

Sequestered Spaces, and What is Within and Without
in Regards to Naomi Novik's *Temeraire* Series

In episode fifteen of the *Be the Serpent* podcast, entitled “My (Psychic, Firebreathing) Little Pony,” hosts Alexandra Rowland, Freya Marske, and Jennifer Mace celebrate their childhood relationship to “horse books” – books “about a human forming a relationship with an animal” (after 8:22). However, their main focus is not horses or other realistic animals, but instead dragons. The wish fulfillment that the fantasy of dragons as life-long companions represents is one that frequently repeats itself in modern fantasy literature. This is something that more traditional scholarly studies have also noticed. In Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James' *A Short History of Fantasy*, they remark how “More than one critic has commented [that Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern* books] are essentially the girl fantasy of owning a pony of her very, very own and being able to *talk* to it” (95). Mendlesohn and James do not expand upon this statement, and it is easy to be dismissive of it. There definitely is room to expand on this statement – it reads rather critical of the concept as a whole, as if it is too childish for adult fantasy (or science fiction in the specific case of the *Dragonriders of Pern*). It seems to dismiss McCaffrey's work, even though it is a great influence on the fantasy genre, but this paper is not a defense of *the Dragonriders of Pern*. What is important in this statement is the idea of this “pony of her very, very own” in relationship to dragon-based fantasy. It is a trend recognized by both popular and academic sources alike. As the hosts of *Be the Serpent* discuss *Pern*, they connect this “fantasy horse book” series to a more recently published series that shares this same trait, that of Naomi Novik's *Temeraire* novels. Novik's series certainly follows in the legacy popularized by McCaffrey's series, where companionship between dragons and riders drives the narrative forward. These relationships not only affect personal relationships between characters, but the very structures of societies these characters live within. In *Temeraire*, dragons and their

riders, and the relationships they form, result in the creation of sequestered spaces where expectations of early 19th century British society are questioned and altered.

Temeraire's Genres and Influences

As it has already been noted, *Temeraire* is a product of the *Dragonriders of Pern* series' legacy, but that is not to say Novik's series is solely derivative from McCaffrey's. *Temeraire's* alternate history/historical fantasy dual genre contrasts against *Pern's* fantasy-resembling science fiction status. *The Dragonriders of Pern* occurs on Pern, a planet that humans so long ago colonized while suffering setbacks that result in the colony technologically regressing and forgetting their history upon Earth. What are called dragons within that series is wildlife native to Pern that has evolved over millennia because of human influence. *Temeraire* occurs on an alternate-Earth where dragons have always existed alongside human society and were later domesticated by human society. Set during the Napoleonic Wars of 1803 to 1815, the series sees protagonist Captain William Laurence of the British Navy have to switch careers after winning a dragon egg as a spoil of war. The egg hatches into the dragon Temeraire, who chooses Laurence as his rider, forcing the naval captain into becoming a captain of the British Aerial Corps. The series follows Laurence and Temeraire's adventures as they acclimatize to their new lives. It is soon revealed that Laurence is not just entering a new career, and he is instead introduced into what is essentially a new society, one that is hidden within the historical British society known from our real history. Places for this society are called "dragon coverts" within the text. This new society is one that contrasts against the one Laurence grew up within, and against his proper British gentlemen, or conservative, expectations. Within this society, we find an element of the series that is practically an element of fantasy to Laurence, but could be considered simply a

matter of proper equality to the modern reader – the Aerial Corps employs female soldiers. *Temeraire*'s world-building logic functions within both elements of historical fantasy and alternate history to allow these female soldiers to exist within the series' historical setting.

Timothy E. Scheurer and Pam Scheurer, in "The Far Side of the World: Naomi Novik and the Blended Genre of Dragon Fantasy and the Sea Adventure," examine the *Temeraire* series as "blending historical fiction with fantasy" because "[Novik] is blending a specific subgenre, the Historical Adventure Novel of the Napoleonic Wars with that of the Contemporary Dragon Fantasy Novel" (573). They state how Novik's "blended genre... [merges] to fuse traditional conservative elements with those that are innovative and progressive or perhaps even radical" (587). They claim that "Novik's novels are attempting something that is relatively new, blending historical fiction with fantasy" (573), but historical fantasy is certainly an established subgenre of fantasy. This subgenre is one of "novels set largely in a genuine historical context and often drawing upon actual historical events, but blending these with fantasy tropes" (*Encyclopedia of Fantasy* "History of Fantasy"). Scheurer and Scheurer more so identify that *Temeraire* utilizes a historical period that is not often featured in historical fantasy.

