

Summer 2021

## Cultures and Colonization in Tamora Pierce's Young Adult Novels

Jessica R. Dube

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dube, Jessica R., "Cultures and Colonization in Tamora Pierce's Young Adult Novels" (2021). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 2270.  
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/2270>

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies at Georgia Southern Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Georgia Southern Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu).

# CULTURES AND COLONIZATION IN TAMORA PIERCE'S YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

by

JESSICA DUBE

Under the Direction of Caren Town

## ABSTRACT

The content represented in young adult literature can be a shaping force for adolescents as they begin to understand more about themselves and the world around them. Fantasy fiction is especially powerful, as it allows readers to consider issues outside of their own experiences and learn through the characters of a fictional world. This thesis focuses specifically on the works of Tamora Pierce, and the ways in which she represents sociopolitical issues in her fictional world of Tortall. I analyze the ways in which Pierce's works fulfill Landt's standards of good multicultural literature, and how the representation she presents can educate readers in the real world. From Keladry of the *Protector of the Small* quartet, adolescent readers can learn to appreciate the value of cultures outside of their own. Pierce also deals with complex problems, such as slavery and colonization, and puts significant effort towards making her world respectful of enslaved and indigenous populations. Both Daine, of the *Wild Magic* quartet, and Beka, of the *Beka Cooper* trilogy, encounter slaves in their lines of work and endeavor to treat them as equals, setting a mold for readers on respect for others. While some of her characters from early novels, such as *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*, fit the trope of white savior, Pierce's more recent publications in the *Trickster* Duology work to break the stereotype of the white savior and provide a model for readers to follow as they approach issues surrounding indigenous groups in their own world. In addition to the value of these novels to individual readers, Pierce's work has potential as a tool of pedagogy, and can be used in the classroom to structure discussions of

sociopolitical issues in ways that allow young adult readers to engage with the texts and the wide variety of ideas they present.

INDEX WORDS: Tamora Pierce, Colonization, Culture, Indigenous populations, Young adult literature, Susan Landt, Multicultural literature, Race, Fantasy fiction

CULTURES AND COLONIZATION IN TAMORA PIERCE'S YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

by

JESSICA DUBE

B.A., Georgia Southern University, 2019

M.A., Georgia Southern University, 2021

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

© 2021

JESSICA DUBE

All Rights Reserved

CULTURES AND COLONIZATION IN TAMORA PIERCE'S YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

by

JESSICA DUBE

Major Professor:	Caren Town
Committee:	Sarah McCarroll
	Carol Jamison

Electronic Version Approved:  
July 2021

## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to everyone who encouraged me in my exploration of literature, particularly of Tamora Pierce's novels. To the librarian who helped me reserve her books from other branches so I could read them. To the used bookstore owner who printed out a list of every Tamora Pierce book as a checklist I could hang on the wall of my childhood bedroom, and let me know each time she got in a copy of something I didn't have yet. To the coach who let me walk around the track in high school PE with my copy of *Mastiff* the day it was released. To my mom, who encouraged me to read Tamora Pierce books out loud on road trips, and talked about them with me when no one else did. I also want to dedicate my work to Dr. Sarah McCarroll for encouraging me when I first thought about graduate school, as this never would have been written without that first step.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my mother, Marlo Dube, for reading even the roughest version of my writing and providing encouragement to explore my ideas. I also deeply appreciate the assistance of Dr. Caren Town in developing this thesis into what it has become, and for telling me that Tamora Pierce is worth exploring, even as I struggled to find scholarship on her works. I want to thank Dr. Carol Jamison for her support in my thesis work and willingness to adjust my timeline. Last but not least, to my fiancé, Peyton Bowker, who, along with my roommates and friends, never stopped pushing me to do my best work.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	3
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	5
2 MULTICULTURALISM.....	10
3 SLAVERY.....	16
4 COLONIZATION AND INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS.....	24
5 <i>TRICKSTER</i> DUOLOGY.....	31
6 CONCLUSION.....	38
WORKS CITED.....	41

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

While it can provide an escape from the mundanity of modern life, the themes present in fantasy literature can also reflect issues in the real world. The way in which topics are addressed in a fantasy setting influences the reader's perception of issues in their own world, and how they approach a solution. In his article "Why We Need Dragons: The Progressive Potential of Fantasy," Daniel Baker acknowledges the "potential for progressive socio-political representation" of fantasy literature (Baker 437). Fantasy allows readers to expand their horizons by considering problems that have only a tangential or metaphorical connection to real life. By understanding how the characters of the fantasy world deal with their issues, readers indirectly learn how to approach problems such as interpersonal conflicts, moral dilemmas, and big picture questions in their own reality. similar problems in their own reality.

Readers of young adult literature (YAL) can be particularly open to such influences, as adolescents are still in the process of developing their awareness of themselves, let alone of global matters. Young adults are continually redefining their sense of social identity, and exposure to real and imaginary worlds through literature can have a positive impact on the development of their global understanding and critical thought. In this thesis, I argue that Tamora Pierce's novels across her many series approach topics that are relevant to young adult experiences and provide her readers opportunities for awareness and understanding of themselves and the world around them. The diversity of languages, social and political structures, and character backgrounds in her novels also teaches empathy to young readers who may not have had previous exposure to other cultures and customs.

Pierce, with 18 novels set in her medieval fantasy realm, creates diverse countries with detailed histories and cultures. Readers learn more about each of these countries, their histories, and their issues, through the adventures of Pierce's protagonists. Nearly all of Pierce's main characters are female, which is discussed by other scholars<sup>1</sup>, but that is not the sole point of interest in her novels. Complex sociopolitical issues play major roles in her works, and an understanding of problems in this fictional realm helps readers consider the implications of similar issues in their worlds. While Pierce touches on a number of topics, including prejudice against LGBT+ individuals, sexism in education, bullying, and death of loved ones, I will be focusing on the racial and ethnic diversity in her novels, as well as discussions surrounding slavery, colonialization, and the treatment of indigenous populations.

Many of Pierce's series have the same premise: a young woman, aged 10 – 17, must overcome an obstacle to her own success and that of those close to her. For Alanna, the subject of Pierce's first novel *Alanna: The First Adventure* (1983), that obstacle is the law against women training for knighthood, and she is forced to disguise her sex to achieve her goal of becoming a knight of the realm. Years later, in the *Trickster* duology (2003 – 2004), Alanna's daughter Aly is pitted against her parents, as she wants to employ herself in the dangerous field of spy work and is offered an opportunity to prove her skills. Keladry, the subject of the *Protector of the Small* quartet (1999 – 2002), is the first girl to openly enter training to become a knight after Alanna worked to remove the legislation against female knights, and she faces intense hazing by her all-male peers. Daine, of Pierce's *Wild Magic* quartet, had to flee from her home after her family was killed by raiders, and found a new home with scholars and fighters in

---

<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Dawn Day's "*Girls Who Kick Butt*": *A cognitive Interpretation of Tamora Pierce's Adolescent Feminist Fantasy* and Leah Phillips' "Real Women Aren't Shiny (Or Plastic): The Adolescent Female Body in YA Fantasy" both provide comprehensive discussions of Pierce's young women.

the capital city who teach her to harness her unique powers. Beka, in the *Beka Cooper* trilogy set nearly two centuries before Alanna's, trains as law enforcement to punish criminals who targeted her family when she was young and living in poverty. In addition to these works, Pierce continues to write and publish new installments to her universe with her most recent publication of *Tempest and Slaughter* in 2018.

