For many theorists, both feminist and not, the figure of an archetypal, active female warrior hero has been problematic. Many feminists believe it is gender stereotyping to suggest that women are unable to possess the force of the archetypal warrior hero and that this archetype is ultimately available to both men and women. I briefly define the nature of the archetypal hero and an argument is made for the active female s/hero who possesses the “masculine” powers of the hero and thus allows the archetypal power of the active warrior hero to pass to women. Joseph Campbell’s work on the archetypal hero of myth is drawn on extensively. One of genres that allows an exploration of the s/hero is SF. I explore the s/hero in SF, particularly as she is evoked in Joanna Russ’s stories, published as short stories first and then collected in 1976 and published as The Adventures of Alyx.

**Keywords:** Joanna Russ, Adventures of Alyx, female hero, Joseph Campbell, monomyth, hero’s journey, feminist science fiction, female warrior

The hero is an important archetypal force that appears in myth and literature from all over the world, with his attributes shifting to serve the society that has called him into existence so that we have both Gilgamesh and David standing beside characters like Batman and Spawn. Although this archetypal figure has been gendered male for most of history, an interesting shift has taken place in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: we have been creating an abundance of women heroes, what I refer to as s/heroes. This shift in popular consciousness is largely due to the socio-political gains of feminists. As twentieth and twenty-first century feminisms usher in a powerful criticism of gender codes and the way women and femininity are treated, it follows that those archetypes that give image to the play of dynamic forces in our collective psyche also have to be renegotiated. Because the hero was coded masculine and male in the past, this figure becomes the site of a fascinating, and popular, renegotiation of gender codes and what we, as a twenty-first century society, expect of our heroes. I want to address the following question here: what do we expect of heroes? And can a woman meet those expectations? I contend that we still expect of the warrior hero much what we always have – and that, yes, women can most certainly take up arms in archetypal battle.

The process of renegotiating gender codes and rethinking archetypal heroes really begins with twentieth-century SF, particularly with the writing of feminist SF authors like Joanna Russ. A brief consideration of the heroes of feminist SF authors like C.L. Moore, Tanith Lee, C.J. Cherryh and Octavia Butler suggests that the s/hero should be identified in exactly the same way that a male hero is, and we must expect no less of her. It is not the masculinity of the hero that must be revised, but the masculinist interpretation of the archetypal content of the heroic journey. Russ does this with particular deftness, as I show below. In SF, Joanna Russ’s Alyx is a perfect example of the archetypal s/hero.

Before continuing, a distinction must be made concerning different kinds of heroes, particularly the one I explore here: the archetypal “warrior” hero, not the tragic hero or the Everyman/Willy Loman hero, both of whom embody a different heroic ethic and explore different human concerns than that of the archetypal warrior hero. The hero with whom I am concerned here is the Campbellian hero of archetype and myth. The accepted attributes of this hero are as follows: he is fully human and yet is able to commit himself to an action that demands almost superhuman virtue and strength; he undertakes the heroic journey (most succinctly described by Joseph Campbell); and he embodies a heroic ethic that sets him apart from the rest of his society.

