident in novels such as Charnas’s *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), or Tepper’s *The Gate to Women’s Country* (1988). Not all of these communities are literally or fully separated, but there is a high degree of segregation and all three authors use the dystopian setting to present highly critical views of male authority, both in the past and the present situations. Suzy McKee Charnas’s *Holdfast Chronicles*, comprises *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1978) are especially clear examples of this pattern and perhaps the precursor of trope: she presents the slave Fems of Holdfast and their Classically homosexual masters (divided into Seniors and Juniors); the Riding Women who are lesbian and don’t even require men for procreation; and the Free Fems who attempt to start a free society but cannot fully escape their learned subordination. Despite clues for the reader about the source of the apocalyptic Wasting, the tyrannical Holdfast men blame the Fems, as well as absent blacks and liberals, for their downfall. In *The Wanderground* (1978), Sally Miller Gearhart presents another lesbian separatist community isolated from the surrounding male dominated cities. Narrative focus is redirected to an

examination of the hill women's society and their relationship with the city dwellers (some of whom are oppressed women and "gentles" or gay males, a theme which reappears in Tepper's *Gate to Women's Country*). Unlike the Holdfast novels, where breeding is a despised, unmanly chore, the gendered division is justified on biologically essentialist grounds; "It is not in his nature not to rape. It is not in my nature to be raped. We do not co-exist." (Charnas 25). As is common in these feminist tales, there has been an apocalypse and the women have developed psychic powers, which can be read as a metaphor for women's emotional sensitivities or as an attempt to surface women's agency and empower them within hierarchical patriarchies. Russ describes these skills (somewhat caustically) as "passive and involuntary" noting that "If female characters are given abilities... which cannot be developed or controlled...The power is somehow *in* the woman, but she does not really possess it." (Russ "Image" 84). Previously in SF, the rational and emotional aspects of humanity have been somewhat divided into binary opposition, gendered to masculine and feminine where the feminine is Othered, so that this kind of repositioning seeks to not only validate these "innate women's skills" (Russ "Image" 84) but also enhance them into a source of agency and authority. Within the dystopian frame, these writers are accentuating and distorting certain features of patriarchal societies in order to examine and critique them.

The same ideas of separate living as a necessity for women's safety are pursued in Marion Zimmer Bradley's long running *Darkover Series*, whose Renunciates mirror the Riding Women of Holdfast (*Free Amazons of Darkover*, 1985), and Lee Killough's *A Voice Out of Ramah* (1979). Although the traditional domination of society by males is maintained in *Ramah*, their control is jeopardized by the extreme minority of the male population. Readers eventually discover the dreadful truth that this is a self-imposed disparity, but the real focus of the narrative is on the success of the women and their society once outside the immediate control of the male hierarchy. The thing that matriarchies of all kinds have in common is their examination of the connection between women, sexuality and authority in the world, particularly the fear this engenders and the

desire of patriarchal forces to impose control (sometimes violently) and assert the status quo in these communities.

1980s

The 1980s sees a backlash against the second wave feminist movement. While some criticism of any school of thought is understandable, much of this resistance is driven by attempts to re-assert the traditional gender roles and their relative social standings (Faludi 5). While many features of women's earlier SF writing still appear and are expanded upon, the utopian visions of a world without men and independence for women seem to be replaced with representations of women struggling under the rule of men. One of the earliest of these darker visions was Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), but the *SFE* notes a similar effect in Tiptree's writing, observing that "the intensities of her vision ... had, if anything, darkened as the 1980s began." (*SFE*). This darkening is a common feature of women's SF in the 1980s, perhaps as the idealism and achievements of the second wave are overtaken by social resistance and awareness of how deeply ingrained gender roles and expectations are in society. Separatist and gender exclusive communities continue to be presented frequently, as in Pamela Sargent's *Seed series* (1983) and *The Shore of Women* (1986), Joan Slonczewski's *Door Into Ocean* (1986), Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985), and Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988). Margaret Atwood's seminal *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is one of the strongest (and best known), describing in an extended frame tale the highly religious society of Gilead where women are categorized and forced to reproduce in a post-nuclear world. While not presenting a separatist vision like some of the other examples given here, there is a distinctly segregationist edge to the society presented in Gilead, where women occupy invisible domestic spaces and only interact with men in limited and highly controlled circumstances. Tepper's *Gate to Women's Country* is a reversal of this narrative, depicting a city of women who manage the breeding out of violence from humans by segregating and managing the men, who live a martial, Spartan lifestyle but are unaware of their second-class status. The post-apocalyptic setting remains a particularly useful one for challenging and reformulating social structures as it allows the writer to

work with familiar factors and change only those elements they want to question. In the case of feminist SF writers, the key element is naturally gender, but often includes other economic and political factors as well as they are a source of control within a patriarchal system.

Bujold's makes her debut with "Barter" in 1985 (*Dreamweavers* 43-50) and her first three novels follow shortly after in 1986; *Shards of Honor*, *The Warrior's Apprentice*, and *Ethan of Athos*. Bujold's only foray into radical social re-organisation is the single sex community described in the stand-alone novel *Ethan of Athos* (1986), a male only planet who send a lone diplomat into the wider galaxy to retrieve female genetic material for their cloning program when their existing stock begins to deteriorate. Rather than depicting a feminine dystopia, Athos is presented as a kind of utopia where all social roles are occupied by males and so are equally valued. Ethan's naïve encounters with galactic gender behaviour (and the actual females that he has been taught to dislike) provide a window for critiquing and commenting upon all socially constructed standards of behaviour. This is one of the few male only societies presented in SF that engages strongly with questions of domestic chores and child-raising but, perhaps typically for Bujold, she has reversed the polarity of the trope to create new insights into social organisation. Bujold does not engage frequently with the radical solutions suggested by other female writers in the main narrative arc of the *Vorkosigan* series but does use the same tools of cognitive dissonance and estrangement, where the reader is constantly comparing their experience of the primary world with the alternatives on the page, to critique the imperial patriarchy on Barrayar. She creates a complex "double estrangement" (Westfahl 237) where her main character, Cordelia, comes from a culture that is more egalitarian than the readers' but is placed into a culture that is more overtly prejudiced (especially regarding sexuality, gender, race, disability, and class) than the primary one. As a method of introducing "subliminal" ideas of change to an audience, it is finely balanced and Bujold's widespread commercial and critical success is testament to her skill at doing so (Lake 9). Some critics of Bujold's writing emphasise the lack of engagement with some of those prejudices, particularly as her characters are largely upper class and protected from many social ills by title and money.

Aspects of race and class are lightly critiqued but many elements of what would now be called ‘white feminism’ or ‘white privilege’ are apparent in these works (Frankenberg 51). This is at least partly, I would suggest, because of how early she was engaging with these issues (before the third wave was fully realised) It is also a reflection of her “human beingist” philosophies (James *LMB* 136; Lake 9). Her early hesitance to be identified as a feminist author seems to be a response to her interest in humanism and morality at many points on the continuum, as well as the rising backlash and critical analysis of second wave feminism when she spoke. In the mid-eighties, after the second wave of feminism had merged into an era of backlash, and before the third wave had clearly defined itself, the word ‘feminist’ was often perceived as a limiting identification⁶. Indeed, some women still struggle with the social implications of the label. In 2010, Bujold softened this position somewhat, noting that “A woman who isn’t a feminist would be like a slave in favour of slavery” (James *LMB* 136). Bujold may not have addressed all the criticisms of White Feminism (Stableford lxvi-lxvii) but she is certainly engaged with the underlying drivers of women’s struggles, particularly the need for validation and recognition of the feminine in society.

This ‘rediscovery’ of Space Opera (as Hartwell and Cramer position it) has been largely due to the work of writers like C. J. Cherryh and Bujold who have tested and refined the possibilities of the familiar elements of Space Opera. Hartwell describes them as “the queens of space opera” (Hartwell “Nine Ways Part 1” 20), while Gary Westfahl in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* remarks that

CJ Cherryh and Lois McMaster Bujold have been the most noteworthy new creators of traditional space opera, garnering large sales and major awards for a series of novels set in richly elaborated future universe (*Cambridge* 205)

⁶ Just as Atwood initially rejected the labelling of her work as SF for its perceived limitations to a genre ‘ghetto’, not necessarily because of its applicability to her work.

Westfahl also comments that

These authors' novels are blends of classic, Ruritanian and romantic space opera, with wars in space balanced by a nuanced understanding of politics and persuasive attentiveness to personal relationships. (*Cambridge* 206)

Patricia Monk suggests that

because social change for various reasons always lags behind technological change, the sociological change that accompanied the development of technology which produced space opera was something more than the writers of space opera were ready for, or even equipped to deal with. (Monk 307).

Monk touches on all of the themes I will address, however lightly. These include the unacknowledged bias of older narrative structures; the shift from a narrative definition of Space Opera, "Instead of asking *What* is space opera?" to a use-defined one "we could ask *Why* is space opera" (311). The capacity for the 'lesser' subgenres of speculation, Space Opera and Fantasy, to contain social critique and commentary; the repositioning of popularity as a measure of value against older measures of scientific verity or literary rigour; and renovation of the "highly encoded...extensive use of conventions and tropes" of Space Opera (Monk 309). She is hampered, I think, by her position on the cusp of the shift between the "modern" impulses identified by Latour; the old formalist ways of measuring the genre had not yet been surpassed, and the new literary definitions of genre had not yet seeped into discussion of speculation (qtd in Bould and Vint 50).

Westfahl rejects Monk's claims for Space Opera as a "consistently and seriously underestimated" subgenre (Monk 295), commenting that

...it is no mystery why all science fiction commentators criticize space opera: they have to. That is, publicly committed to the idea of a genre which aspires to scientific rigour and

literary quality, they are virtually obliged to publicly condemn works which visibly flout those aspirations. (Westfahl *Cambridge* 177)

This comment positions Westfahl as a formalist appreciator of speculative writing, one of those who “separates and purifies” (Bould & Vint 50) the genre rather than accepting variant uses of texts (or, at least, as one of its defenders). These comments perpetuate the assumption of cultural prestige for traditional literary and scientific values with their embedded male subjectivities, while allowing acceptance of Space Opera as “charming and evocative” or “temporary freedom” from the “rigours of writing hard science fiction ... [or] superior literary science fiction” (Westfahl 183). Monk is clearly approaching Rieder’s definition of genre as defined by usage (Rieder 191), while Westfahl maintains a structuralist approach with its unacknowledged cultural biases⁷. However, I would hesitate to position Space Opera as a “degenerate” form of “true sf” (Pringle 45) so much as an early manifestation of SF that has both less mature and less sophisticated iterations, as well as more mature, more sophisticated variations. A position that is echoed in Attebery’s description of the difference between “genre” and “formula” speculation (*Strategies* 9) and Sanders’ comment that “The charge that space opera is by nature oversimplified and hackneyed may apply to stories that do not exploit the subgenre’s possibilities.” (Sanders 5). As such, my understanding of Space Opera is that it is the *core* of the SF mode of speculation, one of the oldest variations, and a jumping off point from which many redefinitions, abandonments and reformulations have occurred.

Cherryh and Bujold (mentioned in the same sentence, as ever) are again eclipsed by other writers in Alastair Reynold’s summary of New Space Opera that appeared in *Strange Divisions and Alien Territories: The subgenres of science fiction* (2012). He gives a lengthy overview of male British writers of Space Opera and their influence on the redefinition of the subgenre, remarking only briefly that “For more than 30 years” Cherryh has been writing Space Opera and that “Much the

⁷ Westfahl even goes so far as to claim that “the chief value, and enduring attraction, of space opera is that it gives writers and readers exactly the kind of occasional vacation they need from the arduous official demands of their literature.” (183)

same could be said for the enormously popular Vorkosigan series of Lois McMaster Bujold” (Reynolds 22). In a very familiar way, these female authors (Nancy Kress is also mentioned) are sidelined from the core of acknowledged Space Opera as well as from its renovation, and it seems that their popularity and perhaps their gender, shaded by their use of science, are contributing factors. Bujold is described as “old fashioned” and “anything but cutting edge” but her “emphasis on character and relationships” is once again highlighted, as is her “enormous popularity” (Reynolds 22).

In another essay from this collection, Bujold is presented by Catherine Asaro and Kate Dolan as part of the ‘planetary adventure’ subgenre (39). Here the valuation of non-hard science is clearer. Cherryh is lauded for “her prodigious background in history, linguistics, archaeology and psychology” (48) and the influence of these areas of knowledge on her stories. Where Reynolds seems to find the combined use of the “sweep and scale of space opera, while also shading into hard SF and military science fiction” (22) a limiting factor, Asaro and Dolan praise Cherryh for work that “straddles several subgenres , including both space and planetary adventure” and for creating “alien viewpoints that challenge readers to take another look at human nature ... you ask yourself certain questions, all the while realizing it may show very great differences from the way your own culture does business.” (49). It seems a curious juxtaposition of two critical articles in the same volume, and highly typical of subtle divisions within speculative criticism, where a one critic approaches the definition and expansion of Space Opera from a science-based, apparently unconscious male subjectivity, while others seek (and find) alternative social and cultural values in the New Space Opera. Bujold’s publishing successes indicate acceptance on a wider level, acceptance that Bujold herself acknowledges as being possible because of other writers, saying

I am not in the position of being a pioneer. I have never had to break in anywhere. All the barriers have been bulldozed down before me by other people. You know, C. J. Cherryh proved that women could write hard science fiction and win Hugos for it. Ursula Le Guin proved that women could [win] Hugos, period, whatever they were writing. Anne

McCaffrey proved that women could be bestsellers, and that was the biggest bulldozer of all. So, when I came along, publishers were ready to ask, "Could this be the next Anne McCaffrey? Could this be the next C. J. Cherryh?" (Bacon-Smith 124)

The third wave of feminism uses the term 'intersectionality' to describe the interaction of race, gender and sexuality in particular, but also generally as a way of describing any combination of factors that impact on women's lives. Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* novels, beginning with *Dawn* in 1987, are an early example of this development in feminist thinking as she combines her own experiences as a woman of colour in America with SF narrative. Butler's first *Patternist* series (1976–1984) engaged strongly with SF motifs such as genetic breeding programs and the awakening of psychic abilities but it is her second series, *Xenogenesis* (1984–1989), that begins to presage the consideration of multiple elements of identity and gender at once. It is unsurprising that another woman of colour, Rebecca Walker is recognised as the originator of third wave of feminist thinking, but clearly these ideas were simmering in the social consciousness before 1992 when Walker introduced the term (Walker "Becoming the Third Wave"). The first *Xenogenesis* novel, *Dawn* (1987) introduces the triple-gendered alien Oankali who are conducting breeding programs on the remnant of the human race, in particular Lilith Iyapo a refugee woman of colour, after humans have destroyed the planet. Like many post-apocalyptic tales, human aggression and unfettered appetites are responsible for this environmental catastrophe, a trait the Oankali seek to cross breed out of the human race.

Third wave feminism also encompasses much broader understandings of the intersection between sexuality and gender. This queering of feminist SF beyond the depiction of lesbianism rises dramatically in the 1980s; from the ambiguously gendered amazons in Janrae Frank's little known *Wolves of Nakesht* (1980), to Eleanor Arnason's *Ring of Swords* (1993) where homosexuality is normalised amongst the Hwarhath, and Storm Constantine's *Wraeththu Trilogy* (1987/88/89) with its lengthy examination of the hermaphroditic Wraeththu. Although Bujold does not engage strongly with racial intersections, her experimentation with gender, on a smaller scale, can be seen in

characters such as the hermaphroditic Bel Thorne in the *Vorkosigan Series*, the discreet bisexuality of Aral Vorkosigan, and the unusual gender transition of Lady Donna to Lord Dono (Bujold *Borders, Shards, Civil*). Bujold's mainstream success and popularity amongst SF readers shows that there was some movement towards feminine presences in SF before the 1990s and the official 'start' of the third wave. This is one of the main reasons why I identify her as a critical transition figure, not only because she was including these aspects in her writing early but also because of her wide-ranging success before 1991.

1990s and beyond

Beginning with Walker's seminal article, the consideration of multiple aspects of women's identity (such as race and sexuality) has had a profound and enriching effect on women's writing of speculative fictions. Many of the themes discussed previously continued to be explored, including matriarchal social structures and psychic abilities, but with new levels of nuance and further deviation from traditional tropes and patterns. The particular combination of SF and the perspective of women of colour became much more prominent following Butler's *Dawn* (1987) as mentioned earlier. Many new writers and texts emerged in the following decades, such as Nicola Griffith's *Bending the Landscape* (1998), Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in The Ring* (1998), N. K. Jemisin especially the *Broken Earth series* (2015, 2016, 2017), Mary Anne Mohanraj's *The Stars Change* (2012), Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* (10), *The Book of Phoenix* (15), *Lagoon* (14) and *Binti* (2015), and Nisi Shawl's *Filter House* (08) and *Everfair* (2016). The inclusion of these new voices and perspectives has provided an energetic expansion of the field with many new names becoming prominent and highly celebrated over the past two decades.

Far fewer books of overtly feminist SF receive widespread attention during the 1990s, which Landon describes as a "general retrenchment – if not loss of ground – by feminists during the Reagan 1980s" and suggests this is "mirrored" in the genre as a consequence of the backlash against second wave feminism in the previous decade (Landon 142-143). Similarly, Murphy observes that

One does see, however, a regrettable resurgence of such "machismo" writing during the second phase of the Reagan years, not only among male writers but also among female writers (Murphy 83)

This partial eclipse is also due to the rise of Cyberpunk as a new subgenre of SF during the eighties which peaked in the middle years of the decade. However, the complexities and possibilities of gender in the SF of the 1990s are explored in much finer detail. The years of development in this field have encompassed the established motifs and began extending them into new territories. Some early examples of this are Gwyneth Jones' *White Queen* (1991) which examines the constructed nature of gender during an alien invasion. This again reflects contemporary developments in feminist thinking closely, as the performative nature of gender was examined in detail by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) around the same time. Marge Piercy's *He She and It* (1991) is another complex addition to the genre, a cyberpunk tale that focuses on a female software engineer, Shira, and her attempts to regain custody of her son. The most prominent and prolific of women writing in this decade were Cherryh, Bujold and Tepper, whose sophisticated blends of Space Opera and social commentary, along with their prolific output, "renovated" SF in this decade (Hartwell, "Nine Ways Part I" 20).

One of the most interesting developments in this decade is the return of negative matriarchies, a trend that seems to reflect criticism of the second wave but which can also be read as attempts to engage with a broader range of female representation and move beyond the limited dynamics of the Princess, the Priestess, and the Maternal tropes. Not all of these solutions are depicted as positive, particularly in later texts like Storm Constantine's *Monstrous Regiment* (1990), and its sequel *Aleph* (1991), which uses a planetary romance structure to present a cautionary tale of matriarchy gone wrong and these thought experiments continue to the present day. The tradition of using fictional matriarchal societies to reflect and critique the current patriarchal one continues strongly into the present era, including Asaro's Skolian novels *The Last Hawk* (1997) and *Ascendant Sun* (2000), Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Kanschans* (2002) and *The Magister* (2003), Sheila Finch's

Xenolinguist trilogy (2003, 2007), Tricia Sullivan's *Maul* (2005), and Justina Robson's *Glorious Angels* (2015). And negative matriarchies continue to be examined, as in Kameron Hurley's *Bel Dame Apocrypha* (2011-2018). The experimentation with pronouns also continues as in Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* (2013) and the other novels of the series, the lone ancillary protagonist (a kind of zombie cyborg) has difficulty correctly gendering humans and uses "her" as the universal pronoun for all humans it meets, creating a strong sense of cognitive dissonance for readers who are used to the masculine 'he' being the default form. This effect is heightened as readers come to understand that a number of key characters are not female during the narrative and are therefore encouraged to question their own naturalised, gendered prejudices as a result. Ann Leckie's other novel *Provenance* (2017) set in the same universe contains similar features, use "xe" and "xey" as a neutral pronoun for all characters.

A Brief History of Feminist Fantasy

Fantasy can reveal that truth, that there is no neutral, objective, natural, commonsense position or perspective, because of its overt play with the conventions with which we define and describe the real, conventions which are themselves constructed by particular discourses. (Cranny-Francis 78)

Fantasy has a long and very complex history, made more complex by the number of influences and revivals of interest that have informed its development. The Fantasy mode of speculative fiction has a much longer history of Proto Fantasy than SF, one that stretches all the way back to *Beowulf* (700-1000?), *The Dream of the Rood* (8th Century), Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595/6), and religious allegories like *A Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). There is significant discussion (and, naturally, disagreement) about the precise difference between the fantastic and Fantasy as a genre (Hume 18), but most agree that Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (and its many offshoots) is a significant "taproot text" (FE) for the modern publishing genre of Fantasy and, thus, *The Lord of the Rings* is often used as a benchmark in a similar fashion to the beginning of the Gernsback era. There

are many earlier tales with fantastic, fairy tale and supernatural elements, but modern Fantasy seems to more often be constrained to patriarchal social systems and cultural values by pseudo medieval or fairy tale settings; as Attebery suggests, this “willingness to return to the narrative structures of the past can entail as well an unquestioning acceptance of its social structures” (*Strategies* 87). However, Lefanu observes that one of the defining characteristics of modern fantastic literature is that it moves towards an “ideal of undifferentiation, with a tendency to dissolve structures” uncovering “what is hidden, and, by doing so, effect[ing] a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar.” (Lefanu 22). Using similar tools of extrapolation and estrangement to SF, Fantasy is equally able to propose alternative, secondary worlds that challenge dominant visions of cultural value as ones that reiterate traditional ones. In the following section I shall attempt a brief overview of Fantasy writing but one that is particularly focussed on women writers and women writing about gender.

Pre 1920s

One of the earliest women associated with fantastic tales is Madame D’Aulnoy, whose non-conformist and highly feminist salons in 17th century Paris were comprised of witty ladies making elegant alterations to established traditions of fairy tales or ‘conte des fees’ to create sharp political and social satires (Seifert ; Rowe; Haase; Zipes). Part of this conspicuous absence are the systemic social and educational barriers that prevented women from publishing or acknowledging their publications openly until much later. The 18th century also saw increasing infantilisation of fairy tales, and a moral heavy handedness about gender that accompanied these changes as a kind of backlash and containment of women’s social freedoms (Haase; Fisher; Zipes). Fairy tales are still a common topic and style in modern Fantasy but outside the scope of this thesis as they are not one of Bujold’s preferred styles.

During the 1800’s there is a revival of fantastical texts, partly due to a kind of nationalistic pride spurred on by folklore collections such as those by the Grimm Brothers, and partly due to an increased interest in childhood development and education. Narratives such as *Alice in Wonderland*

(1865), *The Princess and Goblin* (1872) and its more famous sequel *The Princess and Curdie* (1883), as well as *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1926) by Lord Dunsany appeared but, as mentioned earlier, were largely written by men. A small number of were writing Fantastic children's fiction at the time, prominent among them were Beatrix Potter and Edith Nesbit whose prolific output included *Five Children and It* (1902), *House of Arden* (1908), *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), and *The Magic City* (1910); as well as Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911). These texts are highly Anglo-centric and contain strong didactic content about contemporary colonial values and gender expectations but one thing they do differently is to create an alternative depiction of feisty, independent heroines. In Europe, similar observations can be made about *Heidi* (1880-81), while in the United States texts such as *Little Women* (1868-69), *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), and in Canada *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) appear. There are widely varying degrees of fantastical or supernatural elements included in these texts, I mention them mainly for their consistent patterns of presenting as protagonists pre-pubescent females with overt and often spirited resistance of socially constrictive roles. A pattern that is still common in modern Fantasy and appears in many modern texts, such as *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman (2002) and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008). Although children's literature narratives are socially conservative texts as a whole, depicting women in largely domestic or romantic roles, the pre-sexual age of the protagonists allows the authors to present females in unusually dominant and active roles. For example, Mary Lennox and Alice are both presented as difficult heroines who get angry or short tempered with others, behaviours that were certainly not validated by general society at the time. The fantastic elements of their stories allowed the narratives to be positioned as socially acceptable adventures outside the norm.

There seems to have been a tendency to reject the fantastic as childish and emotional, and to identify these as weaker, female traits, devaluing Fantasy in comparison to the rational, more masculine qualities validated by 19th century society, a tendency that reflects wider social conflicts between Romantic and Enlightenment ideals. This cultural association is made prominent and global by sudden improvements in easy and cheap publication and by Victorian interest in 'childhood' as a

distinctive state from adulthood, one which requires educating small humans into proper behaviour. While these are outside the scope of the current thesis, the apparent absence of Fantasy texts from adult reading at the time is perhaps explained by the parallel development of a rich Fantasy world for children. The rise of colonial adventures by writers such as H. Rider Haggard, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jules Verne, and H.G. Wells which dovetailed readily into early SF, also accounts for this absence somewhat, and for the hardening of the gendered associations of adventure, masculinity and rationality.

The 1920's to the 1960s

As in SF, critics identify this period of high production and high production standards in children's fantasy as a Golden Age, with some deferring its conclusion to the 1940s and *Wind in the Willows* (1940) (Lundin 27). There is some overlap here, however, with other scholars suggesting there is a second phase, a Silver Age, of Fantasy writers with the appearance of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and the *Narnia series* which were published between 1950 and 1956. *Mary Poppins* (1934), the Famous Five series (*Five on a Treasure Island* was first published in 1942), *Pippi Longstocking* (1945), and the less well recognised Arthur Ransome *Swallows and Amazons series* (1930–1947) also appear in this Silver Age of children's literature. The trend towards strong to mild levels of Fantasy and strong female lead characters who significantly challenge the dominant expectations of women's behaviour in the era continues here. Not all of these texts were written by women and the social roles for women are still very conservatively depicted (if not always their behaviour within them, as for example with Peggy and Nancy Blackett who own and sail *The Amazon*, or Pippi who lives on her own with a horse). The success of *The Hobbit* (1937) as children's literature paves the way for *The Lord of The Rings* and I think at least part of that success is due to the enthusiasm of readers raised on fantastical children's literature for a Fantasy novel aimed squarely at adults.

Fantasy writing for adults was not completely absent, but often appeared in the pulps during the 1930s and 1940s, as did SF. There was a strong parallel publishing stream of pulp Fantasy

magazines including *Weird Tales* (1923-1954), *Unknown* (1939-1943) and *Fantasy Adventures* (1939-1953) and many women crossed over, writing short fiction and experimenting with both modes of the speculative genre in a range of pulp titles. Moore's Jirel of Joiry was the beginning of the trope of the shero (Reid 179), a woman acting in the role of a man, usually as a warrior and leader of other men. At a time when a woman acting with masculine authority and social rights was uncommon, Moore depicts a woman as an equal to men and even as superior to non-heroic males thus "redefining the qualities of heroism to include female experience" (Attebery *Strategies* 89). Five of the six short stories telling Jirel's adventures follow a similar Portal-Quest formula (Mendlesohn *Rhetorics of Fantasy* xvii) where Jirel enters forbidding and slightly Lovecraftian Otherworlds to perform great feats. The most interesting aspect of Jirel is not just that she was the first of the sword wielding, armour wearing redheaded rulers that have become such common features of modern Fantasy, but that Moore depicted her with a range of both traditionally masculine and feminine qualities. Whilst she is bloodthirsty, passionate and an excellent warrior, it is often her intelligence and emotional strength that sees her reaching success. Her arrogance, stubbornness and sexual freedom are also mentioned, making her a very atypical female for the mid-thirties and these were far from socially approved qualities in the primary world. Yet Moore's heroine has left an indelible, though oft-copied, mark on the mega-text of Fantasy.

Writers like Marion Zimmer Bradley, Madeline L'Engle, Anne McCaffrey, and Andre Norton began their writing careers during the late 1940s and 1950s but did not universally present women as heroic protagonist figures, let alone as independent and powerful figures. Children's literature continues to be a fertile ground for women writing Fantasy in these decades, with Susan Cooper, Joan Aiken and Madeline L'Engle being published for the first time. Women were having prominent careers but, unsurprisingly, were not yet comprehensively challenging stereotypical presentation of women in Fantasy (neither their behaviour nor their social position). The stratospheric success of *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954 not only opened the door to a much wider audience of Fantasy

readers, primed by the familiar literary fantasies of their childhood, but also to women writing more expansive, gender challenging genre Fantasy.

1960's and 1970's, the impact of the second wave

A similar revolution in the depiction of women occurred in the Fantasy of the 1970s as in SF. This revision was often conscious and encompassed both minor changes in the variety of women's skills and attitudes presented, as well as major changes to the worlds and social structures that surrounded them. In *Tombs of Atuan* (1971) Le Guin begins her reconsideration of gender, expanding on the traditional forms and tropes she relied on in *Wizard of Earthsea* to include more female characters and provide new perspectives on the "weak" women's magic she described in *Earthsea* (Le Guin *Earthsea* 16). Like *Earthsea*, *Tombs of Atuan* is a coming of age story but focuses on a young girl Tenar and her resistance and eventual rejection of the patriarchal faith systems that keep her confined (literally as well as metaphorically). Unlike Ged, who strives to fulfill his magical promise and social obligations, Tenar rejects the world that seeks to confine her and her character becomes an exploration of women's sexuality and maternal social roles (Cummins 12). In many ways, Tenar is the epitome of the Good Priestess character who has to choose between holding magical or social power and having family, love, sex and marriage. Patricia McKillip presents a similar reversal in *Forgotten Beasts of Eld* (1974) where an apparently typical Princess in a tower is in fact an active, (telepathic) revenge-seeking but emotionally stilted heroine, while the hero is intuitive and emotional. Sybel's hidden telepathy with animals provides her with agency and the ability to manipulate others in ways which are often presented as antithetical to the hero and more usually as villainous. As Attebery suggests, McKillip revitalizes these traditional tropes by presenting a critical view of a highly patriarchal society and validating this alternative view through the thoughts and experiences of a female protagonist. Sybel and Tenar are presented as outsiders within their own cultures and this allows them, and through them the reader, to make different judgements about that culture and its values.

Strong female lead characters appear more and more frequently from the 1960s onwards, as in Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover series* (1958-present) and Russ' *Adventures of Alyx* (1976), a collection of short stories originally published from 1967-1970, which are very similar to the earlier Jirel stories, presenting an unconventional but independent female protagonist. Cherryh's *Morgaine* (1976) series uses many of the same features of Moore and Russ' stories, such as time travel and a free-wheeling, hard living, female killer as protagonist, as well as a science fictional frame to explain the protagonist moving from one medieval setting to the next. Both Russ and Cherryh explore the liminal space between SF and Fantasy by including SF tropes with Fantasy settings. Another genre blending text is Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) that mixes horror and fairy tale revision, sometimes in modern settings, which have been described as magical realism (*FE*). Carter focuses her narratives on women's experiences at a deeper level by utilising the psychological and mythological to tell stories about women's marriages, their sexuality, their childhoods and their innocence from a more intimate perspective. At the same time she resists the typically cheerful, positive outlook of fairy tales directed at children.

Not for her Hemingway's clean, well-lighted place, or Orwell's clear prose like a pane of glass. She prefers instead a dirty, badly-lit place, with gnawed bones in the corner and dusty mirrors you'd best not consult." (A Lee 146)

Carter also reverses many of the traditional elements of fairy tales, particularly the absence of mothers who instead appear as rescuers and supportive helpers. Many of these elements are used by Bujold only a decade later, particularly the emphasis on supportive mothering and refocusing the narrative to women's experiences and perceptions. The greater inclusion of female characters generally is supported by the provision of greater agency and authority to them and more active participation in the narrative as a whole. Bujold not only reverses some of the established Fantasy tropes but she also extends them and challenges their limits.

1980s

The 1980s sees a sharp increase in the numbers of women writing Fantasy, and although not all are overtly feminist, many engage with issues of representation and social participation for women in their narratives. Children's literature remains a fertile home for Fantasy with writers like Tamora Pierce and Diana Wynne Jones centralising female characters in their narratives and revitalizing their roles at the same time; Pierce by placing a young girl in 'knight school' and Jones by vastly increasing the variety and skills of women depicted. Elizabeth Moon's *Deed of Paksenarrion series* (1988–1989) presents a quintessential shero in great detail, while Margaret Weis is one of the few women writing consistently for the lengthy *Dragonlance Chronicles* (1984–1985). Robin McKinley presents a series of revised tellings of traditional folk tales with female protagonists who don't wait to be rescued during this decade, while Zimmer Bradley returns to the Arthurian material for *Mists of Avalon* (1983) and her protégé Lackey embarks on the lengthy *Valdemar series* (1987–present).

Le Guin is still producing significant texts like *Always Coming Home* (1985) and beginning to anthologise her fictional and critical works into collections. *Always* is a highly postmodern examination of the lives of a post-apocalyptic culture, the Kesh, where women dictate the pace of life and preservation of culture. Bujold never engages with matriarchy as a political structure; the closest she comes is the Cetagandan culture where women (very discreetly) guard and improve the genome of the nobility, much like the Bene Gesserit in *Dune* (1965). However, there are recurring themes of women throughout her works as the guardians and moral guides of society and of their need for discretion in the exercise of power. The balance of sexuality and authority is delicate, and narrative depictions of women have swung from simple recognition of their presence and potential contribution to political action to much more nuanced and individual examinations of the possibilities for women.

Zimmer Bradley also released her famous retelling of the Arthurian legends *Mists of Avalon* (1983) in this decade, told from the point of view of the women around Arthur, instead of the masculine one more commonly used to present tales of medieval knights. Zimmer Bradley also

initiated one of the longest standing anthologies of feminist SF and Fantasy writing, the *Sword and Sorceress* series, which was a collection of gender challenging short stories and a springboard for many later writers like Mercedes Lackey. Zimmer Bradley, Diana Paxson, Lackey, McCaffrey, and others formed a productive collaborative group during this decade, producing a wide range of feminist SF and Fantasy projects individually and in concert that experimented with the potential for Fantasy especially to present women and their stories differently. A similar centralising of the feminine protagonist and perspective was most evident in Bujold's second Five Gods novel, *Paladin of Souls*, where a secondary character from the first novel is expanded and allowed to explain herself in detail from a first-person perspective. At the same time, her retelling of key events from the past provides important new insight into these events.

1990s and beyond

The progression of more detailed and nuanced discussions of gender increases with the development of third wave feminism and intersectional approaches to gender, race, sexuality and class. Fantasy for children continues to provide strong female protagonists such as Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter series* (1997–2007) and Lyra Silvertongue in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials series* (1995–2000) but, as with SF writing, there is a distinct lull in the production of feminist Fantasy by women for adults during this decade. Publishing in this decade seems to be dominated by lengthy series from male writers who continue to present very traditional gender roles and behaviours; such as Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time series* (1990 – 2013), George RR Martin's *Game of Thrones series* (1991 – present), Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth series* (1995 – present), and so on. The wide range of subgenres developing in Fantasy also makes comparisons increasingly challenging, as the narratives include so many different tropes and features that it can be easy to be distracted by surface detail. Drawing texts together across subgenres becomes more complex as the genre continues to diversify.

However, stereotypes and tropes remain to be challenged and reversal of established patterns is still a common way to construct a feminist narrative. Charnas' later addition to the

Motherlines series, *The Conqueror's Child* (1999), explores the possibility of women and men forging a society in which both can exist. Elizabeth Hand's *Waking the Moon* (1994) challenges the increasingly popular ideal of goddess worshippers as peaceful and idealistic, and the incorrect association of femininity only with kindness and socially approved 'goodness'. This tendency to view women with rose coloured glasses is as damaging to women's rights and social standing as constantly assuming they are antagonistic or sexualising them. Storm Constantine's novel *Sea Dragon Heir* (1998) challenges readers to understand Pharinet's incestuous relationship, while Anne Bishop's protagonist, Janelle, in *Daughter of the Blood* (1998) is a young girl in the first novel when she meets her near-immortal lover-to-be who then waits for her to mature, skirting themes of paedophilia. Bishop also examines rape and sexual violence, of both genders, in detail but particularly of males who are sexually subservient in the matriarchal kingdoms of Terreille and Kaeleer. Terreille has become a violent, degenerate version of the matriarchy of the past, and Janelle grapples with reviving a more respectful version of these social structures in Kaeleer once she ascends the throne, leading to far reaching and personal conflicts between the two nations. Extreme magical power and sexual control in the hands of women are closely observed in both novels, and Bishop presents challenges to conventional tropes through both negative and positive depictions of women utilising these powers. This connection between women's independence and their sexuality is continued in Bujold's narratives (in both modes), though she is far less explicit. The sexual awakening and agency of her key female characters is frequently connected to similar developments in their autonomy and individuality. As in Bishop's *Jewel series*, consideration of the recovery from abuse (both sexual, social and physical) is another common theme in feminist Fantasy stories, including Bujold's *Paladin of Souls* (2003) and Juliet Marillier's intimate and insightful *Blackthorn and Grim series* (2013, 2014, 2016).

The 2000s saw a resurgence of Young Adult (YA) Fantasy with feminist themes, particularly in futuristic dystopian settings like *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008–2010) and *Divergent series* by Veronica Roth (2011–2014). *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah Maas is set in a more

traditional Fantasy setting but, like the other novels, features a strong female protagonist who is a highly capable killer that is able to survive in her harsh surroundings using both brains and brawn. The protagonists in all three series take on the masculine roles of hero, protector and warrior while occupying female bodies and displaying key elements of traditional feminine traits. The reader's experience of Katniss' pragmatic adaptation to the demands of the Hunger Games is particularly interesting as female characters are not often shown to be manipulative of others in such a pro-social way. Lynne Flewelling's *Bone Doll Trilogy* (2001) presents this hybridisation quite literally when the female half of a royal pair of twins is magically concealed in the body of her murdered brother in order to save her life. She later ascends the throne as per prophecy and regains her female form but the reversal is an interesting change to the shero trope. Leckie's remarkable SF *Ancillary series* (2013) uses pronouns to obscure the physical gender of characters and challenge reader's perceptions of gendered behaviour, and her first Fantasy novel *The Raven Tower* (2019) carries this further with a transgendered protagonist presented through the infrequently used second person narrative voice. Bujold experiments with similar ideas but in a more limited way, presenting a selection of bi-gendered (Bel Thorne), transgendered (Lady Donna Vorrutyer), bisexual (Aral Vorkosigan and Ges Vorrutyer) and pansexual (Byerly Vorrutyer) characters (James *LMB* 147–155). It is interesting to note how infrequently Bujold depicts women as non-heterosexual and monogamous, but she does make some attempts to consider alternatives. It seems that male protagonists must deviate from patriarchal norms in order to make space within the narrative for more active and powerful female protagonists. This is certainly the case in *Paladin of Souls*, which Bujold describes as "chick book by intent" (Oak) where most of the key roles in the narrative are filled by women.

Chapter 3: Bujold's Early SF and Space Opera

If you look at the plots... you will find not women but images of women: modest maidens, wicked temptresses, pretty schoolmarms, beautiful bitches, faithful wives, and so on. They exist only in relation to the protagonist (who is male). Moreover, look at them carefully and you will see that they do not really exist at all – at their best they are depictions of the social roles women are supposed to play and often do play, but they are the public roles and not the private women... (Russ "Heroine" 5)

Bujold's reformulation of gender roles is most clearly seen in the insightful use and adaptation of established gender tropes and stereotypical positions. Thus, having outlined these traditional formulations in the previous chapter, I will now explore their use and renovation in Bujold's skilful hands, beginning with the earliest SF novels *Shards of Honor* and *Barrayar*. This chapter will concentrate on the two novels in which Cordelia Naismith Vorkosigan first encounters Barrayaran culture, each having a significant and lasting impact on the other. In the following chapters, I will move some thirty years down the timeline to the novels *Komarr* and *A Civil Campaign*, which introduce Ekaterin Nile Vorsoisson Vorkosigan, who marries Cordelia's son Miles. Ekaterin is an equally interesting Barrayaran woman who benefits from the changes Cordelia has introduced (both consciously and unconsciously) into the highly patriarchal structures of Barrayaran society. Although Miles is the main protagonist of the *Vorkosigan Series*, these two pairs of novels provide a useful structural boundary to my discussion of the reformulation of women's roles and identities in Bujold's SF narratives.

The narrative of *Shards of Honor* follows three distinct arcs: the first tells of Aral Vorkosigan and Cordelia Naismith's accidental meeting on the unpopulated planet of Sergyar. She is there to survey the planet for the Betans; he to establish a forward base for the Barrayarans in an upcoming war. When Aral's troops stage a mutiny and attempt to assassinate him, Cordelia's team of scientists are killed and both of them find each other the only means of survival in a deadly and foreign

environment. Despite their cultural differences, the two form an immediate bond (based largely on mutual attraction, shared pragmatic intelligence and moral codes) and reach the dubious safety of his base, where Cordelia saves his life from further mutinous action. The Barrayaran army are presented as the brutish enforcers of a tyrannical and politically volatile government, so her choice to leave this developing attachment to Aral is balanced against the potential danger of the encroaching Barrayarans. The next section describes their reunion under similarly difficult circumstances; the foreshadowed war has erupted and Cordelia has been captured by Aral's deadly enemy. This makes her much more vulnerable to the violently misogynistic culture of Barrayar, which is presented as the more usual face of this society than Aral's intelligent pragmatism. Cordelia barely escapes being raped and tortured by one of the more unbalanced Admirals of the fleet, Ges Vorrutyer, but manages to survive and winds up back on Sergyar in a temporary prisoner of war camp. A distinctly feminine subjective experience of the aftermath of this war is afforded by Cordelia's interactions with other female prisoners and provides many critical perspectives on Barrayaran culture. Cordelia and Aral's attachment is mutually acknowledged and Aral asks her to marry him but she leaves him again to return to Beta despite the temptation. Keeping the truth of the war's purpose secret drives Cordelia to the edge of mental breakdown, while her government begins to suspect her of being a brainwashed or coerced spy so that she is forced to flee Beta, no longer the comforting home and paragon of liberal values she once thought it. She returns to Aral to attempt a "quiet exile" (Bujold *Cordelia's Honor* 212, 236) but he is strong-armed by the dying Emperor Ezar into becoming Gregor's Regent. The novel concludes with a powerful examination of the consequences of war, again conveyed with distinctively feminine understanding through the experiences of Ensign Boni, a medtech on corpse retrieval duty. This coda ensures that the thematic emphasis of the novel remains with a damning critique of the costs of war told from the perspective of female participants.

The next novel in the sequence, *Barrayar*, did not appear in print for a further five years (some six novels later, all of which concentrated on the adventures of Cordelia's son Miles) although it

picks up Cordelia's story immediately following *Shards of Honor*, before Miles' birth. It, too, uses a three act pattern: domestic scenes while Cordelia struggles to adjust to Barrayaran society; increasing political complications which culminate in a deadly attack on Aral and Cordelia's home, causing permanent injury to Miles in utero; and the outbreak of civil war, as Vidal Vordarian attempts to usurp the throne by marrying Gregor's mother, Princess Kareen, wife of the unlamented late Prince Serg. (Princess Kareen has a namesake in later novels, daughter of the bodyguard Drou. To avoid confusion, I shall refer to this one as Princess Kareen throughout.) As in *Shards of Honor*, criticism of Barrayaran culture is presented from a personal, female perspective, as Cordelia's Betan values come into close daily contact with Barrayar's highly policed and patriarchal gender expectations. It also describes the beginning of Cordelia's influence on the Barrayarans with whom she interacts, an influence that will eventually contribute to significant changes to their gender roles and expectations. One such character is Koudelka, one of Aral's men who was badly wounded in the attempted mutiny on Sergyar, and is now Aral's secretary, adding the first example of physical disability to the range of non-hegemonic masculinity on display in the narrative. Miles' non-hegemonic masculinity (represented through his lack of height and other physical issues) are a defining feature of his interaction with his native society, and of his personality, in the other novels of the series.

