

# Heroines' Journeys: An Analysis of the Potential Power of Tamora Pierce's Fantasy Novels for Women's Growth and Development

## The Need for Heroines

When Tamora Pierce was in seventh grade, her English teacher introduced her to J. R. R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy. As a result, Pierce writes,

I got hooked on fantasy, and then on science fiction, and both made their way into my stories. I tried to write the kind of thing I was reading, with one difference: the books I loved were missing teenaged girl warriors. I couldn't understand this lapse of attention on the part of the writers I loved, so until I could talk them into correcting this small problem, I wrote about those girls, the fearless, bold, athletic creatures that I was not, but wanted so badly to be.<sup>1</sup>

Born in 1954, Pierce would have begun her love affair with reading and writing fantasy literature in the late 1960s. Growing up in the '70s and '80s, I also searched for books to read that had strong female protagonists. They were not easy to find. Pierce has noted that, even today, female heroes, what she calls "sheroes," are rare in children's and young adult literature.<sup>2</sup> In addition, reading professor Alice Feret has found that the literacy materials available in public school classrooms frequently portray girls and women in stereotypical ways as focused on domestic life, passive, dependent, obedient, and conforming.<sup>3</sup> School textbooks continue to marginalize the historical impact of women. Furthermore, within many religious traditions, one has to undertake a treasure hunt in order to find females who are more than peripheral characters in stories, females who are protagonists and determiners of their own life histories.

These observations point to the continuing need for girls and young women to have strong, independent, yet relational, role models they can emulate. They require "sheroes" or heroines. They desire female characters in fiction and real life who exemplify a variety of positive paths one can take: women who can show them that they do not have to be "America's Next Top Model" to be beautiful, poised, and elegant; women who act with courage, integrity, and strength; women who demonstrate that attractiveness is not about "flaunting their stuff," but about allowing their true lights to shine; and women who reveal through their lives that success is about following one's heart and realizing one's true potential. Exposure to the journeys of various heroines can help young women, and older ones as well, undertake and embrace their own heroic (or "sheroic") journeys.

## The Empowering Guidance of Fantasy Literature

According to Joseph Campbell, myths and rituals throughout time and cultures have served the role of guiding persons to full human maturity. The hero's journey, in its various forms in stories from all human groups, is, metaphorically, a journey all persons are called to

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<sup>1</sup> Tamora Pierce, "Tamora Pierce Biography Pages," <http://www.tamora-pierce.com/bio.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> "Profile: Tamora Pierce and Her Books Written for Young Girls," host Scott Simon, with Margot Adler and Tamora Pierce, NPR, *Weekend Edition Saturday*, Dec. 20, 2003. Literature Resource Center, via County of Los Angeles Public Library, <http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itweb/down54663?db=LitRC>. In terms of literature, "young adult" books are those that are considered appropriate for youth approximately 12-18 years of age.

<sup>3</sup> Alice J. Feret, "Mothers and Daughters: Using Books to Strengthen Connections," *Illinois Reading Council Journal* 35, no. 4 (fall 2007): 29.

take. However, the social units that once served as the vessels for the meanings portrayed by myths and epic tales no longer exist in many parts of the world. Campbell writes:

Then, all meaning was in the group . . . today no meaning is in the group . . . all is in the individual. But there the meaning is absolutely unconscious. One does not know toward what one moves. . . . The lines of communication between the conscious and the unconscious zones of the human psyche have all been cut, and we have been split in two.<sup>4</sup>

The modern emphasis on rationality has also led to the deterioration of the guiding power of mythic and religious symbols and spiritual exercises for many people. Fantasies, though, bridge the conscious with the unconscious. Fantasy literature can be a source of meaning-making for today's young people, answering their questions, meeting their deep needs, and ultimately leading them toward mature adulthood.

Contemporary fantasy novels, like the mythologies of long ago, depict outward journeys that symbolize the inner journeys of human beings. In such stories, heroes and heroines overcome monsters and other forms of resistance; they bring back to life or revitalize magical creatures and powers that have been forsaken or long lost and forgotten. These are tasks we undertake psychologically as we live our lives in the "real world." We fight various types of "monsters," face obstacles, rediscover gifts and abilities, and revive repressed energies. Thus, fantasy literature provides tales of meaningful struggle and achievement that symbolize real life battles and successes. According to Bruno Bettelheim, the unrealistic nature of fantasy focuses individuals on their inner processes rather than on the external world.<sup>5</sup> Through identification with fantasy characters, readers encounter psychological challenges and victories and are equipped to engage and celebrate them in their own lives.