**Mapping the Heroic Journey**

The stages of the heroic journey that comprise the monomyth (that is, the heroic pattern reflected in all mythologies) are central to Campbell’s thesis, and in turn to my mapping of Alyx’s archetypal journey. A brief discussion of these stages is therefore necessary. The first stage of the heroic monomyth is that of the Departure. This is the stage in which the hero breaks away from his or her society and establishes an identity untainted by restrictive social convention. The Departure is made up of the Call to Adventure (a catalyst, waking the hero to alternatives to social convention), Supernatural Aid (discovery of a magical token empowering the hero to break away), Crossing the First Threshold (the first step away from home and the aggressive defiance of the Threshold Guardian), and the Belly of the Whale (the hero is trapped in a last-ditch attempt to curtail his or her movement; emergence from the Belly is a rebirth into the world as a hero). The second stage is the Initiation, made up of the Road of Trials (a series of challenges the hero must navigate successfully), the Meeting with the Goddess (in a male hero, the need to reconcile his alienated anima; in a female hero, aspects of her femininity with which she is uncomfortable), Woman as Temptress (illicit sexual desire), Atonement with the Father (the hero meets God, or faces Ultimate Reality), Apotheosis (the hero is transformed having faced God) and the Ultimate Boon (the hero gains something – some wisdom, or an object – that results in liberation for all). The last leg of the monomyth is the Return: Crossing the Return Threshold, becoming Master of Two Worlds and the Freedom to Live (unconstrained by human pettiness, the hero lives free). Having successfully navigating the stages of the monomyth, the hero liberates his or her society from a limiting social structure or ideology.

The warrior hero typically displays prowess in battle and feats of strength and endurance; he displays an aggression and ferocity that allow him to overcome the obstacles before him and to negotiate the trials of the hero’s journey successfully. His ferocity, aggression and physical prowess are what have conventionally gendered the hero masculine. Yet that gendering need not be related to the sex of the hero. Given the contemporary acknowledgement that women may perform masculine behaviour, and vice versa, it should be perfectly acceptable to have a woman warrior hero.

Of course, there have been female heroes in past mythologies and histories, but even a cursory study reveals that these figures were often side-lined in favour of their more robust and popularly acceptable brothers. They were considered exceptions to the heroic rule and the social norm and have had their importance recognised and reasserted only in the last century, usually by feminist theorists. This reassertion of the significance of the s/hero has not come easily, however: there has been much debate even among feminist scholars of SF as what constitutes a s/hero, and whether the s/hero furthers the feminist cause or undermines it because of her masculine character.

Archetype and Gender

Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope write that, “The assumption that the male is subject and hero and the female is object and heroine injects patriarchal sex-role assumptions into the discussion of the archetypal hero’s journey: this confuses the issue and obscures the true archetypal elements of the pattern” (4). The s/hero is bound to archetypal action and must, as Pearson and Pope suggest, be as much subject and hero as the male hero is. But theorists like Sarah Lefanu and Mary Ann Jezewski suggest that a female hero who enacts masculinity is “letting down the side”. Lefanu writes that “The constraints against which...heroines strive are, quite specifically, those imposed upon women by men” (28). This limits the actions of the s/hero and strips her of archetypal potential. And although Lefanu’s reading of the s/hero was done in the 1980s, some current feminist theorists share Lefanu’s ambivalence about the s/hero. Alyce Rae Helford, writing about the TV program Xena: Warrior Princess (1995-2000) notes, “Through demonstration of strengths in traditionally male-dominated arenas, X:WP challenges norms that identify male as sole creators of history and myth. …Stepping into the traditional role of the hero seems a feminist triumph to many; however, it also arguably masculinises Xena, suggesting that for women to be heroic, they must become, in effect, men” (136).

This is the dominant problem for those feminists who are looking for an active s/hero who does not reinscribe a masculinist way of representing authority. But even though the hero has traditionally been male, it does not mean that “he” cannot be performed by “her”: in terms of heroism, “doing is being” (Hollinger 202). The hero is an archetype, and as such there are certain actions and patterns that we expect from him and her. Perhaps, as Jessica Salmonson suggests, we should allow for the fact that “the very act of women taking up sword and shield, to a society like our own which is ruled by men, is an act of revolution” (14).