Another key character is Droushnakovi, a female bodyguard, and the first active serving female in the Barrayaran army. Through these secondary characters and the complicated romantic relationship that develops between them Bujold weaves a complex net of non-hegemonic and patriarchy-challenging identities to comprehensively interrogate Barrayaran mores. Barrayar is a planet just beginning to emerge from a kind of forced exile from the galactic community known as the Time of Isolation, which was the result of invasion by the neighbouring Cetagandan Empire. The war of resistance was eventually successful but only after nuclear warheads were used on Barrayar, especially in the Vorkosigan home district, and many birth defects appeared in the population as a result. Barrayar only succeeded in defeating the Cetagandans by closing the wormhole that

connected them, resulting in an era of civil unrest and technological decline that Bujold uses to justify the outdated morals and social codes evident on Barrayar and which she contrasts with the technological, galactic, and highly cosmopolitan Beta Colony. In particular, Beta's permissive attitudes to sexuality and the freedom from child-birth or "body birth" (Bujold *Cordelia's Honor* 465) provided by uterine replicators proves particularly key when contrasted with Barrayar's far more patriarchal and controlling attitudes to female sexuality, paternity and child-birth. On Beta, birth defects are non-existent as babies can be gene-screened and cleaned at conception, while on Barrayar pre and post-natal euthanasia is the common solution to unnaturally high rates of mutation caused by nuclear radiation and fallout.

Life as the Regent's wife is heavily policed and more demanding than the quiet exile Cordelia expected and she struggles to adjust. Her developing friendships with Princess Kareen, Drou, and Lady Alys Vorpatril (her social skills mentor), as well as her pregnancy, are the only things which sustain her during this time of exile and loneliness. It is this collection of unusual women with whom Bujold surrounds Cordelia that allows further interrogation of gender mores and intimate critique of life for women in a Barrayaran patriarchy (this will be pursued further in the following chapter). However, Bujold draws on Cordelia's outsider status to make her critique of Barrayaran patriarchy. Cordelia's attempts to live as a Barrayaran (rather than according to her own standards) causes her great guilt when Vorkosigan House is attacked by political dissidents and Miles is injured in utero by the antidote to the poison gas used. She feels she could have avoided this injury by having Miles transferred to a uterine replicator as is standard practice on Beta. Uterine replicators are new technology to Barrayar and her decision following the attack to save Miles' life by using one irrevocably alienates General Piotr, Aral's father and a famous war-hero of the Cetagandan resistance. Piotr represents the most traditional and patriarchal aspects of Barrayar, with a deeply held suspicion and fear of 'muties'. Aral's reforming zeal is more in line with Cordelia's galactic views, but he is caught between the two extremes of his wife and his father.

Nevertheless, despite Cordelia and Piotr's seething dislike of each other, when civil war breaks out Aral sends the child Emperor, Gregor, with them into the mountainous back woods. Once again, Cordelia proves her mettle under pressure, winning a grudging measure of respect from Piotr. Cordelia quickly becomes a surrogate mother figure for Gregor (a position she will retain throughout the series as his mother, Princess Kareen, is soon killed), but her concern for her own son increases rapidly as Miles is trapped in his replicator in the capital city. Indomitable as ever, Cordelia convinces Drou and others to attempt an independent rescue. It is hard to imagine a less hegemonically masculine group than two females (one middle aged), a crippled veteran, and a medicated paranoid schizophrenic. During this time they also rescue Lady Alys, witness her husband's murder, and help her deliver a baby as well. Using Drou's knowledge of the palace, Cordelia's wit, and Bothari's muscle, they succeed in rescuing Miles but fail to liberate Princess Kareen, who is killed attempting to shoot the usurper, Vordarian. In the first novel, *Shards of Honor*, Cordelia's experience of Barrayarans is always in the context of war and hostilities, where a certain amount of aggression can be understood as a natural consequence of the situation. Bujold's critique is somewhat external, a criticism of Barrayaran hyper-masculine posturing as well as traditions in military Space Opera writing. But in *Barrayar*, Bujold begins to address the ways in which patriarchal societies function from a more intimate, feminine subjective position, one that she will pursue further in *Komarr*.

Patterns of Gender Reformulation

In order to frame my discussion in this thesis, I have identified certain patterns of style and theme which Bujold uses consistently and which address noteworthy aspects of her treatment of gender: Focus, Reversal, Hybridity, and Complication. I shall unpack and explore these terms in Chapters Three and Four, using examples of significant female characters and key scenes to demonstrate the usefulness of these terms in understanding Bujold's skill in challenging gender norms without significantly undermining the expectations of SF and Space Opera audiences. I shall explore the inner spaces of the "envelope" that Bujold pushes and refolds into new shapes without losing that essential quality that her audiences have come to anticipate and appreciate in SF texts

(Bacon-Smith 122). In Chapter Five I use this framework to continue the discussion of gender in Bujold's later SF novels, and in Chapters Six and Seven apply the same categories to the Fantasy novels in order to emphasize the similarities (and some differences) in the way Bujold reformulates women's roles and identities in the two modes of speculative fiction in which she works.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing the Focus on inclusion of, and emphasis on, a variety of female characters and their actions, and the significant intrusion of traditionally feminine concerns (such as the subjective experience of pregnancy, child rearing, romantic and sexual bonding, and other relationships). Attebery describes these as "feminine stowaways" such as "family ties, overt desire, domestic arrangements, and psychological complexity." (Attebery *Decoding* 181). Secondly, I examine Bujold's Reversal of expected patterns – both in gender roles and in predictable genre features. In the case of Bujold's early SF, the character of Cordelia is a distinctive example, being both female and a starship captain, a middle-aged career woman whose romance with Aral Vorkosigan is deemed so unlikely as to be an obvious cover for a spy ring (*Shards* 195–198). A highly competent leader and outstanding scientist in her own right, Cordelia is also a pacifist and insightful observer of humans with a robust sense of personal agency and the ability to engage in combat successfully when needed. Cordelia is not the only character of Bujold's who confounds reader expectation so thoroughly (and I will discuss further examples in the following chapters) but she is the most notable of a string of such reversals, combining masculine traits with feminine gender norms in a way that results in more fully realised and complex characterisation.

This leads to my third category, Hybridity, which I discuss in Chapters Four, Five and (in relation to Fantasy) Chapter Seven, where male and female gender roles and behaviours are not merely switched but appear in concert, alongside each other within a single character. Hybridity avoids the drawbacks of a straightforward substitution of a 'shero' for a male hero where the character is constructed to succeed within patriarchal frameworks but does not *fundamentally challenge* those frameworks. Too often, writers imagine that picking up a weapon and being present in the action of the text is enough to challenge patriarchal norms. Instead, Bujold uses complex

substitutions where a female body is given masculine authority and social roles (or vice versa). Bujold's hybrid characters engage with their contexts in more radical, challenging ways. They explicitly challenge and verbally comment on the forces of social and cultural pressure that often limit women's engagement with events. Bujold offers the same socially validated trappings of success to her female characters as if their actions and contributions deserve the same recognition; rewards such as agency, sexual freedom, physical freedom (travel), financial gain, romantic idolisation, and social approbation. Furthermore, these patterns of hybridising are by no means limited to female characters; the male characters who support and interact with Bujold's renovated females are necessarily reformed creatures themselves, and some examples of this exchange (such as Aral, Illvin and Ingrey) will be examined in Chapter Seven.

Finally, there are characters who are neither a straightforward Reversal of trope, nor a moderately complex Hybrid combination of existing elements, but are far more Complicated depictions of partial stereotypes who display unique identities and behaviours. In Chapter Four I argue that as a key protagonist throughout the *Vorkosigan Series*, Cordelia is a character who exists in this space and develops a great deal as the narratives progress. However, there are also a number of significant secondary characters whose presence adds greatly to the fundamental challenges Bujold offers to the established gender mores present in traditional speculative fiction.

Focus – the interpolation of female subjectivity into Space Opera

Feminist writers must engage with, contradict, traditional narrative patterning in order to (re)construct texts capable of articulating their marginalized, oppositional positioning – both inside, described by, patriarchal ideology (as the idealist construct, Woman) and outside that discourse, experiential witnesses to its contradictions, its mystifications (as women). (Cranny-Francis 15)

Some of the most urgent areas for reformulation and revision in speculative fiction are those are those that most intimately involve women but have traditionally been least likely to represent

their lived experience. The complex and diverse ways in which Bujold's characters – Cordelia, Drou, Princess Kareen, and Lady Alys - negotiate with these cultural norms, and problematize their limitations, is an indication of how thoroughly Bujold has engaged with constructing new worlds which challenge and critique gender norms of the primary world. Cranny-Francis has noted that this is particularly common in genres (such as the speculative) with strongly unified, conventional performances of gender:

The persistence of ideological messages or discourses within generic forms, coded into their conventions, is one of the characteristics with which feminist writers are most concerned. The gender ideology most often detected in generic fiction is extremely conservative, stereotyping women into the role of virgin or whore, and as the object of a quest or adventure, not the subject. (19)

Sally Robinson and Cranny-Francis both raise questions about the impact gender has on the relationship between reader and writer. Robinson notes that "These discourses construct gendered positions, for writers and readers" (17) as part of a wider discussion of gendered subjectivity, while Cranny-Francis opens up discussion of the differences real or implied gender makes on the reader's experience of a text:

It has been tentatively suggested that it is not so much the sex of the author which secures the exclusion of a text in the process of cultural capitalist accumulation as the address of the text. It is woman-to-woman writing ... which is excluded. (Lovell qtd in Cranny-Francis 23)

Bujold's Focus on women's perspectives and issues relevant to women's lives could be read radical in a genre traditionally perceived as being "books by men for men" (Lefanu 24). I argue that Bujold addresses an implicitly male audience from the perspective and subject position of the female, and that this shift is an important aspect of her reformulation of speculative fiction Focus, adjusting not only the depiction of gender within the narrative but also readers' expectations about

the inclusion and validation of female subjectivities. This shift in Focus becomes particularly challenging for readers with entrenched normative gender expectations when questions of female agency, sexuality and authority are discussed. In both *Shards* and *Barrayar*, previously naturalised aspects of women's experiences (particularly sexual ones) are questioned and challenged through the characters of Elena Visconti and Cordelia. But, as Bujold herself indicates, this intrusion of "alien ideas" (Lake 9) into readers' minds is perhaps the point. In interview with Ken Lake, Bujold has directly discussed the need to rewrite her description of Cordelia's pregnancy for male readers, noting that she had to outline all the dangers of pregnancy more explicitly:

I read this to a writer's group, and the women listening – all like myself experienced mothers – picked up all kinds of emotional resonances from the scene, all of which I fully intended. These were mostly suppressed fear, ominous threat, and great unease; the scene ends with Cordelia going indoors because "the sun was giving her a slight headache". It was not, of course, the sun that was giving her a headache, and there was nothing slight about it – the woman was in a state of real terror. My male listener caught absolutely nothing of this stuff. He reported perceiving Cordelia sitting around the garden like a big lazy cat, and thought she was being really wimpy about the sun.

What was your reaction to this?

I was floored, till I went back over the scene and looked again. None of the resonances I was counting on was in fact stated in words anywhere in the text – I realised I was expecting certain words to 'unfold', to carry hidden baggage which just did not exist for him. I never mentioned haemorrhage anywhere in the text, yet every female listener reported back thinking about haemorrhage at exactly the point I intended them to, not to mention stroke, kidney failure, exhaustion, vulnerability and so on – a world of implication. So I went back over the scene and made clunkily explicit what had been so elegantly implicit before, taking a whole paragraph to list all the complications of

pregnancy and childbirth women think of everyday during the nine months. So now I hope it will work for both morphs of readers. (Lake 7)

This is an unusual perspective in Space Opera and nowhere more clear than here, where not only is the shift in subjectivity plain but its purposeful inclusion is also confirmed directly by the author. These scenes also revolve around the consideration of social and cultural implications of female-focussed technology. They include topics that are of particular interest and concern to female characters such as the arguments for uterine replicators over body births. In the following sections I examine Bujold's depictions of her female characters' unconventional responses to some conventionally feminine encounters, particularly desire, marriage, domestic duties, rape, pregnancy, and death, before concluding the chapter with a discussion of Bujold's main example of Reversal in her early SF novels, Ludmilla Droushnakovi, the female soldier.

Desire & Sexuality

The overt presence of desire and sexuality in speculative fiction is increasing. Much of the early pulp fiction was restrained in its discussion of these topics by contemporary standards of public decency. As a result, some of the most restrictive and masculine views of female sexuality are encoded in that fiction:

The use of sex in science fiction ... seemed to mean only one thing: the role of woman as sex object could be added to the traditional ones of housewife, child-raiser, damsel in distress and scientist's daughter. (Sargent "Women in SF" xlili)

There is still a tendency for modern speculative fiction to preserve and pass on these outdated cultural conformities, including heteronormativity, through unquestioned reproduction of common tropes and the naturalised values these practices encode. This includes other highly formulaic genres where the desire of the female is often insignificant beyond her consent, and even this can be considered unnecessary. As Cranny-Francis reflects:

Within [a] stereotypical pattern [of narrative] the place of the female/feminine is to be the seduced, the subjugated. So where and how does female/'human' desire operate? As a pattern of yielding and subjection perhaps? Certainly this is the kind of desire mechanism encoded in much Gothic fiction with its sadistic but irresistible and essentially tender hero and passive, acquiescent heroine. (15)

The current fashion for supernatural romance/detective novels and the incredible popularity of such conformative texts as *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* certainly seem to support such a position. Romances seem to rely on heroes as much as Space Opera or Sword and Sorcery novels, they are just less well armed. The Byronic model of 'Bad Boy' love interest is the focus of many "woman-to-woman" text types (Moulton 17), the representation of such heroes usually encoding essential tenets of the traditional hegemonic male: an idealised vision of a dominant, active subject, desired by the [assumed female] reader and combining very traditional patriarchal values with the hero's tender feelings and susceptibility for the heroine that yields her some measure of unusual agency. The heroine may now be the central focus of the narrative events, but the socio-cultural values surrounding her remain traditional and patriarchal. Part of Bujold's reformulation is her interest in writing woman-to-man, a much more unusual style but one that she notes as deliberate in the Lake interview.

The gender norms discussed in Chapter Two are examples of this process in action in speculative narrative: the Princess character type preserves ideals of passivity and the role of women as object for men's desire; the Priestess character reveals masculine ambivalence to active and powerful women by dividing sexuality from authority through good/bad binaries for women's behaviour and reputation; while the Maternal stereotypes sideline women into devalued and narratively invisible domestic spheres, neutralising their sexuality behind the closed door of the bedroom. Bujold deliberately disrupts this pattern, portraying in Cordelia a monogamous but sexually active married woman with a blunt frankness about sexuality that is described as typically Betan and therefore shocking to Barrayarans. Cordelia attempts to codify the contradictory

messages about sex that she receives during her cultural exchange in Barrayar and reduces Aral to tears of laughter as a result:

She tried writing out a list of the rules she thought she had deduced, but found them so illogical and conflicting, especially in the area of what certain people were supposed to pretend not to know in front of certain other people, she gave up the effort. (*Cordelia's Honor* 310-311)

Bujold deftly summarises the key differences in gender codes with her description of Barrayaran reticence about female sexuality, particularly the underlying hypocrisy of sexual relations being a taboo conversation subject with women but for men and women in single gender privacy “the most astonishing transformations in apparent databases” is permitted (*Barrayar* 311). Despite the need to engage in sexual activity in order to become mothers, Maternal characters are hardly ever considered as sexual beings in speculative fiction (a feature I shall explore in more detail in relation to Fantasy in Chapter Eight). In SF writing, Susan Wood noted that the elision of female sexuality is not confined to Princess and Maternal types as the depiction of heroic women has similarly suggested that female independence and sexuality are incompatible: “In the pulps at least, [heroic women] could only live their independent lives by sacrificing what their creators assumed was some of their femininity” (Wood 13).

Although referring to Fantasy author Lackey, Crosby highlights the potential for female authors to portray “a truth about female sexual experience” that contradicts normative expectations, as Bujold does. By depicting a range of sexual behaviours of women in both modes of speculation, including “superficial lust, promiscuity, friendly liaisons, partnerships, and life-bonded pairings” (Crosby 129). Cordelia’s partnership with Reg Rosemont, one of her Survey crew, is revealed in hindsight (Bujold *Shards* 184) and she has had at least one other relationship which she prioritised over her career (51). Kareen and Mark in *A Civil Campaign* make a business contract, taking out “mutual options” on each other rather than a formal engagement (Bujold *Civil* 415-416).

But Miles marries Ekaterin and lives happily ever after, as do Cordelia and Aral, and Ekaterin's aunt the Professora and Professor Vorthys (Bujold *Civil, Diplomatic, Komarr*). These relationships are contrasted with the dire examples of both Aral and Ekaterin's woeful first marriages (Bujold *Komarr*; Bujold *Shards*). In yet another formation, Alys Vorpatril and Simon Illyan take up an intimate relationship outside the formal bonds of matrimony and outside social standards of behaviour (Bujold *Civil, Memory*). This brief list does not even begin to encompass the many highly unusual relationships which in Miles engages during his adventures off Barrayar, all of which end with his ex-partners entering into an equally diverse range of alternative relationships (Bujold *Komarr* 308-310). Bujold's characters generally seem more able to engage in sexual relationships that don't lead to marriage outside Barrayar, in galactic spaces or Fantastic ones; on Barrayar there is a definite emphasis on women adhering to social standards of modesty and chastity, while for privileged males, like the Vor class nobility, lust is characterised by violence and possession.

Where traditional depictions of relationships in other speculative fiction appear (if they appear at all) they are presented almost entirely from the masculine perspective and reinforce traditional values through their approbation of masculinity via sexual reward systems, whereas Bujold provides a much broader range of examples of romantic relationships. Interestingly, however, this diversity does not encompass lesbian relationships and intimacy amongst primary and secondary characters is framed as male-to-male or male-to-female only. In Bujold's SF queer characters privilege masculinity – whether bisexual (Ges, Aral, Byerly), homosexual (the all-male planetary population of Athos), hermaphroditic (Bel Thorne, who emphasises their femininity around Miles to appeal to his heterosexual preferences) or transgendered (Lady Donna becomes Lord Dono). It is also problematic that amongst these characters, three share the same surname, Vorrutyer, a byword for deviance and untrustworthiness on Barrayar, and a fourth, Aral, shares the bloodline but not the name (James *LMB* 147). This reflects an unconscious bias on Bujold's part, implying a genetic basis to same-sex attraction that goes against Bujold's depiction of people as multi-faceted and varied. The association of same-sex attraction and the negative connotations of

the Vorrutyer name is all the more surprising given her stated “personal and psychological pursuit of an ongoing theme, personal identity, which sometimes but only sometimes intersects with feminism” (Kelso *Letterspace* 102-103). This limitation also somewhat proscribes wider engagement with homosexuality and other queer attractions or identifications in the societies Bujold depicts and reinforces an awareness of how very few queer characters appear in these narratives. The prominence and positive depiction of queer individuals (excepting Ges) suggests that Bujold is sympathetic overall but that she has not engaged as fully with reformulation of same sex attraction as she has with the limitations faced by women in both real and imagined societies.

Bujold’s vision of alternatives for romantic relationships encompasses both conventional and unconventional solutions to individual relationship needs, reflecting the author’s humanist values and the “one size does not fit all” approach she displays throughout her narratives. What remains consistent is Bujold’s “ability to interrogate pleasure, sexuality, and identity in our society through the exploration of alternate realms ... without being confined to type”. (Crosby 142). More radical feminists might suggest that Bujold’s exploration of desire falls short of queering established patriarchal expectations of intimacy, but it clearly stems from her fundamental interest in humanist philosophies and her recognition of the psychological and emotional complexity and variation displayed by humans.

Marriage

In traditional speculative fiction, marriage is often used as a reward for the hero’s successful performance of his quest, bringing resolution and closure to the narrative and relegating women again to the role of object in the male quest. The expression of desire is often depicted as much tamer within the bonds of matrimony and the invisibility of the female is veiled in domestic concerns that are pushed aside to the margins of the story. In contrast, Bujold focuses on both positive and negative aspects of women’s lived experience of marriage within patriarchal systems. This discussion is flagged explicitly in *A Civil Campaign* by Kareen Koudelka when she resists becoming engaged to Mark Vorkosigan, but is carried on throughout the series:

Cordelia's brows rose. "Is that how you see marriage? As the end and abolition of yourself?"

Kareen realized belatedly that her remark might be construed as a slur on certain parties here present. "It is for some people. Why else do all the stories *end* when the Count's daughter gets married? Hasn't that ever struck you as a bit sinister? I mean, have you ever read a folk tale where the Princess's mother gets to do anything but die young? I've never been able to figure out if that's supposed to be a warning, or an instruction." (Bujold *Civil* 414)

A number of these relationships will be examined in detail throughout this thesis, here, I just wish to establish that there is a consistent pattern in Bujold's writing. She explores the responses of female characters to marriage, as well as their lives within the bounds of matrimony, entering into discussions previously rare in speculation, rarer in SF, about sexuality, pregnancy and masculine authority within relationships. This is possible because of the extended serialisation format Bujold utilises, where the narrative never really concludes but is extended with each new novel, creating further opportunities to elaborate on these relationships.

Part of this capacity in Bujold's work also comes from her assertion that:

[Campbell's] Hero's Journey is just the wrong shape for the Heroine. The journey into maturity ... has an entirely different structure for women than for men, starting from the fact that while the male goes out into the world and returns to his starting point to take over the role of his father, the successful female ... goes out and keeps on going, never to return. (Oak 4)

In traditional folklore for example, the hero sets out to make his fortune through adventures and returns successfully with many of the traditional rewards; wealth, fame, respect, a woman. While stories where the heroine is a protagonist have a stronger emphasis on kindness and endurance, often through household chores and caregiving. Her reward is a well-situated husband but she is one

reward among many for a male adventurer. A good marriage is the ultimate and often only prize for a heroine, in which she transfers to a place of privilege in her husband's household instead of returning to her father's house. Although the scenery changes, the limitation of women to domestic concerns does not change, if anything the scope of women's lives decreases upon marriage. Unlike the masculine hero journey of increase and reward, the circular return is not common and, when it does occur, is not positive for females in folklore, but rather a sign of their failure. In folklore, women's journey is usually linear (Warner 78) and Bujold addresses this idea frequently, both within narrative and outside it, especially through Ista's longing for "a road that does not come back" (Bujold *Paladin* 3). Ista has experienced the circular journey of the hero that is sign of failure for women, and seeks a path to autonomy and self-determination promised by the more usual linear narrative structure of the heroine's journey. She eventually finds one, but it does not conclude with her marriage and containment, rather she creates her own third path to success and freedom. Presenting numerous models of marriage is one way of addressing the relentless uniformity of women's fates in narrative, but Bujold also engages in a much more diverse and radical reformulation. She does this by suggesting that there are alternative fates available and by allowing women to remain on-stage in the narrative even while married and pregnant. Bujold stresses this in her Oak interview about, describing *Paladin of Souls* as a "Chick Book by intent" (6) as both the protagonist and antagonists are female and therefore present a far greater number of alternative models for women's lives than usually given in a single Fantasy narrative. I suggest that these themes run steadily throughout the *Vorkosigan Series* as well. In some ways, *Paladin of Souls* is the realisation of the potential for speculative fictions to imagine and depict alternatives for women, one that Bujold continues to pursue in her fiction.

Bujold suggests that traditional patterns where a woman's life path culminated in her marriage have been complicated by modern technology which has "literally doubled the life expectancy of women in industrial societies" giving instead "a life structure of 'maid, matron, 20-or-30-year-blank, crone'" for which there are "no historical models for that second maturity period"

(Oak 4). The matrimonial relationships of Cordelia and Aral, Droushnakovi and Koudelka, Alys and Simon, Miles and Ekaterin, Kareen Koudelka and Mark Vorkosigan all present alternative solutions to fill the gap of the second maturity period; Cordelia pursues an administrative and political career (even after Aral's death) and then a second family, Drou raises a family of five girls, Alys has a career first and returns to marriage late in life, Ekaterin raises further children alongside a career as horticulturalist, and Kareen prioritises her career without sacrificing her significant relationship. Cordelia, Drou, and Alys's stories reflect the need for this "second maturity period" more readily, but in the later SF, Bujold challenges the assumed progression of a woman's life from maid to matron when Ekaterin and Kareen (amongst others) are shown seeking different paths to self-fulfilment much earlier. These alternatives appear between the action sequences and hold together the series, contributing to enduring reader interest in the ongoing saga as well as individual narratives within each text. Bujold's recurring interest in marriage and her exploration of both the act and the experience of being married is vital to these novels, as much as the complex politics and running gun battles that dominate centre stage, and Bujold examines multiple variations and the consequences for the *women* in them, perhaps even more than for the men. Robinson suggests that:

Contemporary women's fiction *strategically* engages with official narratives – of history, of sexual difference, subjectivity – in order to deconstruct them and to forge new narratives. These official or 'master' narratives range from the traditional male-centered quest story, to discourses of colonialism, to philosophical and psychological discourses which posit Woman either as a metaphor for difference in man, or as an a priori lack. (17)

The narrative structure of the Hero's Journey cannot be applied to female characters without adjustment, as traditional narrative patterns contain different socially normative expectations for each gender, one that is often imposed through the narrative device of the marriage. Bujold's interest in the philosophical and psychological underpinnings of identity, and the ways in which social context affects and is effected by the individual through gendered norms of behaviour is conveyed through the responses of different female characters to the traditional limitation imposed

by marriage. Oak comments admiringly of Bujold's writings that her female characters have "a path to power" that "exists separately from that of men (2). Women have:

a movement and urgency apart from the interests and personal journeys of men. The book is about women's own struggle to grow as people rather than their struggle to thrive in opposition to patriarchal oppression. (Oak 2)

Although marriage often restricts a woman's path to power, Bujold presents a number of alternatives without precluding marriage itself as a path to happiness. She agrees with Oak that "Women do desperately need models for power other than the maternal." (11) and her depictions of Drou, Ekaterin, the Professora Vorthys, and Lady Alys, for example, show married women who achieve success in other arenas than domestic ones. Cordelia and then Ekaterin's outsiders' perspectives are also used to provide a more subjective understanding of issues regarding women and their use of authority that have previously been ignored or sidelined in speculative fictions and in the process, Bujold is able to "redress shortcomings in patriarchal constructions of womanhood." (Weese 21) that exist within and alongside the social institution of marriage.

Domestication

The Maternal representation of women is readily sidelined or backgrounded in the action driven narratives of Space Opera and SF. Wood described it as "the Galactic Kitchen Sink" (18), connecting traditional expectations of women in maternal roles in real life, quasi-historical and futuristic settings. But there are notable differences between Maternal responsibility and domestic drudgery, and Bujold does not engage equally strongly with both areas. I will be discussing specific examples of Bujold's Maternal depictions in detail later, here I will be examining more general examples of conventional, class-based solutions to domestic drudgery, as well as Bujold's approach to depicting Maternal authority. She does not usually provide strong alternative solutions to basic life chores such as technology or magic. Instead she uses the common approach of relegating domestic chores to the servant classes in order to free her female characters from domestic work.

This enables them to engage more strongly with the events of the narrative. The question becomes one of who is tasked with these chores rather than female protagonists. A question for which Bujold does not provide complete answers, as with her discussion of race and lesbianism.

Unlike other Space Opera stories that shuffle women “off stage” (Russ “Image” 83) and justify their absences by supposing the fulfilment of domestic duties, Bujold elevates her female protagonists out of social spheres where these duties are a concern to them. Both Cordelia as Regent-Consort and Countess, Lady Alys as the Emperor’s “official hostess” (Bujold *Civil* 54), and then Ekaterin and Laisa the Empress-to-be, in the later novels *Komarr* and *A Civil Campaign*, have no need to engage in these duties and, in fact, their role in society is such that others wait on them, which leaves them with more time and mental energy to devote to solving the riddles of the plot in their narratives and to establishing their identities. The drudgery and despair of Ekaterin, who regularly performs household duties in the early chapters of *Komarr* while still married to her abusive husband Tien, is replaced with far more active and decisive patterns of behaviour after his death, when she is returned to more privileged and wealthy echelons of the Vor caste, in the company of her aunt the Professora and, later, Miles. The need for this separation to occur in order for female characters to thrive and become active is an oblique criticism of the current work/life balance many women struggle with in the primary world. Although this is only a partial solution, as it does not liberate all women equally, Bujold’s approach does create more opportunities for female characters to engage with the narrative and is a greater acknowledgement of the unseen limitations on women (in both primary and secondary worlds) than is given in much speculative writing.

Russ has described explicitly the expectation that domestic roles will be fulfilled by women that often does not change much between traditional primary and estranged secondary contexts:

But if you look closely at this weird world you find that it practices a laissez-faire capitalism, one even freer than our own; that men make more money than women; that men have the better jobs... ; and that children are raised at home by their mothers. In

short, the American middle class with a little window dressing. In science fiction, speculation about social institutions and individual psychology has always lagged far behind speculation about technology, possibly because technology is easier to understand than people. ("Image" 81)

Russ also notes the naturalisation of these values, where the world of white middle class suburbia “*is never questioned*” even when the writers produce “reasonably sophisticated and literate science fiction” (81, emphasis in original). In the worlds of Bujold, however, domestic roles and responsibilities are not always subject to the same invisibility or disdain. Although the necessary drudge work is often still sidelined, Bujold does make domestic spaces and concerns central to her novels, challenging traditional attitudes to domestic work while she also presents unconventional women engaging with these responsibilities. One way in which Bujold achieves this is by maintaining the Maternal responsibilities of her female characters, even as she jettisons domestic work. Cordelia is given guardianship of the young Emperor and questions the understanding of the highly patriarchal Barrayaran lords and how much power they have handed over to her as Gregor’s surrogate mother. Through her incredulity, readers are made aware of Bujold’s very clear understanding of just how much responsibility and influence Maternal women can have. Bujold emphasises the impact of Maternal care in shaping the ideals and values of these future-adults (Gregor and Miles especially) but also constructs this as an authority that is wielded consciously and responsibly by women, one which has a profound effect on society, rather than allowing it to remain marginalised and invisible as so often occurs in more conformative speculative fictions.

While there are some novels where the minutiae of maternal care are barely mentioned, such as the mid-series novels which describe the James Bond-style adventures of Miles. There are many others where parent-child relationships are central and feminine experiences are foregrounded. In *Barrayar*, Cordelia’s imperilled pregnancy and her increasingly parental relationship with the future Emperor are not mere sidelines to the plot, but significant and central concerns. Likewise, the care and safety of Ekaterin’s son, Nikolai, are central to events in *Komarr*. Her abusive husband, Tien

Vorsoisson, is able to manipulate her through concern over Nikolai's health and to embezzle family funds she has scrimped to provide for his ongoing care. Tien's family also uses Nikolai's custody, and their ability to withhold it under Barrayar's patriarchal legal systems, as a tool to manipulate Ekaterin and demand her adherence to traditional standards of behaviour for Vor women (Bujold *Civil* 404). The Focus on Cordelia and Ekaterin in these novels is one of the main reasons I selected them as the source texts for this thesis as they showcase Bujold's interest in female identity and occupations. They show Bujold engaging with and redefining what it is to be a woman and how to occupy the "middle third" of a woman's life and with finding a "third place to stand" that does not rely on either the maternal or sexual modes of authority to which women are traditionally limited (Oak 8, 11) as both Cordelia, Alys, and Ekaterin pursue professional careers beyond the boundaries of their pregnancies and maternal duties. As with her discussion of marriage, Bujold shows that parenthood is not the "end and abolition of yourself" for women (Bujold *Civil* 414), as might be assumed if one read only traditional speculative fiction where women disappear "off stage" (Russ "Image" 83).

Cordelia's influence extends far beyond her presence, through her role as parent and surrogate parent for many of the other characters in the Vorkosigan Series. When Miles is adventuring, he carries with him values and expectations grounded in the care he received from his own mother, and refers to them explicitly: "Over and over again in the series, when Miles must make a decision, it is the moral voices of his parents, Aral and Cordelia, that Miles hears." (Croft et al. 53). Aral's parenting style complements this influence and is presented as more active and emotionally supportive than traditionally expected of fathers; a sharp contrast with the authoritarian paterfamilias style of parenting provided by his own father, Piotr. Wight has noted that:

Although constructed within a traditional hierarchical framework, the interdependency, vulnerability, and deep affection that characterize Miles's bonds with other men far

exceeds the norm. All military leaders depend on their followers' support, but Miles's dependence on others is overt and highly embodied. (123)

Typically, Bujold suggests that neither gender has unique traits and widens the range of emotions and behaviours associated with each gender by deliberately resisting established tropes. Miles' success is as much the result of Aral's parenting as Cordelia's and as result Bujold presents a more positive portrayal of masculine bonding throughout the series. The continual intrusion of more progressive values is often tied to Betan influence as internalised by Cordelia and espoused by Aral. They are a key component of Bujold's ability to critique patriarchal structures. I am more interested in the ways that Bujold resists and reformulates these traditional tropes, by presenting partially adherent characters alongside those who reject established and highly gendered expectations.

One of the most confirmative models of Maternal care in the Vorkosigan Series is Ma Kosti, the Vorkosigan House cook, whose abilities become the stuff of legend after she is employed by Miles (*Memory* 1997) and who embodies the 'happy homemaker' ideal. Ma Kosti's cheerful and capable demeanour, her 'good fit' for the role she inhabits, reflect a trend in Bujold's writing towards self-realisation and fulfilment through self-knowledge. However, she is frequently acknowledged as highly creative and skilled, and her culinary skills are both politically useful to Miles and commercially useful to his clone brother, Mark. The Vorkosigan family is frequently shown to foster this development amongst their staff and associates, particularly in Miles' extraordinary adventures where his ability to win friends and influence people is crucial. Despite the occasional wry and amused recognition of this extraordinary ability (Bujold *Civil* 279), there is more to this depiction than readers might immediately assume. The problematic aspects of a feudal social space, where domestic chores are separated from the daily life of the upper-class protagonists, is that it can be seen to support the essentialist, often biologically determined, and gendered nature of those domestic chores. The Vorkosigan household is no exception to this; the male staff are generally drivers, guardsmen, butlers and so on, like Pym, ex-military men who are somewhat more visible as they are given names and a presence within the narrative. Female staff, of whom Ma Kosti is the

main representative and the only named character available, are less visible. The most repetitive, least valued of the household chores are relegated to invisible females; as in *Barrayar*, when the punishment for badly behaved guards is the regular work of nameless female household servants:

a couple more youthful types ... attempted to celebrate with a few crackers let off inside the walls. They were taken aside by the guard commander, and emerged much later, pale and shrunken, to slink off. Cordelia later saw them hauling rubbish under the command of a sardonic housemaid, while a scullery girl and the second cook galloped happily out of the house for a surprise day off. (Bujold *Cordelia's Honor* 320)

It is this naturalised oblivion that I think Russ was referring to when she noted the reliance of Space Opera and SF on “feudal economic and social structure” supported by “advanced technology” to create a limiting factor in the representation of women in SF (Russ “Image” 83). Bujold creates a range of depictions and responses to the socially mandated role of women as domestic workhorses. These positive depictions of the lives of domestic staff (such as Ma Kosty and Pym) present opportunities to validate the work and to assert the value and personal satisfaction for some people in doing these tasks, but they are much less emphasised than Bujold’s presentation of what else can be achieved by women in society when they are ‘free agents’ and not limited by such expectations. The answer to redefining how women are treated (in either the primary or secondary world) seems to lie in acceptance of the many and varied expressions possible for femininity itself, something which Bujold appears to have utilised in her narratives long before intersectional approaches came to dominate academic feminist discussions of such topics. Some women choose domestic lives, choose family life, choose Maternal responsibilities; Drou, Princess Kareen, and Tatiana Vorbretten. While others who choose lives as mercenary soldiers and ship captains; Elena Bothari and Elli Quinn. These women are increasingly shown as neither more nor less valued than Maternal ones. In the later SF, some are shown to follow Cordelia’s lead by forging a third path that combines both; Lady Alys, Ekaterin, Empress Laisa and the Professora Vorthys. Bujold sidesteps many issues of class and does not engage strongly with economic realities that might force many women to adhere to social

norms. Instead, she focuses the narrative on higher levels of the social ranks to depict women with the ability to choose their fate and the capacity to acquire agency. This repositions their struggle to achieve self-determination as one all individuals face, limited by their life circumstances rather than by gendered expectations of 'appropriate' behaviour and, although it does not address all aspects of this struggle, it certainly presents old struggles in a new light.

Violence against women

Bujold has also complicated traditional Space Operatic depictions of sexual violence against female characters, even while seeming to repeat the trope. She does this through her contrast of Betan and Barrayaran attitudes to rape and the introduction of female perspectives which greatly problematise traditional representations. The experience and consequences of rape in Bujold's early SF are presented directly through Cordelia's encounter with Vorrutyer and indirectly via the parallel example of his first victim, Elena Visconti, whose torture prompts Aral's determination to intervene in the future to prevent violence against women by his fellow Barrayarans (*Shards* 126, 153). In Bujold's later SF, this issue is more subtly framed as part of Ekaterin's experience of domestic abuse and violence, which will be considered in Chapter Five.

Cordelia's experience of the threat of rape requires readers to consider an issue of relevance to many women in the primary world; an issue which is not usually a central concern in traditional Space Opera where male starship captains are sexually invulnerable, often shown moving from one sexual conquest to another, just as they move (and often *when* they move) from one planet to another (Blair 292; Bowring 396). Cordelia's experiences with Vorrutyer, however, and the preceding scenes of leering Barrayaran brutality place her in a far more traditionally feminine and vulnerable position. For a brief time, Cordelia becomes an object rather than the subject. This objectification, however, is complicated by the reader's retention of the subjective experiences of Cordelia, her responses as well as her inner thoughts provided by Bujold's narration. Cordelia's response to the

“unclean silence” that greets her in Vorrutyer’s rape chamber is to confront him directly, with a very dark humour:

"Looks like a permanent installation," she observed to Vorrutyer, horribly fascinated. It was like a sick joke come to life. "What do you do when you can't catch Betans? Call for volunteers?" (Bujold *Shards* 110)

Through her vocal confrontation of Vorrutyer, Cordelia is removed from the role of silent object and attempts to assert her subjectivity, even while being physically abused and highly objectified. This is typical of Bujold’s frequent use of juxtaposition to create insight, whether that is insight into characters and contexts or to give critical analysis of social mores. This is emphasised by the increasingly black and desert-dry wit Cordelia employs during her ordeal with Vorrutyer. Whereas in other places Bujold uses the contrast of Betan and Barrayaran social behaviours and attitudes (as expressed by her characters), here she is explicitly drawing on the reader’s anticipation of the masculine and feminine stereotypes common in Space Opera to construct more problematic and demanding relationships.

On Beta, sexuality as a whole is less fraught than on Barrayar. Betans engage in a range and diversity of relationships and liaisons that would not be tolerated on Barrayar, and although never outright described as non-existent, sexual crimes do not seem to be as prevalent as they are on Barrayar and are subject to much harsher penalties. Cordelia anticipates some trouble of this kind with Aral during her first imprisonment, as does her crew, who vote unanimously to return and save her as a result. However, Aral’s variation from the Barrayaran norm is discussed explicitly by the two of them (Bujold *Shards* 50). It is not until the second time Cordelia is captured that she begins to understand how vastly different Aral is from other Barrayarans.

She had a guard at each elbow again for the trip through the ship. One grinned and undressed her with his eyes. The other looked at her with pity, far more disturbing. She

began to wonder just how much her time with Vorkosigan had led her to discount the risks of capture. (Bujold *Shards* 109)

This unpalatable truth is presented frequently, reinforced by later comments from other Escobaran prisoners.

“It’s been hell. The guards are pigs. Then, all of a sudden yesterday afternoon, this bunch of high-ranking Barrayaran officers came trooping through. At first we thought they were *shopping for rapees*, like the last bunch. But this morning about half the guards had disappeared – the worst of the lot ...” (*Shards* 153, *my emphasis*)

Aral does his best to halt the spread of this “infection of the spirit” (50), but it is not until he assumes the role of Regent, with Cordelia by his side, that he is able to have a more widespread impact on Barrayaran cultural norms. Bujold is able to avoid the stereotype of weak women waiting to be saved, however, by maintaining the Focus on Cordelia’s subjective experience and inner dialogue. It is an interesting contrast when reading the whole series to consider the passage of time that occurs and to mark the shifts in Barrayaran responses to such issues between this, the earliest of the novels both chronologically and in writing order, and more recent texts where the Barrayaran army has a far less misogynistic (though no less dangerous) reputation.

This early behaviour and attitude is most visibly reinforced in the character of Ges Vorrutyer, who conforms to many stereotypes of monstrous characters in SF and Space Opera with his “amoral flashy freakiness” (113). Like Tiptree’s Fenton and Moore’s Northwest Smith, Vorrutyer (and later Tien Vorsoisson) “personif[y] the he-man adventurism of that same discourse. ... a violent colonialist, white, male discourse which is fundamentally sexist” (Cranny-Francis 31). The prevalence and acceptance of this behaviour in Barrayaran society is acknowledged through comments about Vorrutyer’s relationship and his influence on Crown Prince Serg (Bujold *Shards* 141, 147, 270). Aral notes of Vorrutyer:

"We were in school, and lieutenants together, back when he was only a common voyeur. He grew worse, I understand, in recent years, since he started associating with Prince Serg, and thinking he could get away with anything. God help us, he was nearly right." (Bujold *Shards* 130)

Vorrutyer is depicted as undeniably and overtly evil by his taste for sexual depravity through reference to his sexual preferences of voyeurism, the use of force, sado-masochism, and coercion through drug use:

"Been reading the Marquis again, have you?" he [Vorkosigan] addressed the corpse with a sigh. ... The lieutenant [Illyan] was going through Vorrutyer's drawers and cupboards also, using a handkerchief to open them, and from his expression finding that his cosmopolitan education was not so complete as he had supposed. He remained staring for a long time into the drawer that Cordelia had shut so hastily. (120)

The over-used SFnal conventions of representing the monstrous through feminisation are also repeated through observations about Vorrutyer's beauty, his love of clothing and his bisexuality:

He had dark hair too, curlier than Vorkosigan's and with less grey in it, was a similar age, and rather more handsome. His eyes were quite different, a deep velvet brown fringed by long black lashes, by far the most beautiful eyes she had ever seen in a man's face. They triggered a small subliminal wailing deep in her mind, crying, you thought you had faced fear earlier today, but you were mistaken; here is the real thing, fear without exhilaration or hope; which was strange, for they ought to have attracted her. (*Shards* 107)

This is another regrettably common feature of traditional Space Opera, where power that is negative is often coded as feminine. Even Vorrutyer's emotional attachment to Aral, presented within a romantic frame by both characters, can be read as a feminising dilution of hegemonic masculine tropes by readers fluent with the dominant gender coding of SF. However, Bujold

presents both a positive and negative depiction of bisexuality by including both Aral and Vorrutyer and by emphasising the romantic aspects of the attachment between them (*Shards* 114). Although a typical villain at first glance, whose disrespect for others is used to underline his Otherness and evil, this representation is complicated by the insights into the pain of both perpetrator and victim provided by Bujold. Cordelia and through her, the reader, is acutely aware during this encounter of Vorrutyer's emotional pain and once-loving feelings towards Aral, which Bujold uses to explain the vehemence of his negative response when thwarted, without ever being permitted to excuse it. Bujold separates sexuality and sexual preference from morality for both female and male characters. Bujold suggests that Aral once returned that love when Cordelia discovers:

a portfolio of [Aral's] yellowing pen-and-ink drawings ... There were also three studies of a laughing young man labeled "Ges" that seemed hauntingly familiar. She mentally added forty pounds and twenty years to him, and the room seemed to tilt as she recognized Admiral Vorrutyer. She closed the portfolio back up quietly." (*Barrayar* 238)

Cordelia, with her amazing insight, understands this as well, saying, "The more I look back on Vorrutyer, the more he seems a tragic figure. Still obsessed with a love affair that was over eighteen years ago" (330). Not only is the villain of the piece resistant to simple interpretation and presented with unusual psychological complexity, Cordelia's first-person perspective provides readers with much more than the usual "squeaking doll" (Le Guin "American Sf" 208) representation of women frequently used in speculative fiction. Bujold develops this complexity through her discussion of both Cordelia's near-miss experience and the long-term consequences of Elena's horrific experiences. The gradual erosion of Cordelia's incredible mental and physical strength is described in detail through Bujold's reportage of the conversation between Vorrutyer and Cordelia:

"I'm not going to rape you today," he offered conversationally, "if that's what you've been thinking."