Fantasy allows persons to enter another world, which, while not like the real world, bears semblances of it. The distance provided by imaginary worlds and characters makes it easier for individuals to work through their parallel emotional, psychological, and relational issues. When a reader's difficulty or strong emotion is given form by characters' experiences, her or his unconscious makes the connections and starts working out the issue vicariously through the events of the story. Fantasy surfaces readers' fears and desires but also offers them pathways for integrating these elements into who they are. Relationship struggles in imaginary stories provide a framework for or elicit reflection on relationships in readers' own lives. Fantasy, then, engages readers' psyches at a deep inner level, and it can prepare readers to face their outer worlds and deal with real life issues.

A key point for this essay is Pierce's assertion that "fantasy, more than any other genre, is a literature of empowerment."<sup>6</sup> This may be in part due to the fact that it is a literature of possibilities. "It opens the door to the realm of 'What If,' challenging readers to see beyond the concrete universe and to envision other ways of living and alternative mindsets."<sup>7</sup> The images, metaphors, and symbols of fantasy can be used to play around with possibilities in real life. Nothing is immutable. Through fantasy, readers are given the tools and the impetus to challenge the way things are in the real world. They come to know that "willpower and work are

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: MJF Books, 1949), 388.

<sup>5</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1989), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Tamora Pierce, "Fantasy: Why Kids Read It, Why Kids Need It," *School Library Journal*, Oct. 1993, 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

formidable forces, wherever they are applied.”<sup>8</sup> But even if one is strong, one will be challenged. Fantasy teaches people that, like the characters they vicariously journey with through trials, mishaps, and victories, they can survive adversity and have joyful, rewarding lives. It is a literary genre that elicits hope and optimism in its readers.

### The Value of Tamora Pierce’s Fantasy Novels

As I pointed out previously, young women today need and are looking for exemplary female characters whom they can emulate. Despite the value of fantasy for young people’s growth and development, most fantasy literature portrays males in the primary heroic roles. Pierce’s novels step into this void by providing stories of “girls having adventures and girls kicking butt” (her own words).<sup>9</sup> Her heroines are strong, female characters who frequently have to make difficult ethical decisions about how to use their power. They may “kick butt,” but they also find that they do not feel good about doing it. Their first experiences with killing other persons or human-like beings are often followed by vomiting. Therefore, killing becomes for them a last resort. When they beat a man in a sword fight or get the better of another being through the use of their magical powers and gifts, they do not flaunt it or walk away elated. To them, it is just something they had to do in order to stay on the side of what they feel is right.

While Pierce’s heroines are strong and independent, they are also females with normal human flaws, fears, and desires. They muddle through the pitfalls and complexities of human relationships and discover the joy and fulfillment of loyalty and commitment. They struggle to learn what they can do and what they are called to do. They are also outsiders who find or create their own unique place in the world and affect history by living out who they are. In sum, they are characters with whom many girls and women can relate.

To demonstrate the value of Pierce’s novels, I am going to focus on the story of the first heroine she created and developed, Alanna the Lioness. I will begin by considering how Alanna undergoes the mythical hero’s journey as described by Joseph Campbell. With that as a foundation, I will then draw upon the work of Maureen Murdock to suggest ways in which Alanna’s story is a distinctly feminine or “heroine’s” journey. Finally, I will offer the model of mother-daughter book clubs as a way in which religious educators can utilize Pierce’s novels to encourage and facilitate women’s growth and development.

### Alanna the Lioness

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell describes the basic pattern of what he calls the “adventure of the hero,” which he has distilled from the myths, fairy tales, and folktales of numerous cultures across time. The adventure has three major stages: departure or separation, initiation, and return. The departure phase typically entails a “call to adventure,” some sort of supernatural helper and/or aid, and the crossing of a threshold into another world. Once in this other world, the hero encounters various tests and helpful forces, eventually undergoing a supreme ordeal and gaining his or her reward. Finally, the hero has to return to the world of humanity, bringing with him or her the boon gained in the other world, which promises to renew or restore the hero’s community, nation, or entire world.