Pierce's diverse cast of characters has continued to grow with each new publication, and in a 2017 interview with the blog io9, she acknowledged that inclusion is a conscious effort, for the sake of her readers and her world: "It matters to me [readers] are able to see themselves. That they don't feel outcasted in any way. And it benefits the world. It makes the world feel more real. To have people of all kinds in it." For Pierce, diversity goes far beyond skin color; her characters inhabit a variety of cultural backgrounds, education levels, and socioeconomic conditions, all of which influence their relationships with one another. In this thesis, I will be looking at Pierce's works in terms of their multiculturalism, their treatment of people and traditions deemed as other, and their exploration of postcolonial issues, with a particular focus on the treatment of indigenous groups.

In my first chapter, I discuss multiculturalism, and address the ways in which standards of positive representation can be applied to works of fiction, along with what readers can learn from fictional stories. Additionally, I focus on empathy, a developmental skill that children learn through their own experiences as well as through the experiences of others. Focusing primarily on Pierce's *Protector of the Small* quartet, I argue that the protagonist, Keladry, can teach young readers how to understand and embrace cultural differences between themselves and their peers. The first chapter also introduces Susan Landt, whose work on standards for multicultural literature I continue to reference throughout the thesis.

My second chapter presents the politics that frequently come into play in Pierce's universe, and the sociopolitical issues that she addresses. I largely focus on slavery, drawing from both the *Beka Cooper* trilogy and *Wild Magic* quartet. Through discussion of the *Beka Cooper* novels, I also touch on the importance of first-person narration in young adult literature, bringing in Amanda Thein and Mark Sulzer's work on the Narrator/Narratee/Implied Reader Triangle and Mike Cadden's discussion of double-voicedness. Beginning in this chapter, I present a counter-argument to Roberta Trites and the idea of the power that is held by adolescents in literature. Both Beka and Daine, the protagonists of their respective novels, are invested in bringing about an end to slavery, and are, to different degrees, able to achieve their goals. They can teach young adult readers to care about the struggles of others and show them that they too can have the power to make a change for the better in their world.

In my third chapter, I introduce the topic of colonization, one that Pierce has repeatedly addressed in her works. I discuss the ways in which Pierce falls short on a well-rounded representation of a colonized population with the Bazhir, an indigenous group featured largely in the third installment of the *Song of the Lioness* quartet, as two main protagonists of the novel serve as white saviors to the indigenous people. Here, I engage with the work of Sarah Sahn, who has also written directly about the time that Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* protagonist Alanna spent with the Bloody Hawk tribe of the Bazhir. While there are problematic issues in her first published series, I argue that readers can still learn from the experiences of Alanna, and that Pierce has worked to improve her representation of indigenous populations through her later *Trickster* duology.

The fourth and final chapter ties together the previous subjects with an in-depth discussion of the *Trickster* duology (*Trickster's Choice* 2003 and *Trickster's Queen* 2004),

addressing the aspects of multiculturalism, slavery, and indigenous populations that make up a large part of this series. I argue that Aly, the protagonist of this duology, subverts the trope of white savior while she assists in the plans of the indigenous raka to reclaim their native Isles. I also present a counter to Trites in the form of the young queen who serves as the head of the raka's attempt to regain rulership of their lands from colonizers who invaded nearly two centuries before. Through Aly, young readers can learn to support indigenous populations against unfair treatment while allowing those who have been victimized to take the lead in actions. This duology also sets up the structure for readers to question the relationship of indigenous vs colonizers in their own world, and to understand nuanced representation.

In the conclusion, I discuss the potential of using Pierce's novels in the classroom, as a way to engage young adults in the connections between her fictional universe and the world in which we live. Here I argue that her novels contain many lessons for both her characters and readers, the most important of which is tolerance and understanding. Readers, I believe, can learn from her works to foster a connection with other cultures, to stand up for indigenous populations, and to consider the consequences of colonization and all it entails on a large scale.

## CHAPTER 2

### MULTICULTURALISM

One widely discussed element of YAL is multiculturalism. In her scholarship on multiculturalism in children's literature, Junko Yokota defines the term as "literature that represents any distinct cultural group through accurate portrayal and rich detail" (Yokota 157). While this definition is primarily applied to works of non-fiction or historical fiction, it can be adapted for use in fiction and fantasy. In "The All-White World of Middle-School Genre Fiction," a study on cultural representation in YAL, the authors define their investigation of multiculturalism based on race, specifically works which featured "people of color as protagonists" (Agosto et al. 261). This broader categorization removes the limitation of multiculturalism as focusing only on real life cultures, and instead makes the primary goal of multicultural literature to highlight the experiences of diverse characters within the world of the text.

Pierce's universe appears to be based on a European model, with many of her countries and their politics resembling early European nations, so it is no surprise that many of her characters are written as white. However, Pierce also includes people of color and indigenous populations from multiple races and lands in her works, providing each with well-rounded and thorough descriptions of customs and culture. Pierce's works are thus multicultural within the boundaries of her universe, and that diversity can serve to educate readers on how to approach diversity in the real world. In the article "Guilt, Empathy, and the Ethical Potential of Children's Literature," Maria Nikolajeva writes that "literature allows us, through vicarious experience, [to] understand how other people feel" (Nikolajeva 2). Through the experiences of Pierce's characters, adolescent readers can begin to understand the importance of considering others'

customs and culture, and discovering how characters deal with certain situations may educate readers on how to deal with similar problems in their own lives.

While Pierce writes in two invented worlds, her primary Tortallan universe is home to many countries that mirror those of our own world. For example, the pseudo-European mainland continent features monarchy-lead countries such as Tortall, Galla, Tusaine, and Maren. Scanra, emblematic of Scandinavia, is cold and mountainous, its ruling clans and warlords suggestive of Scandanivian Vikings; Scanra's clans regularly conduct raids by land and sea for their riches. Tyra is a plutocratic republic led by merchants, similar to the merchant republics of Venice and Florence in medieval Italy. The Copper Isles and the Yamani Islands are both archipelagos with vastly different cultures. The Copper Isles may be loosely compared to the Philippines and Indonesia through their shared history of colonial rule and native rebellion, while the social rules and dress of the Yamani Islanders closely mirror those of Japan. Carthak, suggestive of China, is a country separate from the main continent and ruled by an emperor.

Pierce herself has not spoken on the links between her countries and those of the real world, but these connections are widely discussed among her readers<sup>2</sup>; for example, elements of Kyprish, the language of the Copper Isles, have been noted to be lightly modified Indonesian, and Galla is thought to have been inspired in both history and name by Gaul, the Roman France. While many of these associations are implied rather than explicit, the cultural and historical similarities can create a connection with audiences and allow them to see a reflection of their own lives in the lives of Pierce's characters.

