Take it like an elf: masculinity and emotion in Christopher Paolini's young adult fantasy series *The Inheritance Cycle*

Tania Evans
Australian National University

Abstract

Fantasy genre fiction has increasingly received academic attention for its representations of gender and sexuality, and scholars have acknowledged that the genre has the potential to challenge accepted ideas about femininity and heterosexuality. However, few studies have questioned how men and masculinity are constructed within the fantasy genre, despite the prevalence of masculine characters and readers and the influence that popular cultural texts exert over young audiences. This paper uses Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and Judith Butler's poststructuralist gender theories to reveal how dominant ideas about masculine stoicism are negotiated and (re)imagined within Christopher Paolini's young adult fantasy series *The Inheritance Cycle* (2005-2011). I argue that while unemotional masculine discourses are present within the narrative, fantasy genre conventions such as magic and magical creatures invite readers to question their desirability and recognize how they are socially constructed and compelled. By analysing magical telepathic bonds, crying, magical races, and magic, I find that young readers are presented with complex but often progressive ideas about how masculine subjects may experience and express their emotions. The article demonstrates that fantasy genre fiction is a crucial site for analysis in masculinities studies because it provides a means of reflecting and re-creating masculine discourses without the constraints of realism.

Key words: Masculinity, fantasy fiction, emotion, young adult, gender

Elf gibi düşün: Christopher Paolini'nin genç erişkin fantezi serisi *Miras Döngüsü*'nde erkeklik ve duygu

Tania Evans
Australian National University

Özet

Toplumsal cinsiyet ve cinselliğin fantastik edebiyattaki temsillerine yönelik akademik ilgi gittikçe artmakta ve araştırmacılar bu türün feminenlik ve heteroseksüellikle ilgili kabul gören görüşleri sarsma potansiyeli taşıdığını kabul etmektedir. Ancak, erkek karakterlerin ve okurların yaygınlığına ve popüler kültür metinlerinin genç izleyiciler üzerinde oluşturduğu etkiye rağmen, erkeklerin ve erkekliğin fantezi türünde nasıl inşa edildiğini sorgulayan çalışmaların sayısı oldukça azdır. Bu çalışma, eril stoacılık hakkındaki baskın fikirlerin Christopher Paolini'nin *The Inheritance Cycle* (Miras Döngüsü: 2005 - 2011) isimli genç erişkinlere yönelik fantezi serisinde nasıl ele alındığını ve (yeniden) tasavvur edildiğini ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla Raewyn Connell'ın hegemonik erkeklik kavramından ve Judith Butler'ın postyapısalcı cinsiyet teorilerinden faydalanmaktadır. Anlatı içerisinde duygusuz eril söylemler yer alıyor olsa da, büyü ve sihirli yaratıklar gibi fantezi türünün ayrılmaz parçalarının okuyucuları bu söylemlerin arzu edilirliğini, nasıl inşa edildiklerini ve oluştukları sosyal bağlama nasıl bağlı olduklarını sorgulamaya davet ettiğini savunuyorum. Sihirli telepatik bağlar, gözyaşı, sihirli ırklar ve büyüyü analiz ederek genç okuyucuların eril öznelerin duygularını nasıl deneyimleyebilecekleri ve ifade edebilecekleri hakkında karmaşık ancak genellikle ilerici fikirlerle karşılaştığını buldum. Bu makale, eril söylemlerin realizmin sınırlılıkları olmaksızın yansıtıldığı ve yeniden yaratıldığı bir araç sunması bakımından fantastik edebiyatın erkeklik çalışmaları içinde analiz edilmesi gerekli bir alan olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: erkeklik, fantastik edebiyat, duygu; genç erişkin, toplumsal cinsiyet