According to Campbell, it is possible for a hero’s tale to be a series of independent cycles of the hero’s journey strung together.<sup>10</sup> This appears to be the case with Pierce’s “Song of the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>9</sup> “Profile.”

<sup>10</sup> Campbell, 246.

Lioness” quartet, which began as a single book, but which she later edited and revised so it could be published as four separate volumes. Each volume depicts one round of the hero’s journey, with the last book in the quartet depicting Alanna’s ultimate ordeals and supreme rewards.

The story begins in *Alanna: The First Adventure*. Alanna and her twin brother Thom have just found out that their father is sending them to the places they least want to go: Alanna to the convent, where she will be taught how to be a proper noble lady, and Thom to the palace, where he will be trained to be a knight. It quickly occurs to Alanna that, ideally, they should switch places, because Thom, an aspiring sorcerer, can learn magic at the convent, while Alanna can put to use her fighting skills by becoming a knight. This is Alanna’s first call to adventure, although the reward of knighthood will not be gained until the end of the second volume in the series.

The switch requires the collaboration of the village healer, Maude, who has been secretly teaching them to use their magical Gift against their father’s wishes and who is supposed to take Alanna to the convent. Maude, seeking guidance, creates the conditions through which Alanna has a vision of the Black City – her call to adventure for this volume. Maude also serves as Alanna’s first helper, giving her a warning and a piece of supernatural wisdom to guide her through all her journeys: ““Think before you fight. Think on who you’re fighting, if only because one day you must meet your match. And if you want to pay for those lives you do take, use your healing magic. Use it all you can, or you won’t cleanse your soul of death for centuries. It’s harder to heal than it is to kill. The Mother knows why, but you’ve a gift for both.”<sup>11</sup>

The first threshold Alanna has to pass on her way to knighthood is Coram, the sergeant-at-arms of her father’s castle who has been teaching her and Thom the basics of the warrior’s craft and who will act as her manservant while she is a page. Alanna has begun to convince him to continue on to the palace after finding out she is not Thom when a wood-snake crosses his path. The snake is a typical threshold guardian. It is Alanna’s quick action that saves Coram from being thrown from his horse and convinces him she is the better candidate for a knight’s training.

During her training and education as a page, Alanna experiences various trials and gains several allies, including Prince Jonathan; George, the King of the Thieves; and Myles, a gentle, wise knight and teacher. Maude’s words come back to haunt Alanna when the Sweating Sickness takes a friend’s life. She jumps into action when the Prince’s life is threatened, finally calling on her Gift to heal him and save him from death. During this ordeal, she again sees a vision of the Black City, and it calls to her. She also hears the voice of the Mother Goddess guiding her.

Another trial begins with Alanna opening a door no one else could. Behind it she finds a sword containing old magic. Before she can leave the room with the sword, she is threatened with death by its guardian powers. When she lets go and accepts her own death (a fear that she needs to transcend), the sword, later named Lightning, saves her. This will be only the first time that Lightning serves as a magical aid to save Alanna from death or destruction. The next time will be in the Black City, where she has to fight gods who for centuries have been calling the youth of the Bazhir tribes to them, so they can feed off the life in them. During her encounter with these gods, she is stripped bare, and Jonathan finds out she is a girl. This is symbolic of the shattering of the ego, the outer mask. By defeating these gods, Alanna and Jonathan become legendary heroes to the Bazhir, but the significance of this is not realized until the third novel in the quartet. At this time, the boon that Alanna receives is Jonathan’s request for her to be his squire, despite his new knowledge of her true identity.

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<sup>11</sup> Tamora Pierce, *Alanna: The First Adventure* (New York: Macmillan, Atheneum, 1983), 11-12.

*In the Hand of the Goddess* begins with a more typical call-to-adventure scene. One night while traveling, Alanna, who hates to be wet or cold, gets caught in a storm. With her horse, Midnight, she seeks shelter under a large tree on top of a hill, a symbol of the World Navel. The first herald to appear is a “dark, loathly, [and] terrifying” wood-spider.<sup>12</sup> Next, a skinny, wet, black male kitten with purple eyes like her own comes to her, another representative of the unknown and undeveloped elements of the unconscious. Finally, a tall, hooded, mysterious stranger, whose voice reminds Alanna of “a pack of hounds belling in the hunt,” arrives. She is the Great Mother Goddess, and she sets up the tasks for this book. Alanna must accept and deal with three fears: the Ordeal of Knighthood; love; and Duke Roger, a powerful sorcerer and the prince’s uncle, who seeks to kill him and his parents in order to gain the throne. The Goddess gives Alanna an amulet, an ember-stone, with yet unknown magic, and she tells the kitten to guard her. The kitten, Faithful, comes to save her more than once.