Susan Landt, in her article "Multicultural Literature and Young Adolescents: A Kaleidoscope of Opportunity," lays out broad categories of representation that should appear in a

---

<sup>2</sup> Online fan forums have hosted discussions of possible connections between real life countries/events and those which appear in Pierce's works.



work for it to be classified as multicultural. While Landt's work discusses these criteria in response to books set in our own world, her framework can be applied to works of fantasy fiction as well. Landt's first mark of multiculturalism is "the accurate portrayal of the culture or cultures depicted in the book includes not only physical characteristics such as clothing and food, but relationships among people within the culture and with people of different cultures" (Landt 695). Although Pierce's works do not directly represent our world, she provides each of her invented countries, peoples, and cultures with fully fleshed out histories. Her protagonists also regularly interact with members of other cultures: Keladry (*The Protector of the Small* Quartet), for example, spends a majority of her childhood in the Yamani Islands as the daughter of a Tortallan diplomat; Daine (*Wild Magic* Quartet), born in Galla, travels to Carthak after living in Tortall; Alanna (*The Lioness* Quartet) lives for a time with the indigenous Bazhir of Tortall's Great Southern Desert; Aly (*Trickster's Duet*) resides in the Copper Isles among the indigenous raka. Through the adventures of each of these protagonists, readers learn about the rich history of Pierce's universe, and the struggles of each character.

As most of Pierce's protagonists are in the same age range as their target audience, they provide a way for readers to connect to the text. Nikolajeva, in her article "Memory of the Present: Empathy and Identity in Young Adult Fiction," looks at recent cognitive studies on adolescent learning. She suggests that "Young readers may not have mastered the ability to empathize yet, but they are in the process of developing this skill. Their involvement with young fictional characters ... is still more complicated than adult readers' engagement with adult fictional characters" (Nikolajeva 90). The characters of Pierce's works set an example for readers to learn how to empathize and understand other cultures, providing a model of how to respectfully interact with customs other than their own.

For example, while Keladry, the protagonist of the *Protector of the Small Quartet*, is a native to Tortall, she is well versed in the culture and customs of the Yamani people. Having grown up in the Yamani Islands, the daughter of a Tortallan diplomat, she spent much of her time around Yamani children, and in turn adopted their conventions and practices. Upon returning to Tortall to enter her training for knighthood at the age of ten, she begins to understand the cultural differences between Tortall and the Yamani Islands. From her first appearance, she is shown to engage in the Yamani expectation of masking emotions; in the Islands, it is considered shameful to allow displays of deep emotion in one's features or voice. Although she is occasionally belittled in her own world for not showing her feelings, she continues to employ the Yamani custom well into her adult years, exemplifying for readers that certain customs can be adapted and used well by those who take the time to learn them. Also, while in classes at the palace in her early years of training, Keladry's teacher of etiquette draws on her first-hand knowledge of the intricate manners of the Yamani people, showing both her peers and readers the value of understanding the traditions of other cultures.

During her time in the Isles, Keladry was trained with the Yamani children in basic fighting, a style which differed greatly from what her Tortallan peers and teachers practiced. Over time, Keladry learned to combine the fighting styles of the two nations and became a stronger warrior because of her immersion in both cultures; for example, her weapon of choice is a Yamani style glaive, a bladed polearm similar to the Japanese *naginata*. During the later years of Keladry's training, while she was serving as squire to a knight, Keladry and her knight-master joined the Grand Progress, where Keladry's knowledge of Yamani culture and people proved invaluable, as purpose of the Progress was to introduce the Yamani princess Shinkokami to Tortall and to her betrothed, Crown Prince Roald of Tortall.

Convening at the palace before embarking on the Grand Progress, a member of the Yamani party sought out Keladry, reintroducing her to her childhood friend, the now-betrothed Princess. In discussing their childhood together, Princess Shinkokami tells Keladry “While you learned from me, I learned Eastern ways and speech from you and your family” (*Squire* 104). This emphasizes the exchange of cultural knowledge that regularly takes place in Pierce’s works, and the importance of two members of different countries learning from one another. Keladry went on to use her knowledge as a bridge between the Yamanis and Tortallans, cultivating friendships and helping the betrothed couple find mutual subjects of interest. By the time Keladry and her knight master leave the Grand Progress, the Queen and other members of the royal court would join the Yamani ladies each morning for weapon practice, and relations between the groups became more friendly interactions than formal requirements.

Over time, Keladry helped teach her peers what she had already mastered: people should learn as much as they can from different cultures, whether it be fighting style, traditions, or beliefs, and adapt what they know to best serve their purposes. Readers can model their behavior on Keladry’s, to appreciate and learn from other cultures, and to use that knowledge to help others. Additionally, they can learn from Keladry’s friends and peers to embrace other cultures and traditions that may be unfamiliar, and to respectfully teach people about their own cultures. Overall, Keladry and her companions offer a well-rounded model to readers of understanding the practices of other cultures and fostering friendships with those who are different from themselves. The portrayal of individuals from both Tortall and the Yamani Isles distinctly fulfills Landt’s first criteria of a multicultural work: the thorough representation of characters from different cultures, and their relationships with one another. This portrayal is important to readers who may see elements of their own culture represented in that of a fictional one, as well as

teaching young adult readers how to adapt to and respectfully appreciate the practices and traditions of other cultures. Pierce here teaches her readers to understand and embrace those that are different from themselves.

## CHAPTER 3

### SLAVERY

Part of understanding a country means understanding its politics, and Pierce frequently discusses the politics at play in her universe. Pierce works to make the countries in her fictional realm as fully realized as possible, and in doing so refuses to gloss over complicated sociopolitical issues. Perhaps one of the most complex of these issues is slavery; the holding of slaves can have a profound effect on laws, social structure, and economic systems in a country. While it is clear through the attitudes of her protagonists that Pierce intends to send a message opposing the practice of slavery in any form, she addresses how different countries of her world have dealt with it. In doing so, Pierce fulfills another of Landt's criteria for effective multiculturalism: "Realistic social issues and problems are depicted frankly and accurately without oversimplification" (Landt 695). The issues that appear in Pierce's work are never one-dimensional; she addresses the circumstances from multiple viewpoints, and although she writes for young adult readers, her novels show the relative complexity of issues such as slavery.

Just as in our own world, the attitudes towards slave holding vary between countries and cultures and change with time. Though the majority of Pierce's works in the Tortallan universe are set within the span of 40 years, her *Beka Cooper* trilogy is set over 150 years before the events of the rest of her series. This trilogy focuses on an early Tortall, a Tortall in which slavery is still legal. In addition to the earlier setting, the *Beka Cooper* books also differ from Pierce's other works in their narrative style. While most of her books are written from the perspective of a third-person omniscient narrator, the *Beka Cooper* trilogy is written as a journal from Beka's own hand. This difference is crucial, as it can change the way a reader relates to the text.

In Thein and Sulzer's article "Illuminating Discourses of Youth through the Study of First-Person Narration in Young Adult Literature," they discuss the impact of YAL that is narrated from the first-person perspective. They outline the Narrator/Narratee/Implied Reader Triangle, which defines the relationship that each point has with one another. In the case of the *Beka Cooper* series, Beka herself is the narrator. The narratee is for whom the first-person narrator writes; Beka is writing as if in a diary and mentions in the first novel that she is doing so as a memory exercise. In the close of the third and final book, she says that she will no longer keep her diary: "It is better that I stop now, so my descendants will have only great things to read of me," indicating that her narratee(s) would be her future descendants (*Mastiff* 451). The implied reader is not any one individual; rather, they are a hypothetical figure, "someone who appreciates and understands the *exchange* between the narrator and narratee and feels compelled to keep reading" (Thein and Sulzer 49). While the implied reader is not the *actual* reader, the actual reader must, in some way, relate to the implied reader in order to get something out of the text. Through the use of first-person narration and the Narrator/Narratee/Implied Reader Triangle, Pierce displays an effective use of double-voicedness, where she is "not only sharing her single voice or perspective, but she is also responding to and anticipating her potential readers' needs and desires" (Thein and Sulzer 47). In reading and interpreting the double-voicedness, audiences can analyze their own thoughts about the subject, which here is the practice of slavery.