In fact, *Temeraire* does not fully "blend" the historical with the fantastical. The dragons, the reasoning that results in the dragon coverts that allow Novik's fantasy to exist *alongside* historical British society, are an element that locate *Temeraire* not only in the genre of fantasy, but also in the subgenre of alternate history. To use Karen Hellekson's term, the dragons of *Temeraire* are the "nexus event" that results in the alternate-Earth of *Temeraire*'s setting. According to her study *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time*, "True alternate history stories take place years after a change in a nexus event, which has resulted in a radically changed world" (7). *Temeraire* certainly exemplifies this, despite the fact that alternate history is

usually considered a subgenre of science fiction, and that Hellekson's study focuses on and builds her model on the idea that the subgenre is subgenre of science fiction. Hellekson acknowledges the possibility of links between alternate history and fantasy, but "[wishes] to limit [herself] to science fiction, as linking fantasy and historical concerns brings up a whole new set of questions" (11). She does not state these questions, but notes that in regards to alternate history, it is "[the use of] the triumph of magic over science as a nexus event [that] results in a fantasy text, not a science fiction text" (11).

What is so interesting about *Temeraire* as a fantasy series is that its fantastical element, the additions of dragons into our planet's biological history, is not treated as magic within the context of *Temeraire*'s world. Dragons are biological – they are studied scientifically just as any other animal was and is studied within our reality. Novels in the series end with excerpts from in-universe historiographical texts. The excerpt specifically from *His Majesty's Dragon* are notes on different dragon breeds that had been mentioned throughout the novel as if they were not horse breeds (347-353). The scientific presentation of dragons could potentially problematize *Temeraire*'s status as a fantasy series, especially because of its relationship to alternate history and because of the precedence set by McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern*. Hellekson gives a brief list of examples of fantasy alternate history literature even if she does not focus on those examples (Hellekson 10), and the *Temeraire* books are clearly marketed as fantasy and the biological nature of its dragons cannot refute that direct intent. Regardless, the fantasy of *Temeraire* still neatly fits into Hellekson's classifications, exemplifying her already mentioned "true alternate history" category.

The dragons are a nexus event with a long-established history within their alternate-Earth, and the differences found in this Earth when compared to our own reality are because of

the dragons. The social expectations of early 19th century British society, Napoleon raging war across Europe, the technology and dress of the period, they are all recognizable within their historical setting up until the point where they intersect with the nexus event of the dragons. These nexus event dragons “[result] in a number of other changes that cascade, culminating in a world dramatically discontinuous with reality” (Hellekson 8). One of these differences is the sequestered society that exists within the dragon coverts of the British Aerial Corps. Warrior women are frequent staples of current literature, but in *Temeraire*'s historical context, they are extremely abnormal. However, because of the nexus event dragons, and because of how early 19th century British society inclines to deal with those dragons within the world of *Temeraire*, women-soldiers may exist within sequestered spaces hidden from the proper historical society.

Michel Foucault coined the term “heterotopia” for those kinds of sequestered spaces as the ones the women-soldiers live within:

real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. (*Aesthetic, Method, and Epistemology* 178)

The dragon coverts exemplify elements of “crisis heterotopias,” heterotopias that are “sacred or forbidden places reserved for individuals who are in a state of crisis with respect to society and the human milieu in which they live;” Foucault then lists military service as an example of one of these crisis heterotopias (179-180). However, the coverts also exemplify characteristics of the “heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals are put whose behavior is deviant with

respect to the mean or the required norm” (180). Members whom later join the service after engaging with the average British society, like Laurence, experience the dragon coverts as a crisis heterotopia where new rules for participating within that secluded society must be learned. But others, such as the female-soldiers who grow up in this society, remain a part of this society for their whole lives because they experience the coverts as a heterotopia of deviation. Their deviant lifestyles are all they know.