Russ herself expresses the sentiment that any attempt to curb the positive action of the s/hero is a submission to outdated social norms. Her rejoinder to this debate might well be, “Masculinity equals power and femininity equals powerlessness. This is a cultural stereotype that can be found in much literature, but science fiction writers have no place employing stereotypes, let alone swallowing them goggle-eyed” (“What can a heroine do? “ 84). Joanna Russ’s Alyx stories, collected in 1976 as The Adventures of Alyx, narratively enact the ideas expressed by Campbell and feminist theorists such as Pope and Pearson, and Marina Warner who explore archetypal s/heroism. Pope, Warner and Russ acknowledge that the hero is masculine, but the distinction they identify is that while the s/hero and hero are both gendered masculine, some of the obstacles faced may contain different psychical content and conflicts when the hero is a woman. Alyx follows the monomyth of the Campbellian hero but because Campbell assumes that the hero is always male and genders the heroic journey accordingly, Russ cannot simply replicate that journey for her female hero. Instead she revises those aspects of the heroic journey in which the content has been interpreted from a solely masculinist perspective. She thus demonstrates that feminist authors can create female Campbellian heroes through the strategic revision of the implicitly masculinist aspects of Campbell’s theory. Russ’s revision of Campbell allows the archetypal s/hero to emerge – a hero acceptable to both feminists and scholars of archetypal heroism.

Alyx’s Transformation into Hero

Russ’s stories follow Alyx, a woman who defies the restrictive social conventions of her world and becomes a tough, unapologetic, assertive female hero. Russ creates a world apart for Alyx, who follows the god Yp and spends time in the city of Ourdh. And yet the barriers between her world and ours seem increasingly flimsy as the stories progress, until she finally seems to be undertaking the redemption of our world as well as hers. Russ relocates Alyx from one location to the next in the tales, undermining the sense she belongs to only one place and when, in the final tale, Alyx’s descendant appears in a twentieth century United States of America, we are left with the distinct impression that this hero belongs as much to us as she does to other places and times.

“I Thought She Was Afeared Till She Stroked My Beard” (first published in Orbit 2, New York, Berkely Books, 1967, as “I Gave Her Sack and Sherry”) is the second Alyx story, but in the chronology of Alyx’s heroic journey, it explores the first part of the journey: the Departure. When we first meet Alyx, she is nameless; like the traditional hero, she has no independent identity. Her brutish husband sets her to the manual labour of a servant, but she yearns for something alien to her world, something expansive and we are told that she goes about her work with “her head full of pirates” (32). The pirates are rich in symbolic significance: for this nameless girl, they represent a rogue, violent, and masculine freedom from the captivity and servitude to which she is bound – an existence of enforced femininity. When real pirates enter her husband’s house, her Call to Adventure is sounded. The woman sees her husband rooked by the pirates, sees them defeat him, and knows that she need no longer stay with him.

Because the pirates represent a way of life outside the norm, subject to nothing but their own laws, the girl is fascinated with their agency and must internalize the lessons they have to teach. It is also important to note that she has visions of the pirates before they arrive: the hero hears the Call to Adventure, but often the voice that sounds the call is their own. It is thus appropriate that the pirate captain, an externalisation of the girl’s alienated animus and desire for agency, becomes her guide: she must internalise him.

However, before the girl can leave with the pirates she must assert her independence from her husband (and the social constraints that curb her freedom). When she challenges her husband’s treatment of her, his response serves as a summation of that society’s attitudes to women:

SHE: It is beneath my class to do it and you know it.
HE: You have no social class; only I do, because I am a man [31].

The girl acts in order to liberate herself: she kills him. This action is significant because “androcide” becomes the focused representation of a revolutionary war. Taking the life of a member of the sex that has denied women the capacity to act opens new grounds for female characters in the existing archive of comprehensible and permissible story lines. In Russ’s texts, androcide as a narrative device represents women’s claim to agency. … Women, who are conventionally supposed to give life, especially to male offspring,
transcend this demand of patriarchy by taking the life of a grown man. Women, who are conventionally expected to help the male hero, become the heroes of their own stories, destroying precisely those characters in the story that would bar their access to heroism [Cortiel 46].