"It had crossed my mind. I can't imagine what suggested it."

"There's scarcely time," he explained. "Today is but the, as it were, hors d'oeuvre of the banquet, or a simple clear soup, very pristine. All the complicated things will be saved for dessert, in a few weeks."

"I never eat dessert. Weight, you know."

He chuckled again. "You are a delight."

"Like master, like man," she shot at random. I cannot keep this up much longer; my heart shall fail me soon. (Bujold *Shards* 111-112)

The failure of Cordelia's resilience, the crumbling of her drive and intelligent resolve, are important elements of Bujold's construction of this rape scene. To take readers by the hand, through the dismantling of a heroic character, piece by small piece, is a more emotional and harrowing way to transfer some understanding of the impact of the event to the reader than the far more common way in which writing with a masculine subjectivity lingers over the sexual details or bypasses detail altogether for a report of the event in the past or future tense. Cordelia's resistance allows Bujold to illustrate the elements of Vorrutyer's interest in rape and to underline that it is a crime of power and control rather than sex or desire.

Another of the more unusual examples of female subjectivity comes in the lengthy examination of the consequences of rape for women; epitomised by the narrative arc of Elena Visconti, Escobaran prisoner and unwilling mother of Bothari's child. Vorrutyer uses Bothari to rape her, as he initially threatens to do with Cordelia in their confrontation (Bujold *Shards* 111-112). What is unusual in Bujold's work from conventional SF is consideration of rape from the woman's point of view; Cordelia's in the moment and Elena's through the long recovery process. This is magnified by the detail in which Elena's recovery is discussed. It is interesting to note that Bujold diverts the consequences onto a secondary character, not I think, because they are less important, but because they enable her to contextualise those consequences as long term and debilitating. This allows Bujold to maintain Cordelia as the focal character, the centre of action and momentum, where the same consequences as Elena suffers would derail Cordelia's presence in the narrative. Cordelia's

high social standing as wife of the Regent of the planet Barrayar does not allow for personal consequences without wide side effects and does not allow her to travel freely to resolve conflicts. However, Miles is still a free agent, eminently movable and with only personal consequences.

The narrative visibility of those consequences is retained through the ongoing presence of Elena Visconti in *Shards* and later *Warrior's Apprentice* and of her daughter (*Shards* 148, 152). Bothari's active role in Elena's story is chilling, though it is only recounted third hand to Cordelia by Aral on the day of the daughter's birth (Bujold *Barrayar* 224). Bothari is later killed by Elena in *Warrior's Apprentice*, and he accepts her attack with a clearly indicated suicidal acceptance of responsibility for his actions (Bujold *Warrior's Apprentice* 181-183). While rape in and of itself is not an unusual feature of SF or Space Opera, this third person intimate perspective of it is. Typical features are juxtaposed by Bujold with inversion of the subjective viewpoint and greater visibility for the consequences as the drawn out consequences of Elena's recovery span four books. These complications prevent Bujold's use of these events from remaining a predictable moment of violence used to justify further action, especially when they further the emotional and physical journey of the female characters involved rather than the men⁸. Wolmark suggests that rewriting SF conventions from the "unexpected and 'alien' perspective of the female subject can work towards giving a critical position from which such an interrogation could begin" (54). The presentation of the experience from the victim's point of view, as well as the greater and more detailed representation of consequences, provides an insight and focus on female experiences not available to readers of more conventional Space Opera.

Reproductive Technologies

Reproductive technologies and uterine replicators in particular have been much discussed in SF and related criticism, first appearing in *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley in 1932. They expand

⁸ See Gail Simone's website on the Women in Refrigerators trope at <https://www.lby3.com/wir/>; <https://www.vox.com/2018/5/24/17384064/deadpool-vanessa-fridging-women-refrigerators-comics-trope>

the biological limits of gestation, but they also provide Bujold with opportunities to explore the cultural differences such a technology might create for the societies with access to them. As here, in *Barrayar*, where Beta's different modes of reproduction are compared and discussed at length:

After lunch one afternoon [Cordelia] lay with her feet up on a sofa in a shaded patio between the house and its back garden—gestating assiduously—and reflected upon the assorted reproductive customs of Barrayar versus Beta Colony. Gestation in uterine replicators, artificial wombs, seemed unknown here. On Beta Colony replicators were the most popular choice by three to one, but a large minority stood by claimed psycho-social advantages to the old-fashioned natural method. Cordelia had never been able to detect any difference between vitro and vivo babies, certainly not by the time they reached adulthood at twenty-two. Her brother had been vivo, herself vitro; her brother's co-parent had chosen vivo for both her children, and bragged about it rather a lot. (Bujold 298)

Bujold repeats this idea in *A Civil Campaign* when two of the Koudelka sisters complain about being trotted out as “prize agricultural exhibits” at Barrayaran social events as one was in-vivo and the other in-vitro (48). Description of the replicators, and the inclusion of a thorough account of Cordelia's later surgery to save Miles' life, requires the inclusion of a long section of speculative 'hard' science, albeit biological and medical rather than the more usual military or space-flight related tech that appears in other Space Opera (Bujold *Barrayar* 398-399). The comparatively primitive medical technology of Barrayar is juxtaposed with Cordelia's Betan perspective, as she has experienced more sophisticated off-planet medicine. This provides Bujold with a clear opportunity to examine the process in detail and include social commentary on the differences between her home world and adopted world:

The operating room seemed clean and bright, if not so copiously equipped as galactic standard. Cordelia, wafting on her float pallet, turned her head sideways to take in as much detail as she could. Lights, monitors, an operating table with a catch-basin set

beneath it, a tech checking a bubbling tank of clear yellow fluid. This was not, she told herself sternly, the point of no return. This was simply the next logical step.

Captain Vaagen and Dr. Henri stood sterile-garbed and waiting, beyond the operating table. Next to them sat the portable uterine replicator, a metal and plastic canister half a meter tall, studded with control panels and access ports. The lights on its sides glowed green and amber. Cleaned, sterilized, its nutrient and oxygen tanks re-charged and ready ... Cordelia eyed it with profound relief. The primitive Barrayaran back-to-the-apes style gestation was nothing but the utter failure of reason to triumph over emotion. She'd so wanted to please, to fit in, to try to become Barrayaran. . . . *And so my child pays the price. Never again.* (396)

Estrangement here is offered subtly. Bujold uses the familiar language of surgery from the real world as well as unfamiliar invented science. We step from “Lights, monitors, an operating table with a catch-basin set beneath it” where the doctors “stood sterile-garbed and waiting” to a world of “float pallets”, “hyposprays” and “vibra-scalpels”. The primary world technology of hospital gurneys, hypodermic needles and scalpels are extrapolated into the future through the addition of unexpected descriptive terms. Interestingly, this process is reversed with sponges (a familiar prop in many accounts of surgery) repurposed from their common usage into something far more speculative:

The fragile placenta must be chemically and hormonally persuaded to release from the blood-vessel-enriched uterus, without damaging too many of its multitude of tiny villi, then floated free from the uterine wall in a running bath of highly oxygenated nutrient solution. The replicator sponge then had to be slipped into place between the placenta and the uterine wall, and the placenta's villi at least partially induced to re-interdigitate on its new matrix, before the whole mess could be lifted from the living body of the mother and placed in the replicator. (Bujold *Barrayar* 398)

One of the most frequent reasons given for the dismissal of Bujold's work and others like it is the lack of science (*SFE 2nd*). A fairly entrenched and wide-ranging series of arguments are presented by advocates of 'hard' science like "chemistry, physics and biology and the observational sciences" in preference over the supposedly 'soft' sciences, "the behavioural and social sciences" (Gunn "Toward" 84). Critics do not always agree that sciences are equally rigorous, a distinction that is made because data in the soft sciences is perceived as "at least partially subjective" dealing with "theories and general statements" rather than "objective" and "verifiable" predictions (Gunn "Toward" 84-85).

The terms 'hard' and 'soft' SF are the tangible labels of this argument's origins⁹. Fans would accept "dubious scientific content" but "What they seem to have objected to is being forced to pay attention to the social structures within which science and its creations must operate." (Attebery *Decoding* 48). Kathryn Cramer suggests that what makes a story feel like hard SF is a "technophilic" stance (24), a prejudice among readers that makes them:

feel that he (using the gendered pronoun advisedly) is part of a technologically-minded elite, someone who can contemplate the real workings of the universe without fuzzy thinking or sentiment. (Attebery *Decoding* 48)

The biologically-based speculative science Bujold includes is both grounded in contemporary knowledge and extrapolative in a way that advocates of hard SF demand (Gunn "Toward" 84). I suggest that the scientific content of Bujold's writing is overlooked because she also writes about the soft sciences, such as psychology, but mainly because the science is sometimes woman-centred and forces the reader to pay attention to the social structures around the characters (Attebery *Decoding* 48). Even though Bujold includes science based narrative devices that clearly fit into the

⁹ "The SF community borrowed the language of *hard* and *soft* from science at least as early as 1957, when P. Schuyler Miller used the term *hard science fiction* in a review column in *Astounding* (Stableford, "Last" 1)" (Attebery *Decoding* 48).

hard categories; such as the physics of the wormhole collapsing device in *Komarr* and descriptions as above of the biological technology of the uterine replicator. Much of the criticism of Bujold's work is instead unvoiced, an absence of commentary rather than active hostility. As Kelso suggests

This is social experiment on a truly ample scale; if it has gathered little interest, it may be because of that equally hoary prejudice against ideas that are neither hard science nor men-based. (Kelso "Loud" 81)

Amongst other, more typical, Space Opera science in Bujold's works there are instances such as those discussed here where 'women's sciences' (like women's actions and women's spaces) are crucial to the plot progression; an important addition to Bujold's reformulation of traditionally gendered narrative patterns.

Death and War

In contrast to reproductive technologies, which have traditionally been seen as the demesne of women, death and war are often presented as the province of men. However, Bujold focuses the narrative on a variety of lived experiences and refuses to separate these on gender binaries. A frequent feature of Space Opera is the large space battle, where many ships and lives are lost, and Bujold challenges reader's expectations of the genre with inversion and adaptation of traditional themes and imagery. Cordelia voices the most interesting of Bujold's perspectives, when she and Aral successfully reach his base during her first imprisonment and Aral becomes concerned that Cordelia is being "annoyed" by his young, all-male crew;

"They haven't been annoying you?"

"No, amusing me only. I wonder if they realize how they are used?"

"Not a bit. They think they are the emperors of creation."

"Poor lambs."

"That's not how I'd describe them."

"I was thinking of animal sacrifice."

"Ah. That's closer." (Bujold *Shards* 69)

Depictions of male soldiers are valorised in both the primary and conventional secondary worlds as the pinnacle of social prestige, but here "the emperors of creation" are repositioned to a modernist view of foot soldiers as cannon fodder through the insertion of Cordelia's non-Barrayaran, maternal perspective. Her feminine perspective "punctures the formulaic envelope" (Kelso "Gernsback" 19) of the traditionally masculine and self-congratulatory, often militaristic, tone of conventional Space Opera. As Kelso also notes, Bujold "Repeatedly ... shifts focus from the successes, exploits and glory of war to their human cost" (Kelso "Loud" 50). But one of the most direct challenges to the masculine subjectivity so common in SF and Space Opera is given in the coda to *Shards*, titled 'Aftermaths', where a middle aged, female Medtech is retrieving bodies from the battlefield of the Escobaran war with the help of a young pilot. She finds the bodies of a young male Escobaran soldier, Vorkalloner a Barrayaran officer, and a young Escobaran woman in various states of destruction. Medtech Boni treats all of the bodies with dignity, replying to the young pilot's observation that Barrayaran bodies should be "dumped with the rest of the garbage":

"Not at all. ... Think of all the work he represents on somebody's part. Nine months of pregnancy, childbirth, two years of diapering, and that's just the beginning. Tens of thousands of meals, thousands of bedtime stories, years of school. Dozens of teachers. And all that military training, too. A lot of people went into making him."

She smoothed a strand of the corpse's hair into place. "That head held the universe, once."

(Bujold *Shards* 250)

Their conversation brings into strong contrast the socially accepted responses and assumptions of the pilot (young and male, though not Barrayaran) with those of the 'alien' (the middle aged and female medtech) and the substitution of 'medtech' for 'nurse' is equally significant in terms of reformulating gendered norms. Earlier, Cordelia voiced a very similar opinion, saying "Save me from that! To pour your life into sons for eighteen or twenty years, and then have the government take

them away and waste them cleaning up after some failure of politics—no thanks" (Bujold *Shards* 40). These consistent inclusions of feminine perspectives and experiences almost directly contradict the usual militaristic tone of Space Opera. And the use of this subjectivity in particular as the closing imagery and final keynote of the novel elevates its significance beyond what is usual for such a short series of scenes (Bujold *Shards* 242–253). Kelso also comments on these events when she notes:

The novel's closure punctures the formulaic envelope even more fiercely by rewriting that cliché of SF, space battle. [Usually] it is sanitized by distance ... [other SF writers] offer high mortality rates but dignified deaths. Bujold, however, extrapolates the human cost with a space burial detail, where the reader confronts the 'reality' of death by decompression: a corpse "spinning fiercely, guts split open ...and hanging out in a frozen cascade" (Kelso "Gernsback" 19)

Not only does Bujold confront us with the gruesome corpses through Medtech Boni's painstaking recovery work such as when the pilot makes a great deal of fuss about the messy and intimate washing of the bodies that is required (*Shards* 246), but also with the intimate, personal face of grief when the reader learns that she is searching for her own daughter amongst the drifting rubble of the battlefield (252-253). The way in which this realisation is delivered so abruptly, the way it breaks into the dialogue and the awareness of the pilot, likewise punctures readers' familiar, comfortable distance from the war and their easy dismissal of the large numbers of dead that such space battles usually bring. Bujold names the three individuals whose bodies are recovered, and two of these have a direct connection with other characters; the dead Barrayaran is Vorkalloner whom we have briefly met with Aral, and the young woman is the medtech's own daughter. In doing this, she reminds us that each body was once a whole person, with parents or other carers who lavished much time and effort on them. All three heads "held the universe, once" (*Shards* 250). A deliberately maternal and feminine perspective is introduced into the sometimes offhandedly-masculine environment of SF, where deaths and dead bodies can become 'just' another part of narrative action

or a kind of gory backdrop against which heroism occurs. Bujold gives corpses names and encourages readers to reconsider their established responses to familiar SFnal tropes.

Bujold's Focus on women's subjectivities and experiences includes different issues that are of concern to many women which are often omitted from Space Opera and SF. This is one of the most significant ways she reformulates images of women in her speculative fiction and in the SF mode as a result. She engages readers of what she calls both "morphs" (Lake 7) in reading from a feminine subjective viewpoint to create narrative interest and Focus on these ideas and experiences. Bujold recognises and validates a wide range of female identities and interests beyond those usually depicted as valuable in traditional tropes, such as the Princess, the Priestess, and the Maternal. She also explores the experiences of women who take on roles that have traditionally been the province of men in patriarchal, hierarchical societies. This anticipates the arrival of the third wave of feminism in mainstream SF by a number of years.

Reversal

Bujold provides other validations of women as active participants in the narrative through secondary characters like Ludmilla Droushnakovi and her desire to be considered a real soldier, as well as her complex responses to socially normative Princess roles for women on Barrayar. In the hidebound patriarchal hierarchies of Barrayaran society, Drou aspires to respect and validation equal to that of her brothers and father who occupy socially approved roles in the military. While at first seeming to be just a fairly typical example of the 'woman warrior' or shero stereotype, the reversal of masculine warrior hero tropes without much addition of female perspectives, Drou develops into a far more complex character. Drou's initial appearance in *Shards of Honor*, as a stereotypically heroic bodyguard, is modified by the introduction of more feminine aspects during her romance with the non-hegemonic Koudelka in *Barrayar*. Drou's desire to be loved and become a mother is not sacrificed to her career aspirations or martial skill, and Cordelia selects Drou to accompany her on the important and dangerous mission to rescue Miles' replicator and Princess Kareen from the

other side of enemy lines. Over the course of the twelve novel series, her narrative arc provides an interesting insight into Cordelia's influence on the personal and the political environment of Barrayar (James *LMB* 142). Bujold's use of 'frill' as a pejorative Barrayaran slang term for a useless woman is contrasted with Drou's love of frilly clothing, capturing the contradictions of her situation as the first female serving in the highly masculine environment of the Barrayaran army (*Shards* 93). Later, Drou leaves the service to raise her family but this is presented as a decision based on Drou's desire to avoid life and death situations once she takes on parental responsibilities as much as her desire to conform to Barrayaran cultural norms. Elena Bothari-Jesek does the same *Memory* (Bujold *Memory* 44). Bujold does not suggest that women can do both at once like superwomen, as is suggested in the primary world, but that women have the ability and interest in doing both during different phases of their lives. Bujold depicts a greater variation and different sources of validation in women's lives that are more determined by individual interest than social dictates.

When readers first encounter Drou, she has been handpicked and trained to be a less obtrusive bodyguard for Princess Kareen, mother of the Imperial Heir, who then insightfully re-assigns her to Cordelia. Drou's position is unique, when asked if she was encouraged, she says "Everyone thought I was just odd." and notes that she "was too big for the women's classes. Nobody could give me any real practice, and besides, doing all katas was so dull. My brothers used to sneak me into the men's classes with them." (Bujold *Cordelia's Honour* 275). This combination of interest and physical ability is presented as unusual in Barrayaran society. Princess Kareen had been "asking for female guards for years, but they had a lot of trouble getting anyone who could pass all the tests" (275) and Drou proudly notes that she's "listed on Captain Negri's staff budget as Bodyguard, Class One." (Bujold *Cordelia's Honor* 266)

When Cordelia describes her own life in the mixed and egalitarian military of Beta, Drou's reactions tell readers much about the difficulties she has faced in pursuing her vocation as the only Barrayaran female on active military duty in the first two novels:

"Mixed," said Droushnakovi. Was that the light of envy in her eyes? "Women and men both serving." ...

"Respect," sighed Droushnakovi.

"Well, if people are laying their lives on the line for their community, they ought certainly to get its respect," Cordelia said equably. (Bujold *Cordelia's Honor* 272)

Reflecting on Drou's comments, Cordelia notes the consequences of Barrayar's stringent culturally normative social codes, when she observes "I feared Barrayar for what it did to its sons. No wonder they have trouble getting anyone to pass the tests" (275-276). Cordelia has not encountered such entrenched sexism on Beta and her outsider's perspective illuminates the highly gendered nature of these codes. This is clearly shown in Drou's struggles to gain respect as both a soldier and a woman, especially from her future husband Koudelka. The inequality and the limitations created by gendered social expectation are repeatedly shown in action on Barrayar, for example during practice bouts at the beginning of *Barrayar*, where the traditional, patriarchal position is voiced as usual by Aral's father, Piotr. "You'll be wanting women in the Service, next," complained Piotr. "Where will it end? That's what I'd like to know." (Bujold *Barrayar* 303). These attitudes are critiqued even more directly when Cordelia supplies the dialogue for a conversation about Drou's participation in practice fights that she can see but not hear in *Barrayar*:

Cordelia could not hear what they said to each other, across the garden, but supplied her own dialogue from gesture and expression, murmuring, "Aral: Cordelia wants Drou to play. Kou: Aw! Who wants *gurls*? Aral: Tough. Kou: They mess everything up, and besides, they cry a lot. Sergeant Bothari will squash her - hm, I do hope that's what that gesture means, otherwise you're getting obscene, Kou - wipe that smirk off your face, Vorkosigan - Aral: The little woman insists. You know how henpecked I am. Kou: Oh, all right. Phooey. Transaction complete: the rest is up to you, Drou." (303, original emphasis)

The forceful application of Cordelia's will, through the appropriated authority of Aral, to include Drou in the practice fighting works as both an example of the challenges women face as soldiers on Barrayar and a metaphor for the lives of women in the primary world who face similar attitudes and restrictions on their behaviour and aspirations. While it takes Drou a few rounds, and further overt support from the Vorkosigans after she is 'goosed' in the ring as an attempt to distract her from the fight, she employs her full strength and her success is resounding, dropping her larger opponent to the mat with a sizable "boom" (Bujold *Barrayar* 305). Cordelia's translation of the traditional masculine subjectivity presented in SF is recorded with comedic ruthlessness by Bujold and anticipates wider controversies and behaviours that are currently dividing the gaming and speculative fiction communities of practice in the primary world¹⁰.

Drou's unusual position is explored further in two key events: Koudelka's confession to raping her and Drou's resulting pregnancy scare. After Drou and Koudelka have sex, Koudelka feels guilty for having raped her but this is a great insult for Drou. Firstly, because she understood them to making love and forming a relationship and, secondly, because Koudelka is severely physically damaged. His ingrained assumptions about the inferiority of women and the underlying gendered assumption that he could force the more physically able and highly trained Drou to do anything against her will are revealed.

Drou slammed him expertly into the wall, and paralyzed him with a nerve thrust, her fingers jammed up into his solar plexus. His breath stopped.

¹⁰ For example, the lengthy and heated discussion of the SFWA Bulletin cover (<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/12/science-fiction-sexism-sfwa>, <http://www.sfwa.org/2014/02/presidential-statement-regarding-sfwa-bulletin/>); and John Scalzi and Mary Robinette Kowal's 'army of insects' (<http://whatever.scalzi.com/2014/02/18/join-the-insect-army/>); Sarkeesian's vlog on Feminist Frequency and the crisis around her successful Kickstarter campaign (<http://www.feministfrequency.com/>; <http://au.ign.com/articles/2013/05/31/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games-why-it-matters>); and representation of women in gaming (<http://www.vg247.com/2014/02/17/deep-down-the-rabbit-hole-of-ingrained-games-industry-sexism/>).

"You *goon*. Do you think you could lay a hand on me without my permission? Oh! To be so, to be so, so, so—" Her baffled words dissolved into a scream of outrage, right next to his ear. (Bujold *Barrayar* 412)

Bujold lays bare the normative ideals of masculine entitlement and superiority with precision and clarity. Kou is a crippled war veteran who requires a cane to walk and has had all of his nerves replaced with synthetic wiring but still assumes he would be able to take from her anything she did not mean to give. This surfaces and de-naturalises the value-laden assumptions that underpin Kou's behaviour and thinking. Bujold has been noted to use "typically damaged" or "characteristically wounded" male characters (*SFE 2nd and 3rd*) and part of the reason lies in this imbalance. By so comprehensively tipping the scales against Kou (a substandard male by Barrayar's impossibly hegemonic standards), Bujold reveals the underlying prejudices of Barrayaran gender politics that enable him to construct and justify his sense of superiority. She then positions this understanding as strongly divorced from reality and reiterates the point.

But Bujold does not leave the critique there; she also explains the feminine perspective to readers explicitly via Cordelia's comments to Aral and Kou, treating the men as an expository audience, just as scientists' daughters have been treated in much SF writing. Cordelia reveals the consequences of these sexist attitudes on personal relationships:

"But if she doesn't think I—what reason?"

"You don't see it?" She frowned at Aral. "You either?"

"Well . . ."

"It's because you just insulted her, Kou. Not then, but right now, in this room. And not just in slighting her combat prowess. What you just said revealed to her, for the first time, that you were so intent on *yourself* that night, you never saw *her* at all. Bad, Kou. Very bad. You owe her a profound apology. Here she was, giving her Barrayaran all to you, and you so little appreciated what she was doing, you didn't even perceive it." (Bujold *Barrayar* 414)

Not even Aral, the most reconstructed and sympathetic of Barrayaran males, is permitted to escape this critique of the imbalances present in romantic and sexual relationships at the hands of the “educated outsider”. He recovers quicker but is clearly positioned as equally ignorant about the true source of Drou’s enraged shout.

Thus, through Drou, Bujold documents a more complex iteration of the ‘warrior woman’ trope. Going beyond simple reversal, she places the challenges and successes of a woman making her way in a man’s world alongside more expected feminine behaviours. Drou’s love of frills (572) and her developing romantic attachment to Kou framed in very traditional roles (530–536) are contrasted with events such as the recounting of her first active combat experience of killing (531–533). Unlike sheroes in other SF, where they are frequently socially isolated figures in a patriarchal system, Drou is surrounded by women who both conform to and challenge Barrayaran gender norms. The social impact of a woman serving so successfully and decisively is shown to have flow-on effects for other women over the course of the series. Although the Barrayaran mind-set still has not fully encompassed the idea of women openly in service by the end of the second novel, alternative behaviours and roles, such as professional careers and military service, are becoming increasingly acceptable during the later novels. For example, Elena Bothari leaves Barrayar in *Warrior’s Apprentice* in order to have a military career. The potential for these cultural norms to change is indicated at the end of *Barrayar*, when Drou’s father gives preference to her opinion on weapons over that of her brothers’:

[Cordelia’s] jaw eased a bit when a rhyming brother was waved to silence by Dad to make room for some comment by the bride on the topic of hand-weapons. "Quiet, Jos," Sergeant Droushnakovi told his son. "You've never handled a nerve disruptor in combat." Drou blinked, then smiled, a gleam in her eye. (Bujold 575)

Beta’s alternative norms provide cultural contrast *within* the narrative that Cranny-Francis describes as the “imaginative conceptualization of a better future” when she says:

Because of its estrangement from the everyday world of experiential reality, science fiction (and fantasy) can present women in new roles, liberated from the sexism endemic to their society even in its most emancipated state. ... By this means a rationale can be given for struggle, an endpoint envisaged which is better than the current situation ... The injustices and limitations of the present become increasingly visible and intolerable. In other words ... the breakdown of its [patriarchy's] naturalization. (Cranny-Francis 42-43)

On Barrayar we see the process of de-naturalisation in action. Cordelia's military successes and her position in society instigate a movement towards acceptance of women in the military, which is supported by Drou's successful participation in ending Vordarian's coup. Drou's successful performance as a female soldier mimics Cordelia's and makes way for other Barrayaran women to consider more non-traditional roles. A wider circle of Barrayaran women take up non-traditional roles successfully and the change spreads outwards in ever widening circles from Cordelia, source of the ripples in the still pond that is Barrayar. These changes are largely conveyed through the fates of the second generation of Barrayaran women such as Ekaterin, Laisa, Miles' extraordinary collection of girlfriends, the daughters of Drou, and others who experience the resistance and challenge that Cordelia's arrival presents to Barrayaran norms. These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. Kareen, Drou's eldest daughter, eventually studies off planet as a therapist, while a second daughter Olivia marries the trans-gendered Lord Dono (previously Lady Donna) and is ennobled, while a third becomes a diplomat with her husband. Bujold creates insight by leveraging the three worlds (Beta, Barrayar and the primary world) and their attitudes to gender against each other.

This chapter has demonstrated that the reformulation of gender we see in Bujold's early SF works begins, as in all of her novels, with an increased focus on female characters and female perspectives and lived experiences. I argue, however, that Bujold pursues these changes with a keener eye for the sources of the elision female characters have suffered and for the consequences of the changes she makes to their contexts. In a similar vein, and unlike narrower heroic

interpretations, Bujold's use of Reversal draws attention to a broader range of inequalities in gendered representation, rather than merely allowing women to be capable in the role of substitute men. Cordelia, Drou, and the others like them, show that in Bujold's worlds women assert their own value and their capacity to contribute to society. The complexity that is evident in Bujold's Reversal of gender roles such as those depicted in Drou becomes even more significant in her depiction of a range of women whose gender identities are marked by more extensive Hybridity and Complication.

Chapter 4: Hybridity and Complication in Bujold's Early SF

Reversing such a deeply ingrained cultural pattern as the association of chaos with the feminine requires more than simply reinserting women into narratives. One way to reshuffle the cards is to postulate a different set of gender differences, setting up contrasting identities that seem to correspond to, but are ultimately not congruent with, the ones we take for granted ... with the ultimate effect of displacing the masculine from its privileged position in epistemology. (Attebery *Decoding* 162)

Hybridity

The masculine ideals celebrated in Space Opera have long reflected and reinforced traditional roles as they are valorised in the primary world: the Scientist, Leader, Warrior, and Explorer tropes for men; the Princess, Priestess and Galactic Kitchen Sink/Maternal for women. However, these are now being challenged in fiction as much as in the real world. Steven Cohan notes that hegemonic masculinity is a “regulatory fiction of normality” (24) that “articulates various social relations of power as an issue of gender normality” (35), and are therefore not “biologically or naturally occurring role[s]” (Baker 5). Bujold engages frequently with the degree to which gender and identity are socially constructed, mainly by placing characters outside their traditional roles and critically examining the results, located within a wider discussion of the individual's relationship to their social context and culturally mandated restrictions. James has observed that in the mid-series novels: “Miles is surrounded by women who are, in part, masculinized, or who at least take roles traditionally held by men; they are mercenary commanders or soldiers” (*LMB* 138).

His mother, Cordelia, is one of their number but perhaps also the most extended and complex example of this Hybridisation in Bujold's works, occupying traditionally masculine roles such as the Scientist, Warrior, Leader and Explorer, as readily as she does the feminine ones of Princess, Priestess and Maternal. This complexity in Cordelia's character is two-fold; firstly, Bujold's greater inclusion of feminine subjectivities and concerns, such as violence against women and reproduction,

and secondly, Bujold's emphasis on the feminine aspects of Cordelia's personality. It is the combined effect of these that prevents Cordelia from being reduced to a shero or side-lined. In the previous chapter, I discussed Drou as an example of Reversal for, even though she exhibits behaviours and preferences traditionally associated with both genders, the depiction of these traits in her life is relatively straightforward. Drou presents a limited hybridity, but this hybridity is much more extensively explored in Cordelia where the engagement with gender tropes is much more complex. Bujold's depiction of Cordelia in stereotypically male heroic roles resists the normative pattern where "The gender ideology most often detected in generic fiction is extremely conservative." (Cranny-Francis 19). This pattern stereotypes women "into the role of virgin or whore, and as the object of a quest or adventure, not the subject." (Cranny-Francis 19). Bujold's reformulation of Cordelia allows her the freedom to become subject and activator of narrative events, where she is neither the prize nor the object. Furthermore, her position as a mature female who holds open-minded Betan attitudes to sexual diversity, within the clearly defined bounds of a romantic and monogamous relationship, neatly negate the categories of both 'virgin' and 'whore'. Similarly, Bujold's construction of Cordelia resists and revises the elements of Le Guin's comment that:

SF has either totally ignored women, or presented them as squeaking dolls subject to instant rape by monsters – or old-maid scientists desexed by hypertrophy of the intellectual organs – or, at best, loyal little wives or mistresses of accomplished heroes. (Le Guin "American" 209)

Bujold rejects these tropes (squeaking doll, old maid scientist, loyal little wife and mistress) and, where she does use them, includes dramatic inversions and renovations that challenge the foundations of these tropes. One of Bujold's common techniques is to include elements of gendered behaviour typically associated with the opposite gender in her characters. Thus, Cordelia the starship captain, Aral the bisexual war hero, Miles the hero in a non-standard physical body, and Alys the society lady and spy master. Bujold resists presenting any stereotype as universal, opting for a more intersectional and hybridised construction of characters as individuals rather than

representatives of a type. My analysis of Bujold's re-imagining of a female SF hero will explore how Bujold uses "codedly feminine" (Roberts 16), as well as masculine traits to construct Hybridity and to resist normative gender roles. Cordelia is a multi-faceted character and an important deviation from traditional SF and Space Opera heroines, as well as a benchmark against which later changes and reformulation of Barrayaran attitudes to women can be marked.

Masculine Tropes and Cordelia

Scientist

Cordelia is positioned early and often as a rational thinker. Although her emotions are foregrounded and their inclusion is another example of the "greater psychological depth" (*SFE*). Bujold frequently incorporates into her speculative fiction, from the very beginning Cordelia's credentials as a scientific and knowledgeable character are clearly established. On the first page of *Shards of Honor*, she refers to "her biological collecting equipment" (Bujold 3), and the differential gravity between the unnamed world on which she finds herself and her home world of Beta Colony (3). When disaster occurs, Cordelia's mental inventory of possible causes further establishes the wide range and technical bent of her knowledge, quickly establishing the scientific foundations of Cordelia's mentation (5). The catalogue of Cordelia's exemplary scientific skills encompasses mathematics, biology and meteorology, as well as chemistry, parasitic biology, anthropology and more (35). In other words, she possesses the sort of multi-skilled and broad scientific background readers can comfortably assume necessary for the "Commander" (3) of a planetary Survey team, charged with discovering and quantifying previously unexplored planets. Later, when Aral offhandedly refers to her as "a geologist, or whatever" (12), she corrects him with the far more technical and scientific title of "Astrocartographer" (12, 100), a frequently used piece of SF jargon for that mysterious, and largely fictional, branch of mathematics that enables travel and navigation through space.

Her position of authority and the complex realities of her social context are clearly and early identified through such careful distribution of clues in a manner typical of immersive speculative

fiction. This careful positioning not only adds to the prestige of Cordelia's science but reflects the structures of the world and the civilisation that lies behind her, exemplified by the mysterious but important sounding "Betan Astronomical Survey" (10) of which she is part. This prestige is only increased and reiterated to readers by subsequent throwaway comments in later novels about the difficulty of entering the Survey and reaching her lofty heights as a commander.

"Did you know Lord Mark's mother was a *Betan Survey captain*? ... A *Betan Astronomical Survey captain*. And nobody even thought to mention it! ... Holy saints, you people! ... She was a *Betan Survey commander*, for God's sake! Do you have any idea how those people are chosen, what they do? If I'd completed my postgraduate work with honors, ... I could have hoped, only hoped, to put in an application, and even then I wouldn't have had a prayer of beating out all the Betan candidates, if it weren't for their off-worlder quotas holding open some places specifically for non-Betans." (Bujold *Civil* 296)

This positioning continues in the second novel, *Barrayar*, where the extent of Cordelia's scientific knowledge is further established by her detailed understanding of uterine replicators despite her stated claim to have only a passing familiarity with them and no specific need for them in her Survey work (Bujold *Shards* 165-170, 219-222). All of these elements work to consistently underline the level of technical and scientific knowledge assumed as basic for both women and men on Beta Colony. As does Aral's later incredulosity that "not owning a comconsole" is the lowest standard of living Cordelia can imagine (Bujold *Cordelia's* 358-359). Cordelia often refers to her mathematical and logistical prowess as a source of pride and the defining feature of her thinking processes: "*I used to be a jumpship navigator. Really. If she could handle five dimensions upside, surely she ought to be able to manage a mere three downside*" (258 original emphasis). In particular, Cordelia valorises rational thinking when she rages against the damage done to her son in utero; "The primitive Barrayaran back-to-the-apes style gestation was nothing but the utter failure of reason to triumph over emotion" (396). This depiction of maternal concern frames Cordelia's

“feminine” emotions in a technological context, further challenging readers’ expectations of familiar gender roles and responses.

Presentation of a female occupying a traditionally masculine role without being de-sexed is unusual within SF and society more broadly, where science and rationality are often culturally constructed as masculine; because, as Attebery notes “the signs for knowledge, vision and masculinity form a complex, interrelated system, in which each can stand for the others” (Attebery *Decoding* 61). Attebery suggests that “knowledge with domination” remains a core tenet of both primary world science and SF narrative because “The hardness of hard science is that of the male body – or rather that body socially constructed as the opposite of female pliancy and permeability. (Attebery *Decoding* 47). This is a significant example of the kind of reformulation Bujold pursues, one which specifically resists traditional positioning of women as absent from spheres of knowledge and cut off from the power this represents. Cranny-Francis argues:

understanding of the ideological mechanisms by which women are excluded from knowledge, from ways of knowing the world which in themselves confer power (by which for example, the individual becomes a member of one of the institutions of knowledge/power in our society) [is] ... one of the most important areas of analysis and research for feminists. (Cranny-Francis 48)

Cranny-Francis also refines Suvin’s concept of estrangement, labelling it, “Extrapolation ... essentially another estrangement convention ... used by feminist writers to show the practices of gender ideology in our own society, by making the society and those practices seem new or strange or different” (68). A significant characteristic of Bujold’s reformulation is this use of extrapolation, the repositioning of familiar assumptions about gender into new patterns and combinations, which in turn creates new perspectives on the role of women as individuals and as members of their societies.

Bujold's reformulation is more complex than simple reversal of gender roles, however, as it encompasses both the *resistance to* and *reconstruction of* dominant hegemonic norms. Through the opportunities available to women within Betan society, and the contrasts enabled by comparison with more traditional and patriarchal Barrayaran gender norms, Bujold's questioning of women's experiences in the primary world of the reader becomes most apparent.

Feminist writers can manipulate these conservative narratives and genre conventions because they both recognize and understand them, can play their game, and yet are not contained by them or subsumed within them. (Cranny-Francis 19)

By utilising the traditional tropes and constructions of SF and Space Opera and the stereotypical tools of hero creation, Bujold engages both aspects of reformulation. She depicts resistance to traditional limitations on women's access to and utilisation of (scientific) knowledge and knowledge-derived power in society, while reconstructing familiar tropes of SFnal heroism to include the feminine.

Leader

In an entirely similar way, Cordelia as a highly capable and effective leader of personnel. Bujold's first mention of her name appears with the title of "Commander" (*Shards* 3) immediately positioning her as a character of authority and worthy of respect from both readers and other characters. The possessive terms "her team botanist" (3) and "her team zoologist" (5) accentuate this authority. However, it is her acceptance of responsibility for the team and their safety, as well as others' acceptance of her orders, that provides far greater depth to readers' experience of her active leadership. Cordelia's vision of leadership clearly includes taking personal risks rather than asking others to protect her; she orders the remainder of her team (safely in orbit in a Survey vessel) to abandon herself and Dubauer on the planet as "There are fifty-six lives depending on you up there. You can count. Fifty-six is more than two" (8). The fact that they only obey her to a limited degree is

presented more as a sign of flexible Betan cultural expectations of authority than any softening of Cordelia's personal command (11, 22- 23, 86, 154).

After Dubauer has been debilitated, Cordelia relies on her sense of leadership to summon the strength to continue:

She glanced at Dubauer beside her, and jerked her mind from the easy vortex of despair.

I'm still a commander, she told herself sharply; I have a command. You serve me still, ensign, although you cannot now serve even yourself. (20)

While these events provide insight into Betan ideals of democracy, egalitarianism and personal autonomy, their most significant effect is to reinforce Cordelia's value to her crew and their respect and care for her as their leader. She is so critical to their success and so admired that a threat to her personal safety enables fifty-six anti-authoritarian Betans to reach consensus that they will place their own lives at risk to rescue her. Attebery suggests that "the science fictional trope carries its scientific freight while doing – *by doing* – something else" (Attebery *Decoding* 32) and here Bujold displays this duality of purpose, not for science but to accentuate Cordelia's exceptional leadership.

Perhaps more surprisingly, during Aral and Cordelia's trek across the hostile planet to the dubious safety of his mutinous crew, Aral frequently defers to Cordelia's expertise and decision-making. He, a stranger, her captor and member of a decidedly patriarchal culture, after mere hours in her company, recognises and accepts her authority. The pattern of Aral accepting her decisions with little resistance and doing what is necessary to put them into action is set during this trek, although Cordelia and Aral still divide tasks along what one might call fairly traditional gender lines; Cordelia cares for Dubauer, while Aral performs the hunting and pace setting duties of an otherwise alpha male. Perhaps most importantly, when they finally meet one of Aral's crew – someone he assumes is an ally – it is she who correctly identifies the man's treachery and saves them all not once, but twice, from his duplicity (Bujold *Shards* 59). While Aral is made vulnerable by injury and

sudden attraction, to Cordelia's influence it is still extraordinary for a male character to defer quite so consistently to a female character's authority in Space Opera and SF. Especially a man such as Aral who is presented as an alpha male with physical, social, political, racial, and economic privilege, and who has been raised within a highly patriarchal culture. This is another subtle way in which Bujold uses the responses of secondary characters to reinforce readers' respect for Cordelia. She becomes capable and decisive in readers' minds because of the many and varied ways that Bujold validates her; through the responses of other characters, through her own actions, and even her thoughts.

Beta Colony's acceptance of mixed crews is referred to often, as a distinction from Barrayar's patriarchal hierarchy, but it is also another way of showing preferment and respect for the main character. Once Cordelia enters Barrayaran culture after her initial encounter as prisoner and later when she exiles herself and marries Aral, her past experience of leadership and Betan cultural expectations forms part of the feminine perspective that is uncharacteristic for SF and especially Space Opera. Cordelia's becomes the readers' experienced guide in a foreign land or, as Rosinsky observes, Cordelia's relationship with Aral presents:

the exotic foreign education of a representative of our dominant culture to illustrate the ways in which we might productively change our society and ourselves. ... change [that is] personal, involving redefinition of self, as well as political and cultural... (Rosinsky 35)

Bujold manages to avoid the shero effect of an overly dominant female, in a traditionally masculine role where the cultural space remains socially conservative and the shero is an idealised exception. Aral gives voice to this difference, noting "You're not what I expected a female officer to be. You're as professional as any officer I've ever served with, without once trying to be an, an imitation man. It's extraordinary" (Bujold *Shards* 49). Cordelia's ability as a figure of authority also serves to further underline her intelligence, perceptive nature and scientific knowledge, accentuating her accomplishments within the narrative and positioning her positively with readers without needing to abandon her femininity. The sheroic depiction undermines feminist

reformulation as it still posits masculine qualities as preferred and ideal, even while allowing that certain unusual females may perform them successfully. Hybridity is a more demanding reformulation, as it suggests that feminine qualities are equally valuable and do not disbar one from positions of leadership.

Cordelia's position as Commander of a Survey team assists in creating focus on her and creates expectation of more active participation in the events occurring around her. This makes Cordelia doubly resistant to the passive and secondary presentations of women usual in traditional SF and Space Opera and Bujold herself notes that this is a deliberate, if subtle, resistance on her part:

No feminist, writing a feminist tract, is going to change any man's or woman's fixed mind. But that same obnoxious fellow may read a book packaged as militarist SF, and never notice the alien ideas flowing into his mind along with the events of the story. Ideally my subversion should remain subliminal. (Lake 9)

A quick survey of the verbs used to describe Cordelia's behaviour, in just the first seven pages of *Shards* – from the time she appears until she is first taken prisoner by Aral – show a distinct pattern of command, higher order thinking or perception, and direct action (See Appendix 1). This is Attebery's nexus of "knowledge, vision and masculinity" (Attebery *Decoding* 61) and a significant shift for female characters in SF, constituting another major element of Bujold's reformulation of women in Space Opera. Not only is Cordelia repositioned as a female commander and positively supported by the respect and obedience of those around her, often male, Bujold also resists the traditional presentation of female characters as passive, with passively acquired skills and abilities. Cordelia's skills are depicted as the result of education, skill, training and experience.

Textual dominance by male characters does not merely spring from more active participation in the plot but from domination of both the knowledge and public spheres of the societies presented in them. Many women are 'present' in SF but that does not always mean that they are dominant or

expressive. For all the insight Cordelia's interior monologue gives readers, it is the expression of those ideas, the respect given them by other characters, and their impact on events in the narrative that really reinforces Cordelia's significance and centrality to the plot. Cordelia's blunt and sometimes confrontational approach to situations reinforces her expectation that she is entitled to speak her mind. Her thoughts have a deeply intrinsic value, a position that seems to be appropriated to male speakers more often in SF. The lack of this validation for female characters is one of the more consistent ways that female characters are sidelined or made passive.

A particularly interesting example of this kind of interaction occurs during the early chapters of *Barrayar*, where Cordelia is engaged in seemingly pleasant social chit-chat by one of the many Vor lords who populate the series. We discover later in the text that he hungers for the Imperial throne and, indeed, he begins a civil war in order to obtain it during the novel, but this is the first time we are introduced to his character in depth. Lord Vordarian is clearly angling for political advantage or information of some kind from Cordelia. His seemingly innocent queries about the sex of Cordelia's baby take on more ominous overtones as his ambitions are revealed and readers understand he is fishing for knowledge of Aral's plans for the throne, and whether or not Aral intends to attempt to claim it for himself or his unborn child. When Cordelia's pleasantries fail to provide Vordarian with the information he desires, he alludes to Aral's bisexuality, hoping to upset Cordelia but instead is nonplussed by her Betan tolerance for sexual variation:

"He's bisexual, you know." He took a delicate sip of his wine.