In his article "The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novel," Mike Cadden argues that "The dialogic or double-voiced text represents voices as equal and provides alternative interpretations that offer, in their aggregate, no single and final answer for the reader" (Cadden 147). Therefore, through her discussion of slavery in Beka's journal entries, Pierce puts forward

both her own and Beka's stances on the issue while leaving space for the reader to consider their own ideas and arrive on a potentially different final answer.

In the first two books, Beka mentions slavery, making it clear that she does not support the practice. She works in law enforcement in the poorest area of Corus, the capital city of Tortall, and regularly sees parents sell their children into slavery. While she does not approve, there is very little she can do against the practice as it remains legal in the country. In the third novel, *Mastiff*, Beka becomes even more closely acquainted with slavery. After making a name for herself as an exceptional guardswoman, she is put on the case of tracking down the kidnapped Prince Gareth. Beka and her partners learn that the prince's kidnappers have been using the slave trade as a cover for their movements around the country, and that the young boy has been disguised as a slave.

At one stop on their travels, Beka meets Linnet, a young slave girl who worked alongside the prince for a short time; while Beka asks questions of the child in an attempt to get more information, she also displays care for Linnet by giving her food and sewing cloth pads to protect her from burns during her work in the kitchen. Beka treats every slave with respect, taking the time to learn their names and speaking to them as she would any of her companions, rather than demeaning slaves, as a majority of the upper class are seen to do. On their journey to catch up to the captors, they are met with the bodies of multiple slaves discarded on the road, adults and children alike. Beka mourns for each of the souls lost, and this event strengthens her distaste of the practice of keeping humans captive as property. These moments highlight for readers the moral challenges involved in slavery, especially as it pertains to child labor and the death of individuals.

The search party is able to recover the prince and return him to his royal parents, who offer anything the rescuers could ask for in return. While Beka refuses to ask for anything herself, the four-year-old Prince Gareth asks his parents for what he knows that he and Beka both desire: freedom for all slaves in Tortall. Based on the conditions mentioned in Beka's reports and the prince's own description of the things he experienced and witnessed as a slave, the King publicly renounces the practice of slavery and signs a new law: "As of the first day of October, all slave traders will leave Tortall. From that time forward, there will be no selling of slaves within our borders" (*Mastiff* 448). The law goes on to outline the timeline for the total end of slaveholding in the country, and the King invites Beka to sign as a witness for the proclamation of the law. She ends her final journal with the reflection that there will be no slaves in Tortall by her grandchildren's time, taking pleasure in the role she had in getting this new law enacted.

This powerful conclusion leaves readers in a position to consider their own roles in oppressive structures. While Beka is a young girl from one of the poorest areas of the capital city, she has a hand in bringing about the end of slavery in Tortall. This powerful suggestion is in direct opposition to the argument of Roberta Trites, specifically her book *Disturbing the Universe*. She writes "When ideologies in YA novels focus specifically on government, they tend to convey to adolescents that they are better served by accepting than by rejecting the social institutions with which they must live" (Trites 27). Pierce works against the suggestion of Trites and shows her adolescent readers that it is possible for someone like themselves to rebel against social institutions, particularly those which are unjust.

Returning to the work of Thein and Sulzer, the first-person narration of this story allows space for the reader to consider and develop their own opinions. Through reading the first person narration, the actual reader must consider the double-voicedness of the text, which "invites real



readers to develop a conscious and active awareness of their own affiliation of disaffiliation with the implied reader,” in this case inviting the readers to reflect on their own thoughts about slavery and the treatment of slaves as portrayed in the novel (Thein and Sulzer 52).

In *Emperor Mage*, the third installment of Pierce’s *Wild Magic Series*, Daine and her mentor visit the slaveholding country of Carthak, traveling as part of a peace delegation sent by Tortall. Daine accompanies only to help heal the Carthaki Emperor’s prized birds and is expected to remain silent on political tensions that are outside her realm of experience. The entire delegation is explicitly instructed in regard to slavery, “Do not speak of freedom to the slaves. However we may dislike the practice, it would be unwise to show dislike publicly” (*Emperor Mage* 7). These words, spoken early in the novel, set the scene for the reader about Carthaki attitudes to slavery, and suggest that this subject will reappear throughout the narrative.

Once on board the transport boat with the delegation, Daine has her first encounter with a Carthaki slave. Daine’s ward, a young dragon<sup>3</sup>, gets away from her and approaches one of the chained men rowing a vessel down the river; Daine retrieves the creature, apologizing to the man for interrupting him. As soon as the chained man looks up from his oar, he is immediately targeted by an overseer, who whips him. Daine is clearly disturbed by the interaction, but, knowing that she cannot protest the treatment of slaves, she is forced to keep silent. This moment sets the tone for the treatment of slaves in Carthak, suggesting that harsh punishment is a regular occurrence for the enslaved population. Additionally, Pierce shows young readers that Daine remains respectful of those individuals who are here treated less than humanely.

Shortly after arrival at the palace, Daine sees to the Emperor’s birds; she comments to Lindhall Reed, one of the caretakers of the animals, that the birds’ symptoms are suggestive of

---

<sup>3</sup> While dragons, and other mythical creatures, play a fascinating part in Pierce’s universe, I will not be discussing them in this work.

poisoning, and asks about their food, which he tells her is prepared by slaves. Reed advises her not to mention poison to the Emperor until she is sure of the cause, for “he would kill the slaves. It wouldn’t matter to him if the poisoning were deliberate or not – only that it happened” (*Emperor Mage* 35). The Carthaki Emperor clearly cares more for animals than he does for the lives of humans, especially those whom he considers inferior.

Lindhall Reed also tells Daine that all of Emperor Ozorne’s personal slaves are mutes, and Ozorne himself later remarks that they “make the best slaves,” since “they do not chatter” (*Emperor Mage* 140). This scene is particularly disturbing, as the inability of these slaves to communicate is seen as an asset rather than a problem deserving of sympathy and assistance. Moments throughout the text continue to point out the unjust treatment of slaves to the perceptive reader. At a dinner, “Female slaves, wearing loincloths and nothing else, went from guest to guest, filling wine goblets,” emphasizing the commodification of these women as a product, like the wine, to be consumed (*Emperor Mage* 59). This commodification of women’s bodies, as discussed by Laura Mulvey in her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” implies a “sexual imbalance”: “In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact” (Mulvey 62). While Mulvey is describing a visual appearance of sexualized women, these nearly nude slave women in the written world of Pierce are subject to the same gaze that Mulvey points out in her work. The Banjiku, a tribal group from Zallara, a southern region controlled by Carthak, are slaves forced to perform alongside animals in a performance reminiscent of a circus.