Once the girl has escaped her husband, “she [zigzags] between the tree trunks and [flashes] over the cliff into the sea” (34), moving away from her domestic land-based existence into another world altogether. She dives into the ocean to join the pirates – a classic example of the hero’s descent into a lower world where things are dreamlike and fluid. This movement usually heralds some attempt on the hero’s part to define his or her identity, to claim a reality from among the illusions with which he or she is presented (Frye 97). Russ has her protagonist “discover” herself in the ocean, “the primordial element, the mother sea (as opposed to the male sky)” (Ferber 179) so that her hero engages with her alienated animus while supported by the elemental representation of a vital, chaotic anima. Although the fluidity of this scene is typical of this stage of the Campbellian monomyth, Russ inflects it with a feminist potency that revises its meaning somewhat: the undercurrent of wild, feminine energy serves to highlight the fact that Alyx’s growing agency is alien to that of her male captors and often threatening to them.

After escaping her husband and society, the hero’s next step is to receive Supernatural Aid from the Cosmic Mother. In another revision of Campbell, Russ accomplishes this meeting with the Cosmic Mother in a telling manner: the girl is immersed in the oceanic, feminine element and thus not fully separate from the Feminine Principle/Cosmic Mother. Also, when Russ introduces the reader to Alyx in the first story of the collection, “Bluestocking”, we are told that “legend has it that the first man, Leh, was fashioned from the sixth finger of the left hand of the first women, Loh, and that is why women have only five fingers on the left hand. The lady with whom we concern ourselves in this story had all six fingers, and what is more, they all worked” (9).

Alyx is born as the first woman was, as the Cosmic Mother made her, before man took her sixth finger. If the sixth finger represents women’s agency then Alyx, nameless as she is at this point in the story, is born whole and with a capacity for agency that other women lack: she is capable of acting because she has all her fingers, and they all work. The sixth finger is the amulet Alyx is given by the Cosmic Mother. Jeanne Cortiel writes that “Agency” signifies the power and ability to effect changes in the process of human history. Combined with the recognition by others that the agent is indeed the origin of that change. …This concept builds on two premises: first, that the actions of an individual constitute their identity and second, that agency is a prerequisite for human existence within the cultural context. If I am denied this capacity, I do not exist as part of society [15].

Women, in this nameless young girl’s world, do not exist as part of society because they are denied agency. But when Alyx is born with the amulet – the sixth finger – she signifies that a change in the course of history is coming: she will become a “destiny” (10) and change the world for others around her too.

As the young woman swims toward the pirate ship, her connection with the Cosmic Mother strengthens. She feels “something form within her, something queer and dark, and hard, like the strangeness of strange customs, or the blackened face of the goddess Chance, whose image set up at crossroads looks three ways at once to signify the crossing of influences” (30). The girl, because she is acting against the norm, implicitly adopts another set of customs: those of the Cosmic Mother. The difference between the relationship Russ establishes between Alyx and the conventional one of male hero to Cosmic Mother is interesting: where the male hero accepts a token of the Cosmic Mother to be used in later trials, Russ identifies Alyx with this entropic, unruly female force and the kinship empowers Alyx. This is a significant feminist revision of the masculinist monomyth.

The girl’s connection with the power of the Cosmic Mother equips her to meet and defeat the Threshold Guardian, the pirate captain. During her time aboard his ship, the girl interacts with the pirate captain for a specific purpose on four separate occasions. On the first, she learns finesse in battle. On the second occasion, she and the captain share a sexual interlude: but the captain cannot respond to her until she covers her naked body and adopts coy, submissive role. With conscious irony, she plays this part and then goes on to ravish the captain: having internalised the aggression of the animus, she will never again be a docile sexual object. On the third occasion, the captain becomes so frustrated with the girl’s defiance of his authority that he locks her in his room in the hull of the ship – the Belly of the Whale. While she is here, and before her last confrontation with the captain, she comes across a pretty mirror that he gave her. Northrop Frye points out that mirrors often appear during this stage of the heroic journey and present the hero with the chance to see himself or herself, and evaluate his or her identity (Frye 117). For Russ, the mirror reflects an identity prescribed for the girl by patriarchal society: it represents the male gaze and the problems inherent in the creation of female identity influenced by its authority. As the girl considers her reflection, she deconstructs the identity created for her by patriarchal culture; she recognises the distortions in the surface and throws the mirror aside, uninterested. Then she picks up the sword the pirate left behind and chooses to become the hero.