"Was bisexual," she corrected absently, looking fondly across the room. "Now he's monogamous."

... "He *told* you that?" he wheezed in astonishment. (Bujold *Cordelia's Honor* 330)

The verbal war continues and becomes progressively more heated:

His eyes glinted in sudden open malice. "Do you know how Lord Vorkosigan's first wife died?"

“Suicide. Plasma arc to the head.” she replied promptly.

“It was rumoured he’d murdered her. For adultery. Betan, beware.” His smile had turned wholly acid.

“Yes, I knew that too. In this case, an untrue rumour.” All pretence of cordiality had evaporated from their exchange. (332)

Cordelia’s performance of traditionally masculine heroic traits is reinforced by this assertiveness. The conversation continues in this vein and Cordelia concludes by threatening him in return. Later, Cordelia will order Bothari to execute him, making her apparently idle threat not to “annoy” her something else entirely (322). Here is no passive bystander, no victim or mistress, no prize to be won or alien/planet to be conquered.

Another of the more interesting activations of this blending of genders occurs in the reconstruction of bravery in Bujold’s narratives. The nature and qualities of courage can easily become gendered as male, particularly in such combative and conflict-laden narratives as those of SF and military Space Opera. This cultural positioning can also become hardened into naturalisation where the association of courage with masculinity becomes so consistent that readers accept it as the norm. Consequently, the feminine becomes coded as not courageous. This process is particularly well explained by Cranny-Francis:

When the discourses involved are dominant in a society, this naturalization is particularly easy; no confrontation with entrenched beliefs occurs, simply reinforcement. Much of the writing in our society operates this way. It is non-oppositional; the discourses it encodes are dominant discourses and so its narrative process is entirely non-problematic. The discourses are ‘natural’, the causal process is ‘natural’, the temporal sequence is ‘natural’ – and the text is very easy to read. The text reproduces the mechanical causality in which we are accustomed to thinking, the arrangement of events in temporal sequence constituting a reasoning process which we regard as ‘natural’ or obvious or commonsense. Yet when

one considers that this process simultaneously encodes ideological discourses, then the problematic nature of narrative is visible perhaps for the first time. (Cranny-Francis 11)

This naturalisation of values is one of the reasons blockbuster novels like the *Harry Potter Series* and *The Da Vinci Code* are able to generate such strong interest; these texts utilise the “conventionality” of dominant tropes and their “ideological implications” to secure an audience. Cordelia’s unconventional response to the acceptance of the Barrayarans after her adventures neatly conveys and perpetuates the cognitive dissonance of the reader. Bujold writes that:

The assorted Barrayaran Vor reacted to her with a frozen, deep formality. *They doubtless figure me for crazy-dangerous, a madwoman let out of the attic by overindulgent relations.* It finally dawned on her that their exaggerated courtesies signified *respect*. It made her furious. (*Cordelia’s Honor* 569)

And later “She was formally introduced to [Drou’s] brothers, now brothers-in-law, who regarded her with that awed respect that made her teeth grind.” (575). Like Tiptree, Bujold foregrounds the discussion of bravery and its components to show explicitly the “ideological mechanisms by which that ‘otherness’ is confirmed, reinforced and naturalized.” (Cranny-Francis 35) and by repositioning such a traditionally masculine quality as also available to the female, she enables the stranglehold of gender-identification to be weakened. Attebery reiterates this position incisively, when he observes that:

So long as those tropes are allowed to remain invisible, their function is necessarily normative. Working as unchallenged assumptions, they reinforce existing patterns of associations and social arrangements Dead tropes can be revived and redirected deliberately by someone who is aware of both their conventionality and their ideological implications.” (*Attebery Decoding* 34)

Ensign Boni's work with the dead in the coda of *Shards*, 'Aftermaths', is a prime example of this kind of repositioning, courage is not merely the ability to face gunfire but also to face one's own dead, as well as those of the enemy, with compassion and respect (Bujold *Shards* 242-253). Bujold uses SF's ability to question ideologies to instead examine the gendered nature of the comfortable and familiar relationship between gender and courage, which may in turn open readers' minds to questioning other socially normative gender roles and culturally mandated expectations.

This is the strength of Bujold's reformulation, Cordelia is not an exotic shero whose uniqueness presents an impossible benchmark for female behaviour, nor is she an idealised, overly simplified representative of her kind, but a fully integrated and functioning member of both societies through which she moves. That dramatic events overtake her and determine the pattern of her life is part of the excitement of the narrative elements. These are carefully placed for consideration beside discussion of how those societies operate and the resonance of her own behaviour within the framework of those social expectations. If readers had not already understood the reformulation of Cordelia, here there is certainty that she is an active and unconventional female hero.

Cordelia's role as a social, political, military, and family leader remains a focus throughout the series, the influence and size of her responsibilities continually expanding. In *Shards*, she also leads the team that successfully breaks Barrayar's blockade of Escobar, delivering hitherto unknown technology that is used to destroy the Barrayaran fleet and end the war (Bujold *Shards* 100-107). Later, near the conclusion of her second captivity, Cordelia is transferred to a prisoner of war camp and, as ranking officer, the responsibility for the female prisoners is immediately foisted upon her. These are highly vulnerable prisoners who have been raped and tortured during their captivity by more typical Barrayaran soldiers (153). In *Barrayar*, she once again leads a small team that short-circuits a nationwide mutiny. As a reward for her success at avoiding civil war, she is endowed with responsibility for the boy Emperor Gregor's personal household and education. This move reflects

the Barrayaran patriarchy's limited understanding of 'power', in contrast to Aral and Cordelia who clearly recognise the influence she will wield in this role (Bujold *Cordelia's Honor* 570)

As wife of the Regent, Cordelia is essentially the First Lady of Barrayar for much of the series until Gregor attains his majority and Aral steps aside, providing in this role both social and political leadership for the wider community, as well as personal and emotional leadership within her household. In the final novels of the series and in their supposed 'retirement' Cordelia and Aral are appointed Viceroy and Vicereine of the planet Sergyar and its new colony. The Vorkosigan Companion notes particularly that the title of Vicereine is given to Cordelia in her own right, not just as a courtesy title for Aral's wife (Carl and Helfers 523) and this is confirmed in *Gentleman Jole and the Red Queen* (2015) where Cordelia continues in this role independently after Aral's death. Her role as a leader continually expands throughout her life and is presented as anything but passive or uneventful. Cordelia's authority, and her influence on Barrayar in particular, is an almost never-ending sequence of shock-waves, extending out from her arrival and bolstered by the consistency with which she acquires new and more significant leadership roles.

Warrior

Despite coming from an essentially pacifist culture, Cordelia is consistently placed into harm's way and shows considerable military skill and quick reflexes that (mostly) enable her to evade injury. From the outset of *Shards*, the description of her actions seems to position her as a warrior among scientists, something that perhaps also serves to further underline her suitability for a leadership role on Survey missions. She and Aral have a long running debate throughout the first two novels about the value of a stunner over more conventional weapons, and their difference of opinion is used to highlight some of the underlying moral differences between Beta Colony and Barrayar, particularly regarding the value of human life. Cordelia's argument in favour of stunners is that "nobody hesitates to *fire* a stunner...and it gives you a margin for error" while Vorkosigan prefers a disruptor as it has "real authority" (47). In a manner typical of Bujold's tendencies to challenge readers, Cordelia later comes to have cause to understand his position, admitting that "Vorkosigan is

right, she thought; a disruptor *does* have real authority.” (Bujold *Cordelia’s Honor* 95). The use of a stunner rather than the more deadly weapons of the Barrayarans is explicitly positioned as an expression of Cordelia’s Betan morality and value for life rather than her gender. She is outmanoeuvred in her first encounter by Aral’s superior Barrayaran weapons and training, however this is unsurprising for readers because Barrayarans are described as “crazy bastards” and “twitchy militarists”, who “aren’t amateurs”, and are “not, repeat, not, to be trusted...On no account surrender.... You’re outgunned, out-armoured, and out-manned.” (Bujold *Shards* 8). She is also familiar enough with weaponry to correctly identify the kinds of weapons used to destroy her camp (5) and kill another team member (6). Later, in *Barrayar*, upon hearing a distant explosion she notes to an apparently ignorant bystander: “It was a Class Four sonic grenade, probably airtube launched. ... Unless the thrower was suicidal. ...Haven’t you ever heard one go off?” (Bujold *Cordelia’s Honor* 314). In fact, the unfortunate recipient of this comment is not ignorant but a Barrayaran trying his patriarchal best to soothe her ‘feminine’ nerves. However, the implication of her experience and familiarity with a range of weapons systems and live fire is clear to readers and underlines the difference between Cordelia and a more traditional Space Opera heroine.

After this swift introduction as a defensively capable, if not aggressive, soldier, Cordelia’s role as a warrior is maintained and even expanded throughout the novels. It is one of the most marked and consistent ways in which Bujold resists passivity by appropriating masculine roles for a female character. When read as a single text, the combined narrative arc of *Shards* and *Barrayar* shows a consistent pattern of establishing Cordelia’s expectations and point of view (Betan) on various issues and then challenging them with the complicated realities of Barrayaran politics and social behaviour, which then usually require military resolutions. In the early stages of *Shards*, Cordelia saves Aral’s life while they are still on the planet Sergyar, correctly identifying a traitor about to betray him:

The disruptor trembled slightly in Gottyan’s hand, as he wavered on the edge of his decision. Cordelia, barely breathing, saw water standing in his eyes. One does not weep for the living, she thought, but for the dead; in that moment, while Vorkosigan still doubted,

she knew he intended to fire. She brought her stunner up, took careful aim, and squeezed off a burst. (Bujold *Shards* 59)

Later, she sees through Gottyán's second attempt to betray them (60). Shortly after Aral resumes his command, Cordelia's Survey crew arrives, attempting to rescue her. As ever, she takes matters into her own hands and once more engages in combat:

Her stomach pumped sour bile into the back of her throat. Here the custom of all-male crews on warships paid her, for he hesitated just a fraction of a second to shoot a woman. In that fraction she fired first. He slumped heavily over her, head lolling on her shoulder. Bracing she held him as a shield before her. Her second shot laid out the next guard as he was bringing his disruptor to aim. The third guard got off a hasty burst that was absorbed by the man she held, although the nimbus of it seared the outer edge of her left thigh. The pain of it flared screamingly, but no sound escaped her clenched teeth. With a wild berserker accuracy that seemed no part of herself, she felled him too. (94)

These actions confirm that she is more than a quick witted, quick reflexed amateur; she risks her life knowingly to save others and takes life here with the ruthlessness of a soldier, accepting the sacrifice of that life to save her own and the personal injury that accompanies live fire in a combat situation with practised ease. Despite the frequency with which characters engage in combat in Space Opera, Bujold's use of Cordelia's internal perspective allows her to convey a criticism of war that is not always achieved in more traditional SF. Through close engagement with the reasons each combat occurs and detailed discussion of the emotional as well as practical consequences, Bujold is able to unpack the tragedy of an individual's participation in combat as well as challenging conceptual arguments for engaging in war at all. In this example, Bujold justifies the short, brutal combat as Cordelia's actions save many lives including Aral's. She also undermines reader approval of the mutiny, positioning its genesis in ambition and political opportunism (Bujold *Shards* 61-62). However valid the mutineers think their actions, the varied responses and private thoughts of other

characters are allowed to cut across these validations, encouraging readers to develop a more complex critical perspective. Cordelia's subsequent escape with the knowledge and location of the planet Sergyar, and its attendant wormhole, sparks a war in which Beta Colony allies with Escobar to prevent Barrayaran imperial expansion. Unlike many SF heroines, Cordelia is the direct and active pivot on which the military and narrative action of these novels continually turns.

The complexity of Cordelia's position as Betan moral advocate *and* warrior is perhaps best summed up by a conversation that occurs in *Barrayar* when she is planning her lightning raid on the palace to rescue her unborn son. Cordelia needs to co-opt her female bodyguard Droushnakovi to help her sneak in and out of the grounds and reminds Drou that:

"Kareen gave you to me"

"To be my mentor. We thought you were a soldier."

"Never. [replies Cordelia] But that doesn't mean I never fought." (Bujold *Cordelia's* 498)

Despite many admiring references from Barrayarans impressed with Cordelia's decisive actions and war-like skills, she consistently resists the title and implications of 'soldier'. Aral attempts to compliment Cordelia saying, "You have the competence one would look for in a mother of warriors." and her reply is an emphatic "Save me from that!" (Bujold *Shards* 41). During an escape from Vordarian's soldiers in *Barrayar*, Cordelia earns the respect of both Sergeant Bothari and the aging veteran Kly by devising a clever ruse to side-track a large number of Vordarian's men. Kly compliments her "You think like a soldier, m'lady" but she again rejects this label:

wrinkl[ing] her brow in dismay. What an appalling compliment. The last thing she wanted was to start thinking like a soldier, playing their game by their rules. The hallucinatory military world-view was horribly infectious, though, immersed in it as she was now. *How long can I tread water?* (Bujold *Cordelia's* 458)

Cordelia is beginning to recognise the effect of her context on her identity and, as the novels progress, her decisions about which of her Betan ideals she cannot afford to lose and which of the Barrayaran attitudes she needs to adopt in order to survive, create a reflective heroes' journey to engage readers with similar moral questions. For example, when infiltrating the palace to rescue her unborn son's replicator she muses to herself:

she was insane enough by now to sacrifice these peoples' lives for her son's, ... but not yet mad enough to trade them for nothing. She hadn't grown that Barrayaran yet. (547)

Aral frames these changes in her more positively, stating that "...if a Betan can become so Barrayaran, maybe it's not so impossible for Barrayarans to become a little more Betan. Change *is* possible." (567). Bujold once more challenges the common expectation that Space Opera is somehow light or deals lightly with deep moral concerns. Cordelia is clearly shown time and again as a capable warrior-hero but one who acknowledges and grapples with the darker aspects of these actions. Her directness and high moral expectations lead her to act in situations where others would refrain and in ways that the Barrayarans around her would not. Bujold uses this psychological construction to 'activate' a female character and resist the inaction typical of feminine characters in SF. By also instilling Cordelia with a strong sense of self-awareness, Bujold provides direct insight into the character's perspective on her context. In *Barrayar*, readers hear Cordelia's internal dialogue frequently through italicised thoughts that often contradict or complicate the positions she occupies. Not only are we given the third person intimate perspective on Cordelia's thoughts, we 'hear' her self-talk as well. Bujold permits such complexity to be conveyed directly to the reader in order to reveal female character's agency.

Despite her concerns about the morality of war and violence more generally, when leading the attack on the imperial castle to retrieve Miles' replicator, Cordelia also comes back with the head of Vordarian, the usurper, in a plastic shopping bag. From the standpoint of a feminist critic, it is highly interesting to note that this mission is conducted in order to save the life of an unborn,

potentially unviable (and socially rejected) foetus and the overthrow and execution of the pretender is not the purpose of the foray. Cordelia even says so directly, telling Aral that “Vordarian was almost a side issue, from my point of view.” (566). But unlike the earlier killing of Vorrutyer, which is carried out by Bothari to protect Cordelia (116-117), the execution of Vordarian is carried out by Bothari on Cordelia’s direct order. Cordelia takes full responsibility and, in very blunt language, reflects:

Surely she was mad. She didn’t feel anything, no grief or remorse, though her heart was racing and her breath came in gasps. A shocky combat-high, that immortal rush that made men charge machine guns. So this was what the war-addicts came for. (552)

Cordelia again demonstrates a deeply psychological understanding of courage that is simultaneously critical of violence in this scene, where her determination to continue despite her fear seems the very definition of bravery:

Was it bravery, or stupidity, that drove her on? It couldn’t be bravery, she was sick with fear the same hot acid nausea she’d felt just before combat during the Escobaran war. *If I do not act, my child will die.* She would simply have to do without courage. (543)

Cordelia’s physical and psychological journey to recovery from this combat experience is not straightforward, nor is it over quickly or without permanent consequences. However, Cordelia’s execution of Vordarian earns her the respect of Barrayaran society. Earlier, Aral has suggested “My people will forgive a brave soldier almost anything” (Bujold *Shards* 262). This raises her ire still further as she perceives their respect to be misplaced. Her fury is clearly presented with female rather than male subjectivity and within a consciously articulated framework of feminist resistance to patriarchal condescension:

It made her furious. All [Princess] Karen’s courage of endurance had bought her nothing. Lady Vorpatril’s brave and bloody birth-giving was taken for granted, but whack off somebody’s head and you were really somebody, by God -! (Bujold *Cordelia’s* 569)

The presentation of a female perspective on the more usually masculine demesne of active combat is a complex recombination and reformulation of the usual tropes.

Thrown into high relief by the skill of Bujold and the careful opposition of the two cultures portrayed, fundamental social issues such as the use of weapons, the place of euthanasia, the legal status of clones, the place of women in society, and the use and abuse of power, are examined through a variety of secondary characters. Many of these discussions are only possible through the juxtaposition of the heroic warrior tropes of Space Opera with Cordelia's gender and Betan values, and the unexpected responses and thoughts they enable Bujold to present to readers. Bujold applies the idea of SF as a thought experiment to the question of humanity – what it means and how to be one – from a range of perspectives, particularly female ones.

Explorer

“To boldly go where no man has gone before” is probably one of the most famous of all catchphrases to emerge from Space Opera texts. But the role of Explorer is also one that has been dominated by an association with the masculine. Curiosity, so closely tied with the search for knowledge or science, and adventuresome wanderlust have been tied to a vision of an intrepid and independent heroic male space captain. This trope has been influenced by the science-based adventure narratives of the early nineteenth century, such as those by Verne and Wells, and the later “planetary romances” (Pringle 38). By incorporating the elements of curiosity and wanderlust into Cordelia, Bujold not only redefines what it is to be female in Space Opera, but uses them as the unseen drivers of her narrative. One of the main drivers of story progression is conflict, and many writers have discovered that there are few better ways of introducing two opposing forces than the protagonist who is an intrepid explorer. Motivated by a desire to find new places, new people, and new things to interact with, this extroverted protagonist is especially common in SFnal settings where new planets are just waiting to be discovered, explored and/or conquered. This form of embedded narrative progression is essential in many genres; including detective fiction, westerns, episodic tv serials, and adventure narratives.

In the past, much Space Opera has adhered to this “he-man adventurism ... a violent colonialist, white, male discourse which is fundamentally sexist” (Cranny-Francis 31) with its overtones of *terra nullius* where the acquisition, consumption and possession of planets/resources/females is assumed. Or, as Attebery observes “the male scientist looks at a feminine universe, which thereby becomes both his mate and his property” (Attebery *Decoding* 51) the planets and aliens are implicitly there for ‘discovery’ and consumption by male space adventurers (Wolmark 72). This pattern was promoted within “the traditional masculinist, idea and technology focused format of the Gernsback continuum” (Kelso "Gernsback" 18) and most famously challenged by early feminist writers such as Russ, Tiptree and Le Guin. Bujold, however, does not adhere consistently to either of these systems of meaning but develops her own “third place” (Oak 11) from which she can observe both extremes. She does not perpetuate the stereotypes, nor the cultural contexts without examination. Her criticism is not always as blunt as that of Tiptree or Russ who also present typical hegemonic heroes in atypical situations and use this contrast to explore the consequences of Gernsbackian attitudes in detail (Moore; Tiptree).

One particularly clear example of Bujold’s complex layering of traditionally male and female attributes is Cordelia’s power of perception, a highly valuable trait in an exploring character. Attebery notes a “gendered distinction between the one who sees and the one who is seen” (Attebery *Decoding* 49). The male eye, he suggests, is an active presence in the text, whereas the female eye in traditional Space Opera and SF remains passive:

Unlike, say, voices or genitalia, male and female eyes differ hardly at all, and yet when eyes get adopted into symbol systems like language, the meaning of the female gaze differs dramatically from that of the male. More precisely, women are rarely represented as looking or seeing. ... *Men’s eyes, by contrast, seize upon objects and control them.* ... Thus, the eye – or rather the symbolic representation of the eye – is both a marker of sexual difference and a sign of scientific prowess. (49; *my emphasis*)

Bujold's use of such typically masculine attributes in a female character is exemplified by Cordelia's sense:

as of a second sight, that she could see right through his wounded spirit the way doctors saw through a wounded body with their diagnostic viewers. and above all the great gash of his brother's death seemed red – livid in her mind's eye. (*Cordelia's* 384)

Later she says of Bothari "She watched him; she could read his shoulders and spine and gut better than that blank beaky face." (499). Cordelia's powers of perception are consistently necessary, valuable and life-saving within the narrative; the lack of technological supports creates the first of many Hybrid features in Cordelia. Second sight and intuition are frequently feminine characteristics under traditional schemas, perception and the intelligence to make use of it might be considered innate characteristics and to therefore fit within Russ's categorisation of power that is "passive and involuntary" (Russ "Image " 83). However, Bujold takes pains to describe how Cordelia's skills have been honed by years of education, training and experience, and magnified by the transition from Beta to Barrayar. Sometimes this is achieved through external validation, through comparison with local expectations, and sometimes through her outrage at Barrayar's limitations. Bujold's consistent use of active and directive verbs, particularly in describing Cordelia's actions becomes a critical but almost subliminal part of this process (see Appendix 1). Significantly, Bujold clearly uses Cordelia's active skills of perception to puncture the veil of culturally naturalised gender roles presented within the text.

There are numerous references to Cordelia's powers of perception, her desire to explore both geographically and intellectually, as well as a positive depiction of her natural, scientific curiosity. This is particularly clear in the earliest chapters of *Shards* when her character is being established. Unlike many traditional male Space Operatic explorer characters, Cordelia's interest in new encounters is presented as responsible, concerned, almost maternal and framed by thoughts of caretaking and preparedness, rather than possession or conquest. She is explicitly positioned as an

explorer, however, early in *Shards*, when “The two explorers gazed entranced at the mountain above, enveloped by the silence.” (4). Her curiosity is identified equally quickly, “Cordelia was just wishing herself on the plains below, to see the novelty of water falling from the sky...” (4); and her mental processes are consistently described in terms that evoke direct consciousness of her role in exploration and discovery, “So the unknown breeds dragons in map margins, she reflected” (5). However, Cordelia’s frequent use of locational metaphors and interpretation is also significant; Bujold writes that she “was as unsettled as if all her star maps had been randomised, leaving her lost; but at least knowing she was lost.” (85). Bujold consistently frames Cordelia’s inner imagery with the language of a star explorer, even in times when she doubts her abilities and for readers used to traditional, conformative gender depictions this language often places Cordelia into masculine patterns.

This perspective is continued throughout the series, the reader is immersed in the worlds through which Cordelia travels by the experiential and explorative perspective of “the exotic foreign education of a representative of our dominant culture” (Rosinsky 35), or at least through the eyes of a Betan whose values reflect those of the primary world in many ways. She tells herself to “Pretend you’re an anthropologist ... studying the savage Barrayarans.” (Bujold *Shards* 70) advice she displays when later she “listened with fascination, trying to puzzle out yet more about How Things Were Done Here.” (Bujold *Cordelia’s* 299). On some occasions, this is even the vector for comedy to be inserted into the narrative, such as when Cordelia presents Aral with a list of Rules about sexual conduct and allowable conversation topics between the sexes on Barrayar (310-312). As Russ has suggested, much can be understood about a society’s attitudes to gender through discussion of “personal and erotic relationships” (Russ “Image” 85), something that is an infrequent feature of SF where sexuality is most often presented from a masculine perspective. Bujold combines sharp, socially observant comedy with feminist criticism, conveyed through comparison of Betan and Barrayaran sexual mores, with the further implied contrast of the reader’s primary world hovering in the background.

Bujold draws attention to the *humanity* of the individual woman by placing her into roles traditionally ascribed to men and by describing her in terms usually used to construct masculine tropes. This greatly complicates reader responses to her characters and is an effective technique for engaging readers, but one that denies the usual powers of stereotypes to engage by evoking familiar social norms. Bujold appropriates the role of Explorer and by filling that role with a female diverts the cultural narrative from the typical SFnal patterns of control and consumption to more generically humanist ones of encounter and understanding.

This is the strength of Bujold's reformulation; Cordelia is not an exotic shero whose uniqueness presents an impossible benchmark for female behaviour, nor is she an idealised, overly simplified representative of her kind, but a fully integrated and functioning member of both societies through which she moves. Dramatic events overtake her and determine the pattern of her life, which is part of the excitement of the narrative. However, these are carefully placed for consideration beside discussion of how those societies operate and the resonance of her own behaviour within the framework of those social expectations.

Feminine Tropes and Cordelia

Bujold's reformulation would be less effective if Cordelia did not also retain character traits more traditionally associated with the feminine, an important consideration given how many traditionally masculine roles she occupies. The key difference between Hybridity and Reversal is that there are fewer examples of female characters where the hybridity is balanced between male and female. Most characters display partial hybridity and the full range of possibilities is often limited to leading characters. Hybridity is a more detailed and complex examination of the interrelationship of socially mandated gender norms within one character. Reversal is a shallower engagement with this exchange and seems to be used mainly with key secondary characters, such as Drou and Liss who both contain elements of Hybridity but operate within the narrative as female characters in male roles. Cordelia is not, as Aral has observed an "imitation man" (Bujold *Shards* 49) and Bujold is able

to “repeatedly transgress the boundaries between sameness and difference and prevent closure around such distinctions” (Wolmark 80). Wolmark goes on to say that this “cannot be resolved within the conventional narrative structure [and] remains both fragmented and open-ended.” (80) which is perhaps why Bujold’s lengthy serial structure has been so effective in conveying this perspective.

Discussion of this propensity to shift position and blur boundaries in Bujold’s work has also been related to Miles, Cordelia’s son, and his codedly feminine construction, alongside the codedly masculine representation of Bujold’s female characters (Kelso *Three Observations* 93-95). Bujold herself suggests that Miles:

might be a female in disguise? Look at his qualities: he is small, fragile, at serious disadvantage even in a fist fight; he gets most of his power by the clever manipulation of others, must win by intelligence and self-control, and as he lives in the ‘wrong’ mutant, deformed body he is socially disadvantaged as well. ... Do you notice how he pays close attention, as part of his survival mechanism, to the thoughts and feelings and reactions of others? What he’s saying is often wildly different from what he’s really thinking ... but I’ve put it into what I think is a convincing male body and spirit. (Lake 8)

While not directly referring to Cordelia, these comments certainly indicate Bujold’s awareness of, and engagement with, the idea that gender is culturally constructed or performed. These remarks also indicate her willingness to create hybrid forms of character with aspects of both traditional male and female gender roles. Moreover, the characters themselves - Cordelia, and later Ista in *Paladin* - voice a similarly intersectional understanding of their identities, acknowledging their varied and sometimes competing roles in life. When refused a rough stimulant on account of her ladylike status, Cordelia replies:

"I'm not pretty, I'm not a lady, and I'm not from the capital. And I'd kill for coffee right now. I'll try it." ...

Kly regarded her with bemusement. "So what are you, off-worlder not-a-lady?"

"I was an astrocartographer. Then a Survey captain. Then a soldier, then a POW, then a refugee. And then I was a wife, and then I was a mother. I don't know what I'm going to be next," she answered honestly, around the gum-leaf. Pray not *widow*. (Bujold *Cordelia's* 442)

The inclusion of other cultural categories means that women's identities are acknowledged as more than 'simply' the sum of their gender or other defining features. Identity is instead recognised as a far more complex interaction of context and the individual's characteristics and responses, now commonly identified as intersectionality. Bujold recreates these subtle variations in detail, depicting Cordelia with representative features of both masculine and feminine tropes. Bujold's experimentation with the representation of gender in secondary worlds runs parallel to the articulation of gender as mutable and culturally constructed entity, as defined by Walker in "Becoming the Third Wave" (1992) and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* in 1990.

Attebery notes that his feminist approach to SF requires discussion of both "symbolic as well as literal gender, about ways of invoking femininity and masculinity other than the direct representation of male and female characters." (Attebery *Decoding* 49). In the same way, Bujold uses both symbolic and literal gender representation to create Cordelia's character, fleshing out the masculine hero roles into which she is placed with familiar and traditionally feminine qualities. Cordelia (and her guide, Lady Alys) are fully cognizant of both the symbolic and literal uses of their femininity on Barrayar and are shown to challenge both as needed. Cordelia's clothing choices are significant, although personally more comfortable in her Betan fatigues, she adopts more feminine clothing on Barrayar as she struggles to adjust to the patriarchal society (Bujold *Cordelia's* 320-337). Bujold's preference for complex partial positions and recombined tropes allows her to reformulate both the individual and their context within the freedom of a wholly constructed secondary world. This extends to the tropes themselves and the expectations of readers.

Princess Tropes

Some of the key aspects of the hegemonic feminine roles that Cordelia retains are her consistent representation as a romantic heroine, as a figure of authority, and as a mother. Although Cordelia firmly retains her status as a Princess and love interest of the hero, she is privileged in that relationship by Bujold's promotion of her subjective position. Cordelia is academically and militarily active, as well as visibly maternal, stubbornly refusing to leave the stage once she becomes pregnant and parent to increasing numbers of natural and surrogate children. She defies masculine authority and speaks to it critically and publicly when necessary. She is no-one's prize and, indeed, her psychological state suffers in *Barrayar* when she is forced to submit to traditional Barrayaran gender expectations as a passive society lady (Bujold *Cordelia's* 367). Bujold extends this reformulation to her Fantasy writing through characters such as Ista and Iselle, see Chapter Six. Similarly, Cordelia's sexuality and permissiveness is contrasted with conservative Barrayaran mores, through surprise at her early acceptance of Aral's bisexuality (330) and through his later relationship with Jole (Bujold *Gentleman Jole*). Bujold undertakes a more nuanced examination of the complex interaction between women's sexuality and social standing in her discussion of Cordelia's experiences on Barrayar than is usually shown in speculative fiction.

Perhaps more importantly than any of these other deviations from traditional Princess tropes, Cordelia's foreign genetics and her acceptance of alternative modes of childbearing and conception are explicitly rejected by patriarchal Barrayarans. This challenges one of the most enduring stereotypes of the Princess as one who guards the blood line of the royal house as Miles suffers from a range of disabilities, while Mark is a clone. Cordelia is constructed as Schrodinger's Princess, simultaneously a figurehead of romantic femininity and a model of active feminine authority.

Priestess

Real world ambivalence about women holding power is expressed through the containment of socially compliant women and fear of non-compliant ones. Secular authority for women in

speculative narratives often appears tied to their celibacy and Good Nun stereotypes while deviation from accepted cultural norms of feminine behaviour lead to negatively sexualised depictions that emphasise the lack of control society has over the woman with power. I have labelled this the Bad Witch variant of the Priestess binary. Good Nuns rarely have lovers or families, while Bad Witches usually express an uncontrolled sexuality. This is exemplified in the sharply defined contrast between Professor McGonagall and Bellatrix Lestrange in the *Harry Potter series*. Quite a few *femme fatales* and other evil female characters are, in fact, Princesses or Maternal figures who develop into Priestesses by accumulating independent power. This authority is often expressed through money, control over children, or supernatural agency that allows them previously unavailable freedom of action. That Bujold allows her women to break free of these stereotypical positions is a significant appropriation of the greater license that is traditionally given to masculine characters. Especially when combined with Bujold's general resistance of negative representations of women's sexuality.

Cordelia has access to a great deal of power. She inherits social influence through her relationship with Aral and his position as Regent and potential heir to the Imperial throne (Bujold *Cordelia's* 276). This is accompanied by financial power, personal charisma and fame, warrior skills, as well as her incisive intelligence and psychological insights. However, Bujold resists the limitations of the Priestess trope by depicting Cordelia's sexuality positively alongside her personal authority. Cordelia holds a great deal of influence over Barrayar as a whole: setting trends in women's education, their use of uterine replicators, their independence, and even their parenting. This is especially clear in her role guiding the young Emperor Gregor successfully to the throne. Good Nuns are not usually sexualised but here Bujold balances both qualities in one woman. This deviation from traditional norms is supported by Bujold's frequent depiction of Cordelia's success. Cordelia has both political, social and military victories, usually involving active intervention and/or the application of her warrior skills. Cordelia receives credit for the death of Vorrutyer and respect from the population along with it, but Barrayaran acceptance of her authority is cemented when she returns with Vordarian's head and prevents civil war. Cordelia straddles the binary between the two

conventional halves of the Priestess trope. The length of her story allows Bujold to develop her into a highly complex example of a female protagonist.

Significantly, Bujold does not attribute Cordelia's successes solely to her performance of the masculine roles outlined previously. Cordelia is also clearly attributed with 'women's intuition' in ways that are significant to the narrative as a whole. After the "acid" discussion with Vordarian (Bujold *Cordelia's* 332), she approaches Aral's head of security, Simon Illyan, asking if Vordarian is on Illyan's "short list" of suspected conspirators:

She hesitated. She wasn't about to reply, *Intuition*, though that was exactly what those subliminal cues added up to. ... The man's hatred had been profound, his blow precisely, if mistakenly, aimed.

"Move him to your short list," she said. (339)

Aral later commends Illyan's early interest in Vordarian using similar language, remarking that "We'd found Vordarian was conspiring, at HQ and elsewhere. Illyan's investigation was inspired. Top security people must have that sort of intuition, I suppose" (425-426). Besides being another opportunity to validate Cordelia's perceptions and judgement, readers are reminded by the repetition of "intuition" that it was, in fact, *Cordelia's* insight that first uncovered the plot. Intuition is traditionally a feminine intelligence, which also reinforces reader perceptions of Cordelia straddling gender binaries. Here, however, it is not only the "innate" powers that Russ has remarked upon at work, but also her knowledge and experience managing people (Russ "Image" 83).

Cordelia's sexuality is equally foregrounded. She acknowledges her initial attraction to Vorkosigan readily and the only shame she feels is for admiring a deadly enemy:

She found herself disquietingly aware of his body, muscular, compact, wholly masculine, stirring senses she thought she had suppressed. . . Even if the shape of his square strong hands was a dream of power in form. (Bujold *Shards* 31,33)

Cordelia flouts restrictive Barrayaran sexual conventions with enthusiasm (Bujold *Cordelia's* 310) during their married life. Indeed, the latest novel, *Gentleman Jole and the Red Queen*, relies extensively on her ability to maintain and succeed in a discreet three-person marriage for over twenty years. All while maintaining the respect and admiration of the highly conservative Barrayarans. Even after the death of Aral, the man who provided so much independence and authority, she continues to lead the colony on Sergyar independently until her *self-appointed* retirement (Bujold *Gentleman Jole* 126, 423). Bujold redefines the capacity of female characters in speculative fiction by presenting and validating women's authority and sexuality, the two opposing elements of the Priestess trope, balanced in one character. This is Bujold "pushing the envelope" from the inside once more (qtd in Bacon-Smith 122).

Maternal

Similarly, Bujold problematizes the depiction of Maternal figures in speculative fiction by including a number of widely divergent depictions of maternal care. Familiar presentations of good, bad and absent mothers are complicated by Bujold's insightful use of feminine perspectives. More detailed discussion of Bujold's Maternal depictions will follow. Indeed, the very foregrounding of such women who are mothers yet retain a vital role in the narrative is its own kind of radical revision of such characters within traditional SF depictions.

Cordelia's literal and symbolic roles within the narrative of the early SF novels are often constructed within Maternal frameworks. Many aspects of the authority and responsibility she undertakes in her capacity as a leader are also described in terms that are used for mothers. This is particularly true when she enters the Barrayaran political sphere, as that society has very limited models for female authority other than the Maternal. However, Cordelia's leadership is presented with extra connotations of care giving, concern, emotional attachment, and moral development. Bujold immediately positions her in this Maternal role in the opening chapter of *Shards*, through Cordelia's care for Dubauer whose debilitating injury reduces him to the state of a toddler (Bujold

Shards 8). These Maternal aspects of her complex identity are made even more explicit in *Barrayar*, both through Cordelia's relationship with the men who serve her husband and during her own difficult pregnancy:

“She watched Bothari, Koudelka, and Vorkosigan standing together for that brief moment. *The walking wounded, one, two, three. And me, the lady auxiliary.* The survivors. Kou in body, Bothari in mind, Vorkosigan in spirit, all had taken near-mortal wounds in the late war at Escobar.” (Bujold *Cordelia's* 261)

Before Miles' birth and her assumption of care for Gregor, Cordelia is noted as taking particular care of these three men. For example, she takes possessive care of Bothari, calling him “*my monster. My good dog*” (355, 532), accepting him as a kind of fur-baby and allowing him to use her as a psychological ideal to aspire to (Bujold *Cordelia's* 566). A regard Bothari returns, calling himself “*Lady Vorkosigan's dog*” (p. 505). She also buys Aral's wounded secretary, Koudelka, a sword-stick to use instead of a cane (276) and notices his suicidal behaviour before others (367). It is particularly interesting to note here how much she downplays her own wounds taken in that war, just as severe as any of the other characters mentioned; Bujold frames her resilience with classic imagery of maternal care and self- sacrifice.

Another common social role for women on Barrayar is acting as go-between or ‘baba’ for the many marriages that take place, whether arranged or romantic, and Cordelia takes on this role in both the earlier and later novels of the series. In the middle of the mission to retrieve her son's replicator in *Barrayar*, Cordelia needs both Kou and Drou to be wholly present and not distracted by their unresolved romance. So, with characteristic bluntness she gets quickly to the heart of the matter (529–536). When they later object to Mark as the suitor of one of their daughters, Cordelia cuts to the chase by resurrecting the couch on which Kou and Drou first began their affair to remind them of their own past difficulties and emotions (Bujold *Civil* 408-409). Cordelia's insistence on

dealing with things as they are, rather than as they ought to be, is one of the most powerful ways in which she creates change on Barrayar.

More than simply modelling alternatives and “stirring up the girls” (Bujold *Cordelia’s* 294), she begins to intervene in true Maternal fashion in the lives of those around her. Her unwillingness to accept solutions that are traditional, simply because they are socially normalised, means that she creates new resolutions for existing problems. She enacts change directly, becoming a model for further changes. Bujold consistently prioritises the emotional well-being and opportunities for personal development of the secondary characters as Cordelia’s motivation for making changes to Barrayaran ways. For example, she refuses to accept Barrayaran prejudices against disability and supports Koudelka’s healing. Likewise, she encourages Drou’s fulfilment as a warrior without asking her to sacrifice her love of frills. Sometimes just an alternative and supportive perspective is enough. When her opinion of Princess Kareen’s behaviour is challenged by an officer:

Cordelia favoured him with a glittery grin. “Oh, but you never know what any Barrayaran woman thinks by what she says in front of Barrayaran men. Honesty is not exactly rewarded you know.” The staffer gave her an unsettled look. Drou smiled sourly. (Bujold *Cordelia’s* 484)

Cordelia is able to translate emotional and psychological complexities to the often rigidly simplistic Barrayarans around her, as when Koudelka confesses to raping Drou and is corrected (412). Cordelia not only explains the Barrayarans to readers and to herself, but also to each other, educating them about how to play nicely with others as mothers are expected to do.

By far the most interesting part of Cordelia’s maternal experience is the arduous pregnancy she undergoes with Miles. Not only is Miles removed from her body and placed in a replicator to save his life, but she is also separated from the replicator when he is held hostage by Vordarian. Cordelia’s ideal of a large family is a strong point of adherence to patriarchal expectations. For a native of overcrowded, environmentally ravished Beta,

“... family size ... was the real, secret, wicked fascination of Barrayar. There were no legal limits here, no certificates to be earned, no third-child variances to be scrimped for; no rules, in fact, none at all. ... Cordelia wriggled her toes and cuddled into the cushions, afloat on an atavistic cloud of genetic greed” (Bujold *Cordelia's* 299)

However, after Cordelia and Aral are poisoned during an attempted assassination, Cordelia is given an antidote that has deadly consequences for fetuses (386, 395). Tragically, Aral knows the consequences of the antidote but insists on its use in order to save Cordelia's life. The antidote is also the reason for their lack of further natural children as Aral's fertility is also destroyed by the antidote (395). Cordelia enlists the aid of an ambitious doctor immediately after the poisoning and saves Miles' life by having him transferred to a uterine replicator where his development can be better monitored and supplemented. Again, the extreme lengths to which Cordelia will go to save the life of her child position her within established expectations of the maternal instinct. The interest for feminist critics in Bujold's examination of maternity is the variety of attitudes and experiences she represents. Not all women aspire to motherhood and not all who become mothers flourish. It is hardly surprising that Cordelia seeks the use of uterine replicators to save her child when her character has already been established as having a positive view of them. What is slightly more radical is the equal strength of such emotions in male characters, such as Aral, who must take a more determined, oppositional stance against the morals of his homeworld, personified by his disapproving father (417-420). The opposing positions of Barrayaran patriarchy and Betan tolerance are represented by Piotr and Cordelia, and Aral is torn between them.

Bujold also contrasts traditional body births and their dangers with the safer and more modern uterine replicators. Cordelia's concerns during her early pregnancy are voiced aloud, and Bujold deliberately draws readers further into a female point of view with her “clunkily explicit” (Lake 7) revision for “both morphs of readers”:

Leaving aside Alys's whispered obstetrical horror stories, of course. Hemorrhages, strokes, kidney failure, birth injuries, oxygen interruption to fetal brains, infant heads grown larger than pelvic diameters and a spasming uterus laboring both mother and child to death . . .

Medical complications were only a problem if one was somehow caught alone and isolated at term, and with these mobs of guards about that wasn't likely to happen to her. (p. 300)

Bujold also increases the hard science content overtly through her discussion of replicators, but there is nothing soft about the personal and psychological impact for characters.

I knew it was safer, I knew it was there—" Her voice broke. ... Cordelia eyed it [the replicator] with profound relief. The primitive Barrayaran back-to-the-apes style gestation was nothing but the utter failure of reason to triumph over emotion. She'd so wanted to please, to fit in, to try to become Barrayaran. . . . *And so my child pays the price. Never again.*" (p. 396)

Pregnancy is re-framed explicitly for male readers as a potential cause of death, away from weapons and battle which more usually dominate scenes of violence in SF. Uterine replicators help women to avoid the potential for death and dangers that arises from body births. They are not unique to Bujold, a fact she readily acknowledges, but are generally agreed to first appear in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). Bujold even uses the same verb, 'decanted', to describe these births. Alongside the use of female perspectives, Bujold increasingly sharpens her focus on the social and cultural implications of such female-centric technology. This reformulation and renovation of familiar gender-based limitations is both typical for this author and the source of increased sophistication in the text. It is not only through combat that women express courage and Bujold validates women's alternative experiences and challenges for her readers.

Exploring and explaining family relationships is a key aspect of Russ's suggestions for reformulating SF to be more inclusive ("Image " 85). Bujold emphasises this difference from traditional SF in the *Vorkosigan Series* through the addition of a range of extended family members.

The Vorkosigan household not only includes the core members of Cordelia, Aral, Miles and Gregor, but also Drou and Koud, Bothari, Pym and Ma Kosti. All of whom are household servants or retainers who share intimate knowledge of the family workings and goings-on. Elena, Bothari's daughter, and Ivan are so close and frequent a presence as to be sibling-like in the history of Miles' childhood. Later, of course, there is the addition of Mark as a further very problematical sibling and the large number of Koudelka girls, daughters of Drou and Kou. The variety of their career and marital fates form a notable sub-plot in *A Civil Campaign*. Even Illyan is a semi-permanent addition to family events as he has personal responsibility for the safety of the Vorkosigans and their extended family as Chief of Imperial Security as well as personal sympathy.