As the novel approaches its climax, Daine is increasingly frustrated with the situation of the slaves of Carthak. After she is captured by the emperor and believes that her mentor is dead, Daine breaks free and, with help from the gods, wreaks havoc on the Carthaki palace. During the

devastation, Emperor Ozorne flees, leaving the ruined capitol to the presumed heir, his nephew Kaddar. Once Daine has dethroned the Emperor and discovered her mentor alive, the destruction ceases, and Kaddar learns that Ozorne planned to have him killed under false pretenses. Kaddar pardons Daine for her role in the ravaging of the palace and offers her riches in return for saving his life and uprooting the unjust Emperor. Daine rejects personal gifts but asks for the Banjiku people and Emperor's mutes to be freed immediately. She also urges Kaddar to consider the future of Carthak in relation to slavery, reminding him that mistreated slaves can turn on their oppressors, and that other countries have successfully ended the practice: "All they need do is look across the Inland Sea to know life doesn't have to be like this" (*Emperor Mage* 182). Kaddar makes no promise to completely outlaw slavery, voicing his concerns that the nobles of Carthak could turn on him for such a declaration, but does say that he will consider the issue. Kaddar's mention of the issues surrounding slavery also satisfies Landt's second criteria for multiculturalism, that the author refuses to oversimplify realistic social problems. Pierce does not allow her characters to gloss over the complex world of political consequences but instead discusses these complicated ideas in ways that her readers can understand.

Although readers are highly unlikely to encounter actual slaves today (at least in most of the developed world), Daine's behavior can be used as model to remind readers to treat others, especially those considered "lesser" according to societal standards, with equal respect and courtesy. Drawing on the ideas presented by Nikolajeva, I argue that readers may also learn empathy for those who face different struggles by witnessing through Daine the feelings of those who have little control over their own circumstances. While Daine is unable to achieve the promise of total abolishment of slavery on the scale that Beka did, she still sparks the beginnings of change for the slaves of Carthak. Throughout the novel, Kaddar disproved of the harsher

treatment of slaves, and this gentler young man takes over the throne after his violent uncle is deposed. Unlike in Trites' argument, Pierce shows that young people can be granted the power to change the circumstances of their world, even as they are limited by societal constraints. She tells her readers that they too can have power in their own world, the ability to change rules and challenge standards that are unfair towards many.

## CHAPTER 4

### COLONIZATION AND INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

Another way in which Pierce represents the complexity of the real world in her work is through the discussion of colonization. In addition to the Banjiku of Carthak, Pierce incorporates two other major indigenous populations as part of her novels, both of which have had their lands colonized by other countries. For example, the Bazhir are the tribal, desert-dwelling inhabitants of the Great Southern Desert; this region was incorporated into Tortall nearly 100 years before the events of the *Song of the Lioness* series in which the Bazhir are featured. The raka<sup>4</sup>, appearing in the *Trickster* duet, are the indigenous population of the Copper Isles, an island country west of Tortall that has been ruled by luarin<sup>5</sup> colonizers for nearly three centuries. While Pierce's treatment of the indigenous populations often gives satisfactory representation of the groups under Landt's standards of multicultural literature, there are moments in this series especially where her representation falls short.

The Bazhir reside in the Great Southern Desert of Tortall, and are visited for a time by Alanna, the protagonist of the *Song of the Lioness* quartet. They initially appear in the first installment of the series, *Alanna: The First Adventure*, and play a large part in the third novel, *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*. In the first book of the series, Alanna and her peers in training for knighthood visit the Great Southern Desert, staying in the only city built by the usually nomadic Bazhir. While there, she and her companion, Prince Jonathan, venture to the Black City, the only other stone city in all of the Desert; demonic beings known as the Ysandir resided there, feeding on any Bazhir who got too close to the Black City. With the help of the

---

<sup>4</sup> The indigenous population of the Copper Isles refers to themselves as "raka," a word that remains un-capitalized throughout the novels.

<sup>5</sup> The raka's term for the white colonizers of the Copper Isles, many of whom came from mainland countries such as Galla, Maren, and Tortall. Like the term "raka," this word remains un-capitalized throughout the novels.

gods, Alanna and Jonathan were able to defeat the Ysander, earning themselves honorific titles among the Bazhir. It is from this moment that Pierce sets up Alanna and Jonathan as white saviors, a term which is generally applied to a white person who helps non-white people in a self-serving manner.

In his “What Do We Really Mean by “White Savior?”: A Little Due Diligence is the Minimum Requirement,” Taylor Thiessen works to analyze the usage of “white savior,” discussing the many meanings of the term, ultimately landing on one primary defining aspect: “the narrative is about the assistor rather than the recipient” (Thiessen 30). Alanna occasionally fulfills this role, although she does come to learn more about the history and traditions of these people and grows to respect their culture and practices. Jonathan, however, remains firmly in his role as a white savior, accepting a position among the tribes that lends to the further colonization of the Bazhir, which in turn draws the focus of the narrative away from the tribe and to their white savior.

While Pierce has already set up the foundations for Alanna as a white savior to the Bazhir, this is interestingly subverted in the beginning of *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*. At the start of the novel, Alanna and her mentor Coram are traveling through the Great Southern Desert when they are ambushed by hillmen. Men of the Bloody Hawk tribe of the Bazhir approach the fight and kill the remaining hillmen, rescuing Alanna. Alanna learns that this tribe does not recognize the king of Tortall as their ruler; some tribes accept the colonization and rule of the Tortallans, while others do not. They bring her to their camp to decide her fate, as she is considered a trespasser on the lands that the tribe occupies. It is at the camp that a man of the tribe recognizes her as one who defeated the Ysander and calls her by the name “Burning-Brightly One” (*The Woman* 10). Because of her title, she is more highly regarded than other

outsiders, although this does not automatically guarantee her place in the tribe; she faces and is successful in a trial by combat in order to win the title of a warrior of the Bloody Hawk. .

The cultural practices of the Bazhir are different from Alanna's perceived normal; their women all wear veils, and are traditionally prohibited from acting as warriors, leaders, or shamans of the tribe. Alanna, for her place as the only female warrior of the tribe, earns a new title: The Woman Who Rides Like a Man. Alanna refuses to accept that the men of the tribe are granted more control than the women, and she desires to train three children who are outcasts from the tribe to use their magical gift. She initially refrains from teaching them, knowing that she cannot break the Bazhir custom that only the shaman of a tribe can train others with magic; however, she is granted the opportunity to make a change when she kills the former shaman in self-defense, and must take his role until she can train a replacement. Although seemingly reluctant, the headman of the tribe agrees to allow her to train the three children to replace her as shaman, one boy and two girls.

In her article "Decolonizing Childhood: Coming of Age in Tamora Pierce's Fantastic Empire," Sarah Sahn addresses the time Alanna spent with the Bloody Hawk tribe, and particularly discusses Alanna in the terms of a white savior to the Bazhir. Sahn points out that Alanna "does not hesitate to use her white savior status to push for the changes that will allow her to train two outcast young women to be her successors" (Sahn 156). Alanna does in fact realize that she has a unique position of power, both as the Burning-Brightly One and the Woman Who Rides Like a Man, telling Coram "To the Bazhir, I'm a legend. They take things from me they *wouldn't* take from anyone else" (*The Woman* 95). Alanna's position does give her influence over the tribe, although I do not agree that she is simply a white savior. While some of

Alanna's behavior can be viewed through this lens, she does ultimately gain more understanding and respect for the culture of the Bazhir people during her time with them.

In working with the girls, Kara and Kourrem, for example, Alanna learns more about women's positions in the tribe. She takes up the traditionally feminine arts of spinning and weaving from her apprentices and comes to understand more about the women of the tribe. Though Alanna views the veils as a symbol of the men's control over women, the young women like them, and they do not want to go against all tribal customs. Alanna does not press them further on the issue, seeming to understand that her discomfort is self-serving. In building relationships with other women of the tribe, Alanna comes to realize that these women don't need a white savior. In the words of Sahn, "Alanna learns that the Bazhir women are far from the silent, oppressed, veiled women she had believed" (Sahn 156). While learning more about weaving from the older women, she comes to understand their perspective, and that their influence in tribal matters is far from insignificant. Through Alanna's growing willingness to accept different perspectives, young readers can understand how they should act when faced with cultural traditions they may disagree with. In the same way that Alanna realizes that the wearing of a veil does not affect Kara and Kourrem's abilities to serve as shamans, readers can recognize that women around the world who choose to veil their faces or heads are no less competent than their unveiled peers.