The dragon coverts of Great Britain, the training and housing grounds for the Aerial Corps, greatly embody the idea of these places “designed into the very institution of society” that are still “outside” of that society. The Aerial Corps have land designated to them by the Crown, and some coverts, such as Loch Laggan where Laurence and Temeraire first train, even have towns meant to directly support their operations (*His Majesty's Dragon* 122). The full nature of the Corps' operations is known to those working in and supporting the Corps, but beyond these members, the true reality of life in the Aerial Corps is rather secretive. Before Laurence joins the Corps, he thinks that the lives of aviators as ones “lived as men apart, and largely outside of the law... in a sort of wild, outrageous libertinage in small enclaves, generally in the most remote and inhospitable places in all of Britain” (12). Laurence certainly thinks ill of life in the Corps before he is forced into it himself, but not even he could guess how different society within the Corps is until he is startled by the reality of female officers, or aviatrixes as I will call them for the rest of the paper to clearly delineated them apart from their male colleagues, when he first meets Catherine Harcourt (144).

The aviatrixes and the heterotopias they exist within are fantastical elements alongside the nexus event dragons. *Temeraire's* carefully constructed world is an immersive fantasy alternate history, immersive fantasies being fantasy literature “set in a world built so that it

functions on all levels as a complete world” (Mendlesohn *Rhetorics of Fantasy* 59), that world being so logically built that “Any sufficiently immersive fantasy is indistinguishable from science fiction” (62). *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* includes its own entry on “Alternate Worlds” and note the difference between alternate history science fiction and alternate history fantasy is that if “a story presents a different version of the history of Earth *without arguing the difference...* then that story is likely to be fantasy” (edited by John Clute and John Grant). Though we do get historiographical excerpts as bonus material in the novels, explanation is not the focus of the presentation of the dragons as the nexus event within the *Temeraire* series; the main difference between *Temeraire*’s world and ours is left unexplained. Instead, explanation is focused upon excusing the existence of aviatrixes, the aspect of *Temeraire* that is realistic when paired against modern reality, and the expectations of modern readership. Unlike the dragons, which are a new element added into this historical context, aviatrixes are an element that directly counters the reality of that historical context, and so explanations and excuses (like their heterotopias) must be given to justify their inclusion.

There is one more important influence upon the *Temeraire* series. With their focus on the historical influences upon the series, Scheurer and Scheurer also identify Novik’s most major influence when constructing the *Temeraire* series, even greater than that of McCaffrey’s *Dragonriders of Pern*. They note how Novik creates a “tandem hero” through the bond between Laurence and Temeraire, just as how Patrick O’Brian “[yokes] Jack [Aubrey] and Dr. Stephen Maturin together in *Master and Commander* and continued it through the... series” (Scheurer and Scheurer 581). The Aubrey-Maturin series is a collection of historical naval novels also set during the Napoleonic wars, focusing upon the previously mentioned friendship between Captain

Jack Aubrey and Dr. Stephen Maturin. Novik has openly stated that “the *Temeraire* series didn’t literally start as fanfic, but it launched out of it” and that launching point was that she

got into Aubrey/Maturin fandom and started writing fic, then started writing AU stories, and the AUs started getting longer and longer and more elaborate, until one day I started noodling a dragon-riding AU that kept not working as fanfic.

(“Naomi Novik Talks Fanfic-Inspired Fantasy and Ending *Temeraire* in her Reddit AMA”)

Her world and characters deviated so greatly from the source material she was working with that “she [realized] [she] was writing original fiction, so [she] scrapped [the fanfiction] and started writing *Temeraire*” (“Novik AMA”). The historical setting of *Temeraire* is so firmly grounded in a naval officer’s worldview because that is the model Captain Laurence was created from, and elements of that worldview are both reflected and questioned in *Temeraire*’s perspective, alongside the secluded setting of the heterotopias.

Temeraire’s Narrative Perspective – The “Tandem Hero”

In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn examines immersive fantasy examples that use the “rhetorical strategy in which the characters whom we ride are *antagonists* within their world. It allows them to question it while staying within the shell of immersion” (66-67). Captain William Laurence, the third son of an aristocrat, is our protagonist. Despite his gentlemen upbringing and his initially conservative views, he manages to quickly adapt to the radical new lifestyle he is forced into, and the new radical companionships that accompany that lifestyle. He slowly evolves beyond the proper, gentlemen naval captain he is at the beginning of the series. He

builds his relationship not only with his intelligent, critically aware and questioning of social dynamics dragon Temeraire, but also his relationships with the aviatrixes he serves alongside.