The most significant of these examples of Cordelia's increasing maternal responsibilities and positioning within the narrative is the development of her relationship with Princess Kareen's son, the boy Gregor, who is heir to the Imperium. In *Barrayar*, Cordelia and Gregor must escape into the rural backwaters around Aral's country property after Vordarian's coup begins. She immediately becomes a surrogate mother *in loco parentis*. Bujold establishes this relationship through frequent descriptions of small domestic routines that don't ever impede the action of the narrative. The greatest difficulty for Cordelia during this experience is that Miles' replicator is trapped on the other side of enemy lines and eventually taken hostage by the ambitious Vordarian. She makes this exchange of responsibilities explicit, saying "My little boy is in the capital, too, same as your Mama. And you're with me. We'll look out for each other. You bet." (Bujold *Cordelia's* 449). Her connection with him becomes so strong that when they are separated for security reasons, she instructs the Armsman who will pretend to be his father while protecting him:

"He's also a little boy. ... Take care of the Emperor for Piotr [Aral's father], yes, but you take care of Gregor for me, eh?" ... He gave her a nod, not as retainer to his lady, but as one parent to another." (462-463)

This is at first a temporary arrangement, that after his mother's death becomes permanent. Cordelia anticipates and accepts this fate *before* she is given responsibility for Gregor's personal finances as well: "*I'll look after your boy, Kareen*, Cordelia thought as the flames [of his mother's pyre] rose up. The oath was more costly than any gift being burned, for it bound her life unbreakably to Barrayar" (569). The power of the maternal relationship to shape a person's character and values is directly addressed when Cordelia accepts authority and responsibility for Barrayar's future Emperor during Aral's Regency.

...she was given oversight of the Emperor's household. And education.

"But Aral," said Cordelia, stunned. "Vortala emphasised I was to have no power."

"Vortala ... is not all-wise. Let's just say he has a little trouble recognizing as such some forms of power which are not synonymous with force. Your window of opportunity is narrow, though; at age twelve Gregor will enter a pre-Academy preparatory school."

"But do they realize...?"

"I do. And you do. It's enough." (Bujold *Cordelia's Honor* 570)

It is one of the most far-reaching consequences of her arrival on Barrayar. As the formative guide and model for the future ruler of an empire spanning three planets, Cordelia's parenting skills have a dramatic and widespread influence on the whole of Barrayaran culture. Cordelia's visible influence as shaper of the mores of that society now extends well into the future when she becomes the source of moral education for the Emperor.

Cordelia's collection of surrogate children is supplemented even further in the later novel *Mirror Dance*, when Miles' clone brother Mark arrives. On Beta, clones are legally recognised siblings and Cordelia's insistence that the clone be acknowledged as her son is another intrusion of contradictory Betan values into Barrayaran culture. Mark's sometimes difficult integration within the family is a recurring feature. Bujold again explicitly examines Cordelia's ideas about parenting through conversations with Mark.

"But do remember, you're *allowed* to ask for help. It's part of what families are all about."

"I owe you too much already, milady."

Her smile tilted. "Mark, you don't pay back your parents. You can't. The debt you owe them gets collected by your children, who hand it down in turn. It's a sort of entailment. Or if you don't have children of the body, it's left as a debt to your common humanity. The family economy evades calculation in the gross planetary product. It's the only deal I know where, when you give more than you get, you aren't bankrupted—but rather, vastly enriched."

.... The Countess's idea of maternal concern was damned unnerving, sometimes, Mark reflected as she made her way out" (247)

Despite the masculine traditions in many of the roles she undertakes, Cordelia is equally and often positioned in Maternal roles. Her acceptance of her role as the Regent's wife and surrogate mother to the Emperor seems to place her in the role of surrogate mother to the whole planet, imagery that is only increased when she becomes Vicereine of the colony on Sergyar. James notes that this is:

What makes Bujold's works stand out in the context of contemporary science fiction and fantasy ... not the number of women or their strength of personality; it is the importance of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood in her narratives. (James *LMB* 138).

This use of the Maternal is a deliberate intrusion of a feminine psychological perspective into the traditionally masculine narrative of Space Opera. It is also a more complex representation of a female starship captain and part of a wider engagement with issues of gender.

Cordelia's closing words in the final chapter of *Barrayar* offer a strong insight into Bujold's conceptualisation of parenthood and a comprehensive summation of this aspect of Cordelia's nature: "Children might or might not be a blessing, but to create them and then fail them was surely damnation." (Bujold *Cordelia's* 583). Bujold constructs Hybridity of gender for Cordelia by focussing on female experiences, skills and interactions while she fulfils masculine roles. This provides greater

freedom and agency and greater potential to resolve dilemmas. Cordelia's perspectives and solutions are often unconventional, disrupting normative patterns of behaviour and the expected responses, opening the way to new solutions and new ways of thinking for character and reader alike.

Complication

While Bujold's depictions of Cordelia's hybrid identity significantly reformulate SF tropes, she furthers this reformulation through secondary female characters. I make a distinction between Hybridity, where the traditional gender tropes are deliberately realigned so that both sexes display both types of gendered behaviour, and Complication, where the reformulation is still deliberate but less uniform. For Complicated characters, there is less of an emphasis on balance in the exchange between the genders and a highly individualized approach to resisting and reframing gender. Complicating Bujold's depiction of gender in a variety of ways are the loyal wives and mistresses in the margins, such as Princess Kareen and Lady Alys. These women occupy traditional positions of passive figural authority, but their profound impact on the events of the novels and the cultural and political history of Barrayar is fundamentally different from traditional depictions. Cordelia remarks on their differences from the usual high Vor ladies: "Lady Vorpatril, whose social enthusiasms concealed an acid judgment... [and] ... Princess Kareen, whose naiveté had surely been burned out long ago by that expert sadist Serg" (Bujold *Cordelia's* 332). The less central a character is, the more unpredictable they are able to be, especially in terms of categorizing their purpose and behaviours. A Hybrid character like Cordelia occupies most or all of the tropes from both genders, while a Complicated character sits largely within one category but has attributes or behaviours of another.

Alys and Princess Kareen's authority comes with expectations of strict adherence to normative models of Princessly behaviour; they are mild, beautiful, highly born, well-bred ladies. Their education is complete enough for them to manage a large household or to ornament social events but their skills are barely recognised in their own right. Their genes hold the key to the inheritance of

future generations but have no personal benefit to the ladies, only to their firstborn sons. Regina Lee observes that like most of her type Princess Kareen is just a “physical medium of transmission for the genetic material between generations” (R Lee 37). They achieve social approbation through advantageous marriages and successfully birthing sons. Bujold assigns them a miserly one each, their lives divert so quickly from the standard script once they come to readers’ attention that there seems to be no time for more.

Alys is initially positioned in contrast to Cordelia. Where the newly arrived Cordelia struggles with her ignorance of Barrayar’s restrictive norms of feminine behaviour, Alys Vorpatril demonstrates a skilful performance of these norms. She is more socially and politically active, an unusual combination on conservative Barrayar. But she is also more traditionally feminine with a keen interest in clothes, entertaining and shopping (Bujold *Cordelia’s* 299-300). However, her overt expression of femininity is positioned not only as personal interest but also as part of Alys’s awareness of the subtle powers that can be wielded by women within strictly patriarchal confines. These interests are never mentioned without some shading of political significance. At the beginning of *Barrayar*, Alys is tasked with training Cordelia in ways to successfully navigate the Barrayaran political scene and is depicted as a typical Vor wife, albeit one with more social savvy than most. Her husband, Padma Vorpatril, is described as a conventional and somewhat weak-willed but urbane Vor lord, without much of the usual military strength aspired to by Vor lords. His execution in the streets by Vordarian’s thugs would have led to the death of a heavily pregnant and labouring Alys but for the intervention of Cordelia. Alys calls him “that idiot Padma” (Bujold *Cordelia’s* 520) and weeps as her son, Ivan, is born in a dirty basement during the crisis. Criticism of Padma continues when Cordelia later rebukes Kou by saying “ ‘Try’ is not good enough. Padma Vorpatril ‘tried.’ You bloody *succeed*, Kou.” (529) and Alys’s mourning is described as “embittered” (572). Alys’s disappointment in her husband, and the failure of the implied social contract of obedience in exchange for the protection of marriage, seems to inspire Alys to expand her sphere of influence and take more active steps to protect herself and her son. These developments occur in the later novels of the series

where they are an unsurprising addition to Bujold's depiction of Alys as greater and more complicated than the confines of the Princess trope in which she initially appears. Like Ista in Bujold's Fantasy works, Alys is an example of a capable woman, limited by the society in which she lives, who grows through exposure to the narrative events Bujold describes. In her first appearance, Alys is a quite conventional but disappointed high Vor Lady, however, by the end of *A Civil Campaign*, she has built her reputation into a formidable political and social tool, is working closely with Imperial Security, and has re-partnered outside of marriage with a formidable Barrayaran man.

Equally, Princess Kareen is aware of political realities and is perhaps even more personally at risk as the wife and mother of the Imperial heir, Gregor. She is an archetypal Princess, but her Maternal duties as mother of the future Emperor have a profound impact on her life. Cordelia seeks clarification of Princess Kareen's status in the Imperial line:

"That would be for the military to decide," she shrugged. Her voice lowered. "It is like a disease, isn't it? I'm too close, I'm touched, infected ... Gregor is my hope of survival. And my prison." (Bujold *Shards of Honor* 335)

Her fate is inextricably bound to those of her husband, Serg, and their child. Serg's father, Emperor Ezar promises Princess Kareen his protection from Serg's debauchery and abuse but only provides it *after* she has successfully produced a legitimate heir (Bujold *Shards* 270-271). Little wonder then that Princess Kareen seeks alternative forms of protection, most notably through a potential rematch with another Vor lord, Vordarian. In private she confides to Cordelia that she had encouraged Vordarian's attentions and imperial aspirations as a counter measure to the threat she perceived from Serg once Ezar was dead (Bujold *Cordelia's* 270-271). With both of these men gone, Princess Kareen unsuccessfully attempts to distance herself from Vordarian but instead becomes his hostage as a means for him to claim the throne. Bujold reveals the vulnerability of women within patriarchal systems through Princess Kareen's status as pawn. When Cordelia is called upon to give

her opinion of Kareen's appearance in video footage leaked by Vordarian during the civil war, she sees through Barrayaran expectations to the heart of Princess Kareen's dilemma, observing that:

"She's been dealing with this sort of nonsense all her adult life . . . what do you expect of her? She survived three years of marriage with Serg, before Ezar sheltered her. She must be a bona fide expert in guessing what not to say and when not to say it ... What does she owe you, owe us, after all? We've all failed her, as far as she knows." Vorkosigan winced. ... Maybe the only revenge she thinks she'll ever get is to live long enough to spit on all your graves." (Bujold *Cordelia's* 484)

This insight is sustained when Drou is horrified by Princess Kareen's apparent betrayal but Cordelia reassures her "She didn't look like a lover to me. She lay like a prisoner." (Bujold *Cordelia's* 543).

These are yet more instances of Cordelia speaking truth to power and explaining the women of Barrayar to their men. Initially, Bujold positions Princess Kareen as a highly conformative Princess type character and provides critique of Barrayaran culture through her.

Princess Kareen does not survive Vordarian's civil war, sacrificing herself while trying to assassinate Vordarian. Cordelia is able to prove that Gregor has survived and that Vordarian not only lied about his fate but was the source of the threat. The "twitchy militarism" (Bujold *Shards* 8) of the Vor infects Kareen as well and overcomes her reserve and self-control when her main social purpose is undermined. Like Alys, and despite conforming to the stereotypes, Princess Kareen provides significant examples of Complications to traditional depictions of Princesses. Her violence and vengeful actions, when considered alongside Alys's behind-the-scenes manipulations, make both women striking examples of ways in which Bujold makes female characters seem to adhere to socially constructed gender roles and yet not be limited by them. Princess Kareen in a desperate moment, Alys over a lifetime. Together they provide important examples of Bujold experimenting with secondary characters and powerful female figures alongside the primary figure of Cordelia, avoiding the isolation common for female characters in more traditionally gendered speculation.

Bujold's serialised narrative arc, where each novel builds upon or into the last, is particularly common in speculative fiction and here it allows Bujold to develop greater depth and character development over a lifetime of experiences. Bujold's secondary characters are not mere bit players, who "strut and fret their hour upon the stage and then [are] heard no more" (Shakespeare 998), but psychologically complex and responsive to the situations and context Bujold builds around them.

In the later SF novels of the *Vorkosigan Series*, Bujold's engagement with intersectionality and her depiction of culturally unconventional solutions to the challenges women in her narratives face becomes more overt. This increasing complexity is, in part, the result of the more complex narratives Bujold is able to create over multiple novels showing the lives of the same characters. The thirty year gap between Bujold's early SF, *Shards of Honor* and *Barrayar*, and the later novels, *Komarr* and *A Civil Campaign*, highlight these shifts. Bujold is able to reformulate women's stereotypical social positions even further in these later novels. I posit that the span of her narrative supports this shift towards increasingly socially challenging outcomes. However, Bujold's increasing skills in balancing narrative elements, as well as shifts in her own thinking during her own career, contribute significantly as well. Bujold's work does not consciously include feminist ideals, nor did it shape feminism as a movement, however, the creation and publication of her works during the same critical period means that they reflect many of the concerns and interests of women in the primary world at this time. The origins of Bujold's most challenging reformulations can be discerned in the earliest stories of Cordelia's encounters with Barrayaran culture, but their fullest potential to communicate women's concerns and to imagine alternative solutions for them is best met in Bujold's later works. Her depictions of female characters and the outcomes she provides them deviate more clearly from established patriarchal narrative tropes and structures.

Chapter 5: Bujold's Later SF

Gender relations enter into and are constituent elements in every aspect of human experience. In turn, the experience of gender relations for any person and the structure of gender as a social category are shaped by the interactions of gender relations and other social relations (Flax 623-624)

If female characters have traditionally been “off stage” (Russ "Image" 83) in Space Opera and Science Fiction more broadly, this is often the result of conflict-driven narratives that seek fiery apotheosis in celestial and military spheres rather than domestic ones. The more Bujold returns to the home planet of Barrayar during the *Vorkosigan Series*, the more readers engage with female characters, as well as the increasing diversity in their dispositions and occupations. In previous chapters I have discussed Cordelia's hero's journey, *Shards of Honor* and *Barrayar*, which use her outsider's perspective to give readers an insight into the culture of Barrayar *before* the introduction of off-world ideals and morality. Cordelia is a reformer who makes a significant impact on Barrayaran society despite the hurdles placed in her way. She gathers a loyal group of supporters of both genders who see her as a catalyst for the various changes they long to introduce on Barrayar. As one might expect with a serialised narrative such as this one, Bujold's extended return to Barrayar some thirty years later, in *Komarr* and *A Civil Campaign*, brings not only a return of the female characters previously introduced and a continuation of their stories. Bujold also introduces a critical view of Barrayar's development post-Cordelia and the cultural upheaval to which her notable adventures have contributed. Female characters are present in all of Bujold's narratives; but in her SF they largely appear in masculine spaces, rather than domestic ones; science labs, prisoner of war camps, crime lords' palaces, battlefields of all sorts, and inevitably lots and lots of spaceships. Domestic spaces are foregrounded in the four novels based on Barrayar, enabling Bujold to extend the depiction of women. In fact, while *Komarr* and *A Civil Campaign* contain both political intrigue and the occasional combat or hostage scene, they seem deliberately focussed on the female-

dominated spheres of household spaces, daily domestic routines, formal and informal social spaces, high and middle class gatherings, and that most feminine of settings, an Imperial Wedding.

In the intervening novels, Miles has engaged with an “extraordinary list of lovers” (Bujold *Komarr* 308-310) and mainly meets women who display a combination of masculine roles and feminine traits, or Reversals like Drou. This includes Elena Bothari, a mercenary soldier and commercial shipmaster; Elli Quinn, a mercenary Admiral; Taura, a genetically engineered super soldier; Rowan, a slave and medical researcher; and Rian, a Cetagandan haut lady and empress. Rian might seem to be a very traditional female character as she is extraordinarily beautiful and adheres to the Princess trope quite strongly. However, her skill and social rank are framed by Bujold as the result of extensive knowledge and study of science which can be read as highly masculine, making her more like Bujold’s hybridised characters. In Miles’ highly militarised and conflict driven spacefaring life there is little room for anyone not in the military and of his five love-interests, three are soldiers, one is a medical officer he rescues from slavery, and one (an “unrequited mad crush” 310) the unattainable Empress of an enemy nation. All are presented as Miles’ social and intellectual equals. Their greatest commonality, apart from a distaste for Barrayar’s stifling patriarchy, is their appropriation of behaviour and social roles traditionally associated with males in order to assert greater personal autonomy. Bujold’s depiction of life amongst the stars largely excludes social and domestic demesnes where most women operate or presents highly modified militaristic ones. Consequently, the traditional focus of SF on heroic and outwardly motivated characters is maintained. In *Komarr* however, Miles and Ekaterin embark on a romantic relationship which gives readers, and Miles himself, an insight into why his previous relationships failed. Like Miles, Ekaterin has experience of other worlds, including Komarr and the other colonies. This blends her knowledge and understanding of Barrayar and matches Miles’ half Betan, half Barrayaran upbringing and outlook. Miles’ previous girlfriends have all been either entirely off-world characters or entirely Barrayaran, or raised on Barrayar and desperate to escape! Only a character like Ekaterin with a foot in both worlds can meet Miles as an equal. Bujold also throws Miles directly into Ekaterin’s private

domestic sphere, exposing her most bitter and intimate secrets to readers and to Miles. Through Ekaterin, Bujold is able to critique Barrayar's cultural norms because her experience of domestic abuse and other worlds have given her an incisive, outsider's eye like Cordelia. Bujold gives both mother and wife narrative license to transgress the boundaries of Barrayaran society.

Bujold deliberately confronts the absence of domesticity in speculative fiction in a number of ways in *Komarr*; not only is Ekaterin's private world described in detail, it is a volatile and violent environment through which Bujold provides a female viewpoint on a range of emotional, sexual and physical abuses. Such abuses are not always made visible in fiction, let alone in speculative fiction. But Ekaterin's domestic space is also elevated to narrative significance because Bujold alternates the protagonists' point of view between chapters from Ekaterin to Miles and back, something she has not done before in the series. Bujold has also not used a female protagonist voice since Cordelia's. In this way, not only does Bujold present an unusual subjective viewpoint, she also presents that viewpoint to a group of readers who do not usually encounter such perspectives in the traditionally patriarchal spaces of SF and Space Opera. It is no coincidence that Bujold's writing is contemporaneous with similar developments in feminist thinking. Bujold is writing for both morphs of readers but provides two different experiences; for female readers it is one of recognition and representation in the genre, while for male readers it is one of insight and understanding of the other gender.

The need for a feminist approach to Bujold's texts is also validated by the realisation that external definitions of femininity are often formed to restrict and control women. This includes the binary notions of bad girls and good girls, damned whores and god's police (Summers). A binary that is expressed socially through the parallel emphasis on women's sexuality as a commodity for consumption and as a measure of virtue or source of shame. In *Komarr*, Bujold allows Ekaterin to resist the authority of patriarchal Barrayar through the symbolic decision to leave her husband, despite the negative social consequences. Tien Vorsoisson, like Piotr Vorkosigan, is the representative of patriarchal Barrayar for readers. Whereas Piotr was wrapped in social adulation,

respect and validation due to his position as a cultural icon, Tien struggles with the restrictions of patriarchy and suffers from the disconnection between old and new social orders. Exiled from the centre of power on the colony of Komarr, he is much less politically and financially secure. An embezzler, Tien is arrogant but simultaneously emotionally fragile, jealous and suspicious, and he takes his emotional and career frustrations out on his wife physically. Perhaps worst of all in the view of hyper-masculine, mutation-averse Barrayar, he carries a lethal dystrophic gene that he has passed on to his son. Piotr's experiences leading a rebellion against foreign invaders, enduring the Time of Isolation, and the brutal civil war that follows are used to excuse his excesses. He is also positioned as being representative of an older generation against whom both Cordelia and Miles struggle. Tien has no such validation within the narrative; his character is an excoriating depiction of all the ways that hegemonic ideals of masculinity are problematic for men as well as women.

The physical as well as the cultural distance between Komarr and Barrayar emphasises the greater intellectual and personal freedoms available on the conquered colony planet of Komarr, which has not always laboured under the same strict gender roles as Barrayar. Significant changes have occurred in Barrayaran society, largely as a result of Cordelia's influence, and this changed context allows Bujold to expand upon the patterns of gender reformulation. The traditional tropes of feminine characters in Space Opera and SF novels appear but continue to be revised through more nuanced inclusion of masculine attributes and freedoms. Socially constructed gender roles are challenged by these juxtapositions and by the wry humour with which they are delivered. Self-discovery, as ever, forms a significant part of characters' development and journey during these novels.

Focus on female lived experiences remains high in *Komarr*, with Miles' future wife Ekaterin now providing a third person intimate perspective on women's lived experiences. The use of gender tropes is more Complicated than ever, with fewer straightforward substitutions enabling more intersections between these tropes. Bujold also uses Ekaterin to explore the "third place to stand" that she identifies as necessary for mature women, such as the highly independent Princess figure of

future Empress Laisa. The subtle shadings of Hybridity are presented in detail as Barrayaran women undergo an awakening of consciousness similar to the early stages of second wave feminism in the primary world (James *LMB* 141). Both Ekaterin and Lady Alys engage with this process of liberation, although Ekaterin's journey is followed more closely by the reader. The fates of the four Koudelka sisters are used to shed light on changes across the breadth of Barrayaran society via the depiction of increased tolerance and altered social expectations in a post-Cordelia society. The potential for cross-gendered experience is presented through the Reversal of Lady Donna into Lord Dono, whose transition from female to male provides a number of interesting opportunities to discuss explicitly the performance of masculinity in contrast with the lived experience of femininity. Bujold does not avoid some of the criticisms levelled at the second wave (especially Betty Friedan's 'white feminism') in her construction of a racially homogenous, financially secure, educated and heterosexual community. However, her engagement with identity politics is more diversified and intersectional than it might first appear, particularly in her discussion of self-determination. It was also unique in speculative fiction at the time.

Focus

Ekaterin

Ekaterin's difficult first marriage is one of the more riveting and insightful representations of marital discord captured in narrative fiction. Bujold utilises her perspective to introduce a range of infrequently examined topics and sensibilities to the traditionally masculine framework of Space Opera. Bujold invites readers inside Barrayaran domestic spaces and focuses on the private lives of characters. Using "double estrangement" (Westfahl 237) in order to critique social constructions of family behaviour. This includes female-centred discussion of marital rape, domestic violence, emotional abuse, custody and divorce battles, as well as women's subjective experiences of sex. All of which remain problematic issues for women in the twenty-first century. The hard won right to vote and the right to equal pay are empirical rights to which humans are entitled regardless of their sex or gender. However, a woman's right to authority over her body and sexuality remain contested

and women's ability to insist on these rights has been far more vulnerable to opposition because patriarchal societies prioritise the rights of men to sex and fatherhood. Although legislation has been passed outlawing intrusion on women's bodies and lives, this does not mean that women were in any less danger. This is the area of social reform where women's rights to their bodily autonomy conflicts directly with men's exercise of traditional social privileges and expectations.

Women's reproductive health, depictions of women in porn and pop culture, and right to refuse sex are key areas that remain a source of conflict in the primary world of readers and are key issues for feminists. Whilst awareness and reporting of infringements have increased, the incidence of such violence against women has not shown a proportional decrease as a result of legal change¹¹. Indeed, the rise of the internet and its attendant anonymity has seen threats of such violence increase. Rosemarie Tong suggests that until these "de jure" social changes are "de facto", women's experiences of the world will not be equal (35). Previously, Bujold has discussed rape within a familiar 'stranger danger' framework. In her early SF female victims of rape and violence were almost exclusively prisoners of war. In *Komarr*, she enters less visible, private spaces within a traditional patriarchal marriage, and examines the vulnerability of women who have neither the social, emotional, nor economic independence to escape abusive situations. The difference between Ekaterin's socially constructed expectation of protection and care from her husband and the reality of grinding emotional and increasingly physical abuse, is manifestly clear.

Bujold's introduction of sex from a woman's subjective viewpoint in previous novels was a radical enough departure for Space Opera. Bujold elaborates more fully in the later novels with the complex issues surrounding women's experience of sex and consent. In *Komarr*, rape is not the imposition of a violent stranger and predator on the protagonist, but rather the emotional abuse

¹¹ See (Buzawa and Buzawa; Hoyle and Sanders; Sherman et al.). In the UK - <https://kareningalasmith.com/counting-dead-women/>; In Australia - <https://www.facebook.com/notes/destroy-the-joint/counting-dead-women-australia-2018-we-count-every-known-death-due-to-violence-ag/1909721162408952/>; In the US - <https://countingdeadwomenusa.wordpress.com/about/>

and coercion of sexual favours from an unwilling spouse. Bujold's critique is strengthened by the depiction of a cultural context where rape and physical abuse have rarely been publicly acknowledged, let alone within the bounds of socially sanctioned marriage. This remains a problem for women in the primary world, where women's dress, their use of intoxicants, their occupation, and their relationship with the rapist are still used to question the 'legitimacy' of the rape. Stranger rape is still the dominant perception of rape, rather than the more thorny issues of date rape and partner rape, that often appear to go hand in hand with other acts of violence against women. These issues are left unexamined because they require the community to acknowledge the participation of a broader range of men in socially deplored behaviours¹². Bujold's presentation of Ekaterin's personal thoughts in italics allows her to present social critique from within the shell of the secondary world, just as she did with Cordelia's interior thoughts in *Barrayar*. Through Ekaterin's harrowing and intimate experiences, readers are introduced to this dilemma in detail and positioned to sympathise with the woman.

Through the sexual violence depicted in *Komarr*, Bujold resists the overt "amoral flashy freakiness" of Vorrutyer from *Shards of Honor* (113), instead presenting through Tien Vorsoisson the more mundane face of patriarchy. The insistent, inconsequential, daily exposure to normalised cultural violence reinforces the feminine as less important, less capable, and yielding. The brutish, brooding, paranoid and patriarchal Tien dominates his family in the early chapters of the novel *Komarr*. Bujold alerts to Ekaterin's feeling of "an odd twinge of identification with the transplanted ecology outside, slowly starving for light and heat, suffocating in a toxic atmosphere" (*Komarr* 2). As Tien becomes more frustrated by events, Ekaterin notes that she "will have to offer sex very soon" (55) to defuse his tension. Bujold is emphasising Ekaterin's estrangement from the intimacy of marital relations. In fact, a kind of anti-intimacy is presented where Ekaterin's experiences isolate

¹² <http://www.casa.org.au/assets/Documents/statistics-4.pdf>, <http://www.casa.org.au/assets/Documents/SA-myths.pdf> (accessed 01-04-17); <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/knowledge-centre/our-publications/discussion-papers> (accessed 05-04-17)

her from her feelings and desires, and even her identity, rather than drawing the couple closer as sex is often supposed or expected to do. This failed intimacy is explored at length through Ekaterin's interior monologue (55, 58). Bujold explores the landscape of uncertainty and insecurity that domestic violence creates.

For Ekaterin, sex becomes a way of managing her husband rather than an experience of mutual delight or sympathy. One that is finely tuned to *his* needs and *his* moods as a method for deflecting *his* negative emotions (55). There is no reciprocity other than an obligation for Ekaterin to stroke his ego by expressing satisfaction with his performance. She notes that "Tien demanded response of her and worked hard to obtain it... He became upset - with himself, with her? - if she failed to participate fully" (55). The distance between his perception of events and hers is eloquently outlined through juxtaposition of Ekaterin's performance of the role and the emotions she hides from him:

It went according to plan and practice, after that, mission accomplished all around. Tien kissed her when they'd finished. "There, all better," he murmured. "We're doing better these days, aren't we?" She murmured back the usual assurances, a light, standard script. She would have preferred an honest silence. She pretended to doze, in postcoital lassitude, till his snores assured her he was asleep. Then she went to the bathroom to cry. (59)

Here a woman's experience of sex is defined by external expectations, the experience is not personal even though conveyed from an intimate perspective. Ekaterin is objectified by the intrusion of Tien's ego and this clouds his ability to either perceive or appreciate Ekaterin's sexuality as a valid and distinct quality from his own experiences.

Ekaterin's response is not just disappointment in the social pressures that lead to an abusive arranged marriage. Her experiences are shown to erode her identity and are clearly depicted as abusive (Bujold *Civil* 196):

Unable to act a lie with her body, she'd learned to erase herself from herself ... The inward erotic fantasies required to absorb her self-consciousness had become stronger and uglier over time; was that a mere unavoidable side-effect of learning more about the ugliness of human possibility, or a permanent corruption of the spirit? (Bujold *Komarr* 55)

Denial of the value of the other is an essential first step towards abuse, denying your partner's sexual identity and preferences is such an intimate rejection that it becomes abusive on a fundamental level. Ekaterin notes this, herself, when she reflects on the role of sex in her marriage, "*I hate him. I hate myself. I hate him, for making me hate myself*" (59). Through the complexities and hidden layers of emotional abuse, Bujold deliberately draws Tien as the worst possible husband – feckless, suspicious, corrupt, arrogant, narcissistic – and explores Ekaterin's complex responses, creating a detailed and intimate portrait of domestic abuse.

Bujold continues the pattern of exploring the long term consequences of sexual violence for female characters. Ekaterin reflects that "the walls had suffered from his clenched fists a few times" (55) but it is the tension and "angry explosion[s] of muffled, cutting words" (55) and the "days of frozen, silent rage, filled with unbearable tension and a sort of grief" (Bujold *Civil* 196) that upset her the most. There is little physical abuse shown, but early indicators of abusive behaviour abound in the patterns of emotional abuse, stalking and extreme jealousy, criticism and controlling behaviour displayed by Tien. Readers experience first-hand the dreadful realities of a psychologically abusive union that is nevertheless socially approved and desired by her family. Ekaterin's struggles to recover from this abuse in the wake of Tien's death continue throughout *A Civil Campaign*. Although this novel follows the story of Miles' romantic pursuit of Ekaterin to a happy conclusion, Tien's brutality continues to overshadow their relationship and echoes of the suffocating imagery of the first book are frequent. Ekaterin calls them "old scars of mind", saying she is "half crippled by old reflexes" (Bujold *Civil* 428) even while revelling in her newfound freedom:

Every night now, lying down alone without Tien, was like a taste of some solitary heaven. She could stretch her arms and legs out all the way to the sides of the bed, revelling in the smooth space, free of compromise, confusion, oppression, negotiation, deference, placation. Free of Tien. (80)

What was a throwaway observation in *Barrayar*, when Cordelia suggests that Princess Kareen lies “like a prisoner” not a lover (Bujold *Cordelia's* 543) is expanded in *Komarr* to be an underlying metaphor for Ekaterin’s entire marriage. She “*did not know what a prison I was in, till I was freed*” (Bujold *Civil* 80, original emphasis). Kelso notes that this “picture of a woman struggling from a chrysalis of stagnation to begin a second life is a staple of feminist fiction” (“Loud Achievements” 74). This is a pattern that Bujold references in the early life of Cordelia, but explores in depth here, and later in her description of Ista’s escape from the confines of her family in the Fantasy *Five Gods* novels.

The contrast between masculine and feminine experience of the same world is made explicit in *Komarr* by presenting chapters from different perspectives; one from Ekaterin’s, followed by one from Miles’. Bujold has never done this in previous texts and this combines with narrative emphasis on Ekaterin to swiftly confirm readers’ awareness that she will become Miles’ future wife. One result of this is to emphasise the significance of Ekaterin’s subjective experiences. Bujold surrounds Ekaterin’s substantial inner thoughts with a range of banal domestic duties and activities; such as preparing dinner, entertaining guests, taking her child to the doctor, 4, 6-8, 121, 182. The description of private, domestic contexts is a remarkable inclusion in SF and Space Opera. Bujold places the traditional, conformative experiences of Ekaterin’s domesticity into direct contrast with Miles’ more cosmopolitan Betan values. His more interesting employment and his personal freedoms are contrasted through the parallel with her gender defined and limited experiences.

This masculine-centric view of the universe is directly challenged through Cordelia’s questions to Miles about Ekaterin’s first marriage and is another example of Cordelia’s Maternal instruction of

the people around her.

"Just how bad—" the Countess began.

"Did I offend her? Badly enough, it seems."

"Actually, I was about to ask, just how bad *was* Madame Vorsoisson's prior marriage?"

(Bujold *Civil* 257)

Cordelia's correction of Miles' misunderstanding is a quite explicit redirection of the reader's attention from masculine to feminine world view. Miles is not the subject here, Ekaterin is, and her experiences are the key to understanding events, not his. This redirection reformulates the unconsciously masculine viewpoint of most speculative fiction and makes visible this bias in both the primary and secondary worlds. Bujold's re-prioritisation of Ekaterin's experience over Miles' is significant, as are the ways in which Bujold challenges Barrayaran social mores about women's capacity and behaviour. The cultural realities of Barrayar are changing and readers experience an uncommon perspective on upper and middle class Barrayar by entering these less visible domestic and familial spaces.

Second wave feminists, particularly the more radical ones such as Shulamith Firestone and Germaine Greer (Firestone; Greer; James *LMB* 144) have long engaged with the consequences and implications of social control over women's reproduction and bodies. Firestone in particular explored the idea that women should be freed from biological determinism, arguing that just because their bodies *bore* children they were not then necessitated to *rear* those children. Le Guin explored this radical departure in *The Dispossessed* (1974) and *Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). Many, many words have been spent by speculative and feminist writers in proposing and critiquing alternatives to the dominant pattern of most human communities in which child rearing and the unpaid labours of women are both expected and devalued. Many writers of mid-seventies feminist SF engaged with this idea when they imagined alternative gyno-centric communities; such as Russ' short story 'When It Changed' (1972), Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* (1986), and Pamela

Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986). Some of these communities were founded in the primary world, such as Amazon Acres in Walgett, NSW. The desire to create more equal worlds persisted throughout the 1980s and 1990s in speculative fiction such as Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* (1996). *Gate* maintains this tradition of depicting feminist separatist communities, slowly revealing the truth that the women are in control. This is less direct than some of the peak feminist SF of the 1970s but avoids the undermining of matriarchal social orders that occurs in much pulp SF. Similar to Stone's "The Conquest of Gola", *Gate* is one of the few stories of this kind where women remain undefeated. On the other hand, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) instead presents a more depressing ending for women. All of these alternatives, however, are depicting alternative solutions to the gendered division of reproduction, child-rearing, and domestic duties.

Bujold acknowledges her debt to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* for the idea of the uterine replicator. She claims no awareness of Firestone's work or her similar use of Huxley's ideas to imagine an alternate future where women do not bear the majority of the unpaid and unacknowledged labour involved in child rearing (James *LMB* 144-145). The potential use of replicators to relieve women of these burdens is not only pursued in Bujold's narratives on Barrayar but recorded directly in her unusual variant of the single-sex community, *Ethan of Athos* (1986). Single-sex communities were previously explored by pulp writers in the 1930s and 1940s, and by feminists in the 1970s as women-only utopias. Athos is a male-only world and the narrative revolves around an individual male sent to acquire ova in order to sustain reproduction in the colony. The unfairness of what is considered "women's work" being unpaid and undervalued in both the primary world and on Barrayar is encapsulated by Ethan's incredulousness that such a state of affairs exists in the rest of the galaxy (Bujold *Ethan of Athos* 145). He states that "Athosians would never sit still for such a hidden labour tax! Don't the primary nurturers even get social duty credits?" (77-78). Far from this ideal, on Komarr Ekaterin shoulders the entire burden of primary care duties for her son and yet because of his gender she has less legal authority over him. When Tien dies she is only able to

continue her primary caring role because his nearest male relative is a bachelor in military service for whom the addition of child rearing duties would be greatly inconvenient:

Vassily had granted her custody of Nikki with his word. He could take it back again as easily. It was she who'd have to take suit to court—his District court—not only to prove herself worthy, but also to prove him unworthy and unfit to have charge of the child. ... She hadn't a prayer of winning against him. If only Nikki had been her daughter, those rights would be reversed ... (Bujold *Civil* 402)

Even after he's gone, Ekaterin faces similar difficulties when trying to access medical care for her son without Tien's consent (213). The peculiarly patriarchal tilt of Barrayaran law continues to prioritise the male over the female even after death. Due to his genetic condition Tien had an "obsession with concealment" and refuses to allow Ekaterin to have another child, not even using a replicator, as the required genetic screening and cleansing would necessarily expose his terrible secret (Bujold *Komarr* 3-4, 6). The only acknowledgement of his illness and use of off-world technology that Tien will allow is contraception to prevent further children (Bujold *Komarr* 35). Further undermining Ekaterin as it prevents her from fulfilling the social expectation that she will have a large family. Ekaterin experiences a lack of control and autonomy over her body and that of her child, held hostage by gender and social expectation. Bujold continues to centralise the life events and perspectives of women in these narratives, more than most SF writers of her era.

Many women in the primary world experience the same limitation of access to abortion and contraception that are similarly bound by legal and social convention to political and theological traditions that prioritise masculine privilege. Currently, political and social controversy over women's rights to access contraception, reproductive health care and abortions is increasing as conservative elements in society try to roll-back previous legal gains. In Poland, women went on

strike to protest reversal of laws protecting access to abortion¹³; in Russia, laws regarding domestic violence have been reversed, weakening the capacity of women to seek legal redress and protection from abusive spouses¹⁴. In America, the Hobby Lobby decision allowed employers to refuse female employees access to contraception as part of their health insurance due to “sincerely held religious belief”¹⁵. The removal of Federal funding for Planned Parenthood in America does little to lower the rate of abortion, but rather, drastically reduces the availability of low cost healthcare and reproduction services (including contraception provision) to vulnerable women¹⁶.

All of this does little to reassure contemporary feminists that social conventions regarding the role of women in child bearing and rearing are being reconsidered in any significant way. The potential for speculative fiction, such as Bujold’s, to conceptualise alternatives and consider the implication of wide scale social reform of reproduction and child rearing is a defining feature of the genre. Bujold brings together the speculative potential of fiction about technology and secondary worlds with a focus on female experience of them to explore issues that are more usually left “off stage” or made invisible. As noted earlier, its not only the number of female characters or their strengths, but “the importance of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood in {Bujold’s} narratives.” (LMB 135). I suggest that Bujold does more than simply emphasise these issues or draw them to readers’ attention, she also challenges readers to reconsider these aspects of their own lives in the primary world. Bujold exposes the challenges and costs of patriarchal constructions and impositions on women’s bodies and women’s lives through her intimate perspective on female characters’ experiences. By reformulating the women she depicts and describing their emotional responses in detail, Bujold engages her readers with distinctly feminist concerns about women’s bodies and their

¹³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37540139> (accessed 29-04-17)

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/30/russia-decriminalise-domestic-violence-laws> (Accessed 29-04-17)

¹⁵ https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/27/magazine/what-the-hobby-lobby-ruling-means-for-america.html?_r=0 (Accessed 29-04-17)

¹⁶ <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mike-pence-breaks-tie-planned-parenthood-defunded-senate-vote-tie/> (Accessed 29-04-17)

rights over them.

Complications

Bujold's "third place to stand"

Bujold sheds light on both traditional and new constructions of motherhood through the dual perspective of a woman who has a private and, increasingly, public life. At first, Ekaterin's role as Nikolai's mother and the private griefs of her life overshadow all other aspects of her existence, including the fact that her uncle is one of the highest ranked individuals in the Empire, an Imperial Auditor. Through Ekaterin's private life, Bujold considers issues of pregnancy, contraception, child rearing, economic dependence, and custody after divorce. The unconscious social emphasis in fiction on the public spheres of "the academy, the forum and the marketplace" (Tong 34), over private and feminised spaces are called to account by Bujold. She raises private spaces to critical narrative position and inserts previously invisible women into public spaces to dramatic effect (James *LMB* 138). Firstly, Ekaterin is taken hostage by terrorists and successfully ruins their plans (Bujold *Komarr* 245–281). Then, she provides an effective solution to a new political problem by manipulating existing, patriarchal legal structures (Bujold *Civil* 119-123, 501-502) and thirdly, she foils a complex intrigue involving treason and political manouvering at the highest levels with a very public marriage proposal (495). Ekaterin achieves all of this while recovering from abuse and widowhood, continuing to care for her son, rediscovering a career and establishing her financial independence. Women are not only more visible in Bujold's public spaces but exhibit far more agency and effectiveness.

In the early SF novels, Cordelia models female autonomy and authority which is readily taken up by Barrayaran women such as Alys Vorpatril. While Cordelia's example assists younger women like Ekaterin, some thirty years later she still voices the sense of the unknown Bujold calls "terra incognita" that the new generation of women are facing. Bujold observes that women in the primary world have a new life structure of "maid, matron, 20-or-30-year-blank, crone" which takes into account the extended life spans of women. Bujold suggests:

There are no historical social models for that second-maturity period. It's something our time is having to invent. Men's life spans have been extended as well, to be sure, and we're seeing more fellows re-invent themselves with second and third careers (and sometimes families). But for men, it seems to be a smoother extension of what they were doing already, and less of a *terra incognita*." (Oak 6)

Despite Ekaterin's younger age and her ongoing role as a mother, this attitude of uncertainty and self-discovery is reflected in her observation:

I am not who I was. I can't go back. I don't quite like who I have become. Yet I still . . . stand. But I hardly know how to go on from here. No one ever gave me a map for this road." (Bujold *Civil* 427)

Ekaterin has grown to maturity in conservative upper class Barrayaran cultural spaces and experiences Friedan's "problem that has no name" that "dissatisfaction supposedly felt by suburban, white, educated, middle-class, heterosexual housewives in the United States" (Friedan *Mystique* 380; Tong 28). Bujold reiterates her belief that the Heroine's Journey has a different "road" than that of the hero (Oak 6), one that "doesn't come back" (*Paladin* 3).

Bujold sets out this different road for many of the women in her narratives. Ekaterin returns to study and begins a landscaping and horticultural career; building a second family of her own with Miles and three more children. Ekaterin's aunt, the Professora Vorthys, has both a successful academic career and a number of children (Bujold *Komarr* 242). Alys has an adult son and a second career as Gregor's Hostess and domestic spy master, and Cordelia has further children placed into replicators during the most recent novel (Bujold *Gentleman Jole* 15). Bujold does not supply readers with a singular, exceptional woman, but with a diverse range of examples of women facing the challenges of this "second-maturity" phase head on (Oak 4). Bujold has discussed her understanding of this need in detail, including her perception that a non-Maternal source of authority is

increasingly becoming necessary in the “20-or-30-year-blank” that comes after maternity and before old age:

Women do desperately need models for power other than the maternal. Nothing is more likely to set any subordinate’s back up, whether they be male or female, than for their boss to come the “mother knows best” routine at them. We need a third place to stand. (Oak 6)

Yet again, Bujold bypasses the extra difficulties encountered by lower class women by situating Ekaterin in very comfortable social circles Ekaterin has the freedom in *A Civil Campaign* to explore her desire for further education and to pursue a career rather than merely seeking employment or having to make a second marriage under social pressure. The challenge of balancing home and career life is confronted in *Komarr* and *A Civil Campaign* within the Barrayaran context.

Bujold uses this opportunity to examine the challenges for women balancing personal and professional fulfilment and the connection between these two avenues for self-determination. Ekaterin’s aunt and uncle are both academics and pursue equally respected careers, but Ekaterin queries the Professora’s choices; “Had she made secret compromises? She had a solid place in her profession—might she have had a place at the top? She had three children—might she have had six?” (Bujold *Komarr* 242). Bujold’s narratives clearly depict the difficulty of achieving both simultaneously and as highly dependent on economic stability. Ekaterin is only able to contemplate these options once she is free of her traditional, patriarchal marriage. Importantly, once married to Miles she is of sufficiently high rank and income to have a large personal staff to take over the daily drudgery. Her marriage to Miles, like that of her aunt the Professora, is also an uncharacteristically supportive marriage where the Professora’s academic ambitions are fostered rather than smothered. Bujold alludes to alternatives within Barrayaran society, such as women choosing not to marry at all or else pursuing professional responsibilities. These are neither prevalent nor generally approved and accepted on conservative Barrayar.