Masculine subjects in Western society are compelled to practice emotional repression, a process demonstrated through popular phrases such as "man up", "boys don't cry", and "take it like a man." Yet these discourses do not go unchallenged, especially in young adult fantasy fiction, where stoic hegemonic masculinity is often thrown into question. I argue that in Christopher Paolini's fantasy series *The Inheritance Cycle* is one such text in which genre conventions play an integral role in subverting emotionless masculine discourses and inviting young readers to question how they may benefit from emotional expression. *The Inheritance Cycle* was published between 2005 and 2011 and sold over twenty-five million copies, won a children's choice award, spent weeks upon bestseller lists, appeared in numerous languages, and was adapted into the 2006 film *Eragon* (Random House 2008; International Reading Association 2005; Macauley 2014). The series' success has been attributed to a number of elements, particularly the protagonist Eragon's emotionally open and hence highly subversive relationship with the dragon Saphira (Estes 1; Leonard 27) and its reinterpretation of traditional fantasy genre conventions (Jones 30; Rosenberg 7; Ward 11). While *The Inheritance Cycle* is a work of fiction, popular culture plays a crucial role in reflecting and shaping masculine identities in 'real' life and allows audiences to imagine how these constructs may be renegotiated in new and more inclusive ways. Considering how popular *The Inheritance Cycle* has been among young readers (Del Negro 1; Hamilton 3-4, 15; Rosenberg 5-7), analyzing masculine emotions in the series contributes to our understanding of how young readers are invited to repress or express their feelings based on their gender.

Using Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity alongside Judith Butler's gender theories, this paper focuses upon magical bonding, magical races, the quest, alcohol, and magic. In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler argues that sex and gender are not innate but performative, comprised of repeated acts that are seen to express masculine and feminine subjectivity. The ideal form of masculine

subjectivity is what Connell describes as hegemonic masculinity, a concept that allows scholars to discuss the most revered formation of masculinity within a local, national, or global context, against which all other masculine configurations are measured. While the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been critiqued for many reasons, including its lack of clarity and failure to engage with poststructuralism (Beasley 2012; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Demetriou 2001; Jefferson 2002; Wedgwood 2009), it provides a means of analysing the dominant configuration of masculinity which is, amongst other things, associated with logic and reason (Branney and White 260; Brody and Hall 396; Seidler 9). While I focus upon gender, I do not suggest that other identity categories, such as race, class, and ability, are any less important for the meanings that circulate within *The Inheritance Cycle*. As intersectional theorists have shown, dominant identity categories such as whiteness and heterosexuality rely upon one another for their articulation (Butler 1993; May 2015). However, given the tension between dominant masculine ideologies and emotion and their complex construction in the fantasy genre, it is not within the scope of this article to examine how masculinity intersects with other identity categories in relation to emotion.

While some recent cultural texts have attempted to destabilize these gender dichotomies between hegemonic masculinity and its feminine or other, supposedly 'lesser,' others, many popular fictions continue to draw upon them. This is true of the fantasy genre, which has traditionally emphasized place and plot rather than detailed characterization (Attebery 2; Lynn xxvi). Critics point out that while many boys and men attempt to emulate emotional hardness, it can have dire consequences on their health, as 'vulnerable' emotions are repressed and may manifest as substance abuse, violence, or suicide (Branney and White 260; Jakupcak et al. 275; Oliffe et al. 77). Despite these realities male stoicism prevails in popular culture. In the fantasy genre, in which boys and young men are more often than not the protagonists, emotions find an 'acceptable' physical outlet in quests, revenge, and fighting, the genre's driving tropes (Lynn xvi). The textual

reliance upon outdated gender binaries has implications for the familial and cultural encoding of 'appropriate' male behavior (Brody and Hall 396; Seidler 18). However, as Daniel Baker (2012) has argued, the fantasy genre does have radical potential for challenging accepted ideas and attitudes about gender and sexuality, and this subversive potential is certainly present in *The Inheritance Cycle.*

The four novels in the series, including *Eragon* (2005), *Eldest* (2006), *Brisingr* (2009), and *Inheritance* (2011), take place in the pseudo-medieval fictional land Alagaësia, in which characters complete numerous quests, the purpose of which is to defeat the 'evil' King Galbatorix and restore peace and prosperity to the kingdom. While the series has been criticized as derivative and clichéd, its success with young readers is undeniable (Del Negro 1; Hamilton 3-4, 15; Rosenberg 5-7). Considering popular culture's role in shaping young readers' attitudes and values, *The Inheritance Cycle*'s popularity indicates that the masculine discourses in the series are significant to both masculinities studies and fantasy studies.

Dragons, Direwolves, and Dæmons

Young adult fantasy fiction often features masculine protagonists whose adventures force them to repress their emotions, yet genre conventions such as the telepathic magic bond can destabilize this unemotional masculine ideology. Magical psychological contact has featured in numerous fantasy texts, including Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995-2000) and George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series (1996-forthcoming), both of which feature characters who share a telepathic link with an animal. Lenise Prater (2016) has also analyzed the magical bond convention in Robin Hobb's fantasy novels, and argues that, "psychic powers help to reimagine the boundaries between the self and the other, and this destabilization of the unified masculine subject provides space for an alternative understanding of identity" (23). The magical bond can be used to challenge stoic hegemonic masculinities because, as Prater suggests, "symbolic or

metaphoric queering" (32) through genre conventions subverts the notion of a unified, singular, and stable masculine subject.