Laurence's narration initially reveals and reflects moral values commonly held in the British society of this historical period, and so he becomes a device through which we can measure what elements of the female characters (and of Temeraire's inquisitive, socially conscious questions) are radical in their contemporary society and which are not. As Scheurer and Scheurer analyze, Laurence and Temeraire make "what can be called the tandem hero" (581), and like as in the *Aubrey-Maturin* series, "the surgeon or the dragon, complements the hero, primarily because he comes from a different background and functions as confidant and at times even a conscience for the hero" (582). This partnership is what allows Laurence's perspective to both explain the conservative view of British society and to re-evaluate and question that conservative view. The tandem hero involves two character types constantly interacting with each other, "one, like Will... generally conforms to our notions of the traditional hero, and, the other, like Temeraire, can be described in term we usually ascribe to the 'alien Other' in literature and film" (583). Scheurer and Scheurer comment that originally "the Other in fiction and film was an entity who embodied negative characteristics or values that were perceived as threatening to the dominant culture" but that the Other has evolved over time, at times even "quite to the contrary, often [possessing] qualities valued by the dominant culture" (583-583). Though Temeraire is in no way an antagonist, they read him as an Other character that "perpetuates the myth that we can control 'the Other,' especially the Other who poses a threat to our rationality, order, and other cultural values" (585). The Aerial Corps offer an illusion of control, but it is an incomplete version of control. Novik puts "progressive social philosophy... into the mouth of her dragon" and is "able to speak contemporary values without

seeming anachronistic” (587). Temeraire has the power to question society, just as the dragons have the power to create a heterotopia that allows for aviatrixes to exist.

Separating the dragon coverts away from the average British society is another form of incomplete control because the heterotopic society then must be respected within those secluded spaces, even if it is the improper, immoral version of society. Laurence’s perspective as an initially conservative man who grew up outside of the aviators and aviatrixes’ society is key to exemplifying this. Even after Laurence is recognized by Admiral Powys as Temeraire’s captain, Laurence is not told the exact nature of his and Temeraire’s trainer until he faces the dragon who will train Laurence at Loch Laggan; the Corps cannot begin to trust Laurence until he has been brought into the sequester spaces where their society operates.

Laurence quickly realizes why he had not been given knowledge about his trainer being an actual dragon beforehand, for “what would the world think, to know [the Aerial Corps] were trained – given orders – by one of the beasts they supposedly controlled” (117). This is another reflection of the dominant society’s incomplete control over the heterotopic society. The secrets the Corps keep would be frightening to the average British citizen. Miss Montagu, an aristocrat, is extremely surprised, exclaiming “Oh, he talks!” when she hears Temeraire speak at their only meeting; herself and Mr. Woolvey, another one of Laurence’s acquaintances, cannot overcome their fear of Temeraire even after witnessing his polite behaviour (109). Musicians at the victory party for the Battle of Dover at the end of *His Majesty’s Dragon* are “somewhat distressed” when requested to play for the dragons present at the function, but their “fear [is] gradually overcome by their vanity” after they realize the dragons are a more attentive audience than the other human guests (336-337). Dragon intelligence is quickly revealed to those who meet them, but if it is accepted and respected, if a person considers them more than common animals like the

misconception many British citizens have of them, is another question. It is vastly important for Laurence's acceptance into Corps' society to do so.

The intelligence of dragons is not the only secret the Aerial Corps keep, and is only one facet of this heterotopic society that must be accepted by someone who wishes to truly participate within it. Acceptance of aviatrixes is another one of the defining factors in the difference between being a true member of the Aerial Corps' heterotopic society or being a man whom simply works as an aviator. Both the dragons and the aviatrixes are an "Othered" presence within the series, and Laurence must learn to accept both Others within their controlled confines. *His Majesty's Dragon* presents an established Aerial Corps captain who is still an outsider to the Corps' society rather than a proper member of that society; this captain contrasts heavily against Laurence's swift adaptation to the Corps.