While Alanna does not give up either of the titles the Bazhir have placed upon her, she happily relinquishes her role in tribal leadership. As soon as Kara and Kourrem pass the traditional test of their shaman skills, Alanna passes the role of shaman to the two young women. This allows Alanna to restore some of the power she held as a white savior to the indigenous members of the tribe, and works with Landt's fifth point of quality multicultural literature:



“Minority characters are shown as leaders within their community able to solve their own problems. Cultural minorities do not play a supporting or subservient role while whites are seen as possessing all the power” (Landt 695). As Alanna gives up some of her power within the tribe of the Bloody Hawk, Prince Jonathan, her companion in defeating the Ysander, truly begins to fulfill the role of a white savior to the Bazhir through becoming the “Voice of the Tribes”.

Early in the novel, readers are introduced to the position of “Voice of the Tribes,” which is held by one Bazhir individual and passed down through generations. The role of the Voice is to commune nightly with the members of the tribe, and, through ancient magic, the Voice understands the thoughts and concerns of each Bazhir. The job of the Voice is to settle disputes and govern the laws by which the Bazhir live, and they serve as a quasi-leader to unify all tribes for the purposes of war, peace, or diplomacy. Historically, this role was held by those born Bazhir, but in *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*, the serving Voice, Ali Mukhtab, passes the role to Prince Jonathan, who is next in line for the Tortallan throne. Mukhtab tells Alanna “Certain tribes have been at war with the King in the North for two generations ... Among our people there is bitterness between those who accept your King and those who do not. And in the end, the Northern King must win” (*The Woman* 45). Despite the fact that Tortallans consider the Great Southern Desert to be part of their country, some tribes of the Bazhir (such as the Bloody Hawk) still reject the rule of Tortall and the colonization of their indigenous lands. In handing this vital role to a man who will, by the end of the *Song of the Lioness* quartet, become that Northern King, Ali Mukhtab is giving his people over to the full rule of their colonizers, and, from Landt’s perspective, putting the indigenous population into a role that is subservient to their white savior.

Mukhtab suggests that the Northern King is destined to win rule over the Bazhir, and that handing over the role of the Voice is the most peaceful way to achieve what the Balance, a Bazhir term for fate/destiny, has ordained. This idea that colonizers are destined by a higher power to overtake indigenous populations can be traced back to British colonialism, under the name of the White Man's Burden. In the United States, this same idea became known as Manifest Destiny, a concept that was largely used to support the westward expansion of American settlers. Manifest Destiny led to many hardships for Native American tribes, such as forced relocation to reservations. While Prince Jonathan is not portrayed as the type of ruler to order anything like the Indian Removal Act passed by the United States' President Jackson, it is no doubt a failing in the category of multiculturalism for Pierce to unquestioningly support the expansion of Tortallan colonialization through Jonathan as the Voice.

Pierce makes it clear that not every member of the Bazhir accepts the Northern King as their own, and it seems an intimate betrayal for Mukhtab to hand the knowledge of these people's hearts and minds over to Prince Jonathan. There is no established way for individuals to reject the choice for the next Voice of the Tribes, and in most situations, the ruling of the Voice is considered the final say for Bazhir tribesmen. Even if they wished, individuals or tribes could not go against the man who serves as both the disliked Northern King and the revered Voice.

The undermining of individual autonomy through the appointment of Prince Jonathan as the Voice sends the wrong message to readers about the rights of a colonized population; even those who are forcibly under control of another country should not have their individual privacy violated in such a way. While the target young adult audience may at first accept this narrative without question, it does allow the opportunity for repeat readers and older audiences to question the implication of this choice and analyze it from a multicultural perspective. It is important to

continue to be aware of and critique injustices, as well as work to move away from the trope of the white savior, especially as these appear in novels aimed at young adult audiences. Just as in the real world, not every decision presented in Pierce's work is suitable for everyone, and the opportunity to criticize such a choice in the fictional realm can teach readers to analyze decisions that are occurring in their own reality.

## CHAPTER 5

*TRICKSTER DUOLOGY*

Though the use of Prince Jonathan as a white savior and a tool of colonization does Pierce no favors, her efforts to create an authentic and respectful representation of indigenous populations did not stop with her first quartet. Her later *Trickster* duology, published fifteen years after the conclusion of the *Song of the Lioness* quartet, provides a much more well-rounded representation of indigenous populations, and works to undo some of the white savior issues present in her earlier writings.

In the *Trickster* duology, Pierce combines the concepts of slavery and colonization, showing how these two issues can serve to further complicate each other. Going by Landt's five standards, these books are also more progressively multicultural than her previous ones. In *Trickster's Choice*, set 24 years after the events of *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*, the reader is introduced to Aly, the daughter of Alanna. Aly meets the brown-skinned raka, the indigenous people of the Copper Isles, and works to help them realize the rebellion they've been planning for decades against their colonizing rulers, providing a model to readers on an appropriate approach to supporting indigenous populations.

Wanting to escape the pressures that come with being the daughter of a famous knight, Aly sails alone to visit a friend, and in the process is kidnapped and sold into slavery. This is the first instance of a Pierce protagonist as a slave, and the novel does not shy away from a harsh and authentic representation of slavery. Aly is held in a pen with other slaves who are all treated like animals, and an omnipotent narrator tells the reader that Aly intentionally gets beaten and bloodied before it comes time for her to be sold; she wishes to look like a fighter, in order to avoid a "career as a master's toy," suggesting that young female slaves are regularly the victims

of sexual assault and rape under the premise that they are property (*Trickster's Choice* 24). When Aly is finally sold in the Copper Isles, it is to the Balitang family, where she quickly becomes part of a decades-long plot to return the Isles to the rule of the indigenous raka.

Situated in the beginning of *Trickster's Choice*, before Aly's story begins, is a brief excerpt from a book entitled *The Luarín Conquest: New Rulers in the Copper Isles*. This fictionalized book from the world of the novel discusses the conquest of the Isles by the luarín, or white, colonizers. Before the colonizers encroached, the tribes of indigenous raka struggled with infighting and weak leadership; a man named Rittevon put together an army from the countries of the main continent, bought the loyalty of many raka nobility, and over the course of several years of violence, took control of the Isles. The end of the excerpt mentions the Kyprish Prophecy, the words of an oracle passed down through generations, which foretells of a queen who will bring the raka to power in the Isles once again. It is upon this prophesy that the raka will build their conspiracy. By starting the book with this selection, Pierce places the history and narrative of the raka at the forefront of the novel, even above Aly's own story. The language of the novel continues to emphasize the indigenous raka, framing their actions in a positive light while the luarín rulers are treated unfavorably and their abusive actions are highlighted.