In *The Inheritance Cycle* the magic bond queers the narrative in ways that promote emotional connection with others. The bond between Eragon and the dragon Saphira forces these two characters to explicitly acknowledge their thoughts and emotions through a telepathic connection—a linkage that expresses intimacy and empathy. In the first novel in the series the experience scares Eragon (Paolini 39), although he soon enjoys the open communication: "Saphira was a balm for Eragon's frustration. He could talk freely with her; his emotions were completely open to her mind, and she understood him better than anyone else" (61). The value Eragon and Saphira place on their emotional bond is demonstrated when they are temporarily separated in *Brisingr*, and Eragon yearns for "the open exchange of thoughts and emotions they enjoyed when in close proximity" (151). Eragon enjoys sharing his emotions with Saphira, which contests the idea that men lack feelings or the ability to express them (Lilleaas 39; Milestone and Meyer 114). Sociological research suggests that "compared with maintaining a stoic silence, they [men] said expressing emotional vulnerability would be easier, even 'therapeutic'" (Oransky and Marecek 236). Paolini himself has commented that Eragon's relationship with Saphira is a "friendship that a lot of young people would like to have" (in Leonard 27). Because Eragon's emotional openness with Saphira is presented as desirable, *The Inheritance Cycle* invites young adult readers to recognize that emotional expression is, as Eragon suggests, more fulfilling than hegemonic masculine stoicism.

The dragons in *The Inheritance Cycle* may be understood as another site upon which masculine (and feminine) Dragon Riders displace or enact their vulnerable emotions, particularly love, tenderness, and affection. When Dragon Riders speak about their dragons, it is often with the emotional undertones that are reserved for romantic heroes in the genre. In the third novel in *The Inheritance Cycle, Brisingr, "*Eragon paused and looked up at Saphira, and his heart was so full of love, he thought it might stop beating" (303). Dragons become a

site that male characters use to embrace their emotions in a safe way while maintaining distance and difference from a 'feminine' emotionality which might be demanded in a relationship with another human character.

The magical bond is also of importance because it can be read in ways that both reinforce and resist accepted ideas about sexuality. Reading the dragon-Dragon Rider bond as a pseudo-romantic relationship suggests that the pairings reinforce what Butler (1990) refers to as the heterosexual matrix—the system in which heterosexuality is compulsory and all other sexualities are policed (17). Most of the dragon and Dragon Rider pairs consist of one male and one female, and it is uncommon in *The Inheritance Cycle* for a Dragon Rider to engage in an intimate relationship with another human or elf during their dragon's lifetime. The relationship between a dragon and a Dragon Rider, particularly where one partner is gendered male and the other female, resembles a monogamous heterosexual relationship in which male characters can experience, embrace, and express their vulnerable feelings while outwardly performing a stoic male identity, and this dynamic is similarly present in Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. If this is the case, however, we may read several of the same sex dragon and Dragon Rider pairs in this series queerly, such as Eragon's half-brother Murtaugh bonding with the male dragon Thorn, Galbatorix forcibly bonding with the male dragon Shruikan, and the elf Oromis bonding with the male dragon Glaedr—even if their emphasis on exclusive, long term partnerships reinforces heterosexist relationship logics (Balay 297; Prater 31-32). Such polysemous representations again reveal the constructed nature of masculinity and men's desire for emotional connection while acknowledging stoicism as 'appropriate' male behavior. These representations make space for this emotional connection within a framework of masculine stoicism or hegemonic masculinity, thereby expanding these terms.

Weeping Warriors

While men may desire contexts in which they can express their emotions, such displays are often viewed as a failure to perform masculinity. The fantasy genre is often home to epic battles, impossible quests, and the constant threat of mortal danger, yet few (if any) male characters are depicted as crying in response to their slain comrades, grievous wounds, or temporary failures. Crying can be, and often is, regarded as the antithesis of masculinity and masculine stoicism (Warner and Shields 95-96), yet the fantasy genre conventions in *The Inheritance Cycle,* particularly the quest and magical creatures, crate narrative space in which crying is visible and acceptable. There are numerous instances in which Eragon is shown weeping, most notably because of 'evil' magical creatures called the Ra'zac who destroy his home and murder his uncle in *Eragon* (90-91), and later, because they murder his mentor Brom (276-277). Eragon cries almost fifteen times in *Eragon* alone, and throughout the series it is the events of his quest, such as the break from innocence and the death of a mentor, and magical creatures (such as the Ra'zac) that cause his tears.