When the girl breaks out of the hull, defying man’s right to define or control her, she emerges to find the pirate ship under attack and launches into battle. In her final interaction with the Threshold Guardian, the captain sees the girl and apologises for the trauma she must feel after the battle:

He said: “Are you frightened? You won’t have to go through this again.”
“No?” she said. “Never.” “Well,” she said, “perhaps I will all the same.” [41]

When the girl takes responsibility for her actions, which are invested with masculinity rather than femininity (and are therefore those of the active hero), she integrates her animus into her psyche and claims agency in all the spheres over which the animus is meant to dominate. The Threshold Guardian has taught her all he can. She crosses the First Threshold and emerges from the ship. The emergence from the Belly of the Whale signifies the hero’s rebirth, and so it is here that the hero claims her identity. She arrives at the city of Ourdh and declares herself to the gatekeeper:

“My name,” she said, “is Alyx.” “Never heard of it,” said the gatekeeper, a little annoyed.
“Good heavens,” said Alyx, “not yet.” [45]

And so Alyx completes her Departure from home and its strictures and begins her Initiation.

**Alyx as Hero**

Once Alyx has proved that she has the courage to undertake the heroic journey, she must undergo a number of trials that will initiate her into the role expected of a hero: she has to test her strengths and discover her weaknesses and learn from these lessons. In “Bluestocking” (1967), Alyx is hired by a young woman, Edarra, to be her bodyguard and help her escape an arranged marriage. Thus begins Alyx’s Road of Trials. The most interesting aspect of this story is how Russ deals with the two obstacles most fraught with gender tension when the hero is male: the Meeting with the Goddess, and Woman as Temptress. These are the only two obstacles where it seems implausible not to have a male hero. But the human experience should never be recorded from only a male perspective, and Russ reconfigures Campbell’s reading of the archetypal journey to make way for woman’s experience as well.

The first Trial is the Meeting with the Goddess which, for a male hero, is an invitation to master the implications of physical life and death. Because Russ identifies Alyx with the Cosmic Mother throughout *The Adventures of Alyx*, the lines between the two figures become blurred so that Alyx’s Meeting with the Goddess becomes a confrontation of those aspects of her own femininity or female experience with which she is ill at ease. And perhaps this is representative of the difference between the experiences of male and female heroes: the archetypal role may be the same, but the psychic conflicts may change to accommodate the lessons needed by each to achieve liberation from stifling norms. Where the Goddess must always be that incomprehensible “other” to man, to a woman the female experiences she represents may not be so entirely alien: for the female hero, the Meeting with the Goddess is thus the catalyst of an internal revelation. For the male hero, it is an uncomfortable encounter with an externalised anima.

In “Bluestocking”, Alyx assumes the role of protector and stifles Edarra’s attempts to develop agency. Alyx is therefore identified with that aspect of the Goddess who is the “mother who would hold to herself the growing child trying to push away” (Campbell 111). We learn later that Alyx adopts this role because she abandoned a daughter when she left her husband. Because of this, Alyx must confront the mother aspect of herself, and learn that mothering need trap neither mother nor child. When she faces down a sea monster that “[holds] its baby to its breast, [in] a nauseating parody of human-kind” (17), Alyx is forced to recognise the parody of motherhood she herself is enacting with Edarra.