Once Aly finds herself at the Balitang household, she and the reader learn more about life in the Isles and its history. As part of the conquest of the Isles, many of the raka that were not killed were forced into slavery by the luarín colonizers. Slavery was (and remains today) a tool of colonization, used to keep insurrections of the colonized population to a minimum. Instituting a racial divide via slavery allowed the luarín to introduce other measures, such as a set of rulings known as The Conqueror's Laws. These laws are extremely biased against the raka; after helping

defend the Balitang family against assassins, Duke Mequen, the father of the family, tells Aly that the local raka would have been put to death if any of the Balitangs were killed:

The idea is that if any member of the luarin nobility is killed, the nearest local raka must have helped the murderer. At the very least, the courts would say that the local raka did not die to stop the killers ... The law itself comes from the time of the luarin conquest. It's how they broke the spine of the raka rebellion. Some of us have laid petitions before the courts to have the Conqueror's Laws repealed, to no avail. (*Trickster's Choice* 201)

This frank conversation on outdated and biased laws is another credit to Pierce's work in terms of Landt; she includes the discussion of complex social issues without oversimplification.

Mirroring the real world, the subjugation of a population of a different skin color results in deep-seated racism in a number of the white luarin. More than two centuries after the conquest of the Isles, the ruling class families are predominately luarin. In many upper-class households, raka are only present as servants and slaves. There are several instances of offhand racism by luarin throughout the novels, but perhaps one of the most striking comes from Bronau Jimajen, a luarin prince of the Copper Isles. Upon meeting Aly as a slave, he tells Mequen "I don't like the precedent, keeping luarin slaves. It gives the raka ideas ... you can't trust the raka to behave themselves unless they know there's a whip close to hand" (*Trickster's Choice* 42). Bronau clearly believes that any luarin are superior to raka and shouldn't be kept as slaves purely because of the color of their skin, along with his careless mention of whipping the raka into submission. Other instances of racism among the luarin include the use of derogatory terms such as "raka dogs" and "raka swine", as well as the mention that many young luarin nobles will have relationships with raka, but never marry them.

Each instance of racism is framed negatively, as Pierce shows Aly responding to bigoted statements by pointing out how they are incorrect and harmful. In keeping with Landt's first mark of multiculturalism, as addressed in Chapter I, Pierce presents a respectful portrayal of the raka culture through descriptions beyond their physical characteristics, such as discussions of their traditional food and clothing. Aly meets several raka during her time in the Isles, and these characters defy racist generalizations. Each named character has their own personality and traits that make them distinct from others, which fulfills the second of Landt's points: "There is diversity within the culture; characters are unique individuals, not stereotypical representatives" (Landt 695). Pierce brings to light the problems of deep-seated racism, all while assuring that her readers understand raka culture and connect with individual characters to increase empathy for their situation.

Among the commoners, the luarin and raka intermingle and produce mixed-race children. Mequen Balitang is the only member of the luarin nobility, a distant relative to the ruling Rittevons, to have mixed-race children; his first wife was raka, and their two daughters, Saraiyu and Dovasary, became the hope of the raka rebellion. While a majority of the raka nobility were killed during the conquest, one branch survived, of which Mequen's first wife was a descendant. The Kyprish Prophecy speaks of a twice royal queen who will bring the raka back to power in the isles, and Sarai and Dove both fulfill the role, with royal blood on both sides of their family. After their mother died in an accident when the girls were young, their father remarried to their mother's best friend, a luarin woman, and they have two younger half-siblings.

Early in the novel, Aly is approached by Kyprioth, the trickster god of the Isles. He strikes a bargain with her: he will help her in her goals to become a spy should she stay with the Balitang family and protect their children through the summer. Although Aly agrees, the god

reveals little else to her until she notices the raka conspiracy inside the household. Through building a relationship with the raka head servants, Aly becomes privy to their plans to rebel and place Sarai on the throne. After the summer, and therefore Aly's deal with Kyprioth, are over, she chooses to stay with the raka and continue to aid in their plans. Aly begins to subvert the trope of the white savior by choosing to stay, even when she gains no personal benefit from her continued assistance. While Aly's bargain with Kyprioth could be considered self-serving for personal gain, she reevaluates her motivations at the end of *Trickster's Choice*, after she is considered the winner of her wager with the god. Aly tells her father "These are good people, Da. I want to keep them alive so Kyprioth can complete his great trick – putting a raka queen, not a luarin king, on the throne ... This will be for them, and the raka" (*Trickster's Choice* 401). Aly is motivated by the objectives of the raka and chooses to stay and help their plans rather than go home to her family.

The language used throughout both novels also places importance on the raka perspective of their world. For example, the luarin made an effort to erase traditions important to the raka, such as giving the land the name of Copper Isles in favor of the native Kypriish Isles, but Pierce consistently uses the indigenous term Kypriish Isles in the narrative. Words and phrases from the Kyprian language are also introduced, such as the nickname "Duani" for Aly. This ties to Landt's third mark of multiculturalism, "Dialogue is culturally authentic with characters using speech that accurately represents their oral traditions. Non-English words are spelled and used correctly" (Landt 695). Although the Kyprian language and raka terminology are fictional, Pierce uses them consistently, and incorporates the indigenous language into natural speech. The terms she uses are defined in the glossary of each novel, showing that even though the language is invented, it can still be used respectfully in context of the story. While cultural authenticity isn't



a concern in a work of fiction, it is still important for authors to consider the implications of the representation of different cultures in their works.

As the raka conspiracy begins to gain strength in *Trickster's Queen*, Pierce continues to frame the raka cause positively. The ruling luarin take more extreme measures in attempts to ensure their stability, and much of the luarin nobility ultimately disapprove of their unfairly punishing innocent people. Aly's network of spies, along with the other branches of the raka conspiracy, sow doubt and distrust among the people of the capital while gaining support for their cause. The Tortallan government, learning of the planned rebellion, secretly sends money and supplies to aid the raka, further emphasizing that the raka are justified in their plans. Although the politics of the raka rebellion are a fascinating and complex subject, many of the finer plot details are beyond the scope of this work. In summary, Sarai elopes and leaves the Isles, while Dove takes her place as the raka's planned queen.

Dove, only fourteen at the time of the raka rebellion, is presented as a fair and just queen. While she understands the necessity for battle as part of the uprising, she wishes to spare as many lives as possible in order to set a precedent for an honest and peaceful rule. Although the raka conspiracy had been in the works for decades, Dove serves as their inspiration, and the face of their return to power. In this role, she disproves Trites' argument that "The underlying agenda of many YA novels is to indoctrinate adolescents into a measure of social acceptance" (Trites 27). Rather than indoctrinating adolescents, the *Trickster* duology teaches its readers that they too can become respected leaders in their community.

The success of the raka uprising serves to fulfill Landt's fifth and final point: "Minority characters are shown as leaders within their community able to solve their own problems" (Landt 695). Though the conspirators had help from Aly, her presence is not implied to be the tipping

point for the uprising. Aly herself, in discussing the plans of the conspiracy with Dove, tells the girl “It was set in stone long before I came. With your approval or without it, the raka will rise” (*Trickster’s Queen* 55). Pierce portrays the raka as a strong community, one that does not require help from the luarin to realize their plans.