The initiatory trials Alanna must face in this novel revolve around these three fears. She has to prove herself as a warrior, while also battling through and surviving the tests that Roger’s magic and power put in her path. In the midst of this, Myles becomes more of a father figure to her; she rejects George’s proposal of marriage, but grows in her feelings of love for him as a friend; and she enters into a sexual relationship with Jonathan, eventually declaring her love for him. When she enters the dark, bare, windowless Chamber of the Ordeal, she is tested with all her fears: cold, helplessness against death, spiders, drowning, and a victorious Roger. The last vision gives her the insight (boon) she needs to uncover Roger’s scheme. After recovering from the Ordeal, she is knighted and then finds herself in a sword-fight with Roger. The ember-stone comes to her aid, helping Alanna defeat and kill Roger. During the battle, the last of her ego-defenses (her special corset) are stripped away, and everyone is able to see that she is a woman.

Alanna achieves her goal of knighthood, but she feels that she will not be accepted in this role. She heads to the desert to sort through her feelings about killing Roger, her role as a lady knight, and what she wants to do with her life. *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man* picks up here, with her capture by a Bazhir tribe and her new call to adventure: to convince this tribe to change its traditions and accept new things, particularly females as shamans. She also must continue to respond to two calls heralded in the first volume of the series, which are to accept her own magical power and herself as a female with feminine qualities. The trials here include taking on the role of the tribe’s shaman; training young apprentices and fighting for them to be accepted by the tribe; learning to weave; and using her willpower to overcome and control the evil contained in a sword that is suggestively imbued with Roger’s magic. In addition, she struggles with her inclination to turn down Jonathan’s proposal of marriage, yet it takes a fight in which Jonathan accuses her of not being womanly to make her decision definite. Still hurting from the fight, Alanna pays a visit to George and they become lovers.

When George leaves Alanna to take care of some of his own business, she returns to the Bazhir. She is soon sent to rescue a sorceress who tells her how to mend Lightning, which was broken at the beginning of the book. This entails a reunion of opposites, of good and evil: Lightning has to be joined with Roger’s sword through Alanna fully claiming and using her Gift. That is, Alanna has to embrace the sorceress within her in order to be a powerful knight. Before dying, the rescued sorceress also gives Alanna an envelope. At the beginning of *Lioness Rampant*, the reader learns that this envelope holds what is a new call to adventure: a map to the Roof of the World and directions to the Dominion Jewel. The Goddess also appears early on in

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<sup>12</sup> Campbell, 53.

this volume, through a dense fog, to give Alanna a call to an inner adventure, which is to answer the question, “Who will you be?”<sup>13</sup>

Alanna explores who she is and who she wants to be throughout this book. She enters a relationship of mutual attraction with Liam, a martial arts-type warrior, which is doomed from the beginning because of his fear of the Gift. She learns to care for a baby and develops a relationship with a woman her own age, a princess who seems to be a perfect match for Jonathan. She also misses George and wonders what she will do once she finds the Jewel and presents it to Jonathan for his use.

To obtain the Jewel, Alanna journeys alone through a blizzard to a cave on the highest mountain in the world – the World Navel and womb of the Universal Mother. There she meets an “elemental,” a being older than the gods, who appears to her in the form of an ape. She fights him, and when he could have killed her, she finds that he is merciful. This bears a resemblance to Campbell’s “atonement with the father.” The creature willingly gives Alanna the Jewel, having found her worthy of it. Injured and depleted of physical and magical energy, she then passes out and has to be rescued from the cave by others.

Returning to the capital city, Alanna learns that her dreams have been telling her what has been going on there. Her brother, a great sorcerer, has brought Roger back from the dead, and Jonathan’s parents have died, making him king. On the day of Jonathan’s coronation, Roger threatens to destroy the kingdom through a massive earthquake. With the combined powers of the Dominion Jewel, his Gift, and Alanna’s Gift, Jonathan is able to bind the earth. But Alanna has to face Roger alone, without any magical power. He calls his former sword to him, but Alanna hangs on to it; it is partly her sword. Her knowledge of her enemy tells her that he expects her to fight, so she stops fighting and lets go of the sword. It zooms toward Roger and kills him a second and final time. Having conquered this embodiment of death by letting go, Alanna is now free to live, which is another aspect of Campbell’s “return.”