When Laurence arrives at Loch Laggan, he is greatly surprised by his first meeting with Captain Catherine Harcourt; he mistakes her as a "slim young boy," but keeps his mouth shut once he realizes he is in fact a she, and that "no one else seemed to think anything of it" (*HMD* 144). Once he improperly addresses her as "Miss Harcourt," he quickly asks for Harcourt's forgiveness and re-addresses her with her proper rank. To directly counter this, the text involves Captain Jeremy Rankin into the conversation, a man who is also gentry-raised like Laurence but has known since birth that he was destined for service since his family "always sent third sons to the Corps" (143). Despite having working with the Corps since childhood as Rankin would have began his training at age seven (12), Rankin is clearly ostracized by the other members of the Corps because of his intolerant behaviour. When introducing Laurence to Harcourt, Rankin almost fails to introduce her with her proper rank, despite being well aware of her rank and lifestyle (145). He is disrespectful of Harcourt's rank, actively excludes her from conversation

(158), and mocks the Longwings' (a breed of dragon) preferences for female riders as a whole (145). He is the clear example to our protagonist that failure to adapt to this new society will result in poor relationships, not only with the aviatrixes he snubs, but with every other active member within it. Harcourt, and another aviator present at Laurence's first dinner at Loch Laggan actively avoid conversation with Rankin (147), and even one of Laurence's trainers shows outright disapproval when Laurence accepts Rankin's offer of a flight into Edinburgh (155).

The Other presence of the Corps' society is maintained by the presence of both the aviatrixes and the dragons, but it is disrespect of the dragons that forces Laurence to realize how Rankin is not truly accepted as an aviator. Rankin consistently disrespects the intelligence of all dragons, and also shows a complete lack of personal and emotional care for his own dragon, Levitas. Rankin does not hold the morals of an aviator – where “every other aviator had introduced himself with his dragon's name ready to his lips; Rankin alone had considered his family name of more importance” (162). Even before Laurence realizes that Rankin's proper gentry-bred behaviour leads to Rankin being ostracized, Laurence is already adopting the morals of a proper aviator and showcasing a similar set of beliefs to those established within the Corps. Laurence respects Temeraire's intelligence and emotional needs, realizing early in their relationship that “the degree of his attention which Temeraire commanded” left “very little [sic] to offer a wife” (107).

Our protagonist always grapples with the Other as represented by the dragons first, hence why it takes the revelation of Rankin's abuse of Levitas for Laurence to stop keeping the man's company, not Rankin's mistreatment of Harcourt. This is not surprising because of his close bond to Temeraire and their constant companionship, and because he was raised with no strong

opinions on dragons themselves. Dragons, and the Corps that he grew up thinking were composed only of men, were the end “to any semblance of ordinary life” (11), and very distant from his own personal life. He had no reason to see any kind of personal connections or expectations with that group. Women, on the other hand, are a group he was raised to have expectations about; Laurence grew up expecting to marry the proper gentlemen’s daughter represented by his childhood sweetheart Edith Galman. When he first joins the Corps, he finds “it hard to believe that a woman could manage [the work] day after day” (146) and thinks it a “cruel task” to ask of a woman. He needs to remind himself to respect the aviatrixes for some time after joining the Corps. He is genuinely interested in understanding the aviatrixes’ lives; when he first meets Harcourt “he would have like to talk to her [about herself], although it would have been difficult not to ask questions” and risk offending her again (146). Fortunately, the second aviatrix Laurence meets, Captain Jane Roland, will frequently be a source of information for him on the life of aviatrixes and sate his desire for information.

As our hero grows he comes to properly respect his female peers. At the victory ball for the Battle of Dover, Laurence will not have a cigar because it would be “[rude] to indulge while Jane and Harcourt could not” (334). Laurence grows so accustomed to aviatrixes that at the beginning of the second novel, *Throne of Jade*, when he is meeting Captain Roland in London and she is in skirts instead of her normal attire because she is outside of the heterotopic space she lives within, he thinks “that now Roland looked very, very odd to him out of uniform” (11).

By having the series’ narrative perspective being told by the conservative half of a “tandem hero,” Novik organically questions the dominant British society of the Napoleonic Wars by slowly having her conservative hero grow into her constructed heterotopic spaces. Though he works for the dominant society, the first novel is titled *His Majesty’s Dragon* after all, Laurence,

because of his relationships with Temeraire and the aviatrixes, becomes engaged with antagonistic values to that society, questioning that society within the rhetorical framework Mendlesohn identifies for immersive fantasy. The “alternate history *explains* the world as it might be” (Hellekson 30, emphasis mine), and Laurence’s initially conservative values and inquisitive nature allows the text to slowly contrast the Corps’ heterotopia against the dominant society.