The only truly acceptable position for a proper Vor lady is that of wife and mother. Ekaterin is

reminded of her duties to "Our class. Solid, honest, loyal Vor. On the women's side, modest, proper, upright ..." (Bujold *Civil* 400). Traditional tales and stories are used to construct and reinforce this cultural understanding. Ekaterin and the Professora discuss the tragic tale of the Maiden of the Lake and the potential disaster for Barrayaran women of the Komarran terrorists' plans to return Barrayar to a new Time of Isolation (Bujold *Komarr* 273). The Professora introduces the first note of dissonance when she wonders whether the tragic heroine's death "was quite so voluntary as ... later claimed" and Ekaterin adds to this problematic consideration by wondering "...if the attack really had taken place the next day, and all the pillage and rape had proceeded on schedule, would they have said, 'Oh, that's all right, then?'" (273). The critical conversation continues, broadening into a discussion of their contemporaries' misunderstanding and romanticisation of Barrayaran history. Ekaterin notes that she wants to go home, but not back to Old Barrayar. She talks sarcastically of girls who:

For some reason ... never play *dying in childbirth*, or *vomiting your guts out from the red dysentery*, or *weaving till you go blind and crippled from arthritis and dye poisoning*, or *infanticide*. Well, they do die romantically of disease sometimes, but somehow it's always an illness that makes you interestingly pale and everyone sorry and doesn't involve losing bowel control. (273, original emphasis)

Just as Bujold earlier uses Cordelia's personal voice to delineate the potential hazards of childbirth, here Ekaterin and the Professora deliver a list of the potential hazards of life as a Barrayaran woman in the Time of Isolation. Masculine perspectives and their domination of political and economic spheres are challenged through the redirection of readers' understanding of the consequences arising from the terrorists' planned actions (250). She delights in her resistance of the very traditions she has just been revisiting:

Laughter bubbled out of her throat, bravura berserker joy. She wanted to destroy a *hundred* devices. She turned on the float cradle's power again and bounced the smashed

remains on the deck a few more times, just because she could. *The Maiden of the Lake* fires back! (p. 280)

Ekaterin's success in defeating her captors is resounding and she berates them for their ruthlessness (Bujold *Komarr* 247-251). The housewife steps out of the shadows and proves herself the equal of her male peers in her understanding of complex politics, moral judgement and her ability to act in life or death situations. Bujold's women create chaos and violence deliberately, in contrast to earlier writers of SF who sometimes presented suburban mother-type women finding "accidental" solutions to problems (Attebery *Decoding*; Russ "recent Feminist Utopias"; Mendlesohn "Subcommittee").

This is a more Complicated depiction of gender than the Hybridity and Reversals that Bujold has been exploring. Bujold has turned her attention to more feminine characters, expanding upon the idea that it is not merely the influence of Cordelia that encourages Barrayaran women to cast off the shackles of restrictive codes of acceptable behaviour. For example, the inclusion of the Professora in *Komarr* is significant. The fact that her career is already well-established hints at a far broader range of alternatives for women in Barrayaran society than was depicted in the earlier novels. Cordelia is perhaps the *first* woman to receive widespread acceptance and approval for this behaviour, but she is not the *only* woman to do so and these later SF novels refer to an increasing variety of alternatives that are not always explicit in Bujold's early SF.

The Maiden of the Lake conversation between Ekaterin and the Professora does more than provide a window into the 'bad old days' of Barrayar. It also undermines the relatively consistent presentation of heroic women as isolated and singular examples of their type in speculative fiction. Cordelia is a reluctant soldier but Ekaterin is heroic without ever lifting a conventional weapon (*Komarr* 278-281). A common additional presence in speculation of all kinds is the shero who mimics traditional masculine behaviour or the lone female on the team; Referring to Princess Leia in particular, one TED talker recently suggested traditional speculative fiction tropes construct female

characters as someone “who has no friends and doesn't speak” (Stokes). This limitation merely nods to feminine equality that does little to address wide-ranging and complex issues of feminine representation.

On the other hand, Bujold’s reformulated female characters are supported with social and personal approval from the similarly reconstructed allies (both male and female) who surround them. Kareen Koudelka, like all five Koudelka sisters is another character who voices this increasingly critical view of traditional Barrayaran norms by the younger generation of women. She asks whether folk tales like the Maiden are “supposed to be a warning, or an instruction” (Bujold *Civil* 414) about how women should behave. Her sister, Olivia, has a dramatic effect on the outcome of Lord Dono’s political campaign when she enables him to avoid an ambush and attempted reversal of his sex-change. While Delia marries a Komarran who is highly placed in Imperial Security, significantly improving his reconciliation with Barrayaran culture and his career prospects through her close relationship with the Vorkosigans. Kareen is set to become very wealthy through her business and romantic association with Mark Vorkosigan, while Martya is shown to be developing affections for a scientist who develops products for Mark. AT the conclusion of the earlier novel, *Barrayar*, Kou and Drou’s wedding was considered remarkable as it took place in the Imperial Palace despite both Kou and Drou being commoners. In her later SF, Bujold expands this variation from Barrayaran norms even further and more overtly complicates the hierarchical and patriarchal divisions common on Barrayar.

Many of Bujold’s characters are active and powerful women amongst their peers, whether those peers are male or female and whatever social strata they occupy. Emperor Gregor’s bride, Laisa, is an independent, and independently wealthy, Komarran shareholder from an extremely prestigious family. She is as close to Komarran nobility as that highly corporate planet will allow. However she is also a highly educated Phd holder and a powerful CEO with many years of political experience (Bujold *Civil* 48, 69, 150). Laisa resists the traditional Princess tropes of passivity and beauty associated with romantic focus. Especially as she retains her plump figure and physical

individuality despite the ready availability of corrective surgery. Bujold again deliberately inserts a woman into the public spaces of the forum, the marketplace and the academy to challenge the assumed naturalisation of masculine domination in those spaces. Through Laisa, Bujold further complicates the modern Princess by depicting one who actively rejects the norms of feminine beauty in favour of body positivity and self-acceptance.

The description of Vor ladies as “modest, proper, upright ...” (Bujold *Civil* 400) clearly divides expectations of behaviour along gender lines, with a double emphasis on restricted sexuality in women who are expected to be both modest *and* proper. Through her self-examination after being freed from Tien’s influence, Ekaterin comes to see the crippling limitations inherent in her previous role as wife and mother:

Tien had protected her proudly, she reflected, in the little Vor-lady fortress of her household. Tien had spent a decade protecting her so hard, especially from anything that resembled growth, she'd felt scarcely larger at thirty than she'd been at twenty. (Bujold *Komarr* 309)

Ekaterin’s ability to intervene in the political plans of Miles’ enemies is largely due to the confidence she gains from the success of her actions in foiling the terrorist plot at the end of *Komarr*. In doing so, Ekaterin earns the respect and attention of the Emperor himself and causes her family to re-evaluate her qualities:

Gregor leaned over and added in a lower voice to Vassily ... "Madame Vorsoisson has my full trust, Lieutenant; I recommend you give her yours." Vassily managed something that sounded like *urkSire!* ... Hugo could not have stared at his sister in greater astonishment if she'd sprouted a second head. (Bujold *Civil* 479)

This scene is important for the reinforcement and support that it gives the character in the eyes of those around her, as well as in the eyes of the reader. Bujold strategically positions her female characters as one of many, whose divergent interests and personal narratives supersede the

limitations of conformative tropes. By contextualizing and presenting this diversity, Bujold expands her audiences' understanding of the social forces that construct a limiting performance of gender. Simultaneously, she questions some of the constraints that underpin gendered roles in speculative fiction and makes them visible.

Hybridity

In the following sections, Hybridity and Reversal, I shall discuss two key characters, Lady Alys Vorpatril and Lady Donna Vorrutyer. Both exhibit direct reversal of established patterns of gendered behaviour, as well as being unconventional depictions of female characters in speculative fiction. Lady Alys because she occupies traditionally masculine spaces of political power successfully in a female body. Lady Donna because she changes the gender of her body as the only means of obtaining this political power. Lady Alys wields her power behind the scenes, maintaining a highly feminine exterior as a screen of plausible deniability for her unusual authority within patriarchal hierarchies. However, Donna acquires a more visibly masculine presence in order to claim authority directly and with social acknowledgement. Both are highly complex secondary characters and show her increasingly sophisticated examination of gender and power

Lady Alys first appears as a secondary character in *Barrayar*, as discussed above. The most interesting part of her story takes place in Ekaterin's novels, *Komarr* and *A Civil Campaign*. Here, she progresses from the traditional Princess role she first inhabits into that of the Good Nun, and finally into something much more complex, hybrid and powerful. As Princess, she is the vulnerable, much loved, pregnant wife of a Vor lord who is widowed during Vordarian's Uprising and rescued by Cordelia (Bujold *Cordelia's* 512-523). Her social skills and interests are acknowledged early when Cordelia is referred to her for lessons in Barrayaran high society but it is after her widowhood that Alys really develops. Having fulfilled her primary Vor lady duties of marrying well and bearing a child she, too, comes to occupy the "terra incognita" of the "20-to-30-year-blank" in her life structure that Bujold discusses with Oak (4). Widowhood has often been a somewhat liberating social status for women in the primary world, offering a financial and social freedom not always available to married

women. There is a kind of respectability offered by the role; capable leadership partnered with social sympathy for an untimely loss. Whatever the reality of the marriage, a respectable widow has always to be pitied and therefore can be received positively. A number of regent queens and businesswomen in older times were able to occupy these previously restricted roles partly because they acted *in loco paternis*, in the place of an absent male figure. Queen Elizabeth I and various famous abbesses and noble ladies, such as Hildegard of Bingen or Eleanor of Aquitaine spring to mind in this context.

In Bujold's world, Lady Alys explores these traditional liberties within a Barrayaran context, acting as Emperor Gregor's hostess and essentially running the Imperial Household in the absence of his mother or a wife. She has morphed into an archetypal Good Nun; sexless, post-maternal, powerful but working in the service of the state and good society. Her areas of responsibility remain highly feminised and domestic. The freedom and political and economic authority she holds are traditionally masculine areas but she is accepted because of her clearly held loyalty to the Emperor and tradition. She does not transgress the social norms. Nowhere is this more clear than in her handwritten letter to Miles where she provides critical insight and advice to his co-conspirators. Both Ivan and Miles recognise the significance of a hand delivered paper letter in a technological culture; "the destroy-after-reading directive was inherent" (Bujold *Civil* 369). The content of the letter also reveals the subtle background ways in which women exercise power in a patriarchal system designed to exclude them. As Tiptree names it, "in the chinks of your world machine" (Tiptree, 205). For example, Lady Alys and the Lady Vortugalov play a remarkably effective "shell game" with uterine replicators and much coveted Imperial wedding invitations in order to affect the outcome of a crucial vote in the Council of Counts. Lady Alys writes that:

"Lady Vortugalov reports not much hope for either René or Dono from her father-in-law. However,—hah, get this—she has shifted the birthdate of the Count's first grandson two days forward, so it just happens to coincide with the day the votes are scheduled, and has invited the Count to be present when the replicator is opened. Lord Vortugalov of

course will also be there. Lady Vortugalov also mentions the Count's voting deputy's wife pines for a wedding invitation. I shall release one of the spares to Lady VorT. to pass along at her discretion. The Count's alternate will not vote against his lord's wishes, but it may chance he will be very late to that morning's session, or even miss it altogether. This is not a plus for you, but may prove an unexpected minus for Richars and Sigur." (Bujold Civil 363-4)

In the same letter, she also notes that

"I would not normally consider it possible to detach Count Vorvolynkin from the Conservatives, but a whisper in his ear from his daughter-in-law Lady Louisa, upon whom he dotes, that votes for Dono and René would seriously annoy, underscored, his adversary has borne startling results. You may reliably add him to your accounting." (364)

Although the ability of Lady Alys to directly impact political outcomes is vocally dismissed by secondary male characters such as Richars, it is flagged as crucial through more central characters:

"Richars Vorrutyer sat right there," said Miles, pointing to René's chair, "and informed me that Lady Alys held no vote in Council. The fact that she has spent more years in the Vorbarr Sultana political scene than all of us here put together seemed to escape him. Too bad." (365)

The full force of her authority as Imperial Hostess is further explained in Bujold's lengthy discussion of the wedding preparations that are described like a "combat drop mission" on a planetary scale (Bujold *Civil* 515). All of Lady Alys' "generalship" being tested to its fullest; Miles describes this in military terms, saying that "your mother may be the most important person in Vorbarr Sultana. ... I've seen planetary invasion plans less complex than what's being bootied about for this Imperial Wedding." (Bujold *Civil Campaign* 33). The true capacity of her position as Emperor Gregor's official hostess remains hidden through most of the series, coming to light briefly in *Memory* when she begins a relationship with the head of Imperial Security. The truth of her position is not fully

revealed until the closing pages of *A Civil Campaign*. She is also a “blind drop” for a prominent secondary character who is a “deep cover informer ... [for] Domestic Affairs counterintelligence” (528-529) is a thrilling addition to her catalogue of skills. Lady Alys Vorpatril is not only at the pinnacle of a complex and highly stratified social and cultural milieu. She is also a very highly placed spy-master within the capital city of a politicised and lethally aggressive patriarchal culture, creating a truly interesting hybridity of feminine qualities and masculine authorities.

This blurring of roles becomes even more complicated when Lady Alys casts off the shackles of celibacy that are such a key aspect of the Good Nun trope. Lady Alys nurses Illyan, the head of Imperial Security, back to health in *Memory* and readers are made aware that she does not have adequate security clearances (Bujold *Memory* 250). Lady Alys’s sudden return to dating and sexual activity with Illyan is noted with amusement by others, and some alarm by her son, in all the subsequent novels. This is significant from a feminist point of view for two reasons: firstly, because it challenges the negative association of women’s sexuality and authority with a positive depiction, and secondly, because marriage is not the assumed conclusion of their relationship. Lady Alys and Illyan’s relationship remains an acknowledged but informal one, and their eventual marriage is presented as a whim and personal preference rather than adherence to strict social dictates. Dictates that would have constrained Lady Alys in her earlier Princess incarnation have become much less significant to the more mature and powerful character she has become. In these later novels, Bujold deftly progresses her through the Good Nun state to a uniquely hybrid complexity. Lady Alys is a valuable ally for Cordelia in the early novels, but by the later ones she has developed into a formidable secondary character, holding power in her own right and actively engaging with the political events of the novel.

Reversal

Reversal is distinct from Hybridity because it is not about the mutual exchange of gendered behaviours but is a shift of one gender to another. The case of Lady Donna, who becomes Lord Dono

with Betan surgery, takes Bujold's interest in pushing the envelope of gender roles to its fullest extent; that is complete physical transformation. It is clear that Bujold is not engaging with issues of transgender psychology or gender dysphoria, as Lady Donna's alteration is presented as part of a campaign to inherit a political title for which she is ineligible as a female. Despite Bujold's highly sympathetic portrayal, some readers criticise this as unfaithful depiction of transgendered people who struggle with internal gender identity. Most of this discussion is informal, as when Cheryl Morgan argues that people don't transition their gender

"for personal gain, or for fun, but because their lives are intolerable in a gender that doesn't match their psychology... [and that] ... There's no serious discussion of Dono's state of mind, or even awareness that this might be an issue. For him, changing gender is just a lifestyle choice." (Morgan).

Lady Donna makes the change to assert her claim to the District she cannot inherit as a woman. She is a more capable and progressive leader and her rival is presented in contrast as a highly corrupt, self-interested and self-indulgent patriarchal male. A typical Vorrutyer in other words. In previous novels as Lady Donna, she appears as a vivacious man-eater, taking many lovers and husbands. Some of whom she is suspected of killing after having flattered and seduced them into marriage for personal gain. In *A Civil Campaign*, this is re-framed as the result of early sexual abuses by Vor lords.

"I doubt," said Dono in a suddenly clinical tone, "that anyone would care, at this late date, that he tried to rape me when I was twelve, and when I fought him off, drowned my new puppy in retaliation. After all, no one cared at the time." (Bujold *Civil* 172)

She rapidly realises that her sexuality is her only source of power within traditional Barrayaran social structures. Lady Donna is driven to accept the limitations of the traditional Bad Witch trope of the Priestess and leans into them as a path to personal autonomy and a measure of freedom. Bujold uses this negative gossip to underline traditional unease with women who hold power and independence from patriarchal structures. As soon as Donna sheds the ethical and moral constraints

on her behaviour that are constructed by concern for social reputation, she is able to manipulate society for her own benefit. Once she becomes a man, she flips from the Bad Witch aspect of the Priestess trope to a Reversed heroic one. Bujold implies a kind of re-birth has occurred with the surgical change of form and he reverts to a virgin. The newly created Dono states that "For once in my life, I wanted to be a virgin on my wedding night" (Bujold *Civil* 448). This suggests that Dono has more personal autonomy than Lady Donna, but he conforms to social expectations more strongly and literally gives up his femininity, especially the potential to become a mother, as part of the sacrifice he makes to become free of gendered limitations. Therefore, I think that Bujold's depiction is not intended as a discussion of transgender issues but as window into a woman's ability to wield authority within a patriarchal world. Bujold employs this Reversal as a kind of thought experiment, placing a woman's formative, subjective experiences into a man's body and social contexts. She does not engage with the psycho-sexual aspects of transgender experiences at all.

Lady Donna remains inside Dono's male body. The superficial change does not erase the political and social experience garnered within the masculine demesnes of politics and society but Dono retains a female insight into those spheres. Bujold leverages this into a direct discussion of what it is to be a man, as both Miles and Ivan give Lord Dono 'man lessons' in how to talk, walk, and move through the world (171, 178-181). There are quite a few occasions where the patriarchal structures of Barrayar are called into question by Bujold through this contrast between Dono's and Donna's subjective experiences. Dono is very popular amongst Barrayaran ladies for his doubled understanding of social contracts because, like Cordelia, he has become an insightful outsider with a unique perspective. But Miles also notices that "Lord Dono was playing Gregor just right—frank, fearless, and up front. But then, Lady Donna had always been observant." (203). Bujold is thus able to comment on social attitudes towards acceptable gendered behaviour (204-205) and sexual relationships (219) from both feminine and masculine perspectives through this character. Perhaps unconsciously, Bujold has reached the outer limit of her readiness to push the envelope on these issues

Bujold avoids the shaming and disrespect so often shown to transgender and LGB people in the primary world and in the world of fiction. Hegemonic masculinity is the peak of privilege and people or character who don't meet these expectations become easy targets. This means that the adoption of feminine characteristics by a male, whether through behaviour and dress or attraction to the same sex, is often understood as a dilution of masculinity and leads to a reduction in social standing. But a woman dressing or acting as a man is also negatively received as a threat and false masculinity. The test of admission is proof of 'real' manhood. Dono has to win the assembled counts over with bravery, honesty, loyalty, and by cunning and a feat of physical prowess and does so when he survives an attempted castration and assassination (446-449). It is important to understand Lady Donna/Lord Dono's character as less of an attempt to create a transgendered character and more as an exploration of the repercussions of gender reversal in action within a rigidly patriarchal secondary world. Bujold is able to illuminate many of the contradictions that underpin existing gender tropes through Dono's reversal. Lady Donna is a prime example of a complex secondary character who resists Barrayaran social mores and takes advantage of technological advances to improve her situation. In doing so, she shifts social expectations of women's behaviour, their talents and ambitions. When society doesn't shift fast enough around her, Lady Donna takes radical action of a physical gender reversal and this profoundly challenges prevailing attitudes. Bujold's capacity to combine one or more gender tropes in the same character achieves a more sophisticated reformulation than a novel where a female character is simply parachuted into a male role. This is the big difference between conformative texts, which reinforce existing models of gender, and those texts like Bujold's which challenge existing models. More numerous female presences in speculative narratives across all media are important, but Bujold also shows how much more effective female characters can be when they are not bound to traditional pattern.

Chapter 6: Focus and Reversal in Bujold's Fantasy

In realist fiction the remarkable woman is conventionally presented as unusual, as some kind of aberration, rather than as the potential (fulfilled) of most women ... in a patriarchal society exceptional women are not only unusual, they are dangerous [and] women are actively prevented from becoming exceptional, accomplished, or heroic... Fantasy has the potential to construct a new kind of heroine. (Cranny-Francis 83-84)

Bujold applies the same skill and processes to challenging and reformulating reader expectations in her Fantasy works and to just as great an effect. One of most significant changes Bujold undertakes is the challenging of traditionally negative associations of femininity, sexuality and authority, which I have gathered into three main tropes: the Princess, Priestess and Maternal. In describing the work of C. L. Moore, Lucie Armitt notes that Moore "preserves these gynocentric dichotomies, but manipulates them into creating a subtext in which female attributes are given new value, thus endowing her female characters with a voice and an active role within the narrative" (Armitt 37). Bujold adopts a similar approach, "continually promoting the female ethic at the expense of the male" (37). Although Bujold's females are less overtly threatening than Moore's, the "typically wounded" or "characteristically damaged" (*SFE* 2nd and 3rd) aspects of Bujold's sympathetic male protagonists certainly exhibit the same impulses. Some imperfection needs to be introduced to hegemonic male characters in order to 'make room' for more active female presences. The male is forced to "take the role traditionally assigned to the female within the text – victimised, powerless and sexually threatened. ... neatly revers[ing] traditional value judgements, transferring power from the male attributes to the female." (Armitt 37). In Bujold's *The Hallowed Hunt* (2005), Ingrey the male protagonist is the lackey of more powerful men and vulnerable, until he accepts the help of his uncanny spiritual companion. This makes both Ingrey and Ista's stories those of protagonists successfully negotiating their way out of a restricted middle life by harnessing supernatural powers. Kelso and Bujold also discuss this aspect of Bujold's writing, in the context of the "codedly feminine" brothers, Miles and Mark Vorkosigan (Kelso *Three Observations* 93-95).

Masculinity seems less inescapably violent and destructive in Bujold's work than in other, earlier feminist SF and Fantasy. Undoubtedly, it *can* be violent, but for the enlightened and sympathetic male characters, success is about finding a balance point between the violent and the feminine.

Bujold readily engages with the complexity of the tension between Fantasy and reality, between masculine and feminine, between the individual and society. Because of the depth and breadth of her character development and world-building, there is never one, simple answer to the moral and social dilemmas that arise. No answer is presented as uniformly applicable or desirable. Indeed, the most successful schemes work precisely *because* they are so carefully tailored to the context and the characters to whom they apply. This highly contextualised and individualised approach to narrative and character construction reflects many of the concerns later defined as intersectionality. A term that has its roots in the connections between multiple facets of a woman's identity (Baumgardner and Richards; Walker "Becoming the Third Wave"). Bujold notes that *Paladin of Souls* is "very much about exploring the different shapes of women's lives, not only as distinguished from men's, but also from each other, each according to her choices and measure." (Oak 4). A key component of this thesis is examining the ways in which Bujold's approach to gender in her Fantasy replicates the methods she uses in SF. In this and the following chapter, I again utilise the four theoretical categories I identified earlier to examine the ways in which Bujold incorporates and yet resists the normative construction of female characters; Focus, Reversal, Hybridity, and Complication. Bujold blurs the boundaries of gendered behaviour through hybrid figures with both masculine and feminine qualities, pushing against the limits of social expectations. The juxtaposition of unexpected elements draws attention to and forces reconsideration of these restrictive constructions.

Focus

Pseudo-medieval Fantasy, such as Bujold writes, might be expected to encourage or even demand similar patterns of restrictive gender representation to those of the primary world in order

to re-construct a convincing historical context. The estrangement and artifice of a fantastical setting enables critical consideration of primary world realities, whether historical or contemporary. Acceptance of literal supernatural or magical power makes the possibility of social or cultural estrangements (such as changes to gender roles) more believable. Bujold makes significant adjustments to the Fantasy mode via her emphasis on female characters and feminine subjectivities within contexts that resonate with historical detail and, in so doing, opens up new perspectives on historicised conceptions of gender. The construction of the past in the primary world as objectively and comprehensively masculine is challenged by rewriting from a female point of view. As Hurley notes:

Women fought in every revolutionary army, I found, and those armies were often composed of fighting forces that were 20-30% women. But when we say “revolutionary army” what do we think of? What image does it conjure? Does the force in your mind include three women and seven men? Six women and fourteen men?” (Hurley 300).

Where once women “lived by twos and threes in the chinks of your world machine” (Tiptree “Women Men Don’t See” 205) they are now invited to take centre stage. This is especially valuable as a critical project given that the masculine subjectivity of history making and keeping has largely become naturalised. As Bammer notes “Both nature and culture are themselves historical constructs” (Bammer 230). In making visible many alternatives, Bujold gives prominence to the possibilities of change and reassessment of the past.

One of the most immediate and significant changes Bujold makes to the Fantasy mode is to fill her stories with realistic women, not just tropes or “images” of them (Russ “Image” 79), and to make the tenets of a woman’s life integral to the narrative. *Paladin of Souls* is an unusual Fantasy novel in that all the main roles of protagonist and antagonists are held by female characters. This includes many of the secondary characters as well. In *The Curse of Chalion*, Ista was a secondary character with crucial understanding and involvement in the titular curse, but in *Paladin of Souls* the narrative

shifts to follow her journey to recovery. Although she is initially a typical Princess character, passive, high-born, beautiful, dutiful, Ista becomes a more active, complex and nuanced character as the story progresses. She expands to fill the narrative roles of both the Priestess and the Hero. The Hero's Journey is circular, he always returns to his father's farm or kingdom to take on the mantle of power and responsibility after proving his worth. Bujold says:

The journey into maturity ... has an entirely different structure for women than for men ... the successful female ... goes out and keeps on going, never to return. The Hero's Journey is just the wrong shape for the Heroine. (Oak 4)

She is referring to the traditional real life pattern where responsibility for a woman is passed from father to husband when a woman marries. Unlike the Hero, a woman does not return to her family unless in shame, instead forming a new household with her husband and their offspring. A home from which eventually her own daughters will leave, never to return. This pattern is created and supported by patriarchal legal systems where property and real estate pass to male heirs only.

What is good for the gander is hardly ever good for the goose in traditional narrative structures. In *Chalion*, Ista has already failed in her role as wife and mother, fulfilling the circular Hero's Journey and returning in shame and disgrace to childhood dependence in her parental household. She suffers through four major life disasters for women; divorce, childlessness, widowhood and madness. *Paladin of Souls* explores this difference and takes up Ista's story immediately after the curse is broken, telling of her gradual return to self-possession and confidence. She complains in the first chapter of her inability to break free, "All roads were one road, they said. A great net across the land, parting and rejoining. All roads ran two ways. They said. *I want a road that does not come back.*" (Bujold *Paladin* 3). Ista "goes out" in a new direction, never to return to the stifling misapprehension of her family home in Valenda, nor to the dangerous capital city and the royal palace where she previously failed. Rather she travels into the borderlands and the

countryside. Bujold makes this diversion explicit, deviating from both the circular Heroic journey and the limited linear version accepted for Princesses in patriarchal societies.

A limited kind of independence for women in primary world societies of the past has been provided by marriage and maternity and the formation of their own household, and for a lucky few the comfortable enjoyment of life post husband and post motherhood. Bujold engages with this deliberately, commenting that Ista's role as "post-mother" was "very essential. She was a vehicle for exploring a challenge faced by very few women in the past, but many in modern times." (Oak 4). In both times economic independence is always a challenge. Given that women were often limited to household duties that supported the family economy but did not generate an income, the potential for a 'road that did not come back' to her dependence on a male was equally unlikely. However, Ista's high social rank enables her to access this potential and after her mother's death she has both the rank and financial security to make her longing for freedom a reality through pilgrimage. There are a number of such examples throughout literature and history. In Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath tells a bawdy story to entertain her fellow religious pilgrims as they travel (*Chalion* 498). Bujold makes direct allusions to this tale in her description of the inspiration for Ista's pilgrimage, the "widow of Palma", who is described as a

"Vulgar woman. I'll wager she has not a pious thought in her head! She uses her pilgrimage only to shield her holiday making from the disapproval of her relatives and get herself a cheap armed escort on the road." ...

[she] was now coaxing the divine of the Bastard to sing hymns with her, though the one she was suggesting more resembled a drinking song.

"She had not one man of her own family to support her," dy Ferrej continued indignantly.

"I suppose she can't help the lack of a husband, but you'd think she could scare up a brother or son or at least a nephew." (Bujold *Paladin* 14)

For many widows this meant greater freedom to travel, to manage worldly affairs independently, and to be actively responsible for their lives *after* their primary roles as figurehead and maternal carer have ended. Furthermore, after their primary value - their virginity - has been claimed by an approved husband, chaperones are less essential and women less keenly guarded. A widow's freedom is achieved largely through the substitution of a responsible female for an absent male figure, which is another variation of the Good Nun. Less supernaturally powerful, more tangibly authoritative socially and financially. Ista has two children, Teidez who is murdered young, and Iselle, who inherits the throne of Chalion. Ista is freed into that state of respectable widowhood which has long ago earned acceptance in the primary world as a mode of female authority. Bujold's allusions to the tales of Chaucer through the "widow of Palma" makes deliberate acknowledgement.

Bujold uses all three feminine tropes in her construction of the complex and dynamic character of Ista: she was once the most revered of Princesses, has surpassed her Maternal responsibilities as her children have reached adulthood, and becomes a reactivated Priestess through the return of her supernatural powers. However, these tropes of feminine representation are linked by their genesis in varied responses to women's sexuality and power. Ista simultaneously challenges the limitations of all three through her independence, her sexuality, and her decisive use of saintly power. At the conclusion of *Paladin*, Bujold, through Ista, reintegrates all three into a new identity. She is a care-giver with responsibility for the lives and well-being of humanity, defending all from the chaotic powers of demons. She is an active figure of authority who wields a devastating power direct from the gods with no human intermediary. She is a warrior and judge, deciding the fates of demons and humans alike, with the power to show compassion or destroy them. And, she is a lover, unshackled by socially normative expectations of obedience and marriage. Bujold connects this potential for mid-life renewal to the lengthening of women's life spans and the "20-30-year-blank" (Oak 6), another of Bujold's uses of estrangement. The shift to an active female protagonist is one level of change, now she is also a mature woman with experiences of life that are foreign to

many male readers, which mark her as Other (Green and Lefanu 2) and have a significant impact on the narrative.

In Bujold's SF and Fantasy, there are two main talents or abilities that Bujold's women have which enables them to escape the patriarchal social order that surrounds them. Firstly, their insight and capacity to both literally and figuratively 'see' the problem that confronts them and their society. Secondly, the freedom that their power and self-determination provide. In Fantasy, this is usually supplied through endowment with supernatural powers. In SF, there is less estrangement as readers are encouraged to identify political, social or economic power as the source of agency, as well as the knowledge of hard science and technology as its tool. In Bujold's SF, Cordelia brings an outsider's perspective to bear on Barrayaran culture, while Ekaterin earns it through her experience of an abusive marriage that undermines Barrayaran cultural norms. Lady Alys has equally disenchanting experience of patriarchal failure which combines with her powerful intellect to provide similar perspective. In Bujold's Fantasy works, the presence of magic is much more literally 'eye opening'. All of the major female characters have supernatural abilities that are conveyed through visions or visual manifestation. Ista is a saint who sees magic and ghosts, talks with her god face to face, and eats demons that only she can directly perceive. Lady Ijada is inhabited by the spirit of a leopard who allows her to see (and smell) magical effects as well as talk to her gods. The two antagonists of *Paladin*, Princess Joen and Lady Catti, are both inhabited by demons who provide similar powers. While Learned Hallana is the priestess of both the Mother goddess and the Bastard, the former gives her dreams and visions and the latter enables her sorcery. Hallana is so powerful that she can even open other characters' magical sight (Bujold *Hallowed* 69-70).

In Bujold's Fantasy there are many kinds of agency that women access. It is important to distinguish between female characters who have no supernatural agency but mundane authority, such as Royina Iselle and Princess Fara of the Weald. Iselle is a significant character in both *Chalion* and *Paladin* but the reader never follows events in the narrative from her point of view. Cazaril, her male secretary, is the narrator and protagonist of *Chalion*. Princess Fara is wife of the antagonist in

The Hallowed Hunt. She experiences the same kind of marital disillusionment as Ekaterin and Alys, when her husband turns out to be both evil and manipulative, lying to her about his devotion. She is later endowed by him with a spirit animal, a horse, as part of his plans and her suddenly increased perception overwhelms her in the climax of the novel (358). This becomes an important part of the reason she is able to resist him in the end. The “reality of the men (and women) who accept a (patriarchal) discourse” which “differs substantially from that of the women who experience its constant contradiction” (Cranny-Francis 103) is shown clearly in both magical and mundane ways. Some women realise this contradiction through their vexation with their husbands, while others discover it with supernaturally doubled perspective. Bujold uses visual metaphors and doubled vision to expose the disconnection between the characters’ lived experiences and to directly challenge patriarchal assumptions about women. Bujold uses the contrast between what is perceived and what is true to consistently validate the women’s alternative observations of the world. Her redirection of the narrative from Cazaril’s masculine perspective in *Chalion*, to Ista’s in *Paladin*, creates a double estrangement that forces the reader to focus on events in *Chalion* described from a powerful new female perspective.

Ista has previously accepted or suffered through others’ decisions dictating her life, but after her mother’s passing she is able to make these assumptions and commands overt and end them. Her relationship with Lady dy Hueltar, an older handmaiden who has managed Ista during her docile madness, is a perfect example of this shift. In the opening chapters, Ista struggles to free herself from Lady dy Hueltar’s smothering concern, but, by the end of *Paladin*, Ista begins to give orders of her own. Lady dy Hueltar’s actions are depicted as driven by her desire to preserve existing relationships and uphold social gender norms. Bujold describes these changes in Ista’s identity through exchanges between the two (*Paladin* 548-554, 570-573). Lady dy Hueltar is old, fussy, highly conformative, and a relic of her mother, the Provincara. More than just being resistant to change, Lady dy Hueltar actively promotes conservative behaviours and thoughts, particularly regarding appropriate dress and behaviours for ladies (37). Lady dy Hueltar is scandalised when Ista first sets

out on her pilgrimage and when they finally reconnect, after all the long adventures and changes of the novel, dy Hueltar tries to reassert her now non-existent authority over Ista (552). dy Hueltar remains in the past having not travelled the same roads. She still expects Ista to be the biddable but flawed Mad Queen Mother and Ista must redirect this understanding. Bujold emphasises this change through the replacement of this very traditional handmaiden with Liss, a tomboyish young courier rider she takes under her wing during her journey.

Another avenue for Bujold's reintroduction of women's experiences of the world is Ista's reviving interest in her sexuality. Her intimate exploration becomes a personal expression of emotional connection and something more than just a wifely or royal duty. Rape is rarer in Bujold's Fantasy worlds than her SF, it is present but never experienced by her female protagonists. Ista was devoted to her royal husband and disappointed by his preference for his male courtier. While Iselle comes close to a forced marriage with an undesirable husband, Ista's experiences are presented as the tarnished dream of a naïve girl (Bujold *Paladin* 71-75). The closest we come to rape in the Fantasy novels is Ijada's narrow escape, told through flashback, not only from rape but also death at the hands of Crown Prince Boleso (Bujold *Hallowed* 13). Boleso's intention to kill Ijada is concealed from his companions, Ijada and the readers. All assume he selects her for his bedchamber for her beauty and proximity and do not suspect he is dabbling in illicit magic. Bujold rescues Ijada with the deus-ex-machina of supernatural powers suddenly bestowed. She prays to her god, the Son of Autumn, for intervention and then successfully kills Boleso with his own war hammer. The leopard spirit Boleso was attempting to absorb inhabits her instead of him. Bujold diverts audience expectations of a virgin sacrifice by allowing Ijada success and through the agency of a masculine rather than a feminine spiritual power. Bujold's in-depth elaboration of the consequences of rape shown in the SF series is avoided here. I suggest she does this because if the rape was treated seriously and given the psychological depth for which she is noted, such an experience would damage her characters emotionally and ultimately drive the plot in different directions.

On the other hand, Bujold presents a range of coercive and impersonal sexual experiences for women in her Fantasy. Women are presented as dutiful or misled and their sexual satisfaction is not expected by either party, showing a more complex and subtle depiction of rape than in her early SF. Rape is not often depicted in the traditional narrative of a vulnerable woman coming into the orbit of a dangerous man but is more like that presented in *Komarr* of Ekaterin's terrible marriage. Ijada is expected to give in to Boleso because he is the heir and Iselle to an ambitious lord who wants to become king through her. Ista's consent to her marriage is never sought, even though she comes to love him, and poor Fara is betrayed by deceptive affection. Romantic sex is the ideal but is only enjoyed by women in equal partnerships. There are many other women in Bujold's Fantasy novels in unequal partnerships who suffer through unsatisfying sexual experiences that are not traditional rapes but which are no less damning of patriarchal expectations of sexual intimacy. These negative sexual experiences seem not to contain as much of the bitterness shown in her SF worlds, but are more discreetly and relentlessly unsatisfying. It is interesting to note the closeness of publication dates between *Komarr* (1998) and *Chalion* (2001), which is perhaps a reflection of Bujold's growing interest in exploring these matters from the subjective perspective of women.

In *Chalion*, Ista agonises over her sexual and romantic confusion, and readers are drawn into a sympathetic relationship with her through this intimate insight into her nature and her struggles. Just as they are with Ekaterin in *Komarr* and *A Civil Campaign*. Both characters have been damaged by their previous relationships with men and the contrast with their second love-matches are a source of much of Bujold's critical commentary about the social and sexual interactions of men and women. Ista's revived interest in romantic liaisons is similar in its depiction of her increasing confidence and re-assertion of her selfhood. This is an uncommon perspective in speculative fiction, both because of its feminine viewpoint and for its mere presence. At first, Ista lacks confidence, saying:

“I am afraid I have no talent for ... dalliance. When I was young I was too stupid. Now I’m old, I am too drab.” *Too stupid then too mad then too drab then too late.* (Bujold *Paladin* 354)

Sexual topics have appeared in traditional speculative fiction, mainly within the framework of the male gaze. They act as an assertion of masculine strength or a validation of that strength rather than as an expression of uncertainty or self-doubt. They are rarely ever from a feminine perspective and what is so powerful is Bujold’s support of this inclusivity.

Bujold comments directly on the importance of Ista’s sexuality:

Part of what was robbed from Ista by the curse, in the dead middle third of her life, was her sexuality. Illvin represents the return of that; and for the very first time in Ista’s life ever, an autonomous sexuality, belonging to her in her own right and not to her husband or family role. Renewal with the emphasis on “new.” (Oak 4, 6)

Earlier in the novel, Ista considers that:

For all the relentless idealism surrounding virginity, fidelity, and celibacy – for women – Ista had known plenty of ladies of rank in Ista’s court who had taken lovers, openly or in secret. She had only the vaguest idea how they’d gone about it. (154)

Outwardly, Ista’s society has very strict conventions about the behaviour of women and, as happens in the primary world, margins for alternatives exist. Similarly, society is able to turn a blind eye to this scandalous behaviour after women have married and fulfilled their wifely duties or else have abandoned conformity to social respectability. That their grateful lovers are consistently wealthy, privileged, white males, says much about the hierarchical, patriarchal ideals underpinning our society as well as Bujold’s invented worlds. Ista asserts this authority and makes new plans at the end of *Paladin*, saying that

I expect to form a travelling court, small and adaptable; the god's duties are likely to continue physically wearing. My clerk – as soon as I appoint one – and yours must deal shortly with forwarding my dower income, as I doubt my tasks will take me back to Valenda" (559).

Ista's ability to recognise and value her own body and needs signals her returning confidence in other areas of her life. It enables her to re-assert her spiritual and temporal authority and defend their legitimacy in the face of criticism. Readers experience Ista's renewal and re-assertion of personal authority as a fundamental part of the narrative.

Where more traditional texts sideline or discreetly ignore such subjects, Bujold instead chooses to foreground feminine experiences and make ideas integral. Ista asserts her sexuality overtly by the conclusion of the novel, with thoughts such as "He should be in bed, she decided. Hers, by preference" (532). Bujold's emphasise this as an important part of the novel by including a (very discreet) description of Ista and her lover's sexual relationship as the final scene. As a further reversal of traditional tropes of gender and power, he accepts a place in her "roving court" as "royal seneschal: a competent and experienced officer, preferably one who knows this area, to direct my travels and secure my person" (567). As such, placing himself under *her* authority. Ista is both actively sexual and at the peak of the patriarchal hierarchy, combining both tropes of the Priestess. She combines respect for her social rank, the agency of her god, and her supernatural abilities with a renewed sense of self-confidence to direct her own life. Bujold depicts the women of her Fantasy novels with the consistent expectation that they need not be passive or side-lined in the narrative of their own lives. This is especially clear with the absence of passivity within the Maternal that will be discussed in detail through Hallana's story in the following chapter.

Reversal

In addition to introducing a Focus on lived female experiences, Bujold consistently Reverses the expected gender roles and traits of characters. In her SF this includes Cordelia the starship

captain, Drou the soldier, and many of Miles' girlfriends. In Bujold's Fantasy, it is Liss the tomboyish courier. In the following section, I outline the ways in which Bujold continues these patterns of placing female characters into traditionally masculine narrative roles in order to present them as active participants. Conformative speculative texts adhere to normative cultural scripts regarding gender, and Fantasy texts are still often conformative. For many readers part of their appeal is the nostalgic longing for a past that never existed. Bujold's ability to work simultaneously within and against the tropes of speculative writing appears in both modes and is a strong indicator of her skills as an author.

Liss is the most overtly reversed character in the *Five Gods Series*, and yet the tomboyish masculinity she displays is complicated by her forays into romance and her acceptance of a traditionally feminine role as Ista's lady in waiting. Her journey parallels Drou's challenge of balancing a military career with a desire for family in Bujold's SF. Placed alongside other, more traditional depictions of feminine skills and interests such as Lady dy Hueltar, Liss is a highly unconventional female, who demonstrates many of the freedoms and skills more usually associated with masculine characters. This even includes the kinds of descriptive phrases Bujold applies to her, such as describing the "firm tread and an aroma of horses and leather" (*Paladin* 28) that precedes her arrival. Bujold's Reversals avoid a simplistic substitution of a shero into a male role, but recognises the complexity of all gender roles. Liss rides better than the males and beats them in a race at a country fair (79-85), she wears pants (27) and swears more than she should. She has extreme freedom of unchaperoned movement as a courier rider (28-30), underlined by her early and unexpected departure from her family farm (29-31). Liss's toughness in surviving harsh conditions on the road and her refusal to seek permission (571) are strongly contrasted with her ignorance of and poor performance in traditionally feminine skills that her society associates with women. For example, she braids hair like a horse's mane (49-50) and her interest in homemaking is negligible. She tells Ista that, "I figured if I had to go home and spin one more skein of yarn, I'd scream and fall down in a fit. Besides, my mother never liked my yarn anyway. She said it was too lumpy." (30). Ista

spends much time training Liss how to be a useful maid, which turns out to be significantly different on the road than the traditional expectations of Ista's previous, elderly handmaiden, Lady dy Hueltar.

The choice between conformity and individuality is repeated in Liss's Princess-like role as the love-interest and objectified source of competition between the two dy Gura brothers, Foix and Ferda. Ferda's much more traditional approach to wooing Liss is expressed through disapproval of her entering the horse race and his disgruntlement when she not only beats him but then deliberately and obviously permits him to win. This is highly typical of normative masculine perceptions of the feminine role in a courtship and in general (79-85). Bujold presents him as the "active, aggressive male subject" (Cranny-Francis 87) constructing Liss as a female "encoded with the ideological positioning of women ... [who is] passive, objectified, positioned as prize or reward for consumption..." (87). His brother, Foix, on the other hand, enters a wood-chopping event where he is able to excel without being in competition with her and to display his attractive physique (84-85). Further, he asks her consent to "aspire" to her hand and her affections (573) rather than expecting to 'win' her attention. Bujold's stated preference is for discussing identity as gender neutral and for approaches that value individualism and free will. This is shown when she says

In fact my work is driven by another agenda, a personal and psychological pursuit of an ongoing theme, personal identity, which sometimes but only sometimes intersects with feminism. ... Explorations of identity formation intersect problems of feminism in many areas ... Why not view both masculinism and feminism as part of the accumulation [of identity], instead of one as the necessary annihilator of the other? ... Almost all of my books are about identity formation or re-formation – coming of age and redemption – on the deepest levels..." (qtd in Kelso Three Observations 102-103)

It is unsurprising that Foix is more successful at wooing Liss than Ferda and she becomes a clear example of agency achieved through action rather than passive acceptance. Lady dy Hueltar's

uncertain status as an old maid only emphasises this dichotomy; she is both unmarried as well as reading the end of her useful working life as a handmaiden. Bujold constructs a dynamic where Ista is choosing between contrasting ideals of womanhood when she chooses between the company of the two women. Ista is going through a process of reclamation as she makes this choice between passivity and action; between adherence to social norms and self-determination.