Unlike many masculine characters in popular culture, Eragon's emotionality is not confined to the private sphere. He also cries in public spaces, including at a funeral in *Inheritance*: "they buried him [the elf Wyrden] while singing several aching laments in the ancient language—songs so sad that Eragon had wept without restraint" (339). In these scenes, as in many others in the novel (762, 849), Eragon is characterized as 'deviating' from normative masculine behavior by performing the 'feminine' act of crying. According to Butler (1990), it is the "occasional discontinuity" of repeated acts—in this case Eragon's crying—that "reveal[s] the temporal and contingent groundlessness" of gender (92). These discontinuous moments provide ways of subverting stoic hegemonic masculinity. Genre codes, particularly the quest and magical creatures, provide contexts in which Eragon is prompted to express his emotions in ways that invite readers to critically engage with unemotional male identity.

The dwarves in *The Inheritance Cycle* also validate the existence of emotional masculinities by disrupting the emotionless male performance that dominant ideologies perpetuate. When the dwarf character King Hrothgar is killed in *Eldest,* masculine and feminine dwarves express their feelings by weeping: "the dwarves tore at their hair, beat their breasts, and wailed their lamentations to the sky. […] After a time, Orik noticed them [Eragon and Saphira] and rose, his face red from crying and his beard torn free from its usual braid" (657). Within the dwarf society crying is not a sign of weakness or failure, but a normal and healthy practice that is acceptable for both masculine and feminine subjects. Unlike 'real' and fictional Western human cultures in which emotional outbursts are policed and punished, the dwarf culture in *The Inheritance Cycle* embraces vulnerable emotions and their overt expression and discloses stoicism as performative. According to Butler (1990), "the strange, the incoherent, that which falls 'outside,' gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that *might well be constructed differently*" (110, my emphasis). The dwarves' emotionality demonstrates that unemotional masculinities are not innate but dependent upon shifting cultural, social, and historical contexts. Such a discrepancy also reveals how a culture that values and validates men's emotions may be possible or even preferable to the stoic and often harmful performance which many characters in the series seek to maintain.

Take It Like An Elf

While masculine displays of emotion are generally promoted through Eragon and the dwarves, many magical races in *The Inheritance Cycle,* including the elves, likewise demonstrate a cultural preference for emotional repression. Elves are a common fantasy convention, although their characteristics vary between texts (Kellner 368; J. Simpson 76). Paolini's elves are similar to those in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954-1955) in that they are powerful, impassive, and possess keen senses (J. Simpson 76), although

Paolini's elves have a stronger aptitude for emotional regulation than Tolkien's. In *The Inheritance Cycle* elvish stoicism echoes 'real' world masculine discourses, but in doing so challenges their purported desirability.

As the protagonist, Eragon admires the elves' unemotional appearance and in *Inheritance* he believes that his elvish mentor Oromis "had been in such perfect command of himself, never the slightest doubt or worry had bothered him" (246-247). Eragon attributes the elves' emotional repression to their communication restrictions: "speaking and thinking in a language that prevented one from lying […] fostered an aversion to allowing one's emotions to sweep one away. As a rule, then, elves possessed far more self-control than the members of other races" (246-247). From Eragon's perspective emotional "self-mastery", or learning to 'take it like an elf', is desirable, and Oromis is upheld as the pinnacle of stoicism. Eragon's allusion to Oromis links his honourable status as a mentor and Dragon Rider with his impassive manner, which emphasizes Eragon's affirmative views about elvish emotional control. The ideological implications this scene fosters are polysemous because, on the one hand, they reinforce emotional regulation as desirable and useful. On the other hand, by casting stoicism as racial rather than gendered, Eragon is able to define his emotional masculine identity not through its "differentiation from the opposite gender" (Butler 22) but from an act that is changed from gendered to racial in the androgynous elf culture. The binary between masculinity and femininity is destabilized and the definition of masculine through difference to feminine is subverted by its irrelevance in the context of emotional self-mastery. While other minor characters criticize the elves' stoicism in *Eldest* (76, 80) and *Inheritance* (118-119), Eragon's admiration for the same characteristic is important, because he holds a privileged position as the text's lead protagonist (P. Simpson 28).