Alanna once again retreats to her Bazhir tribe to think; it is the place where she once felt she could be herself. George comes to her there, and she negotiates a marriage agreement with him. This is not quite the same as Campbell’s idea of the mystical marriage, although George is a “hero” who is able to accept the Goddess/Woman/Alanna for who she is, with tenderness and respect.<sup>14</sup> By marrying George, Alanna chooses a life where she can be both knight and wife, masculine warrior and feminine mother. In herself, she has unified male and female and become “master” of these two worlds. Her whole Self has emerged.

According to Maureen Murdock, women’s quest today is to “fully embrace their feminine nature, learning how to value themselves as women and to heal the deep wound of the feminine.”<sup>15</sup> While based on Campbell’s model of the hero’s journey, Murdock’s “heroine’s journey” is also informed by hers and other women’s experiences. Although Pierce consciously drew on Campbell’s model, I think she unconsciously made Alanna’s adventure a heroine’s as well as a hero’s journey.<sup>16</sup>

Murdock’s cycle begins with a “separation from the feminine” and an “identification with the masculine and gathering of allies.” Alanna’s mother died in childbirth, so the primary female

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<sup>13</sup> Tamora Pierce, *Lioness Rampant* (New York: Random House, 1997), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, 116.

<sup>15</sup> Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine’s Journey: Women’s Quest for Wholeness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), 3.

<sup>16</sup> In a moderated conversation with Philip Pullman and Christopher Paolini in 2003, Pierce shared that she intentionally used the hero’s journey as a model when she began writing fantasy novels. *Alanna: The First Adventure* was her first published novel. Powell’s Books, “Philip Pullman, Tamora Pierce, and Christopher Paolini Talk Fantasy Fiction,” host Dave Weich, July 31, 2003, <http://www.powells.com/authors/pierce.html>.

character in her childhood was Maude, the village healer. She first separates herself from the feminine by resisting Maude's attempts to teach her to use her magical Gift. Then she disguises herself as a boy and enters the male world of training to be a knight, where she attracts to herself male allies. When she begins developing breasts, she binds them so she can continue her ruse of being male. Her separation from females creates a dilemma when she begins menstruating and does not know that this is what is happening to her. Fortunately, she is able to go to George Cooper, who introduces her to his mother, a healer and former priestess of the Great Mother Goddess. Yet she still is not willing to embrace being a woman, and she definitely does not want to have children, so she accepts a birth control charm from Mistress Cooper.

The "road of trials" is as much about meeting inner dragons and ogres as outer. Like many women, Alanna feels that she has to be perfect and prove herself better than the men in her world in order to overcome a sense of female inferiority. She fears being rejected because of who she is and worries that she does not deserve success because of her deception. Yet she also discovers her strengths and abilities while learning to overcome her fears and weaknesses.

Alanna finds the "boon of success" when she becomes a knight and kills Roger, but with those achievements under her belt, her thirst for knightly adventures is diminished. The way before her is not clear, and she feels bad about killing her greatest enemy. Her taking up residence in the desert symbolizes a heroine's "awakening to feelings of spiritual aridity." These feelings are connected to a sense of something missing, of loneliness, dryness, and desolation. What has been lost is a deep relationship with one's own feminine nature, with one's intuition and bodily wisdom. Alanna's "initiation and descent to the Goddess" takes the form of living with an isolated tribe, where she learns to listen to herself and just be. Her experiences with the evil sword and other people compel her to face her shadow side and uncover hidden dimensions of herself. At various points along her life's path, she encounters death and meets the "Dark God" (not Murdock's "dark goddess"). Each time she has to acknowledge that she has a Gift she must use, and she develops a greater sense of her self and her strength.