Through the actions and attitude of Aly, readers can learn to respect indigenous cultures, and find ways to assist in their efforts to reclaim their lands and culture from colonizers. While the reclamation efforts of indigenous populations today are not as drastic or violent as full-scale rebellion, their actions are still worthy of support by those who are not part of their culture. If readers follow Aly’s lead, they can learn to listen to the wishes of those who suffer the most from colonization. Additionally, Pierce’s readers are largely based in America, a country founded partly on the colonization of Native American lands. Through witnessing the unfair treatment of the raka by the racist luarin and following the story of the raka reclaiming their native lands, readers may make the connection to the treatment of Native Americans, especially in regard to stolen land and the subjugation of an indigenous population. Although the treatment of the raka is not intended to be an exact mirror of American society, it does set up the structure for readers to consider the treatment of indigenous populations in their own world, and to empathize with and support those forced to fight for their right to live on ancestral land.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Throughout her novels, Pierce addresses many issues in ways that young adult readers are able to understand. Her diverse characters allow casual readers to develop empathy for the struggles and triumphs of others, and a recognition of the issues of slavery and colonization that are faced in the real world. Adolescents can learn from the experiences of Keladry when it comes to understanding other cultures, and remember both Daine and Beka when they see people treated as lesser because of their position in society. Aly shows readers how to support indigenous populations without falling into the position of white savior, and Alanna holds a lesson on respect for traditions that are not your own. Through Prince Jonathan, readers can reflect on the power imbalance that occurs when the position of the white savior goes unquestioned. Each of Pierce's series and characters teaches the reader something more about the world of Tortall, and, by extension, about their own world.

Further, Pierce's works hold pedagogical potential. These books can be teaching tools that allow instructors to explore the ideas of multicultural literature with a classroom of individuals, each one bringing their own experiences to a discussion of the novels. Instructors can approach the novels by addressing their connections to real life, such as the history of colonization and fate of indigenous populations around the world. A unit, for example, could be structured around a discussion of slavery and the treatment of enslaved individuals, or older students could focus on the intricate politics at play in each of Pierce's series.

In addition to the topics I have addressed in this thesis, Pierce sets the groundwork for a number of other issues, including LGBT+ inclusion, bullying, complex family relationships, and moral values. Young adult students in middle and high schools around the world could benefit

from frank classroom discussions surrounding these ideas, and there is a wealth of resources about the value of teaching empathy through literature. While it is likely impossible for a singular course to address every issue in the over fifteen novels that Pierce writes in her Tortallan universe, an exploration into her world can set readers on the path to considering similar issues in their own reality, or sparking their interest in an in-depth reading of her works.

Like many in today's world, Pierce works towards continual awareness of problems affecting her readers and society at large, and pushes to include representation for all in her works. Her improvement in addressing issues of colonization and racism can be traced from her first publications to her more recent works, and can show readers that learning and constant improvement are goals to be sought after. Venturing outside of the novels, Pierce continues to make strides in inclusion for the sake of her readers. In interviews and fan Q&A sessions, the author has revealed many other points of multicultural merit in her universe. For example, in an interview about the future of the Copper Isles under Dove's rule, Pierce responded: "As a raka ruler, Dove had to reestablish the raka as the ruling class of the Copper Isles. Her first task was to start moving raka into offices in her government, and with so many qualified people, she had no good excuse to keep [a] luarin ... as her spy master" (Pierce). She is here addressing that once Dove's rule was secured, Aly's role of spymaster was given to someone of raka descent, ensuring that those indigenous to the land were in positions of power. Pierce fully embraces the Copper Isles returning to the rule of the raka, even as it ousts her protagonist from the role she served in the rebellion.

The good news for readers, students, and teachers alike is that Pierce continues to write in the Tortallan universe, and her next novel, *The Exile's Gift*, is scheduled to be published in 2022. Following the trajectory set in place by the first novel (*Tempest and Slaughter*, 2018) in her

planned *Numair Chronicles* trilogy, she is poised to engage in discussions of politics, privilege, and corruption in her future works. As an author with one of the longest-running universes in young adult literature, Pierce continues to address issues in ways that engage and educate her readers, shaping the next generation to have empathy and understanding for others.

## WORKS CITED

- Agosto, Denise E, et. al. "The All-White World of Middle-School Genre Fiction: Surveying the Field for Multicultural Protagonists." *Children's Literature in Education*, Vol. 34, No. 4, Human Sciences Press, December 2003, pp. 257 – 275.
- Baker, Daniel. "Why We Need Dragons: The Progressive Potential of Fantasy." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Volume 23, No. 3, 2012, pp. 437 – 459. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/24353086](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24353086).
- Boutelier, Stefani. "Exploring Privilege with Young Adult Literature." *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2019, pp. 17 – 21.
- Cadden, Mike. "The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novel." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Johns Hopkins University Press, Fall 2000, pp. 146 – 154.
- Day, Kathryn Dawn. "*Girls Who Kick Butt*": *A Cognitive Interpretation of Tamora Pierce's Adolescent Feminist Fantasy*. 2018. Queens' College, PhD Dissertation.
- Donovan, Ellen Butler. "Disorienting Reading." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1, Johns Hopkins University Press, Spring 2007, pp. 29 – 46.
- Landt, Susan M. "Multicultural Literature and Young Adolescents: A Kaleidoscope of Opportunity." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. Vol. 49, No. 8, May 2006, pp. 690 – 697.
- MacCann, Donnarae. "The Sturdy Fabric of Cultural Imperialism: Tracing Its Patterns in Contemporary Children's Novels." *Children's Literature*, Volume 33, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, pp. 185 – 208.
- May, Whitney S. "The Lioness and the Protector: The (Post)Feminist Dialogic of Tamora

- Pierce's Lady Knights." *Children's Literature*, Vol. 48, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020, pp. 51 – 79.
- Malo-Juvera, Victor. "A Postcolonial Primer with Multicultural YA Literature." *The English Journal*, Vol. 107, No. 1, National Council of Teachers of English, September 2017, pp. 41 – 47.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1975, pp. 6 – 18.
- Nikolajeva, Maria. "Guilt, Empathy, and the Ethical Potential of Children's Literature." *Barnboken*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2012.
- . "Memory of the Present: Empathy and Identity in Young Adult Fiction." *Narrative Works: Issues, Investigations, & Interventions*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2014, pp. 86 – 107.
- Pierce, Tamora. *Emperor Mage*. Scholastic, 1994.
- . *Mastiff*. Random House, 2011.
- . *Squire*. Random House, 2001.
- . *Trickster's Choice*. Scholastic, 2003.
- . *Trickster's Queen*. Scholastic, 2004.
- . *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*. Atheneum Books, 1986.
- . "Leaving Court: Aly in Port Legann and Taybur in Tyra." *Words of Tamora Pierce*, 2017, <https://tpwords.wordpress.com/2017/10/05/1182/>
- Sahn, Sarah F. "Decolonizing Childhood: Coming of Age in Tamora Pierce's Fantastic Empire." *Children's Literature*, Vol. 44, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016, pp. 147 – 171.
- Theissen, Taylor. "What do We Really Mean by "White Savior?": A Little Due Diligence is the Minimum Requirement." Washington and Lee University, 2020.

- Thein, Amanda Haertling, and Sulzer, Mark A. “Illuminating Discourses of Youth through the Study of First-Person Narration in Young Adult Literature.” *The English Journal*, Vol. 104, No. 3, National Council of Teachers of English, January 2015, pp. 47 – 53.
- Trendacosta, Katharine. “Author Tamora Pierce on Straightforward, Inclusive Fantasy.” *i09 Gizmodo*, 2017, <https://io9.gizmodo.com/author-tamora-pierce-on-straightforward-inclusive-fant-1820313733>.
- Trites, Roberta. *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*. University of Iowa Press, 1998.
- Yokota, Junko. “Issues in Selecting Multicultural Children’s Literature.” *Language Arts*, Vol. 70, No. 3, National Council of Teachers of English, March 1993, pp. 156 – 167