The Fantastical Aviatrixes within and without their Heterotopias

Laurence is the lens through which the reader views the sequestered heterotopias formed by the dragon converts of Great Britain. He is our barometer of normalcy for this alternate-Earth. Where, to the reader, the dragons are the most fantastical element in the *Temeraire* series, to Laurence, the most fantastical element of his narrative is the inclusion of aviatrixes within the Corps. When Laurence first joins the Corps, he notices that the aviatrixes’ “presence seemed to place no restraint on the general company” in the mess hall, but he feels that “both by [everyone else’s] preference and his own he did not feel that he was fitted for participation” in that mixed company (*HMD* 153). It is the aviatrixes, not the dragons, that make Laurence feel that he is within a society that he is excluded from because of his initial conservative worldview – that which represents the morals of proper British society.

Aviatrixes *have* to exist within the sequestered heterotopic spaces of the dragon converts; their place in this world as soldiers is created solely because dragons will it. There is historical precedence within the *Temeraire* series that highlight how dragons are the specific reason that the niche role of aviatrixes is carved into societies within this world. Longwings, a specific breed of dragon extremely important to British Aerial formations, only accept female riders (145). The

historical explanation for this justification is present in the second novel: Longwings often went feral (that is uncontrolled and unwilling to accept a rider) “until Queen Elizabeth had the bright idea of setting her serving-maid to one of we found they would take to girls like lambs” (*Throne of Jade* 320). The historical grounding of this event, the fact that aviatrixes must have a well-justified presence in this historical setting, is made all the stronger by Novik’s choice to tie the justification to a very influential historical figure. This also further expands upon how the nexus event has rippling effects throughout this alternate-Earth’s history that differentiate it from our own history.

Within *Throne of Jade*, Laurence and Temeraire are forced into an diplomatic mission to China. They discover that the Chinese also enlist female handlers for the dragons within their own armies. This alternate-China also has their own historical justification for this change from our own history. The alternate-China’s version of the Hua Mulan legend goes as such:

a girl had supposedly disguised herself as a man to fight in her father’s stead, had become companion to a military dragon and saved the empire by winning a great battle, as a consequence, the Emperor of the time had pronounced girls acceptable for service with dragons. (309)

This is the romanticized tale; the actual justification is far more reflective of a patriarchal society, for “girls being considerably less valued than boys” meant they become the preferred choice to send for conscription, and as “they could only serve in the aerial corps... they came to dominate the branch... until eventually the force became exclusive” (309). Throughout the world of *Temeraire*, the aviatrix is a fantasy directly tied to that of the dragon.

The dragons create spaces for aviatrixes to exist within, but the aviatrixes are not readily accepted outside of those spaces. The intelligence of dragons is simply unknown to the whole of

Great Britain, as most of its population has no reason to be confronted by that fact. Alternatively, the aviatrixes, must actively hide the secret of their inclusion amongst the ranks. Captain Roland cannot visit the Admiralty openly because of the headquarters' location is within London; she must wear skirts instead of her uniform when visiting it (*ToJ* 10-11). Laurence's narration allows the reader to be fully aware of the legality of aviatrixes; plainly, that much of their lives is technically illegal to those outside of the heterotopic coverts:

With her [Captain Harcourt's] hair pulled back so tightly she did look boyish, which was some help, along with the clothes that had allowed him to mistake her initially; he supposed that was why she went about in male dress, appalling and illegal though it was." (*HMD* 146)

Of course, the Crown allows aviatrixes to be exempt from these laws "while engaged upon their duties" (*ToJ* 205). Nevertheless, these women *must* hide their status outside of their duties and the coverts, or they risk becoming a new-worthy spectacle if exposed (20-21). A naval captain, when having his first experience of helping transport dragons across the ocean, exclaims "Every feeling must cry out against such an abuse" he is so affronted when he learns about aviatrixes (204). He reflects Laurence's initial reaction to aviatrixes, and reaffirms that the larger British society would not accept them.