Alanna's "urgent yearning to reconnect with the feminine" is first witnessed when she asks Mistress Cooper to teach her how to dress like a girl (while still continuing to pretend to be a male squire). She really begins to reconnect with the depths of her feminine side when she embraces her Gift and takes on the role of tribal shaman. She even becomes a founder of a Bazhir school for magic and asks one of her female apprentices to teach her how to weave. In these ways, along with claiming her sexuality, she heals "the mother/daughter split." Murdock claims that some women heal this split by taking on mothering roles. Alanna's mothering roles include empowering her female apprentices, teaching boys how to fight with a sword, and learning how to diaper and feed a rescued baby.

Once the mother/daughter split is healed, the "wounded masculine" also needs to be healed. This is the destructive, critical, controlling side of ourselves, a side that also says, "I'm tough and strong; I don't need any help; I can make it on my own."<sup>17</sup> Liam, the Shang warrior, is the symbol of this part of Alanna's journey. He is an unbalanced male, a self-sufficient individual who fears that which he cannot control: magic. This means that he also fears Alanna's feminine side; it is her warrior qualities that attract him. But she has learned to be interdependent and is able to accept his assistance as well as others'. She has integrated her masculine skills and abilities with her feminine wisdom and Gift. Therefore, she is able to recognize that she cannot form a long-lasting relationship with Liam. Rather, she will heal her wounded masculine by forming a relationship with her "Man with Heart," the positive inner masculine symbolized by

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<sup>17</sup> Murdock, 159.

George, who is caring, strong, patient, sexual, stable, and unafraid of intimacy and commitment. He does not try to control Alanna, but allows her to take her time to find her way in life, which eventually leads back to him. By marrying him, she forms a community of equals. This is the “integration of masculine and feminine,” the last stage of the heroine’s journey, yet a process that is ongoing. In her marriage with George, Alanna will have to learn how to balance a career as the king’s “Champion” with being a wife and mother, while George will be serving the king as a master spy. However, she has already learned much about the art of balance. She knows when she is overextending herself, and she has learned to love and accept herself for who she is. She is also not afraid to challenge those with power and prestige, and she has developed the skills and sensibilities to fight for justice.

### Mother-Daughter Book Clubs

Mothers’ relationships with their daughters are important for the formation of their identities and sense of self. Mother-daughter book clubs provide a venue for mothers and daughters to spend time together and to engage in conversation around the shared experience of reading a particular novel. Through these conversations, in which mothers listen more than they talk, girls receive the powerful message that their thoughts and experiences are important. They build self-confidence and develop critical thinking skills. The safe environment of the book club becomes a place where mothers and daughters can talk about values and life issues, often before they arise in the daughter’s life.

Shireen Dodson offers a guide to forming such clubs in her book, *The Mother-Daughter Book Club*. Any time before girls enter high school and get busy with school and extracurricular activities seems to work best for such clubs, so I would recommend reading Pierce’s books with seventh or eighth grade girls. The group should decide the meeting times; about once a month for one to one-and-a-half hours is recommended. Dodson suggests that the participants take turns hosting the meetings (which includes providing food), and that the girls rotate the responsibility of facilitating the discussion. This keeps the conversations focused around their needs and interests. However, an educator may set an example for the girls by guiding the discussion during the first meeting with open-ended questions such as, “Did you like the book? Why or why not? What was your favorite part? Were you reminded of similar experiences in your life?”

Mothers may reflect on how their life experiences are reflected in the novel under discussion, but they should refrain from preaching to their daughters and imposing meanings on them. Rather, the daughters ought to be encouraged to express their opinions and ideas freely. Fantasy in particular can be trusted to help children develop the inner resources necessary to cope with the vagaries of their lives.

### Conclusion

As a heroic journey, Alanna’s story charts a course of human development toward integrated wholeness. Readers of her story are challenged to engage in their own adventures of growth toward individuation. Specifically, Alanna’s journey is one that can encourage girls, and maybe their mothers as well, to be courageous, take the initiative in their lives, and allow their instincts and deep desires to guide them in making decisions.

Mother-daughter book clubs are a setting in which both girls and adult women can explore the nature of their own sheroic journeys in dialogue with Tamora Pierce’s heroines and their adventures. As Feret notes, “Reading about adventurous female characters within an all girls’ book club allows participants to consider their untapped potential in a safe, nurturing



environment.”<sup>18</sup> Religious educators can be the helpers and guides in these processes by facilitating the formation and process of book discussion groups. Thus, the “divine creative and redemptive image” symbolized by the hero or heroine and resident within all of us can be known and brought to life.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Feret, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Campbell, 39.