Marriage Proposals

Bujold's emphasis on female characters in *Paladin* and the other *Five Gods* novels makes Reversals starker against the more socially conservative backdrop of the Fantasy worlds. While individual characters present narrow examples of particular women acting against type or resisting social norms, it is Bujold's much broader interest in Reversing the patterns of romantic relationships and marriage that provide the most expansive challenges to these cultural norms. For example, Bujold presents a Reversal in the usual order of marriage proposal when Iselle instigates a political marriage to a neighbouring prince, sight unseen, because she recognises the mutual political and personal benefits of the match (*Chalion* 343). This trope also appears in the SF series where Ekaterin's love for Miles Vorkosigan is the major plot arc of *A Civil Campaign* and she proposes publicly to disprove a political scandal (Bujold *Civil* 495) but it is repeated in all three of the *Five Gods* novels. Across both series, there are a number of women who propose to their future spouses but it is stronger in the Fantasy series. .

In conventional narratives, the marriage of the Princess usually occurs at the conclusion of a tale, rather like 'Once Upon A Time' usually opens one, and the Princess appears as a token of power exchanged between male figures. She transfers the power of inheritance or genetics from her father's family to her husband's; much as Orico's wife Sara, Wencel's wife Princess Fara, and Ista have done, and as dy Jironal planned to do with Iselle before his spectacular death (Bujold *Curse* 171). As such, marriages in conventionally gendered narratives mark completion and resolution and reiterate the role of the feminine as a passive and impersonal figurehead, the mother of future generations of masculine authority but not holding any individual authority herself (Russ "Image"

83). Bujold challenges these traditions head on in *Chalion*, when Iselle insists on a marriage of equals and on not forfeiting her royal authority:

“I will have Royse Bergon, yes, but I will not give up Chalion to get him, no, not one yard of soil. Not to dy Jironal, and not to the Fox [Bergon’s father] either. ... my future authority in Chalion is to be *mine*, not made over as dowry to my spouse. I will not be turned into a Sara, a mere and disregarded wife, silenced in my own councils.” (*Chalion* 343)

Later, she awards Cazaril, the hero, to her handmaiden Betriz rather than she to him as in more traditional stories. This distinction, and its strangeness for readers, is expanded and made explicit by Iselle’s rebuke when Cazaril assumes the norm and protests his age. She says "I'm not sacrificing her to you as a reward for your loyalty. I'm bestowing you on her as a reward for *her* loyalty. So there." (Bujold *Chalion* 252, *my emphasis*). The reformulation of anticipated gendered power relationships associated with traditional marriage arrangements, especially socially privileged and royal ones, greatly unbalances and redirects readers’ expectations, contributing to the overall effect of social criticism in the texts.

Relationships which do not adhere to Bujold’s strict pre-conditions of mutual consent and self-knowledge are shown to founder and fail, often spectacularly. For example in Princess Fara’s marriage to Wencel; Ista’s marriage to the bisexual Roya Ias; Ekaterin’s first marriage to the abusive Tien; Kareen’s relationship with Crown Prince Serg; and even Aral Vorkosigan’s first marriage. Created with an emphasis on self-knowledge and personal autonomy, Bujold’s depictions of romantic success frequently confound established patterns of gender roles and authority within marriage bonds; in particular the relationships of Ista and Illvin, Ijada and Ingrey¹⁷. Second wave feminism focussed on the consciousness raising of women; the fact that their lives were unfairly determined by patriarchal conventions of marriage, and subsequent resistance of them. Later

¹⁷ Apparently, true love also requires a letter ‘i’. Iselle’s marriage also becomes a love match despite its roots in political necessity and Prince Bergon’s unfortunate initial.

developments emphasise the needs and desires of the individual, which, for some women, includes marriage. With this shift, she challenges one of the fundamental patriarchal constructions of marriage, that the man proposes to the woman and holds the authority (both economic and emotional) within it. Bujold's reversal of the proposal upends traditional assumptions without sacrificing the rights of women who do want to marry.

Bujold's foregrounding of these subliminal cultural messages through the reversed proposal trope, draws the reader's attention to an explicit contrast between expected patterns of gendered marriage behaviour and her reformulations. Not only do unconventional proposals succeed more often than traditional ones, but also Bujold frequently depicts resistance to traditional marriage arrangements altogether. Ista takes Illvin as her lover in *Paladin* but no mention is made of marriage; while in the *Vorkosigan Series*, Lady Alys and Simon Illyan undertake an increasingly public 'liaison' with remarkably few social consequences. Unlike many speculative narratives, the conventional patterns of marriage and child-rearing exist alongside these variations. Alternatives are conspicuously less common in parental relationships; as Russ suggests, the couples mentioned who are unconventionally paired are generally "too young" to be settling down with a family or "too old" with families already established ("Image" 84). Iselle, Ekaterin, Kareen Koudelka and other, similar characters in Bujold's texts are shown making increasingly radical and decisive departures from social conventions concerning their sexuality and their romantic lives. The positive outcomes with which these choices are rewarded in the narrative are a clear indication of authorial endorsement. Bujold rejects the usual patterns where women are objectified and de-personalised, or sent off stage, within their romantic relationships. This engages the reader in consideration of the way gender tropes are often naturalised within speculative narratives. The pseudo-medieval societies depicted in *Chalion* and *the Weald* are highly normative and provide a strong contrast for this reformulation. In Bujold's universes, emotional satisfaction through life-long pair bonds is achieved but only when traditional conceptions of power and authority within personal relationships are challenged.

The Sleeping Beauty

One of the most interesting challenges to the seemingly universal patterns of marriage in conformative Fantasy is the reversal of the Sleeping Beauty topos that occurs between Ista and Illvin. *Sleeping Beauty* is one of the oldest fairytale motifs, and variations of this tale appear in many cultures (Travers 12). In *Paladin*, Illvin is rendered insensate by the demon that his sister in law Catti forces to redirect his life energy to his recently deceased brother, Arhys. Catti has enacted this sorcery against all social standards in order to prolong the life of her beloved at the expense of Illvin's. She only permits Illvin a brief period of lucidity each day in which to eat and keep up his strength so as to better support Arhys (Bujold *Paladin* 182, 208-209, 240-241). Ista appears in the role of the heroic rescuing prince in this version of the tale, her god redirects Illvin's comatose prayers for rescue to Ista and provides her with the necessary supernatural abilities to untangle these events. The parallel to the traditional Sleeping Beauty tale is referenced directly in the hopes of Illvin's servant, who requests Ista kiss Illvin to wake him up. "It was a princess put him here. I thought maybe you could wake him. Being a royina [queen] and all" (Bujold *Paladin* 238-239). However such simple remedies are not effective in Bujold's complex worlds, the reality of Illvin's situation is far more complicated and Arhys does not survive its resolution. The imagery remains and Bujold is deliberately working with the cultural resonances.

Just as Aral is Cordelia's "Right-hand man" (Crosby 134), Illvin becomes Ista's, and both men display the same acceptance of the strengths and abilities of their lovers. The power balance in these relationships is ambiguous, presenting a more nuanced depiction of human relationships rather than re-iterating simplistic hegemonic binaries of the gender tropes. Bujold's employment of "characteristically damaged" or "typically wounded" (*SFE* 2nd and 3rd) male characters becomes integral to this reversal. These damaged men carry within their construction both the elements of difference needed to critique hegemonic masculinities and the deviation from culturally normative roles to accept powerful women on their own terms. Bujold also depicts these male characters as comfortable within these less dominant roles, giving male readers permission to accept their own

deviation from cultural norms of masculine supremacy. By acknowledging the variation of the masculine from the limiting toxic stereotype, Bujold opens up the dialectical space for feminine variation to be created and examined as well.

This reversal of conventionally gendered authority is reiterated in a number of ways during the resolution of *Paladin*. Ista's active heroic role is emphasised when dy Baocia, Ista's brother, inquires of Foix "Do I have you to thank, young man, for the rescue of my sister?" and Foix replies truthfully "No, Provincar ... She rescued me." (Bujold *Paladin* 544). The agency provided by her god to banish demons enables Ista to clearly hold her power separate from secular authority. Similarly, her spiritual and magical powers as a saint place her above the already stratospheric social standing she holds as Dowager Royina. By the conclusion of the novel, Ista assumes the authority of her socially privileged position fully, changes her family's plans for her future, assembles a group of staff and assistants for her demon-hunting journey, and generally accessing the previously inactive powers of a Princess. Bujold's Reversals evoke the fantastic qualities which "exist as the inside, or underside, of realism, opposing the novel's closed, monological forms with open, dialogic structures..." (Jackson 25). By allowing her heroines to deny the need to adhere to domesticated stereotypes of maternal and dutiful behaviour, Bujold opens the narrative door for them to participate in more masculine and active pursuits (such as the plot). This also engages the reader in reconsideration of traditional gender roles in the primary world. Bujold uses the forms and tropes of Fantasy against themselves, playing with gender roles to reveal their limitations, and renovating the patterns of speculative fiction as she does so. Acknowledging that women as protagonists "do not necessarily interrogate the social and literary construction of women as gendered subjects" (Lefanu 24), Bujold expands her discussion. She offers readers women acting as men in order to challenge social norms without slipping into the shero trap of devaluing femininity. Bujold also centres the narrative on these women, and their subjective interests and experiences, further challenging socially restrictive depictions of women and drawing attention to their absence in other fiction.

Domestication and Marriage

One of the more problematic aspects of a feudal social space, where domestic chores are separated from the daily life of protagonists, is that it then seems to support the biologically determined and gendered nature of those domestic chores. Bujold utilises Reversals to further distance the gendered norms of women as responsible for all the necessary but unglamorous domestic work. Bujold does this by presenting women in a range of other roles, by presenting these domestic roles as more significant than as shown in other narratives, and by allowing the domestic drudgery to remain offstage without insisting that all women also exit the stage. In conformative literature, if a female character accedes to social dictates, her reward is the lesser role of housewife, which then removes her from most of the narrative action. If she then resists, she is punished for her difference (Cranny-Francis 83-84). This is a situation Anne Summers described with the evocative phrase “damned whores and god’s police” (313). Summers outlines the choice for women of social approval or disapproval through their adherence to social and sexual expectation. Replicating the biblical comparison of Eve and Mary Magdalene with the more dutiful Martha and the Virgin Mary.

As in the SFnal contexts, Bujold’s use of conventional, class-based solutions to domestic drudgery sidesteps these issues somewhat without addressing the inherent cultural bias against these duties. For example, there are a number of tertiary female characters who remain largely invisible, filling domestic roles and consistently nameless. Women only work within these societies where they are required to by economic necessity. In the higher echelons of society where Bujold positions her narratives, women are expected to maintain that passive unemployed state so typical of historical primary world cultures. On a community level this fosters Princess type behaviours: dependence, the sense of gentility and weakness in comparison with male characters, and a reliance on beauty, appearance, and maternity to meet social expectation and gain acceptance. This situation is reflected in conformative characters such as Cattilara (*Paladin*) and Princess Fara (*Hallowed Hunt*) who seem to accept these limitations gladly. Again, these examples are strongly contrasted with the actions and thoughts of the main female characters who chafe against these restrictive boundaries and seek alternate paths to self-determination and happiness. For example, Catti and Fara both take

action to reshape the world to best suit their needs. Bujold first shows how pervasive these naturalised ideals are and how vulnerable women are to them and then draws readers' attention to the ways in which these characters resist and reject their limitations. This rejection of culturally normative gender roles is highlighted through the protagonists' struggles between balancing social needs for acceptance and validation against personal ones.

More positively, the freedom of her protagonists from domestic work enables them to engage more fully with the events of the narrative. Bujold elevates her female protagonists out of social spheres where these duties are a concern to them: for example, neither Cordelia as Regent-Consort and Countess, Ijada, the noble lady in waiting, Royina Iselle, Dowager Royina Ista, are expected to engage in these duties. In fact, their role in society is such that others wait on them, which leaves them with more time and mental energy to devote to solving the riddles of the plot in their narratives. This increasing freedom is, in fact, the main narrative arc of *Paladin of Souls*, where Ista is able to decisively break free of her clinging family and isolated social position to seek independence. Before her first escape, she wishes for "People to whom, dare she think it, she was an elder to be respected and not a failed child to be corrected. *At your command, Royina, not, Now, Lady Ista, you know you can't...*" (Bujold *Paladin of Souls* 29-30, original emphasis). Here, Bujold voices both the underlying constriction of the Princess trope, that women are treated as children within patriarchal social structures no matter their age, and Ista's resistance of it. Indeed, the whole narrative in *Paladin of Souls* can be seen as an "inverted meditation" on domestic entrapment for women (Bujold *Sidelines* 128). Ista's is a literal constraint whereas Catti accepts the role and welcomes it, until she reaches the limit of her ability to fulfil it. She cannot bear children to a walking dead man and secure the line of succession so she returns to her father's house, heartbroken. Hers is the circular Hero's Journey, reversed into failure by her gender.

As Russ has noted, the feudal structures of traditional societies encapsulate a number of socially gendered expectations about women and their behaviour, and these limitations are reflected in the traditional societies of Chalion and the Weald. Both are highly patriarchal with

political power centered in the hands of a king at the peak of a hierarchical and oath-bound cultural framework. They are dominated by men and by naturalised understandings about the correctness of masculine authority. Some of Attebery's gentle criticism of 'formulaic' writers is reserved for their unconscious migration of social and cultural mores from the author's primary context to the worlds they create. Not because of the conformative values that they inject into the text but for the unthinking contamination of the secondary world:

So long as ... tropes are allowed to remain invisible, their function is necessarily normative. Working as unchallenged assumptions, they reinforce existing patterns of associations and social arrangements ... Yet...tropes, as working parts of a code... may also be used to call presuppositions into question. (Attebery *Decoding* 34)

Some feminist criticism of Fantasy has emerged precisely *because* it encodes and transmits socially normative values (Badami 6). The lack of financial opportunities and restrictions of free movement are familiar limitations for both female characters and women in the primary world. But, it is the limitation of options that economic dependence engenders that really curtails the potential of female characters to step outside patriarchal boundaries. The use of supernatural agency in Bujold's Fantasy acts as a counterpoint to these pressures by providing authority and the means to enforce it. This agency is more overt in Bujold's Fantasy, for as much as Cordelia's confident expectation allows her to overcome similar patriarchal pressures on Barrayar, it is just as much the invisible authority of Aral's name, his title and his money that enables her free action (Bujold *Cordelia's* 278). Without economic resources and social prestige, Cordelia's confidence would be more of a social liability than a success.

In Bujold's Fantasy worlds, Ijada faces this issue when she is accused of murder without significant family or finances to support her claims of innocence (*Hallowed* 10, 59-60). The support of her god and the spirit animal that now inhabits her do little to combat these social liabilities. She merely becomes uncanny which adds to her very conventional society's unease with women holding

power, particularly the supernatural. Princess Fara is oldest child of the Hallowed King, but her claim to the throne in her own right is ignored by everyone in the narrative but her evil husband. Instead, her younger, debauched and deranged brother Boleso's claim eclipses hers even though his unsuitability is privately acknowledged. Ijada's supernatural powers give her agency and draw her into the main narrative arc. In freeing the lost spirits of four thousand ancient soldiers, the consequences of Boleso's death are swept aside and Fara's husband is destroyed. Ijada steps over the strata of women who must bow to social niceties through her success and independence of mind. The other solution in the Fantasy worlds, is for theologically inclined characters, such as Hallana and the priestess of Rauma, to swear loyalty to the temple and their gods, exchanging their freedom for economic security. They accept familiar limitations of their personal choice, such as dress, dwelling, motherhood, property, and occupation, just as they would had they married a man. Through this traditional constraints on womens' sexuality and independence are avoided however. Ista is a dramatic exception to these rules as she has the treble agency of money, social rank, and sorcerous power to support her independence.

Freedom of movement for this class of women is not proscribed entirely, it is monitored and chaperones are commonly unemployed as a preventative measure to ensure women's virtue. Ista's eager embrace of a pilgrimage as an escape from the confines of her family home is presented alongside her struggle to insist on her own choice of companions and is a clear engagement with these concerns (Bujold *Paladin of Souls* 21-26). The fact that her struggle for freedom takes most of the first three chapters is further indication of the importance of these elements to Bujold, both narratively and socially. Chaperonage is positioned in Chalion as somewhere between monitoring of female behaviour and protective custody of valuable property; sometimes literally, as for example during Ista's period of madness (Bujold *Chalion* 55) or the confusion over Ijada's status as prisoner or heiress (Bujold *Hallowed Hunt* 8-9). Married women such as Fara and Hallana have more license but still travel with chaperones, albeit more subtle ones, in the form of maids and attendants. The suggestion is clear that as a married woman's virtue has already been possessed by her husband it is

less under threat, and that therefore the urgency of chaperonage is likewise lesser. Another reflection of attitudes from the primary world, it is never clear whether this is safety from internal or external threat, particularly in the case of Ijada (Bujold *Hallowed* 8-9). Ista's castellar, Ser dy Ferrej represents this attitude when he comments on the widow of Palma's unattended state with disgust (Bujold *Paladin* 14) but Ista's resistance of such concerns is made especially clear in the closing chapters of this novel, when she shakes off attempts to reassert control over her life in very definite terms, declaring "... you may either help, brother, or get out of my way" (Bujold *Paladin* 559). The dominant attitudes of male family members defending what is considered 'theirs' remains and Bujold introduces critique of such positions through her characters' responses to them.

In *Chalion* and the *Weald* these expectations are shared by male protectors and family members of the women, who intervene when either the physical form or the moral virtue of the woman is threatened. Unpicking these associations and examining the consequences of such ingrained attitudes is perhaps best achieved in an alternative history context such as Fantasy fiction. These attitudes and primary world values can be reflected in conformative secondary world tropes, such as the Princess, where economic dependence, proprietorial status and sexual vulnerability are often equated with desirability, romantic availability, and success. The Princess as figurehead is the poster-girl of compliance with traditional values in either world and the resistance of these is a "subliminal" challenge to the limitations of normative expectations and values in the primary and secondary worlds (Lake 9).

Ista – Reclaiming the Self

In reclaiming her self-possession thus repositioning herself from Princess to Priestess and Hero, Ista asserts her place in the narrative. In *Chalion*, she is an interesting secondary character but in *Paladin of Souls* the narrative is almost entirely focused on her emotional and physical journeys. In all the significant roles of *Paladin*, Bujold places female perspectives; the protagonist, significant secondary characters, and both villains with varying degrees of empathy. Bujold has declared that this was "Chick Book by intent" (Oak 6). Like Cordelia, Ista is unusual in the worlds of Fantasy, SF and

Space Opera, as she is both middle aged and female. This which already marks her as Other to readers familiar with speculative conventions (Green and Lefanu 2). In the first novel of the paired *Curse of Chalion* and *Paladin of Souls*, this Othering is overt and physical as Ista is kept off stage in the quiet rural backwater of Valenda, under the watchful eye of her mother, the Provincara and dy Hueltar. This is also because of her “strange fragile health” which is interpreted as madness (Bujold *Chalion* 55). It is Cazaril, the hero, who leaps around on stage breaking the titular curse. Ista initially appears in *Chalion* as a very typical Princess type character; beautiful, off stage, weak through madness, passive, and decidedly not the focus of the main characters or narrative arcs (*Chalion* 3, 29). In her state of madness, she also adheres to the long association of gentility in females with overtly physical weaknesses. This is repeated in *Hallowed Hunt* with Fara’s infertility and headaches (Bujold 11). Bujold depicts Ista twice in *Chalion*, both times very sympathetically, and she is recognised by the hero, Cazaril, as a wounded veteran of the crisis rather than a weak link (*Chalion* 235). This becomes even more acute when his own supernatural powers appear and the parallels with Ista’s ‘madness’ become apparent, to him and to readers at least if not everyone else:

the Dowager Royina’s words came back to him. *The Zangre is haunted, you know.* Not metaphor or madness after all, it appeared, but simple observation. How much else then of the eerie things she’d said might not be derangement, but plain truth – seen with altered eyes? (Bujold 235)

Despite the extraordinary circumstances detailed in the first novel, and Ista’s pivotal role in understanding the titular curse, her opinions and valuable knowledge are dismissed by other characters until Cazaril comes to realise the truth. Ista was an eyewitness to many of the key events and it becomes clear that her odd behaviour was not a mental defect as perceived by those around her, but the consequence of being given true sight by the gods. So rather than being wrong and out of step with society, Ista is in fact shown to be *more* correct than any of them and has a closer relationship with both reality and the supernatural. It is this double-edged relationship with social norms that makes Ista such an interesting character. But rather than upholding socially normative

criticism of Ista, Bujold encourages the reader to instead turn a critical eye on the social norms themselves. Bujold provides Ista with the same kind of outsider's perspective that allows her to "ironize" her society in the same way as Cordelia (Mendlesohn *Rhetorics* 67). Ista is proven correct by the greater authority of the gods and the author who, like the readers, exist outside the society through which Ista moves.

Bujold's representation of Ista is far more complex and more completely reformulated than other female characters in speculative fiction. This reformulation extends to the construction of the narrative itself as there is a greatly increased focus on female presences. There is a significant difference between Ista and other Princesses, such as Fara and Kareen, as she is depicted bluntly rejecting patriarchal expectation from the outset of the second novel. Ista's narrative and social freedoms create opportunities for her to reconsider her life. A kind of mid-life crisis if you will, made more interesting by revision of the tale provided in the first novel but this time solely from Ista's perspective. Revisiting the events makes *Paladin of Souls* more than 'just' a sequel, adding to the critique Bujold constructs of socially mandated expectations of women in conformative, highly patriarchal contexts. In doing so through this secondary world, Bujold engages with the double estrangement of not only presenting alternatives within the narrative but also inviting critical analysis of the primary world.

Chapter 7: Hybridity and Complication in Bujold's Fantasy

"If you are not going to do what has been done and give the girls guns and get them to do the same things as the male heroes, only with skirts on, then what is it? ... It's hidden in the skein, warp and waft of life's fabric; that's where female heroism resides. ... The actions themselves aren't *grande geste*, they're small things that all add up to something. That's not what we associate with the hero; the hero has to be someone who jumps off a building in his vest and knickers and does something and saves people's lives or acts bravely. That's how we've defined it for ourselves. It's finding that in the female form that is so hard." (Emma Thompson qtd in Idato)

One of the benefits of applying an intersectional approach to identity and gender discourse is the acknowledgement and validation of deviations from cultural norms, particularly where adherence to binary norms has been used to restrict self-expression. By positing a limited number of 'right ways to be', whether feminine or masculine or some other category, societies withhold acceptance and validation from originality and promote social cohesion. Unfortunately, this encourages oppression as certain categories are deemed lesser or Othered. One of the most prevalent and powerful external definitions of femininity is the binary between ideals of damned whores and god's police. This is expressed socially through a parallel emphasis on women's sexuality as both a commodity for consumption and a source of shame. Women are presented with conflicting demands to display overt signs of socially acceptable sexuality, but then suffer social stigma if they are 'too' expressive of their sexuality or express a sexuality that deviates from social norms. As Walker argues,

Whether the young women who refuse the feminist label realize it or not, on some level they recognize that an ideal woman born of prevalent notions of how empowered women look, act, or think is simply another impossible contrivance of perfect womanhood,

another scripted role to perform in the name of biology and virtue. (Walker *To Be Real* xxxiii)

Critique of this double standard and concomitant oppression has been a key element of third wave activism through various media: Slutwalks (Cook and Hasmath), popular music¹⁸, informal commentary such as blogging, political cartoons, and essays, such as the Hugo award winning *We Have Always Fought: Challenging the Women, Cattle and Slaves Narrative*, by Kameron Hurley (2016). These explorations of personal identity and “the collective critical reconstitution of the meaning of women’s social experience, as women live through it” are crucial to the contemporary feminism (MacKinnon 83). Emphasis on lived experience and personal narrative opens fictional narratives up as a site for exploration of identity and critique of the cultural values encoded within them. As noted previously, in Fantasy, women’s identity has usually been expressed through the three major tropes – the Princess, the Priestess and the Maternal – that have both reflected and represented society’s concern over women’s access to authority and sexuality. More broadly, these tropes have reflected concerns about the power that self-determination and autonomous self-expression can provide to individuals. If social order is predicated on cohesion and adherence to norms, then wildly individual behaviour can be seen as a threat that tropes, stereotypes and norms seek to contain.

The validation of “multiplicity” and “polyphonous” approaches to gender (Gillis et al. 4) encourages the individual to choose which aspects and to what degree they engage with traditional notions of femininity. The collocation of awareness and validation makes intersectional approaches not just a new set of approved labels for a person. This also provides people with the right to determine which of the aspects that *could* apply, *do* apply to them and *how much*, rather than requiring them to reach benchmarks of acceptable behaviour. Bujold's detailed character building,

¹⁸ Such as popular music like “All Women are Bitches” by Fifth Column, “I’m a Bitch” by Meredith Brooks and “Just A Girl” by No Doubt.

her presentation of a wide range of female characters, and her hybridisation of gender and social roles can be read as an engagement with similar principles. This response, to deconstruct binary positions and seek complex positions, is reflected in Bujold's comments that:

in fact my work is driven by another agenda, a personal and psychological pursuit of an ongoing theme, personal identity, which sometimes but only sometimes intersects with feminism. ... Explorations of identity formation intersect problems of feminism in many areas ... Why not view both masculinism and feminism as part of the accumulation [of identity], instead of one as the necessary annihilator of the other? (Kelso *Three Observations* 102-103)

Bujold's deliberate disruption of gender tropes and social norms creates a fundamental challenge to binary ideals and questions naturalised assumptions about how individuals interact and inter-operate within groups. In this chapter, I am concentrating on the stories of Fara, Ijada, Catti, Joen and Hallana as examples of Hybridity and Complication. This encompasses the ways in which Bujold utilises elements of critique through the juxtaposition of normative roles with unconventional behaviour and resolutions. Her critique is emphasised through the resistance of passivity in the depiction of all the female tropes, but particularly in the frequent presence of Maternal representations. As discussed previously, where more traditional texts would side-line or discreetly ignore such subjects, Bujold instead chooses to foreground feminine experiences and make these perspectives integral to events in the narrative.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways Bujold's characters resist these "cultural scripts" (Croft et al. 105) or schema. This is achieved through Bujold's by inclusion of more subjective feminine perspectives and the Focalising of narrative on women's spaces and women's lives. She also provides Reversals of some of the most fundamental aspects of traditional narrative patterns. Here, I will explore the more Complex and Hybrid reformulations that Bujold offers. When she combines aspects of both conformative tropes and unconventionally gendered behaviours or

thoughts, she creates more subtle challenges to binary depictions of masculinity. Similarly, Bujold validates femininity itself independent of its relationship to masculinity, through her depictions of vital female presences and frequent resistance to negative association of feminine sexuality and power. The shift in subjectivity from a male gaze, where women's sexuality is framed by a masculine needs and appreciation, to a female one means that characters can comment freely on their negative and positive experiences of sex and motherhood. Bujold depicts this through the characters of Hallana and Ista. Hallana with her ongoing parental successes, and Ista through her discovery of a new lover later in life. Hallana's pregnancy is particularly significant for its overt discussion of her sorcerous powers and their management during pregnancy. She achieves this through greater organisation and care and it never prevents Hallana from engaging the events of the novel.

Bujold neither denies nor devalues the presence of women who seek Maternal responsibilities, as many of the separatist and more radical feminist SF novels and short stories have done. Peter Fitting noted of the feminist Fantasy of the 1970s that "it was easier to imagine an end to the sex/gender system by eliminating men than to try and 'rewrite' them" (Fitting 108). As happens in *A Door into Ocean* by Joan Slonczewski (1986) and *The Shore of Women* by Pamela Sargent (1986), the women in these stories who perform domestic duties are neither more likely to be involved in important decision-making, nor more uniformly foregrounded in the text. Domestic duties are side-lined in most speculative fiction as a dull context with little opportunity for the kind of conflict that drives narrative. Separatist SFnal societies do not uniformly question or challenge the devaluation of maternal roles and domestic work as much as one might expect. Domesticity still occurs largely "off stage" (Russ "Image" 83), even in texts where readers might expect to encounter new solutions to old problems. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* being a particularly interesting exception, as is Bujold's own *Ethan of Athos*. Tepper's *The Gate To Women's Country* depicts traditional gender bias regarding domestic duties even as it presents radical revision of the balance between binary power structures of gender. When Bujold engages with domestic spheres, the perspective is decidedly feminine, as in *Komarr*, in which readers are given an insightful and confronting depiction

of an abusive and repressive marriage from the wife's point of view. Similarly, in *Paladin of Souls*, Ista describes the life of a trophy wife in the third person intimate of bitter memory. Bujold also engages with the process of re-writing female characters more fully by presenting a wide range of ways to be successfully female, including varying degrees of involvement in both child-rearing and politics. This is placed alongside a strong disengagement from traditional notions that women's primary role is as unpaid domestic workers.

One of Bujold's most interesting rejections of patriarchal standards is presented via Princess Joen of Roknar, a selfish and bitter woman who corrupts familial bonds to express her thwarted ambitions. The darker aspects of Maternal authority are control and influence and Bujold uses these to create a villain, but one free from sexualisation. Joen's life story conveys strong critique of a patriarchal society that would squander such political skill and talent merely because it came wrapped in female form. Bujold blurs the lines of conventional portrayals of women as either sexless or oversexed. She engages in a more sophisticated way with representations of women holding power not connected relentlessly with their sexuality or their maternity. That Bujold then presents this character as a highly motivated and effective villain, is an interesting reflection of her wide-ranging interest in personal identity and self-expression (Kelso *Three Observations* 102-103).

On the other hand, there are still depictions of female characters who occupy conformative Princess roles in Bujold's Fantasy novels, such as Fara and Ijada. These characters depict power as inherent in their position and relationship to males within the prevailing social order, rather than an active expression of independent authority. Bujold's depictions of these Complicated Princesses are not static benchmarks which characters do, or do not, rise to; rather she presents a range of possibilities and each female character takes a different position on the spectrum from conformative to unconventional. The Princesses Ista, Fara, and Ijada, like Princess Kareen in *Barrayar*, all operate within feudal structures of marriage and inheritance dictated by patriarchal societies. Their role as Princess is largely limited to marrying well and acting as a social figurehead, provider of heirs, beautiful ornament, and passive receptacle of the approval of their societies. At the outset, none of

these characters have any especial powers of their own but, rather, they carry the possibility of future authority in their genes and bodies. Princess Fara is the sibling of the Crown Prince Boleso and her relationship to the throne is a key aspect of her husband Wencel's villainous plans. Ista's far more complex journey from Princess to Saint begins in the same place of adherence to social norms and conformity. Although Ijada does not carry the Princess title, she occupies the same constrictive, socially elevated spaces. Despite their conformity to social dictates, Bujold presents moments when each of these Complicated characters resist socially gendered expectations, undertaking more active roles in the narratives despite the pressures around them to remain passive. That all five of the female characters, Fara, Joen, Catti, Hallana and Ijada, are endowed with supernatural abilities is no coincidence. Rather, it is Bujold's way of making visible their difference from the conformative culture that surrounds them. A literal change in characters presented to readers through the estrangement of the supernatural.

Bujold is able to construct criticism of these traditional roles, and the societies that impose them, within the ambiguous and paradoxical space between the inner self and the outward show of identity. This is matched by a novel's ability to simultaneously convey intimate character insights alongside the reader's omniscient perspective and encourages interrogation of this ambiguity. For example, while Fara, Joen, Catti and Ijada may seem to conform to the idealised behaviour of the Princess trope, the readers' direct experience of their thoughts and motivations provides resistance to the stereotypes. Bujold reverse these representations by substituting activity and success within established patriarchal systems of value, but does not remove men entirely from society in order to simulate equity. Her reformulation is more nuanced and, to my mind, more truly liberating for all genders. Cordelia in Bujold's SFnal contexts, and Ista, Joen and Hallana within her Fantasy ones, are prime examples of women who are both maternal and active within Bujold's writing. Maternal care is a type of authority that does not sit easily within the frameworks of authority common in either Space Opera or Fantasy narratives, and Bujold's frequent use of maternal figures of authority highlights the ways that maternal skills and agency may resist traditional patriarchal and hierarchical

constructions of power. So that Bujold's regular use of female lived experiences within SF and Fantasy narratives does much to renovate and challenge these systems or, as she says "[push] the envelope" of the genre (Bacon-Smith 122).

Without devaluing maternal skills or care, Bujold resists the unspoken conventions that insist that these are a woman's *main* or *only* access to authority. Instead, she creates Hybrid figures. Bujold's experimentation with hybridity and fluidity of gender continues in the *Penric* series of novellas, where a male character is empowered by a complex, decidedly female demon. Ista and Iselle are also presented as Hybrid figures, with masculine authority appropriated in a female body. Similarly, the complexity of Bujold's simultaneous use and resistance of the standard speculative tropes for women makes these reformulations ultimately more challenging to social norms of the feminine as lesser and Other, as seen in Hallana who is both maternal and sorcerous. The exchange of masculine and feminine roles without the devaluation of the feminine, as happens with sheroes, is an important shift in the search for truly equitable presentation of the genders.

Just as Bujold presents Hybrid and Complicated versions of the Maternal roles, so, too, does she reformulate both Good Nun and Bad Witch manifestations of the Priestess. Characters such as Joen, Catti and Hallana provide dramatic renovations of traditional representations of women with authority. The religious and spiritual aspects of the Priestess role are far more overt in the Fantasy mode of the *Five Gods Series*, as gods and demons walk the earth and directly interact with characters. In the absence of atheism and SFnal technology, Bujold is able to explore directly the expectations and limitations of more literal Priestess figures. The agency of these female characters is not shown through metaphors of social, economic, or political power but literally through sorcery and demons. Dowager Royina Ista, for example, is promoted from the social preferment that comes with being a Roy's (King's) wife and mother of his heirs, to being a saint in her own right, inhabited with supernatural vision and powers by the will of the gods themselves. Even here, the old dichotomy of Good Nun and Bad Witch still rears its ugly heads, perhaps more directly than in the

futuristic SF environment where the uncanny is less immediate and Priestesses less obvious. She mentions this in interview:

Part way through, it became evident that this was a chick book, a women's tale, and I began cooperating with that. But as the plot developed, it threw up a whole slew of female actors of all sorts, pretty much spanning the whole spectrum of possibilities. Don't overlook the Provincara, Liss, Lady de Hueltar, Umerue, and of course Catti. This was Chick Book by intent. (Oak 6)

Paladin is a book by a woman, for women and about women.

Writers and readers seem to be fascinated with exploring the possibilities such characters engender, whether they are positive or negative portrayals, lionised or criticised, promulgating more such women or undermining them. Hallana, Joen and Catti do much to reformulate reader perceptions of women who hold power. They reconstruct the established patterns of association that exist between the passive/active and good/evil binaries that seem to be almost irrevocably tied up in depictions of women's sexuality. The variation and frequency with which these depictions appear in speculative fiction can be seen as the grappling of the primary world with discomfort over the pairing of women and power. Bujold, however, separates sexual impulses from a woman's moral and personal choices, presenting female characters with varied and independent responses to their contexts. In doing so, she also validates their ability and the way they rise to the challenges of balancing personal success with supernatural and temporal power. Their sexuality becomes a secondary element of their lives and an almost entirely personal matter. In this chapter, I pursue this relationship of authority to sexuality as a key to understanding Bujold's reformulation of female characters. Beginning with the four who demonstrate her use of Complication: the least reformed Princess character, Fara; the villains, Joen and Catti; and Hallana who is a nexus for these issues. Finally, I explore the complex Hybridity depicted between and within the characters of Ijada and Ingrey, that is the most challenging to established gender tropes and variations.

Complication

Fara

Fara is the most conformative of Bujold's Fantasy Princesses, representing all that a Princess is supposed to be; she is a secondary character and her unwilling role in the hidden supernatural layers of the narrative in *The Hallowed Hunt* is crucial. Her ultimate resistance of patriarchal authority is a key turning point. Fara is heiress to the Hallowed Kingship of the Weald and like Princess Kareen, none of the males who occupy the hierarchies of power even consider her claim to the throne in her own name once her father and brother are dead. Her brother Boleso's appetites for debauchery are mentioned as generous and are unquestioningly indulged. There is less general concern over his rape and abuse of women than for the evidence of his sorcery, which inspires a shamed and complicitous silence. Fara's husband, Wencel is fully aware of the significance of her bloodline giving it more value in his own sorcerous calculations than anyone else in *The Hallowed Hunt*. The value he places on it is *still* based on the ways in which Fara's claim to the throne bolsters his own and contributes to his magical and political plans. He, too, fails to see the woman, seeing only the placeholder of authority. An authority he expects to use at will for his own purposes.

Fara substitutes the expectation to produce heirs placed on socially privileged females for "sick headaches" and vapours (Bujold *Hallowed* 11, 325, 414), but this ill health is universally accepted as a sign of her delicacy and gentle breeding, that Bujold echoes from the primary world. The truth of her failure to conceive and her frequent illnesses is not revealed until the climax of the novel, when it becomes clear that her sorcerous husband has been manipulating her physically as well as emotionally (Bujold *Hallowed* 343-345). Once she understands his true motives and intent and his casual disregard for her, Fara's re-assertion of her self-control and her choices mark a significant turning point in the events of the narrative. She refuses to co-operate further with Wencel's plans once the degree of his control and disinterest is made clear. She then deliberately interferes with his plans, despite his apparently limitless magical powers and the imminence of retribution. Fara defies him and destroys his magical focus.

“I tried to be your wife,” she whispered, “You *never* tried to be my husband.”

And she lowered the tip of the banner pole to the ground, the gray rag falling in a silky puddle, put her foot upon the dry wood, and snapped it in half. (Bujold *Hallowed* 389)

This defiant and independent action complicates Fara’s earlier passivity and reframes her jealous act of abandoning Ijada to Boleso. Bujold positions readers to reconsider their perception of her status and ill health established earlier. As a target for Wencel’s dark sorcery, Fara evokes deeper empathy. Bujold repositions her as a more complex and nuanced character and this ultimately generates greater psychological understanding of the unique challenges she has faced. Fara’s actions puncture the complicit understanding of Princesses as passive tools of an acknowledged, superior masculine, and Bujold uses the contrast of Fara’s actual and brave behaviour against the expected frailty of traditional females. This complicates the representation by divorcing the individual from the stereotype.

The first active intervention of Fara in the novel’s events has in fact occurred before the novel starts, when she abandons Ijada to her brother Boleso. Bujold initially frames this as a barren wife’s irrational jealous. From Fara’s perspective, Ijada appears to threaten her marriage, so Fara takes steps using the limited power she has at her disposal to remove that threat (Bujold *Hallowed* 12-13). While Fara’s action of abandoning Ijada to Boleso is awful, it can also be seen as an active intervention by Fara in her own fate within the constraints of a patriarchal society. Boleso seeks Ijada as a symbolic virgin sacrifice for his sorcerous rituals; she seems to be passive, weak, undefended, merely a beautiful vessel for his own lust for power. Like Wencel, Boleso never considers that either of these women might have powers and strengths of their own. Bujold represents female characters as more complicated independent entities, showing these women impelled to step outside the boundaries of acceptably passive, Princess-ly behaviour. Through these depictions, she invites readers to reconsider female autonomy.

Fara's active defiance intensifies the insight that she has been under siege by the villain for longer than any other individual in the narrative. That she has been exposed daily to his corrupt magic does much to restore reader empathy and repositions the two truly independent, decisive actions she takes. The Princess character type is the most docile face of the unknowable Other, desirable by patriarchal and hierarchical standards and compliant; unlike her more problematic sister, the Priestess, who wields her power more independently. Fara's actions remind patriarchal authorities that the Other is not always as tame as they appear, just as Princess Kareen does in *Barrayar*. Through *Complication*, Bujold resists the elements of the Princess trope but she avoids substitution of masculine qualities as she does with the Hybrid figures such as Ista. Bujold instead explores the dissonance of unexpectedly independent Princesses against a backdrop of traditional social organisation to present women who are more consistently active and autonomous. Bujold's ability to simultaneously write "both within and against popular tradition" in this fashion is significant (Attebery *Decoding* 48).

Joen and Catti - Reclaiming villainy, the Bad Witches

Princess Joen of Roknar and Cattilara dy Lutez in *Paladin of Souls* are definitive examples of the Bad Witch trope that is so familiar in speculative fiction. Through them Bujold applies a critical eye and typically insightful use of psychology to antagonistic characters. Although Princess Joen might seem to belong to the Princess category by dint of her title, she also has access to political, maternal, and sorcerous power. Her active use of that power in the service of self-determined goals locates her more firmly in the category of Priestess. Catti, as the Lord's wife, might seem to occupy the Princess role as lady of the manor at Castle Porifors, however her demon-ridden state and attempts to direct the world according to her whim also make her a Priestess figure. Both of these Priestess figures use their powers outside social dictates; Joen to take temporal power and start a war, Catti to resist the unhappy reality of her husband's untimely death. Bujold complicates this by revealing far more about their motivations and purposes than usual, deepening their psychological insight and contributing to the reformulation of this representation of women with power.

Bujold further heightens reader awareness of this psychology by including negative aspects of at least one of the other traditional trope; Joen displays the dark aspects of the Maternal figure, and Catti is presented as an overindulged Princess figure. Bujold notes that

Joen, for example, while still hidden or latent in the plot might have been either a male or female villain for all we could see, but by the time she arrived on-stage, it was apparent she had to be female, to oppose Ista. She was the worked example of How To Do Empowerment Wrong. (Oak 7)

Joen calls herself the “Mother of Jokona” (Bujold *Paladin* 407) referring to her long Regency on behalf of her son and has borne twelve children, not all of whom survive. When she first appears, her physical description is in great contrast to the long shadow she casts over the narrative, as almost all of the difficulties the characters face have been the result of her actions. Joen is described as “A small, shrunken looking woman clad in dark green silks ...” (320-321) and is everything that can be feared of Maternal authority. When Ista looks with her magical sight, she perceives a:

vast dark menace of the demon glowering from her belly like some pitch black pit into which one might fall forever. Without her demon, she was just... a little, sour, ageing woman. Unable to command respect or compel loyalty; easy to escape. Small. Five gods, but she was small, all her possibilities shrunken in upon herself: her only recourse, force. Stubborn will without scope of mind. (Bujold 406)

She is bitter and demanding, grasping for political and social power with a highly unorthodox weapon as demons are a blasphemy in Jokona. Joen seeks freedom from others’ power over her at any price.

One of those costs is, ultimately, the lives and sanity of her children. Joen alternately smothers her children’s identities with gifts of the attributes and skills from the souls of other people or sacrifices them as if they were her possessions. Her “psychic vampirism” (Oak 7) manifests when

she suborns her daughter Umerue with demon powers and scraps of other women's souls, then her son, Sordso, with a complex construction of remnants of great or educated men. She hopes to make him a more hegemonic masculine ideal, fit to rule Jokona in her place. This depiction of Joen as a female villain is deliberately centred on the betrayal of Maternal tropes, including the use of umbilical imagery (Oak 7). She represents the simulation of care rather than expectation of concern and self-sacrifice on behalf of their children:

Joen it seemed to Ista, was trying to fill Jokona with her authority as a woman filled a household, and by the same techniques; and *no-one* could stretch herself that far. ... Men enslaved each other's bodies, but the silent will of the soul was sacred and inviolable to the gods if anything was. Joen was seizing her slaves from the inside out. What Joen did to her enemies might be named war; what she did to her own people was sacrilege. (Bujold *Paladin* 406)

Joen never questions her own actions or compares them with the actions of those who dominated her own self so cruelly for so many years. Bujold describes her as "toxic" and "metastatic", "a mother in the worst way ... She became not free but a tyrant" (Oak 7). Even amongst such negative depictions, her characterisation is complicated by the respect and empathy Bujold also includes.