The sea monster is an externalisation of what motherhood may mean to a female hero: a monstrous curtailment of movement and action. As Pearson and Pope suggest, “The myth of the perfect mother is an extension of the virginity myth; both are asexual, both require selflessness, and both cast the woman in a scapegoat role” (41). Russ takes this chunk of Campbellian theory and recasts it so that the myth of motherhood, represented by the sea serpent, must be vanquished by the s/hero. A mother has tremendous responsibilities towards her children because she may either encourage independence and the development of agency, or she can suffocate the will to action from them. Alyx recognises that her role is to empower her daughters and to defy the sterile pattern that inhibits both them and

her. From this point on she no longer restrains Edarra and, instead, begins to train her in sword craft and survival skills.

The next trial is Woman as Temptress. Revising Campbell, Russ deals summarily with this obstacle: Alyx is comfortable with her sexuality and so the “problem” of illicit sexual temptation, whether instigated by a man or a woman, simply does not occur. Russ subverts the issues associated with the Woman as Temptress when she suggests that in a woman with a healthy attitude to her sexuality, Campbell’s temptations of the “putrid flesh” do not exist.

Alyx then moves on to Atonement with the Father. In this stage the hero meets God, or is confronted with the “eternal truths of existence”. In the story “The Barbarian” (1968), Alyx meets a strange man who claims to be omnipotent; he says he has “made everything your eyes have ever rested on. Apes and peacocks, tides and times … and the fire and the rain. I made you. I made your husband” (63). He claims the mantle of a god, but is arrogant, spoiled and insensitive: he enjoys the power his position brings him and plays sadistically with the lives of the creatures under his control. And yet, when Alyx kills him and turns off the machines he uses to run the world, the world carries on without him. Her defiance of his control liberates both Alyx and the people of Ourdh from his tyranny. On her return home, and having remarried since her first adventure, she says to her husband,

“I fought all night,” she added, “with the Old Man of the Mountain,” for you must know that this demon is a legend in Ourdh; he is the god of this world who dwells in a cave containing the whole world in little, and from his cave he rules the fates of men.

“Who won?” said her husband, laughing. …

“I did,” said she. “The man is dead.” She smiled, splitting open the wound on her cheek, which began to bleed afresh.

“He died,” she said, “for two reasons only: because he was a fool. And because we are not” [67].

As Russ demythologises the “god” of the closed system into which Ourdh has written itself, she also demythologises the myths against which the s/hero measures herself. The god Alyx destroys is the arrogant, patriarchal deity that this society had adopted, a creature without creativity and mercy. From him, the hero will learn little wisdom. Russ suggests that the hero is better able to choose her fate, to be a “Destiny” (10) she creates herself than to rely on the input of this god. Alyx defies the capricious rule and authority of this small god, challenging the need for Atonement with this Father.

During the Apotheosis that follows Atonement with the Father, the hero is meant to take on the traits of the Father and bring this Boon back to his or her people. Alyx has killed “god” and refuses his traits; the Boon she brings back to her people is liberation – the freedom to live as they choose, subject to no arbitrary rule. Her Apotheosis is a further reclamation of the right to agency, and this is what she imparts to her society. Russ approaches the Apotheosis in much the same way as she deals with Alyx’s meeting with the Father. Her female hero does not suffer the loss of self that Campbell suggests is a prerequisite for the hero at this point in the story. Instead, Alyx remains remarkably unchanged throughout her adventures – she is always thoroughly Alyx: sure of herself, able to act,

and acting. Russ refuses to let her hero be distracted by anything esoteric, to have the locus of Alyx’s agency be directed by anything external to her. Alyx kills god and shows no interest in developing the spiritual tendencies that Campbell clamors for. In an interesting feminist revision, the ethic that Russ’s s/hero champions defies much of what Campbell requires of the male hero in these last stages and yet Alyx remains a Campbellian hero. She takes on the responsibility of helping her people in a physical, practical manner. Russ’s comment on the male hero’s transcendence of self might be: should the female hero really be expected to lay her hard-won identity at the feet of the Father? Alyx trusts herself, and this is the heroic ethic she champions to the last; it is the Boon of brazen personal integrity that she gifts to her world.