Eragon's positive attitude towards the elves' emotional repression is destabilized by the ancient elvish character Rhunön, who criticizes the unemotional façade that her fellows perform. While Eragon's perspective is the readers' main point of reference, he is influenced by his personal

(and often unfounded) prejudices and is often an unreliable narrator. Conversely, in *Eldest* Rhunön is characterized as ancient, highly skilled, and respected within both elf and dwarf cultures, and her dialogue reflects a clear, unbiased, and candid attitude (301-304). When she and Eragon discuss elvish stoicism in *Brisingr*, she claims that she "cannot abide how [her] race has become" because "elves used to laugh and fight like normal creatures. Now they have become so withdrawn, some seem to have no more emotion than a marble statue!" (649-650). By referring to emotional expression in conjunction with "normal creatures", Rhunön implies that her race has become unnatural, which evokes earlier comments in *Inheritance* about the elves' cold, unemotional, and superior characterization (118-119). By suggesting that the elves' stoicism has made them Other, Rhunön implies that men who perform the same unemotional masculinity are likewise alien and unnatural.

While it could be argued that Rhunön's attack on elvish stoicism confirms the binary which defines males as stoic and females as emotional, the elves' androgynous culture and Rhunön's non-normative embodiment of gender resist this character dichotomy. Rhunön can be read as embodying what Judith Halberstam (1998) refers to as female masculinity because she is referred to with female pronouns but is described in *Brisingr* as a blacksmith with "thick muscles" (650) and in *Eldest* as having "short-cropped hair (303), "all the authority of a warrior" (302), and a voice that "reminded Eragon of the old men of Carvahall who sat on the porches outside their houses, smoking pipes and telling stories" (301)—all of which are masculine signifiers. While Rhunön is also described as having, "cradled the weapon [Zar'roc] like a mother would her firstborn" in *Eldest* (302), her characterization disrupts the sex/gender/sexuality correlation. To assume that Rhunön and Eragon's exchange reinforces the connection between femininity and emotion would therefore be too simple a reading. Rhunön challenges dominant modes of masculine performativity by implicitly labelling stoicism as Other, and further demonstrates the constructed nature of gender through her non-normative gender identity.

Despite the openness with which Rhunön, Eragon, and the dwarves experience and express their feelings, *The Inheritance Cycle* also reveals that emotional regulation by men can bring social rewards. The importance of self-mastery is demonstrated in numerous instances, chief of which are Eragon's training as a Dragon Rider and his cousin Roran's quests. Roran faces considerable hardships throughout the series, but unlike Eragon he always attempts to perform a stoic masculine identity by exerting intense internal control over his feelings. After a distressing series of events in *Eldest* Roran represses his emotions in a scene that is worth quoting at length:

> He leaned against the wall and—through the sheer strength of his will—began to gradually subdue each of his unruly emotions, wrestling them into submission to the one thing that could save him from insanity: reason. […] Once he regained control, Roran carefully arranged his thoughts, like a master craftsman organizing his tools into precise rows (246).

Emotional expression is depicted as a destabilizing and destructive practice, although Roran overcomes his "unruly emotions" and thus maintains his morality and sanity. However, Roran's conscious and explicit battle with emotionality also emphasizes how masculinity is constructed through mundane acts (Butler 33, 136, 140. Roran's interior perspective reveals that he is not unemotional but performs psychologically repressive behaviors that constitute his masculine identity. Roran's self-mastery, like the hardening of his body, the use of violence, and the growth of his beard, is connected to his transition from marginalized to hegemonic masculinity within a culture and context that both demands and rewards it. During his quest Roran experiences trials that condition his body and mind to harden in accordance with dominant masculine practices, which in turn enable his hegemonic status. The quest convention facilitates narrative events that cause Roran distress, but his repressive reaction to these emotions invites readers to recognize that stoicism is not natural but performative.