Despite her evil plans, and the distaste with which other characters greet them, Bujold allows Joen a cruel intelligence and the authority of success. Within the narrative, Joen's abuses of power are effective in helping her strengthen her position. She takes a number of successful and secret preliminary steps in her attempted overthrow of Chalion that are achieved before Ista and the gods' intervention. These steps include the assassination of the saintly priestess of Rauma who can devour demons; the death of Arhys and near-death of Illvin which weakens the key military border post of Porifors; the successful elimination and subjugation of Joen's rivals within Jokona; and the very nearly successful siege of Porifors. This last actually falls to Joen's sorcerous might and is only saved by the direct intervention of Ista and her god, the Bastard, when Ista acts as a spiritual Trojan Horse.

All of Joen's actions take months or even years to plan and achieve, and the protagonists of *Paladin* spend much of the novel chasing minor hints before they manage to piece it all together.

Furthermore, simply *knowing* what Joen's plans are, is not nearly enough to thwart them. The castle is brought to its knees, Arhys hacked to pieces and gone to his god, and Ista surrendered powerless into Joen's hands before these plans are undone. Joen is mostly off-stage, a dark presence in the background.

Joen's stubborn will and internal strengths are most explicitly conveyed upon her death at Ista's hands:

No! Joen's mind returned. It is my gift, my great chance! No one shall wrest it from me, least of all you! You were so feckless, you couldn't even keep your own son alive! Mine shall have his place; I have promised it! (Bujold *Paladin* 409, original emphasis)

Joen's failure can be seen as a predictable outcome in a narrative form that favours positive resolution of the heroes' crises; a hangover from Tolkien and fairy tale. The scale of Joen's dangerous power is more than simply a series of increasing conflicts for the protagonists to resolve. They also indicate the potential for feminine aspects to be more thoroughly threatening, not merely the sexy bogeyman presented in the past, but the practical and deadly reality of an unsympathetic adversary, of whatever gender. Glamourising and limiting female characters is often done in accordance with subtle and naturalised cultural values that are harder to resist when they remain invisible, and this is as true of the villainess as the heroine. Reformulation of negative aspects of the feminine in speculative writing is just as necessary and challenging of social norms as reformulation of positive depictions.

The other antagonist, Catti, is not an ally of Joen and her selfishness is much more personal and less dramatic in scope. Catti is merely trying to prevent the transition of her undead husband to a truly dead state and her loyalties become extremely tested by the events at Castle Porifors. Her status as a patriot rather than a pawn of Joen is directly confirmed by Catti:

“Well, *this* demon was sent here,” said Cattilara, “*On purpose*. It was supposed to seduce Illvin, or Arhys, or both, and take Castle Porifors from within for the prince of Jokona. I stopped *that* from happening. As much as any soldier pushing back a scaling ladder in a siege.” She tossed her hair and glowered, as if daring anyone to criticise *this* achievement.

(Bujold *Paladin* 230-231)

Despite the fact that she is possessed by a demon that has escaped Joen, Catti’s will remains her own and, more than that, is strong enough to dominate the will of a demon which has already eaten three or four other souls. “Cattilara rode this demon, not the other way around: it was her will that prevailed here, her soul that was ascendant in that lovely body” (201). Illvin derides her intelligence, but even he recognises that her willpower remains almost indomitable (230). Bujold reports that

If the demon had mistaken Catti for a more tractable mount than Illvin, it had been in for an interesting surprise. For all her exasperation with Catti, Ista felt a certain dark satisfaction at the thought of the demon’s dismay. (230).

Catti is eventually overwhelmed by Ista and releases her hold on Arhys involuntarily, but in the end agrees to literally lend him the strength of her body to stave off Joen’s invasion attempt.

Ista pushes Catti to choose between her loyalties to her family and her nation over her personal need to keep Arhys. A choice that Bujold frames as the need to accept Arhys’s untimely death and the inevitability of loss (*Paladin* 480-482, 564). Bujold permits Catti’s disdainful and distrusting responses to Ista to stand and thus Catti retains the courage of her convictions in a way that female villains are rarely allowed. Bujold’s insightful use of psychological characterisation and her construction of Catti as an independent character with individual wants and needs is largely responsible for this complicated reformulation. Ista (like Bujold) recognises the truth of Catti’s dilemma in a patriarchal world and conveys it sympathetically to readers, she says “It’s a hard thing, when all your life rides on the decisions of others, and you can do nothing to affect the outcome.”

(308). This echoes the comments of Ista's mother, the Provincara, when explaining her duties earlier:

"I have great privilege in Baocia, child. I do not have great powers. ... One is the right to rule – and the duty to protect! T' other is the right to receive protection. ... There is also more difference between a provincar and a provincara than just the one letter." (Bujold *Chalion* 34-35)

Miles very succinctly adds the same idea to Bujold's SF when he observes that

If I unleash ImpSec, the consequences will be my responsibility. It's that devil's distinction between being in charge and being in control. I'm in charge; you're in control. You can imagine how much this thrills me." (Bujold *Komarr* 292).

This paradox is at the heart of Fantasy; the differentiation between responsibility and action, between what is seen and what is known. Bujold extends this to include the knowledge that women's dependence on men is socially constructed and ultimately crippling and is a frequent refrain in her narratives.

Bujold's female villains are positioned as aspects of conformative representations of women early in the narrative. Their lack of remorse and their determination to be self-governing is largely free of the usual moralising that usually accompanies women in these roles. They are free to act and to accept the consequences of their choices, just as all the other characters are, without being underestimated or undermined by last minute reversals of either will or courage. Both women are extremely successful until the intervention of the gods, through Ista. It takes the direct intervention of the gods and their female avatar to undo these women's plans, adding to the representation of success. As does the fact that Ista and Catti both nearly die in their attempts to reverse Joen's plans. It is particularly unusual in Fantasy and SF that the three most significant characters in this novel are female. Although other characters have significant roles in *Paladin*, it is these three who drive the events of the novel. Everyone else is simply responding to their actions and decisions.

Hallana - Reclaiming the sexuality of the Good Nun

In Bujold's *The Hallowed Hunt*, Learned Hallana is a more complex representation of women with power than the heroine, Ijada, because she blurs the boundary between Good Nun and Bad Witch. Hallana holds the authority of two somewhat contradictory gods, the Mother and the Bastard, each providing her with supernatural abilities. The Mother gives her prophetic dreams and the Bastard sorcerous skill, although her primary identification is with the Mother as her first career was as a midwife and healer. This identification is reinforced through her role as mother of five children.

When readers first meet Hallana, she is heavily pregnant, pulled away from her rest and existing family by urgent visions of Ijada's difficulties. She intercepts Ijada and Ingrey on the road back to the capital where Ijada will shortly face trial for murder. Her usefulness and sorcerous power is underlined, not only by this highly fortuitous appearance, but also the practical application of her magic. At the very moment she enters the narrative, she turns an insufficiently respectful soldier into a pig:

"I do not have *time* for you," said the sorceress in aggravation. "If you insist on behaving as though you were in a sty, a pig you shall be until you learn better manners." She waved a hand in the retainer's general direction, and Ingrey quelled an impulse to duck. He was entirely unsurprised when the man fell to all fours and his yelp turned into a grunt. The sorceress sniffed, gathered up her robes, and stepped daintily around him. (Bujold *Hallowed* 53-54)

Others later label these as mere "delusions" (82) but the ability to make a man *think* he is a pig is no less salutary. This act is not presented as a whim but as part of the deliberate and careful balancing of her inner demon's need for chaos and her unborn baby's need for order. Bujold's exploration of the differences between responsibility and control are reprised here in the context of women's active use of supernatural power.

Unlike the majority of sorceresses in Fantasy, Bujold depicts Hallana's power as autonomously held and entirely under her control:

Disorder flows naturally from demons; it is the very spring of their power in matter. The creation of a child, wherein matter grows an entirely new soul, is the highest and most complex form of ordering known, apart from the gods themselves. ... The secret of safety turns out to be, ah ... how shall I put it. *Shed* excess disorder. By cascading small amounts of chaos continually, I keep my demon passive, and my baby safe. (61)

As a loving and loyal wife, Hallana neither uses her sexual attractiveness as a form of control, nor does she exchange it for magical power, nor does she use her Maternal authority for nefarious purposes. She works co-operatively within existing theological and political social structures and is guided by higher powers without curbing her own rationality, her sexuality, or her compassion.

As with many of Bujold's critical interventions, the sense of sight is the one through which inspiration and insight are carried, uncanny or otherwise. Hallana's ability to open this channel of perception for other characters becomes even more significant. Her activation of Ingrey's extra sight also reveals the unholy *geas* placed on him by that hidden menace of the narrative, Wencel, and enables Ingrey to be freed of it (67-69). Hallana is presented as a trustworthy and highly spiritual Good Nun version of the Priestess, with connections at the highest levels of the church's temporal power. While her maternal abundance is heavily underscored, and not unexpected given her choice of deity, the representation of a female character who is fecund mother, ardent lover, spiritual advisor, sorceress and a figure of authority is highly unusual yet powerful. That she remains 'good' and uses her powers for the benefit of the moral journey the protagonists are on without being either celibate or ancient is a further noteworthy deviation from Fantasy norms.

Hallana's loving relationship with her husband, a priest of the Father, Learned Oswin, is the locus of re-introducing sexuality to this 'fairy godmother' aspect of the Priestess trope. Hallana and Oswin are not only shown to have a remarkably equal relationship but to enjoy an active sex life,

discreetly rendered by the presence of many children and certain knowing comments, such as “One shared passion led to others” (90). In both primary medieval and secondary Fantasy worlds, nuns and widows are common representations of somewhat independent feminine authority. Mothers are faced with the choice between authority over their own households or being presented as somehow less maternal and positive if they seek wider authority away from their children, as with Princess Joen. Bujold presents a much wider range of domestic arrangements in her novels. Alongside the traditional depictions, Bujold includes Hallana who, like Cordelia and Alys in the *Vorkosigan Series*, describe their child-rearing arrangements in detail and continue to be actively involved in the events of their novels during pregnancy and after childbirth.

The association between birth defects and magic use in female characters is not uncommon in speculative texts, however Bujold refutes its inevitability in the person of Hallana and her multiple successful births. Bujold makes a point of noting that it is Hallana’s skill and determination that makes the dual role possible, rather than any innate qualities or passive abilities (Russ “Images” 84). When Ijada asks Hallana how she “may safely bear a demon and a baby at once”, Hallana gives a detailed description of the process, that includes criticism of traditional patriarchal structures:

“The creation of a child, wherein matter grows an entirely new soul, is the highest and most complex form of ordering known, apart from the gods themselves. Given all that can go wrong with the process *without* a demon, keeping the two apart becomes rather urgent. And difficult. The difficulty is why some divines discourage female sorcerers from becoming mothers, or women seeking that power until they are grown old. Well, and some of them are just self-satisfied fools, but that’s another subject. It’s all very well, you know, but I saw no reason to stop my life for other people’s theories. My risks are no greater – or different – than any other woman’s, if my skills match them.” (Bujold *Hallowed* 61)

Bujold frames feminine success as the result of hard work, knowledge, experience and deliberate action, rather than the more usual depiction of overtly supernatural and innate gifts, which often

undermines readers' sense of women's active participation in the process. Hallana's attention to this important aspect of her pregnancy and her skilled intervention is referenced multiple times during the text (69). Similarly in *Barrayar*, Bujold describes the difficult birth of Ivan in the middle of a warzone in harrowing detail and frames this as a success because of Lady Alys's courage and determination, just as she does with Cordelia's complicated pregnancy (569). The nexus of women, power and childbirth, is presented to readers carefully, showing an alternative vision of female characters as rational and educated, capable and sexual, powerful as an individual and as a member of respected social groups. As both Witch and Woman, Hallana is freed from the socially normative criticism that seems to cluster around discussion of women's sexuality and their authority.

Hybridity

Ijada and Ingrey

There is more to the reformulation of cultural norms around gender and stereotypes of women in Bujold's speculative fiction, however. More than making the invisible visible through Focus on feminine perspectives and maternal demesnes, as she does with Ista and Hallana's stories. More than resisting established tropes by presenting Reversals such as Liss. More Complication than depictions of active, oppositional characters such as Joen and Catti. One of the sustained challenges Bujold makes to established speculative and social stereotypes is to the binary division of masculine and feminine, and the resultant devaluation of one to the role of Other. At the heart of these fictional tropes is the social judgement that the feminine is lesser. Less interesting, less capable, less powerful, and less engaging for readers. It is a moot point whether masculine domains are usually imbued with qualities that inspire admiration and replication, or whether those qualities are associated with masculinity because they are the most valued, or because masculinity has been the dominant gender in Western civilisation. When Bujold depicts characters who deliberately occupy the territory of one gender while displaying characteristics of the other, she is challenging the naturalisation of these values at a fundamental level. And this is a challenge that she has deliberately designed to engage readers and encourage them to question their own assumptions.

Bujold moved away from Cordelia's radically complex character during the bulk of the *Vorkosigan Series*, exploring more subliminal ways of challenging gender norms through the story of Miles, a codedly feminine presence in a masculine body. As well as the interchange of gender roles between Cordelia and Aral in *Shards* and *Barrayar*, and between Ista and Illvin in *Paladin*, there is one further example of this exchange that I should like to focus on between the characters of Ijada and Ingrey in Bujold's *The Hallowed Hunt*.

Ijada is another Princess figure though not officially a Princess. Her enormous dowry, social elevation, conventional beauty, and conformative acceptance of social norms situate her in this role. Her imprisonment and passive centrality to the events of the narrative underline this interpretation. Initially, she is Fara's responsibility and her jealousy of the beautiful maiden causes Fara to accede to the request of her brutal brother, Boleso, to leave Ijada with him. It is made perfectly clear to Fara and others that Ijada does not welcome the interest of the Crown Prince, yet Fara abandons her handmaiden to his sinister desires. Nevertheless, Ijada quickly demonstrates a Hybrid of traditionally masculine and feminine characteristics that move her beyond the confines of the traditional Princess role. Her decidedly non-passive defence of her virtue, during which she manages to kill Boleso rather gruesomely drives much of the narrative. Boleso is highly unstable and his clandestine ritual is also the cause of Ijada's sorcerous melding with the spirit of a leopard he intended for himself. These events occur before the novel starts and she relates them to the protagonist, Ingrey, who will become her husband by the novel's end, as he escorts Ijada back to the capital city for her punishment.

The leopard spirit that inhabits Ijada endows her with magical sight; she can now see and smell uncanny and supernatural influences in the world. These senses are used by Bujold to create another example of externalised perspectives, in this case allowing Ijada to more critically engage with the society around her. She is held prisoner for a significant portion of the narrative, and when she finally breaks free of house arrest it is to gather and lead a team of religious magic users to rescue Fara, Ingrey, and the four thousand revenant warrior spirits for whom she has become

responsible; a position known as a Bannerman in the Old Weald. The Bannerman's role largely involves holding the souls of slain warriors in trust until a shaman, such as Ingrey, can cleanse them of their animal spirits and allow them to return to their gods. It is this duty that Fara refuses to perform for Wencel by breaking the banner he asks her to hold for him that is her great rebellion because it would have allowed his reclamation of temporal power as the supernaturally enhanced Hallowed King. With the support of the gods, Ingrey defeats Wencel in battle and they are able to return all the lost spirits to the gods and cleanse the tainted battlefield. While the intrusion of such magical responsibilities and powers would seem to make Ijada a Priestess, her use of these powers is far less active than that of other Priestess figures. She does not employ magic directly as she casts no spells, rather she liaises with the gods through visions. Her power comes from viewing the world through altered perception and seeing the truth. Moreover, her resistance of socially constructed positions is not enabled by this magical endowment but is an expression of her own, pre-existing and independent nature. Just as her insight into both the political and spiritual challenges around her is presented by Bujold as an expression of her superior intelligence.

There is a particularly interesting exchange in the Hybridised representation of Ingrey and Ijada. Each adheres to normative constructions for their gender, she a Princess, he a Warrior-Hero. However, it is their emotional responses that challenge gender-normative expectations. Peter Nicholls observed that:

in *The Hallowed Hunt* there seems to me ... almost a sex-role reversal between Ingrey and Ijada. Ingrey is a prey to doubts and fears where Ijada is calm, poised, effortlessly brave, the reverse of the usual characterisation of male and female protagonists in romantic adventure stories. (P. Nicholls, personal communication, 22 May 2012, quoted with kind permission of the author)

Ijada's decisive and forthright nature seems more masculine than conformative women depicted in traditional Fantasy writing. For example, she does not 'wait and pray' as even Iselle does in *Chalion*,

but picks up the nearest war hammer and bashes a man's head in to prevent unwanted advances. Although she selectively adheres to social expectations regarding her behaviour, appearing as a modest maiden and a dutiful lady in waiting for Princess Fara, there is a decidedly non-conformative streak to Ijada's decision making. She plans to defend herself by confronting the charges of murder laid against her and is determined to rely on the justified nature of her response, even once Ingrey makes her aware of the great corruption which stands against her (Bujold *Hallowed* 93). Ijada's expectations of the right to act and to speak in public are not usually supported in conformative representations of women, the silence and passivity that Russ and others have noted is more typical. Ijada is neither and challenges the inbuilt limitations of the Princess role with an alternative depiction of a woman whose engagement with society is direct and self-determined. Such attitudes are often framed as masculine within traditional social frameworks, just as Ingrey's self-doubt and shame seem to position him as "codedly feminine" (Roberts "Female Alien" 16). Ijada's position as 'the trapped Princess in the Tower' and Ingrey's fulfilment of the 'heroic Prince who rescues the fair maiden' trope emphasise this emotional shift that Bujold makes to these characters. Thanks to the intimate perspective that Bujold provides, what is seen and what is known are different and this juxtaposition serves to further separate the individual from the stereotypical and the reader from socially normative expectations.

The unseen but often retold story of how Prince Boleso came to be killed reiterates the potential for sexual violence. Every re-telling reminds readers of Ijada's vulnerability as an object of sexual and political desire. The only reliable witness to Ijada's difficulties is herself, even though there were many others in the castle at the time. Their complicit silence emphasises the distrust and erasure of women's voices and Ijada's movement from one form of custodial care to another accentuates the traditional vulnerability of women within patriarchal authority structures. Ijada's status as a noble lady and her refusal to remain an object complicates these gender and class based boundaries for Boleso's steward in particular. She is treated with unusual respect and courtesy for

the murderess of his lord. Ingrey notes these mixed messages in the nature of room in which Ijada is imprisoned:

It was a brief step, down one floor to a windowless, but dry, storeroom. Not dungeon, certainly not guest room, the choice of prisons bespoke a deep uncertainty over the status of its occupant. ... This prison secured; it did not, yet, punish. (Bujold *Hallowed* 8-9, 19)

Bujold later reminds audiences that the steward gave her this room because of the bar on the inside of the door. In the same way, Cordelia's status as the future Lady Vorkosigan confuses traditional Barraryaran responses to a female prisoner. Privately, Aral responds to Cordelia as an equal, but publicly he extends the power of his rank as her protection. Part of Bujold's "codedly feminine" creation of Ingrey is the consistency with which she presents him as a passive character. He hasn't the same authority as Aral with which to shield his beloved but must wait on the orders and desires of others regarding her. At least three men, Hetwar, Prince Biast and Wencel, have power over Ijada's fate that Ingrey must wait upon (101). Despite his intelligence and free will, and much like the figurehead roles of political significance given to female characters, Ingrey watches and understands politics but does not act independently as he is given no authority or agency to do so (94-95). Ingrey's role as protagonist is established by his position as the point-of-view character but his dependence on the authority of others places the reader into a more passive, subjectively female reading position.

Hybridity goes in both directions. Ijada acts within the severely limited social frameworks accepted for women in the Weald with decidedly masculine freedom and agency. She is limited by the need to conform outwardly to expectations of feminine behaviour but her acceptance of it is conditional. Unlike Liss, she does not wear pants or learn to fight, nor does she have social, economic, or political power, as Ista and Cordelia do. Her natural charisma, wit and courage is magnified by the supernatural power of the leopard spirit and the occasional visits of her god, the Son of Autumn. Her choice of this male god, rather than the more usual Daughter of Spring, is

frequently observed within the narrative to be surprising (92, 96, 109). When Ingrey is first introduced to Ijada after she has bashed in Prince Boleso's head with his own war-hammer:

Ingrey couldn't help thinking that in such an extremity Lady Ijada would call on her proper patroness, the Daughter of Spring, the goddess to Whom virginity was sacred. It seemed very strange for a woman to call on Her Brother of Autumn. *Though this is His season.* The Lord of Autumn was the god of young men, harvest, the hunt, comradeship - and war. And the weapons of war? (Bujold *Hallowed* 14, original emphasis)

Bujold creates Ijada free of those damning feminine traits so often accorded to Princesses. She has no fainting fits, "sick headaches" (11), or tearful outbursts as Princess Fara does. She is not precipitate or overwhelmed by her emotions as is Princess Kareen. She is, in fact, consistently depicted as emotionally and mentally strong and confounds the expectations of many with her calm and rational interactions with the world that would damn her for acting in her own defense.

These overt differentiations between the expected feminine frailty and the dominance of rationality in Ijada are repeated frequently throughout the narrative (10). Ingrey notices that "Truth rang in that voice, and a kind of rocky triumph. In the uttermost extremity, abandoned by all who should have protected her, she'd found that she need not abandon herself. A powerful lesson. A *dangerous lesson*" (15). At other times, she is noted as displaying masculine intelligence and feminine subtlety simultaneously; "she seemed fully capable, once given the lead, of carrying on an oblique conversation before unfriendly ears that might convey more information than it appeared" (109). The fear and emotions that Ijada does experience are almost always delayed or deferred, revealed to others rarely and usually a surprise. Bujold positions Ijada within a more masculine position of rationality ascendant (32).

Bujold uses a wide range of subtle reader cues to position Ijada as more masculine than usual. Ijada's height and physicality are noted frequently. Ingrey observes that "Brilliant hazel eyes looked not up, but across" at him (9) and that "She was not afraid of the right things. Five gods help him,

she seemed not afraid of anything.” (16). Hallana remembers her fearlessness and tomboyish behaviour “you did make yourself quite useful. You were not afraid of the marsh, or the woods, or the animals, or the fen folk, or of getting thoroughly muddy and scratched or of being scolded for it” (57). Her ability to swim enables her to save both herself and Ingrey when his *geas* strikes him for the third time: “the river bottom flattened out, and then *she* was dragging *him* up onto some welcome, blessed shore” (29). Alongside these, her responses are more confrontational and active than conformatively feminine characters. Ijada reports her side of the conversation with Princess Fara when she abandoned her:

I begged her not to leave me here. She [Fara] would not meet my eye. She said it was no worse a barter than any, and better than most, and that I should look to my own future. That it was just the woman’s version of the same loyalty due from a man to his prince. I said I did not think most men would ... well, I’m afraid I said something rude. (12-13)

Ijada’s powers of perception and the access to the greater knowledge that they provide are part of Bujold’s repositioning. The authority of public knowledge is often a distinguishing feature of masculine rationality in speculative fiction (Attebery *Decoding* 181; Tong 34) so that Ijada’s superior intelligence and extra perception of the spirit world becomes another aspect of her Hybridity. In this tale, Ijada becomes Ingrey’s romantic focus and moral educator, complicating further some already unusual patterns and increasing the reader’s subtle perception of Ingrey as feminised and Ijada as masculinised.

Bujold makes it clear that Ijada seeks to meet her enemies in the capital city, Eastholme, not just out of a passive acceptance of her fate as Princesses are wont to do, or naivety, but out of a far stronger sense that justice will prevail. Her own incisive interpretation of events bolsters this confidence (92-93). Bujold validates this insight, giving Ijada the aid of supernatural forces and a strong team of supporters. This enables Ijada to achieve these goals on an impressive scale that spans the past, the present, and the afterlife. Other writers, following a more traditional binary

script, would abandon such a character to their fate rather than foregrounding them. That Ingrey and Ijada carry animal spirits is an important intervention of older, external wisdoms and powers that isolate them. As outsiders within their more orthodox and less uncanny cultures, both Ingrey and Ijada provide a different viewpoint from which to examine and interact with the cultural patterns that were previously naturalised to them and that remain hidden from their fellows. Once again, Bujold contrasts primary and secondary world values to encourage critical examination of gendered patterns.

Bujold's contribution to speculative fiction is broader than just these issues of gender. The ways in which she presents a wide range of female characters active in a variety of contexts comes closer to equality than many of the heroes and strong female characters presented by other writers who purport to address these issues. More is needed than the attribution of certain masculine qualities to a female character, especially when they replace other, conventionally feminine qualities. Perhaps even more essentially, male characters must be depicted and validated with conventionally feminine qualities or else the old binary value judgements risk being simply perpetuated. The separation of female characters from moral judgments based on their sexuality is another vital step over which many others have stumbled. Likewise, writers need to address the separation of female characters' responsibilities as parents from criticism of their moral choices, as well as including more women who are mothers as active participants in the narrative with significant responsibilities outside the maternal. These are all further integral changes that Bujold enfold into her narrative.

Relocation of narratives to encompass domestic spaces is one way to do this as their physical distance from events only serves to marginalise female characters. The consistency with which independence and freedom of action are the province of masculine and/or non-parental characters also serves to cement stereotypes of male characters as the focus of narrative action. The exclusion of male characters from caring roles and family building is another problem, as this lack of domestic ties for male characters is as much a barrier to gender equality in narrative as the universality of

women's connection to domestic spheres. Exile to the more dramatic roles that drive narrative conflict perpetuate hegemonic norms of gendered behaviour. Further, this exile cements these into naturalised and unchallenged stereotypes through repetition, rather than allowing socially constructed ideals of gender to remain malleable and diversified. Bujold's consistent patterns of inclusion and Hybridity provide a model for engaging literature, where both "morphs of reader" are encouraged to identify with protagonists who display both types of gendered behaviour (Lake 7). Male readers need to see as broad a range of behaviour in female characters as female readers do, and to see a broader range of emotional positions validated in male characters. This will encourage the acceptance of changes to socially constructed definitions of 'ways to be masculine' and 'ways to be feminine'.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Feminist generic fiction ... is a radical revision of conservative genre texts, which critically evaluates the ideological significance of textual conventions and of fiction as a discursive practice. (Cranny-Francis 10)

There has always been a radical, nonconformist element in speculative writing; just as there have always been female writers, producers, and consumers of speculation in all its forms (Attebery *Decoding* 1-16; Bacon-Smith 95–108). The popularity of conformative stories that repeat and reflect existing cultural standards means that the stories themselves become one of the ways in which society reinforces and protects cultural norms. My interest has been to examine the tropes of gendered representation, especially of the feminine ones, and to extend feminist cultural critique that has been an acknowledged element of SF criticism since the 1970s (Russ, Sargent, Le Guin) to Fantasy. Bujold is a useful subject for this study as she makes radical changes to the depiction of gendered behaviour and social roles without disturbing the recognisable features of the genres in which she writes.

Trotsky once suggested that “Art...is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes” (Trotsky 120). I suggest that fictional narratives both reflect *and* construct social behaviours and structures. Speculative narratives rely on a strong contrast between fantastic and mimetic elements, creating a rich environment for both metaphor and cultural criticism. Most narratives reflect the values of the era in which the text was constructed, and conservative ones transmit their values through repetition and validation within the narrative (and through the reception of the narrative). Hume called her seminal text *Fantasy and Mimesis* and explored the relationship between the two, a relationship that has often been construed as oppositional or binary. To mimic reality on the page an author needs to create a semblance of that reality, and therefore is it never the real but only a representation of it that appears in narrative. But this semblance will always be defined by the cultural limitations of the era in which it was created and the author’s own unquestioned biases and

assumptions. As soon as the primary world appears in a narrative, it is shaded by the interpretation of the writer and divided from the real, captured within the text by the shell of double estrangement. Consequently, a conformative text that repeats and replicates existing values of the primary world will be a less challenging experience for readers. The reader engages with the speculative text as a separate place to the primary world, even when parts of the primary world are mimicked in the narrative. The primary world may be replicated in the secondary worlds of narrative, or referenced liminally as a place from which transition occurs (as in Mendlesohn's portal quests for example), but it never replaces the real world of the reader who eventually leaves the narrative experience to return to the actual primary world. This effect causes texts to shift their meaning depending on when and by whom they are read. The capacity of speculative writing in both modes to reflect critically on the societies that are their contexts depends on this communication between author and reader. Both modes rely on extrapolation and estrangement to create worlds (either partly or wholly secondary) that imagine alternative ways of being and of re-organising fundamental social institutions. Such a reading asks us to accept that all fictional narrative is un-real and constructed in relation to the cultural standards at the time of their creation. Making it possible to understand social norms in the same way - as constructed ideals which are bound to their era.

If narrative art exists on a spectrum from close reproduction to outré representation, fiction presents versions of reality that exist in a similar range of deviation. This is a particularly broad range when considering that speculative fiction runs the gamut from aliens to faeries, from rockets to warhorses, and rayguns to longbows. In a genre that focuses on world-building with unique and exciting differences, the choices authors make about the construction and ordering of social institutions reflect their understanding of their primary world. This understanding may or may not be shared by the reader. Whenever a secondary world is constructed, unconsciously or not, the author is responding to the world that they know and inhabit. There is a strong tradition of outsider or ruggedly individualistic heroes in SF and Space Opera, which has dovetailed with tropes of heroic representation. All the modes of speculation have been dominated by idealisation of the masculine

and prioritisation of their needs and wants. Historically, SF and Fantasy have reflected these patriarchal and hegemonic ideals of gender using gendered tropes that were accepted and often expected by its readers. Masculine ones such as the Warrior, the Leader, the Scientist and the Explorer, or feminine ones like the Princess, the Priestess and the Maternal. As the genre developed, writers increasingly included more progressive ideas, such as Marxist thought, egalitarian democratic ideals, criticism of social engineering, sensitivity to race relations, and the ethical implications of technologies. However, older gender tropes have remained and gone largely unquestioned by mainstream readers and audiences. The notion of SF as “books-by-men-for-men” (Lefanu 24) persists despite the evidence of alternative depictions being produced and even widely admired.

Lois McMaster Bujold’s work is significant because of her non-conformative positions, although she neither accepts nor rejects these frameworks of the past entirely. Rather she uses the power of extrapolation to imagine worlds where women, even those living in patriarchal societies more oppressive and limiting than our own, are diverse and multifaceted, strong without being substitute men, and emotional without being either victims or maligned for having emotions. Bujold’s work is highly awarded and has achieved popular success, yet she has not had a high profile amongst academic considerations until very recently (Croft et al.; James *LMB*; Kelso *Three Observations*) The rarity with which women are acknowledged and included in ‘top 100’ lists of speculative texts more generally is an example of wider gender bias in action. Bujold has also commented on lapel-pins as a highly gendered choice. These are awarded to writers who win the major literary awards in speculative fiction and can be seen to reflect the male domination of such awards lists. In response, Bujold commissioned a necklace to display her award pins and continues to add to her display (Bujold *Dendarii*). I suggest that it is the very unconventional nature of these changes and their density that causes critical conversation to bend around her works. Rather than conforming to expectations and contributing further conventional examples of gender in speculative fictions, Bujold challenges the status quo at a very fundamental level and provides complex

reformulations that blend some conformative ideas about gender with selected, unconventional ones.

Bujold does many of the things that are typical of writers attempting to critique and imagine alternatives to traditional gender tropes. She presents reversals where women act in traditionally male roles and creates narratives that are focused on female characters and the life events or dilemmas typical for them. Bujold also includes more female characters in her narratives overall. Her unique contribution is in the active and unconventional ways these females interact in the narrative. Where traditionally female characters in speculative fiction are there to be explained to or to act as an emotional support or reward for the hero's actions (Attebery *Decoding* 45-46), Bujold's heroines actively contribute to solving and directing the events of the plot. They are also shown working collaboratively on equal terms with other characters, whether male or female. Instead of presenting strong women who adopt the socially validated behaviours and habits of male characters in order to gain approval and sometimes greater freedoms, Bujold engages with redefining these biased understandings of gender in both primary and secondary world societies. Heroines or strong female characters are more common in narratives nowadays, but their appearance and acceptance is often still predicated on a rejection of feminine qualities in favour of more valued masculine ones. By combining masculine roles and feminine behaviour in the same persona, Bujold challenges readers to redefine the possibilities of gendered behaviour as a whole.

Perhaps the most significant of the changes that Bujold makes to common constructions of gendered behaviour in narrative are the complexity and variability of individual adherence to or rejection of social restrictions. There are very few 'typical' characters in Bujold's works; even the lightly sketched secondary characters often demonstrate important variations from normative stereotypes. Rather than repeating patterns from the primary world and reinforcing existing patriarchal structures in the process, Bujold uses the dialectic space of the secondary world to highlight the underlying inequity of patriarchal systems. For example, the inevitable conflict between Cordelia's liberal, sexually liberated, egalitarian, humanist point of view (instilled during her

childhood on galactic Beta) and the imperial, militaristic, patriarchal, and hidebound culture on isolated Barrayar engages readers in a journey of discovery. This unconventionality even extends to her villains. While some appear as conventional, for example Ges Vorrutyer and Tien Vorsoisson, they are placed into the orbit of Bujold's unconventional protagonists. This provides Bujold with dialectic space to create a critical perspective that undermines readers' ability to dismiss the villains and their behaviour easily.

As Mendlesohn suggests, Cordelia's journey "ironizes" (Mendlesohn *Rhetorics* 67) the culture through which she moves, enabling the women around her to imitate her success in resisting these cultural forces. This externalised perspective of Cordelia's position in the narrative invites readers to explore the limiting culture of Barrayar. Cordelia even attributes this position to herself directly, noting that she should treat her capture as an opportunity for anthropological study of "the savage Barrayarans" (Bujold *Shards* 70). In both SF and Fantasy, the complexity and diversity of Bujold's characters, particularly the female ones, is rare because the ability of the writer to challenge and critique social structures is usually limited to their own ability to perceive and question their own privilege. There are unconscious binaries and hegemonic tropes in speculative fiction, just as there are in any kind of media or narrative. An effect that can be noted in Bujold's limited engagement with race and queerness, as well as in her apparently unconscious preference for middle class, educated and white social spaces. It is important to accept that not all humans are able or want to conform to social expectations, and perhaps even more that people do not have to do so in order to be valued or respected by society. This is the gift of third wave feminism and intersectionality, to recognise and value the diversity of women and the complex ways they define themselves and their relationships with their societies. Restrictions that are often coded into and reinforced by the stories we tell ourselves. There is no 'right' way to do speculation, but it is important to acknowledge the work of writers like Bujold who explore the fundamental conflict between insisting on social order through uniformity and the individual's need for self-expression and inclusion.

Bujold's writing career began during the 1980s, a period of transition between second and third wave thinking, and this context is evident in her narratives. The consciousness raising that is often identified with the second wave is evident in her bold, active female characters who rebel against the limitations and inequities of patriarchal societies. A more flexible and hybridised understanding of gender is included through Bujold's use of psychological complexity and nuanced reformulation of established gender roles. I have described four main ways in which Bujold challenges the construction of gender norms in her narratives. Firstly, there is the increased focus on female characters with a wide range of women presented to readers and a greater emphasis on feminine life events, such as pregnancy and motherhood. Female subjective points of view, psychological detail, and emotional insight are also used throughout to support and progress these narratives. Bujold also presents Reversals, a more familiar and straightforward process of replacing traditionally male characters with female ones, or masculine qualities with feminine ones, as happens with sheroes. This is shown when she depicts Drou the only female Barrayran soldier or Liss the tomboy courier rider. However, Bujold's Reversals are not typically one sided, even in her minor characters. Both Liss and Drou display qualities considered typical of their biological sex as well. These partial positions are typical of the increasingly Complex and Hybrid characters presented by Bujold, who stretches the envelope of traditional depictions of women in speculation. Subtle combinations of masculine and feminine traits are presented alongside overt resistance of conformative gender norms. Bujold creates this explicitly through dialogue and active participation in the narrative. In this way, many of the freedoms of movement, of choice, and of thought that have been the purview of male characters in speculation are redistributed to females without undermining their femininity. Not all of Bujold's women put aspects of their femininity aside, others consistently reaffirm it. Importantly, Bujold separates the traditional, conformative, and tightly bound triad of sexuality-authority-and-morality that often hampers the self-determination and autonomy of female characters. This triumvirate is present in much literature but has been particularly pervasive in speculative fiction. Overall, these changes construct a deeper reassessment

of gender as it is lived in contemporary society. Bujold presents a fundamental challenge to the socially normative bias against qualities and skills defined as feminine.

Reformulating the Norms

As the previous chapters have shown, Bujold does more than repeat these tropes, she also resists their limitations and complicates readers' understanding of gender roles through the changes she makes. The roles of Warrior, Leader, Scientist and Explorer are particularly common protagonists in SF and "intrepid explorer[s] ... spaceship captain[s] ... [and] planetary ruler[s]" (Wight 21) constitute the majority of heroic men depicted in the "planetary romance" style of Space Opera (Pringle 38). Bujold reverses of this vision of masculinity by filling the role with a woman, making it a powerful challenge to normative gender roles. Adrienne Trier-Bienek suggests that the value of studying pop culture texts lies in their "general availability" to the masses as consumable products (Trier-Bienek xiv) and I would add that this 'availability' involves more than just physical access but also the extent to which the morality and cultural values encoded in the text are accepted by the audience. Texts become widely popular when they *confirm* broadly held views and one of the fundamental actions of reformulation is to re-configure expected relationships into new and revelatory patterns without sacrificing reader interest. Attebery talks of "formulaic" and "genre" speculative fictions (Attebery "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula") having two different patterns of use by readers. Formulaic fiction relies on the enjoyment of familiar tropes and patterns of narrative that adhere to established traditions and text-forms; such as the detective story, the romance, the unchallenging speculation. While "genre" fictions use estrangement to confront readers with the unfamiliar and present challenges to reader's moral and intellectual understanding. In formulaic fictions the reader expects and values moral and behaviour patterns that *confirm* their established personal and social views, while in genre fictions readers are more open to narratives that *challenge* their world view. The character of Cordelia in Bujold's *Vorkosigan Series* is positioned carefully along this divide, simultaneously engaging with all of the aspects of masculine representation encoded in Space Opera, as well as all the feminine ones. Thus, Cordelia presents a fundamental challenge to

naturalised masculine authority in the secondary worlds, so that readers' learned cultural values can be either confirmed (if progressive) or challenged (if traditional) in the primary one.

Scope for Further Research

While there has been significant feminist consideration of SFnal texts, developing from second wave writers such as Russ, Sargent, Le Guin and other critics from the 1970s, the consideration of Fantasy texts from a feminist and cultural history perspective has not been as thorough. Alongside post-New Wave giants of the field such as Neil Gaiman and Charles de Lint from the 1980s, and more recent stars like Nora K. Jemisin and Ann Leckie, there are also Fantasy writers, such as Elizabeth Hand, Anne Bishop, and Jacqueline Carey writing radical and divergent female characters that adhere less and less to traditional tropes. Similarly, the model of Focus-Reversal-Hybridity-Complexity is readily transferred to Children's Fantasy and SF texts, both classic and contemporary. Children's literature is a fertile topic for further research as it is a method for transferring established gender expectations to a new generation of readers. This includes the works of modern authors like Neil Gaiman, Cressida Cowell. There are also a number of classic authors of children's fantasy such as Diana Wynne Jones, Joan Aiken and Susan Cooper whose use of challenging female characters within conformative contexts is another interesting site of reformulation.

There are also further avenues to pursue in discussing the works of Bujold, particularly in the consistency with which she depicts her heroic male protagonists as having significant physical or social flaws; characters such as Miles, Mark and Aral Vorkosigan, Koudelka, Bothari, and Simon Illyan in the Vorkosigan Series, as well as Cazaril, Ingrey, Arhys and Illvin in the Fantasy novels, all appear as either "characteristically damaged" or "typically wounded" as observed in the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (2nd and 3rd Ed.). I suggest that this is at least partly in order to 'make room' for more active female characters on stage, but these changes also contain significant elements of social critique of the toxic masculine hegemonies that are typical in speculative fictions. Any movement away from idealised, heroic narrative tropes of gender representation will encompass some kind of

destabilisation or impairment when compared with those heroic ideals. Bujold's ability to empathise and "humanise" (Kelso "Loud Achievements" 51) these characters for readers does much to soften the blows to male privilege that may be perceived as an attack by feminists.

Similarly, there are a number of novels outside the scope of this thesis that deserve further analysis, including the mid-series *Vorkosigan* novels focussing on Miles' interstellar adventures and later additions to the series, such as *Diplomatic Immunity*, *Captain Vorpatril's Alliance* and *Gentleman Jole and the Red Queen*, in which both Ekaterin and Cordelia continue their journeys and their resistance of gender norms. The *Penric and Desdemona Series* of novellas continues to expand and, as mentioned earlier, continues Bujold's exploration of gender as it follows the adventures of a male scholar, Penric, inhabited by a demon composed of five female souls, Desdemona¹⁹. They are also an interesting expansion of Bujold's demon magic novum as Penric is the only character depicted as having actual conversations with his demon as part of their symbiosis. Other characters in Bujold's works are able to perceive the foreign intelligence and access the sorcerous power of the demon (and occasionally the demon ascends and speaks through them). However, mutual accommodation such as Penric and Desdemona share is unique in the novels. Bujold has presented a range of hybrid reformulations in her narratives, but the intimacy of a shared consciousness and body with both genders is a new and interesting expansion of this exploration.

Bujold's ongoing exploration of hybrid, complexly gendered characters in the *Penric* novellas is further evidence of her significance in speculative fiction as she continues to develop her ideas over a long and prestigious career. Increasing academic interest in Bujold's work over the last few years, and the ongoing attention and recognition generated by the high profile awards she continues to receive, are important aspects of recognising and valuing her challenging and insightful works. Bujold's narratives create reform through the recombination of existing habits and features of

¹⁹ Penric's Demon" (2015), "Penric and the Shaman" (2016), "Penric's Mission" (2016), "Mira's Last Dance" (2017), "Penric's Fox" (2017), and the "The Prisoner of Limnos" (2017).

speculative writing into new patterns that focus on female characters and validate their subjective experience of the worlds they move through. Bujold uses extrapolation to imagine alternative solutions for the problems faced by women in patriarchal societies and estrangement to reveal naturalised gender norms to readers. This enables her to extend the potential of speculation to critique dominant socio-cultural ideals. Identification of naturalised values is a key step in challenging and modifying the lived experience of women, in both narrative and the primary world. Bujold's use of 'outsider' characters allows her to explore the social and individual impact of gender. My hope is that this thesis will make an important contribution to the critical conversation, not only about Bujold but also about the depiction of female characters in speculative fiction of all kinds.

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Appendix 1

This is a simple collection of the verbs used to describe the main character, Cordelia Naismith Vorkosigan, used in the first pages of the first novel, *Shards of Honor*. These are collated in order to show their active tone and the preoccupation with vision and perception used by Bujold. These descriptive verbs contribute to the creation of agency for a key female character.

Table layout is simply for ease of reading.

Page 3	4	5	6	7	8	9
glanced	gazed	ratcheted	drew	hooked	found	occasionally imagined
adjusted	entranced	reflected	[breath] inward	dragged	began	sat back
continuing	strolled	supressed	turned	found	breathed	stared
pushed	wishing	gaped	closed	pulled	reminded her sharply	caught her eye
clawing	jarred	she saw	searched	recognised sadly	cut in on him	started to her feet
	murmured	collared	probed	wrenched	demanded	moving
	studied it intently	ordered	cradled	take it		heard
	keyed	walked	stroking	said		pitched backward
	spoke	struggled (to account for)	returned	crouching		struck something
	called again	miserably conscious	began to search	made quickly		darkness swallowed her
	try yours, she said	poked	snapped	shook her head		
	ordered	grimly	hissed	knelt		
	struggled	found it	crawled	to try		
	plunged		carefully considered			
			whispered			
			poked tentatively			