Life in the Corps is where these radical women find their comfortable state of being, the heterotopic space where they do not have to conform to British society's gender expectations. Women of the Corps are performing (or, at least, are attempting to perform) to comply with society's gender expectations whenever they leave the heterotopic coverts. This is reinforced whenever either Captain Catherine Harcourt or Jane Roland are actively wearing or recalling past experiences where they wear skirts. Harcourt tells of when she attended a concert at the age

of sixteen and “how difficult it is to arrange skirts when sitting down” and how she had to imagine an action “more like something a girl ought to do” when she could not strike a man for bothering her. Harcourt’s solution was to pour a pot of coffee on the man, and Laurence reacts with “nearly equal proportions of dismay: at her having been subjected to such an insult and at her means of repulsion” (*HMD* 303). Jane Roland’s performances are also imperfect. Roland moves “without the slightest care for the ruin she was making of her skirts” when attending the victory ball of the Battle of Dover (333), and she constantly grabs attention when out amongst the general public, even when in skirts, because of her “mannish stride and her scarred face” (*ToJ* 11-12). The scar is one “that could only have been made by a sword” (*HMD* 251). Roland is so counter to the expectations of her gender that though she is not the first female captain Laurence meets, he is still “surprised, and not a little shocked, to see a woman so cut about and so forward” (252).

Even motherhood, by the morals of 19th British society, is a role that aviatrixes cannot perform properly. Motherhood is not lost to aviatrixes. One of Laurence’s cadets is Emily Roland, Captain Roland’s daughter. Laurence is “uncomfortable nevertheless” when he realizes Emily does not know her father because Captain Roland did not bother with the proper expectation of marriage before motherhood; Laurence still holds this discomfort even though he “[feels] any more legitimate situation would have been impossible” because of Captain’s Roland’s role as an aviatrix (253).

The aviatrix’s version of motherhood is even drawn into the fantasy of *Temeraire*, defined by their relationship to their dragons. Captain Roland compares dragons and riders as she converses with Laurence: “So we breed the ourselves as much as [the dragons]; I expect they will be asking you to manage one or two for the Corps yourself” (*HMD* 253). This is her

explanation for why she had Emily. Jane would have “never desired children if it were not for Excidium’s [her dragon’s] sake;” her daughter is expected to succeed her as Excidium’s captain (253). Jane’s bloodline is tied to her dragon. This is such a normal part of her own personal worldview that she views Laurence’s bloodline tied to *Temeraire* in the same fashion. Roland comments that she would be willing to have a kid with Laurence though the timing is not opportune for it, and then muses that Harcourt would be a better option in the future. She delivers these statements in what Laurence’s terms an “appallingly practical tone” and continues to embarrass Laurence through the topic of her conversation alone as she comments that Harcourt and him could have “one each for Lily [Catherine’s dragon] and *Temeraire*” (254). In this regard, the Corps treat both the aviators and aviatrixes as if they were more alike to dragons than the average British citizen.

Though not othered to the extent the aviatrixes are, the aviators are fully immersed within this heterotopia. Laurence builds relationships with both his dragon and the aviatrixes, becoming fully involved in the abnormal life he once feared as a naval captain. *Temeraire* exemplifies the “pony of her very, very own” fantasy for both its female and male characters, the connection between dragon and rider so deep that the ownership is also enacted from the dragon upon their rider as they become tied to the rider’s bloodline. However, the aviatrixes are still more limited than their male counterparts, because once they exit the heterotopic dragon coverts, they are expected to reject their lifestyle and preform towards the expectations that the dominant society places upon them.

Concluding Remarks

The *Temeraire* series experiences influences from a variety of sources. Its relationships, from previously established dragon-based literature to the *Aubrey/Maturin* series, lend to its

unique blend of the historical fantasy and alternate history genres. The intersections of these two genres fuels the creation of heterotopias, not only so dragons can neatly function within the historical setting of the Napoleonic Wars, but also so aviatrixes – the source of female representation within the *Temeraire* novels – can function within this setting without calling its historical authenticity into question. Novik’s later work reveals that this element of her work is a matter of female representation; it is a common theme throughout her work that greatly strengthens within her later stand-alone novels. Sara González Bernádez, in her essay “Escapism and the Ideological Stance in Naomi Novik’s *Spinning Silver*,” argues that within that stand alone novel Novik “uses these traditional fairy-tale elements to subvert expectations surrounding the gender of her characters, and therefore criticise the social oppression of women” within the context of *Spinning Silver*’s retelling of the Rumpelstiltskin fairy-tale (11). Novik is well aware of how gender expectations act upon and can be subverted within fiction, but a clear-cut social critique in regards to gender can not be found in *Temeraire* as strongly as in her later work.