In “Picnic on Paradise”, the story after “The Barbarian”, Alyx is brought from the past into the future by a large corporation, the Trans-Temporal Authority, to help a group of tourists escape a civil war. “Picnic on Paradise” is a complex story, but pertinent to my discussion of the heroic monomyth is that Alyx decides that it falls to her to attempt the liberation of all people – and all times – from the insidious control of Trans-Temp.

The Trans-Temporal Authority hopes to use Alyx to their advantage once the mission for which they initially required her is complete. What Trans-Temp doesn’t realise is that Alyx is a hero. She is neither malleable nor biddable: she will champion her heroic ethic, and they will pay the price for their arrogant attempt to control reality. Ironically, Trans-Temp boasts of having created a cadre of Heroes and Heroines – they have found their first real hero, and she will be their downfall.

The last stages of the hero’s journey are not clear cut in The Adventures of Alyx because of the nonlinear style in which Alyx “ends” her journey. She travels back and forth in time, enlisting the help of others in order to lead a rebellion against the corporation. As she does this, she accomplishes the last stages of the journey: the Magic Flight (from her captors), Crossing the Return Threshold (multiple times), becoming the Master of Two Worlds (the then and now), and earning the Freedom to Live as she chooses to. Alyx masters the times she traverses and the worlds she encounters because she submits to no one and to nothing. And she earns her right to live free because she battles tenaciously against anything that would impose control over her and society at large. She is, first and foremost, the champion of the right to personal freedom and individual agency.

Conclusion

Because we, even now, still understand the archetypal hero from a traditional, Campbellian perspective, it is important to acknowledge that a woman can be as much a Campbellian hero as a man can be – Campbell’s dismissive opinions aside. Alyx walks the path of the archetypal hero who transcends the arbitrary rules and ideologies of dominant culture. She claims her right to physical action, and she acts without hesitation, even if violence is needed to achieve her aims. She is steadfast, and she has the integrity of someone who openly acknowledges her skills as a picklock, murderess, and assassin. She has no illusions about herself and is willing, and able, to kill and die for her cause. As Cortiel puts it, “The radiantly assertive Alyx represents a straightforward assault on the male bastion of heroism”: the absolute code that she lives by and her completion of the heroic journey easily make Alyx the equal of any male hero.

Lee R. Edwards notes that “the woman hero forbids the presumption that women are innately selfless, weak or passive…. Insisting that our civilisation’s typical heroic figure - biologically male – cannot alone represent the prototype of heroism, she clashes with the Titans” (13). In The Adventures of Alyx, Russ takes the Campbellian model and illustrates that a female hero can explore as great a psychological, archetypal depth as the male hero because she navigates the same obstacles that he does. Alyx defies those who suggest the s/hero is not a “real” hero, and although Alyx no longer stands alone, having been joined in the interim by other s/heroes written into being by other authors, she may well remain the standard against which archetypal s/heroism is measured.

NOTE

1. In much myth and hero theory, not influenced by feminism, the possibility of a hero who isn’t male has been very controversial. In an overview of the work of Andre Malraux, Romain Rolland (L’Argent Suite, 1937). Fitzroy R.S. Raglan (The Hero, 1937), Joseph Campbell (The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 1993), John Lash (The Hero, 1995), Otto Rank (The Myth and Birth of the Hero, 1909), Andre Saures (The Artist Hero, 1934), Thomas Carlyle (On Heroes and Hero Worship, 1997), James M. Redfield, and Robert Segal (editor of Hero Myths, 2000), all well-known theorists of the hero, one of the few aspects these theorists agree on is that “he” is male. Lash is particularly vehement, denying women access to aggression of any sort – aggression being that which imbues the hero with his capacity for action rather than passivity (10).

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