While Roran has seemingly learnt to master his feelings, Eragon often fails to achieve the same unemotional behavior. During his training as a Dragon Rider, mentors such as Oromis in *Eldest* (346, 397) and the dragon Glaedr and the elf Arya in *Inheritance* (94, 536) encourage Eragon to control his feelings. He is frequently admonished for being too emotional, letting his feelings cloud his judgement, and not keeping control of himself. The importance of self-mastery is stressed by Oromis in *Eldest,* who says*:* "you must keep a better hold over your emotions, Eragon. It could cost you your life if you allow your temper to sway your judgement" (397). Oromis's statement once again illustrates how emotional expression is constructed as a weakness that diminishes Eragon's masculine identity. As the elves train Eragon as a Dragon Rider, they police his deviations from hegemonic standards by encouraging him to control his feelings and adopt the impassive appearance that their culture venerates. Because this process is made visible, readers are invited to recognise that gender is, as Butler notes in *Gender Trouble,* "a strategy of survival within compulsory systems" (139-140). Eragon's complicated relationship with his emotions demonstrates how gender is constituted through the acculturation of 'appropriate' masculine behavior in familial, cultural, educational, and institutional contexts. Such a revelation invites readers to consider the constructed nature of gender and how socializing practices, like those Eragon struggles with, can be renegotiated, resisted, and transformed.

While male characters in *The Inheritance Cycle* attempt to maintain emotional self-control, they also channel their feelings into alternative outlets in their quests such as physical activity or aggressive behavior. David Buchbinder (1994) claims that because masculine emotion is seen as inappropriate, it "may be articulated in other, less positive ways. Accordingly, anger and aggression frequently come to signify appropriate 'manly' feelings" (39). Considering the negative way in which men are taught to regard emotion (Oransky and Marecek 228; Seidler 9; Whitehead 175) vulnerable emotions may be understood as 'unmasculine,' requiring compensatory behaviors such as drinking alcohol and aggression (Buchbinder 39; Jakupcak et al. 275-276).

Throughout *The Inheritance Cycle* and particularly in *Eragon,* Eragon punches inanimate objects when his emotions threaten to overwhelm him: "frustrated, he punched a nearby wall, bruising his knuckles" (256). Similarly in *Inheritance*, his cousin Roran: "put aside thoughts of his slain friend, for they were too painful to dwell on, and instead concentrated upon the most immediate problem at hand: the soldiers at the southern end of the square" (194). Eragon and Roran translate their frustration, grief, and sadness into aggressive behavior that aids their respective quests. Considering their main character status and the rewards they receive within the narrative, such as love, respect, power, and material wealth, channelling emotion into aggression is upheld as acceptable masculine behavior and as a desirable practice with real social rewards (P. Simpson 28).

Aggression is not the only outlet into which masculine characters displace their emotions; throughout *The Inheritance Cycle* and many other popular fantasy texts, work becomes an outlet for masculine emotions (Drummond 104; Lilleaas 40). Like aggression, physical and mental work allow men to displace their emotions by emphasizing their hold on other masculine resources, such as strength, muscularity and organizational superiority (Connell and Messerschmidt 840; Drummond 104). Eragon often uses physical activity as an emotional outlet and says so explicitly in *Eldest*: "he had realized, with Saphira's help, that the only way to stay rational amid such pain was to *do* things" (2, original emphasis). Eragon consciously channels his feelings elsewhere because he understands that during his quest and its often horrific realities, emotion is undesirable and requires distraction or deletion. The text thus utilizes stoic masculine behavior, yet in doing so it also reveals that gender is learned and performed (Butler 140; West and Zimmerman 125, 135). Eragon's statement illustrates that he has learned to draw on masculine resources such as work in reaction to emotionally challenging situations that threaten to disrupt the repetition of those masculine acts that compose his gender identity. While emotion is emphasized as a debilitating and 'unmasculine' force that must be transformed into work,

physical activity, or aggression, this practice is revealed to be performative and thus open to interrogation and transformation.

Emotional repression is also enacted through alcohol, one of the staples in the fantasy genre, which provides an opportunity for men to both transform their emotions and overcompensate for the existence of vulnerable feelings. Many scholars agree that alcohol and masculinity are intrinsically linked in Western society; drinking is an accepted act through which men perform masculinity and rise within the hierarchy of masculinities (Mullen, Watson, Swift, and Black 151; Oliffe et al. 77). Because of its masculine connotations and capacity to influence the drinker's emotional state, some men use alcohol not only to demonstrate their masculinity but to subdue their feelings (Branney and White 256; Oliffe et al. 84-85). The relationship between alcohol and masculine emotional regulation is reflected in popular culture texts and features in a number of adolescent fantasy novels.

Throughout *The Inheritance Cycle* Eragon consumes alcohol to displace his emotions, particularly sadness, grief, shame, and fear. He drinks with his mentor Brom during their quest to find the Ra'zac in *Eragon* (249), binge drinks with the dwarves at a funeral in *Eldest* (50), suppresses his melancholy with mead while hunting the Ra'zac with Roran in *Brisingr* (33), and drinks an elvish alcohol to calm himself in *Inheritance* (342). In each of these scenes alcohol is transformative, intended for "release" and used "to forget" troubling realities (342). Eragon's reliance upon alcohol is indicated when he concedes that, "the tension he felt was too deep-seated to ease with mental tricks alone. […] When Arya returned the flask to him, he downed a large quaff and then chuckled, unable to help himself" (342). From Eragon's perspective, feelings such as fear, shame, grief, and anxiety are undesirable and 'unmasculine,' so he drinks alcohol to minimize his emotional experience. This can also be understood as an act of masculine overcompensation in which Eragon draws on external masculine resources to hide his interior emotional vulnerability. Yet by requiring overcompensation, the scene reveals once again that masculinity is performative: Eragon admits that he is experiencing intense emotions,

which disrupts the idea that masculine subjects are naturally unemotional. While drinking a "large quaff" of alcohol to subdue his emotions reflects accepted masculine behavior, *The Inheritance Cycle* also reveals that gender is "an idea that no one *can* embody […] all along the original was derived" (Butler 138-139). Readers are invited to recognize how impossible hegemonic masculinity is to access because, even for a fantasy quester with magical powers, they require "something else"—in this case alcohol—to be achievable.

The Inheritance Cycle also destabilizes alcohol's accepted role in emotional repression because intoxication makes male characters vulnerable. When Eragon becomes intoxicated in *Inheritance*, he is powerless when his enemies attack: "Eragon staggered and fell to one knee as the ground seemed to pitch underneath him… *Balance is gone,* thought Eragon. *Can't trust my vision. Have to clear my mind"* (346-347). Because of the alcoholic drink that Eragon consumed, he is unable to fulfill his masculine role as protector. Readers are also invited to empathize with Eragon's failure through his perspective: *"*panic blossomed within him so strongly that it almost overrode his sense of reason and sent him running blindly into the night. […] Eragon was not sure how he and Arya could fight them off. Not in their condition" (346-347, original emphasis). Alcohol transforms Eragon from powerful to powerless and his urge to start "running blindly into the night" cements his impotence by suggesting that alcohol nullifies his magical and physical abilities as well as his bravery and masculinity. The fantasy context is particularly important to consider when analysing this scene, because the genre is enamored with epic heroes whose quests and violence cement their glorified status (Lynn xvi; Milestone and Meyer 136-139). Yet Eragon's desire to not only avoid fighting but to run in fear emphasizes how alcohol, as an emotional bolster to masculinity, is here a source of impotence. Readers are invited to recognize that stoic hegemonic masculinities are always already impossible to embody and that the ways in which they can be achieved—in this case through alcohol—may inhibit ones' agency.

Emotion as Weakness and Weapon

Masculine characters in *The Inheritance Cycle* perceive their feelings as the origin of weakness and vulnerability in both *Eragon* (32) and *Brisingr* (607), yet the series also positions emotion as a supernatural source of power. The relationship between emotion and magic has seldom been analyzed within the academy despite the fact that many non-realist texts suggest that magic is stimulated by strong emotions. Linking magic with emotion subverts hegemonic masculine stoicism, especially in *The Inheritance Cycle.* When Eragon first uses magic in *Eragon,* he envisions "dead villagers piled around the spear and an innocent baby who would never grow to adulthood" and so feels "a burning, fiery power [which] gathered from every part of his body" (133). When Eragon's emotions reach a point where "he felt ready to burst from the contained force", he attacks the enemies that have inspired his wrath with magic: "the arrow hissed through the air, glowing with a crackling blue light. It struck the Urgal on the forehead, and the air resounded with an explosion" (133-134). Eragon experiences such intense emotions that he sets an arrow alight and kills his enemies with the ensuing explosion. Later in the same novel, his mentor Brom explains that a similar process initiated the Dragon Riders into the magical arts: "the students were presented with a series of pointless tasks designed to frustrate them… after a time, they would get infuriated enough to use magic" (144-145). In these scenes emotion is not only a conduit to magical power, but a form of power connected to the 'good' characters.

Emotion is aligned with fantasy heroes rather than villains, yet its role as both weapon and weakness is emphasized in the final battle of the series, in which Eragon uses emotion and magic to defeat the evil King Galbatorix in *Inheritance*. Because he has been magically silenced by Galbatorix, Eragon casts a spell using his emotions and the enchantment forces the king to experience every emotion he has ever evoked. When Eragon inadvertently casts the spell, he realizes that, "it was a spell without words, for Galbatorix's magic would not allow otherwise, and no

words could have described what Eragon wanted, nor what he felt… His was a spell of instinct and emotion" (714). The emotion comes from both Eragon and the crystallized dragon souls (Eldunarí) that aid him, who feel "a hundred years of inconsolable grief and anger […] like a roaring wave" (714). The emotionally powered spell that Eragon and the Eldunarí create would "compel him to experience all the feelings, both good and bad, that he had aroused in others since the day he had been born" (714-715). Because of Galbatorix's misdeeds, the effects of the spell are described as "an unbearable cacophony of pains and joys innumerable" (715). As the final battle between 'good' and 'evil,' this scene is one of the most important in the series, and it also offers complex and contradictory meanings about whether masculinity and emotion can and should coexist.

The final battle between Eragon and Galbatorix is ideologically fraught and can be read in ways that both reinforce and reject stoic hegemonic masculinity. Emotional experiences and expression are often seen as a vulnerability and weakness for men (Seidler 13), and emotion clearly weakens Galbatorix and inspires his decision to 'undo' himself with magic (718-719). However, readers are invited to critique Galbatorix's inability to accept and express his emotions when he commits suicide to escape them, saying: "'the voices… the voices are terrible. I can't bear it…' He closed his eyes, and fresh tears streamed down his cheeks. 'Pain… so much pain. So much grief… Make it stop! *Make it stop!*'" (718, original emphasis). By forcing Galbatorix to embrace emotion, his masculine identity is symbolically withdrawn and he chooses death rather than emotion (which we may read as femininity and powerlessness). Galbatorix's final pleading moments offer a harrowing critique of masculine stoicism and a haunting allusion to 'real' Western culture, in which men commit suicide far more often than women because of the cultural stigma that polices their emotional expression (Branney and White 256; Oliffe et al. 77).

Finally, it is worth examining how Eragon defeats Galbatorix not through physical force, with which violent hegemonic masculinity has often been associated (Hatty 2000), but through emotion. Rather than his

muscular body or combat skills, Eragon's emotions create magic and undermine the king's protective spells, particularly his vulnerable feelings such as fear and grief. Similarly, the Eldunarí's "unbearable [emotional] cacophony" strengthens the spell and contains so much power that it delivers the final blow in the battle between 'good' and 'evil.' This climax shows that *The Inheritance Cycle* presents a complex yet often subversive construction of masculinity and emotion, one that may also invite young readers to re-examine their own experiences and reactions.

Conclusion

In *The Inheritance Cycle* unemotional male identities and emotional repression face textual interrogation. Fantasy conventions such as magical creatures and quests reflect the Western conflation of masculinity and stoicism, yet these same fantasy conventions, particularly magic, indicate that emotion provides great power to change the world. *The Inheritance Cycle* does not always illustrate progressive views about emotional openness, yet the idea that men are naturally unemotional, or should attempt to be so, is repeatedly contested. The series thus invites young readers to recognize that masculinity is constructed, and that its enactment often involves psychological and physical harm to men and those around them.

Even though the fantasy genre conventions in *The Inheritance Cycle* utilize stoic masculine ideologies, they simultaneously showcase diverse and less harmful ways in which characters can engage with their emotions. Considering that fantasy genre fiction often facilitates emotional repression through quests, revenge, isolation, and violence, and is immensely popular among young readers, emotionally expressive masculine characters may invite young adults to reject hegemonic stoicism and its damaging consequences. Few academic studies have examined how masculinity is represented in fantasy fiction, yet this paper shows that because of its conventions, the genre is a critical cultural site for masculinities scholars who wish to examine how

hegemonic and alternative masculinities may be (re)imagined. Dominant and destructive ideas about masculine subjectivity are pervasive within the genre, but questioning what it means to be masculine in fantasy fiction—to "take it like an elf", or a dwarf, or a dragon—may reveal how scholars and readers can "redescribe those possibilities that *already* exist" (Butler 148-149, original emphasis) in our real world, but have been obscured by essentialist gender models and hegemonic discourses.

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