That is not to say *Temeraire* is lesser than her later work because it lacks a straight forward critique of gender, but that *Temeraire*’s complex network of influences and historical grounding lend to a complex but also more traditional overview of gender within the texts. *Spinning Silver*, and Novik’s other stand-alone novel, *Uprooted*, feature female protagonists; Laurence is male because he was built off of a male protagonist for reference, and so Novik’s female representation with *Temeraire* solely comes from the secondary characters he interacts with.

Laurence’s narrative perspective of a conservative slowly becoming involved with more radical politics introduces a mixed bag of gender critique and representation. At times, Laurence’s perspective negates strong gender critique within *Temeraire*. “The texts which work

as feminist fantasy are those which situate the reader in a feminist reading position in which the deconstruction of patriarchal discourse is a fundamental strategy” (Cranny-Francis 79), and Laurence fails to present such a position. Despite the fact he respects his female coworkers, there are multiple instances where he actually re-affirms the patriarchal position. He hesitates to bring Cadet Emily Roland on the envoy to China because he “[feels] too heavily the responsibility of watching over a young girl among such [drunkards, brawlers, and goal-birds of a ship’s crew]” and “would be best pleased if the secret that women served in the Corps did not come out here and make a noise.” Jane has no such concerns for her daughter, and wrongly assumes that the reason that Laurence is considering leaving Emily behind and denying her crucial experience as an aviatrix-in-training is not because of her gender, but because she was misbehaving as member of Laurence’s crew (*ToJ* 71). When Laurence is explaining the situation and justifications of why females work within the Corps to a naval captain, Laurence narrates he “[does] not like the necessity himself” (204). He explains to Temeraire why the captain is so affronted by aviatrixes, claiming that “Women are generally smaller and weaker than men, Temeraire, less able to endure the privations of service” (205).

It is, in fact, Temeraire who argues against Laurence’s patriarchal view, stating that “I am smaller than Maximus, and Messoria is smaller than me; but that does not mean we cannot still fight.” Laurence’s quick response, unsurprisingly, is that the difference is “[human] women must bear children, and care for them through childhood” unlike dragons whom hatch from eggs (205). Of course, motherhood is not lost to aviatrixes, Jane and Emily Roland are a clear example of that, but the aviatrix version of motherhood is not the version he is advocating as he explains gender expectations to Temeraire. Temeraire’s criticism of contemporary societal expectations is negated by Laurence’s re-affirmation of the expected norm.

Another reason why *Temeraire* does not take a stronger gender-critical stance as Novik's later work does is the aviatrixes' relationship with the nexus event dragons. "In realist fiction the remarkable woman is conventionally presented as unusual, as some kind of aberration, rather than as the potential (fulfilled) of most women" (Cranny-Francis 83), and though *Temeraire* is fantasy, its stance on women is plainly rooted in the realist conventions of its historical setting. Our narrator still holds his patriarchal views; Laurence reconciles his respect for his female coworkers by viewing them as "not ordinary females" (*ToJ* 205). There is a distinct presence of othering the aviatrixes in *Temeraire*; they are fantastical "aberrations" instead of the average women. The text not only pushes the women of the Aerial Corps into heterotopic spaces outside from the average British society, but also draws a parallel between the Aerial Corps officers and the dragons that justify their existence.

However, Laurence's relationship to Captain Roland supports that part of the *Temeraire* series re-evaluates and rejects the gender roles of the early 19th century period. If in non-feminist writing the "good girls get their man; bad girls are thrown out into the cold" (Cranny-Francis 84), then *Temeraire* does show a strong feminist-inclination of its presentation of Jane Roland's sex life. The fathers of her children do not matter to her and she feels no shame over that fact – she is so disconnected from Emily's father that she doubts "he even knows Emily's name" (*HMD* 253), and she quickly muses about offering herself to have Laurence's own child (254). She is the one who confidently invites Laurence into her own bed (*ToJ* 16). Evidently, none of this threatens her career, and she proudly wears "the triple bars which marked her as a senior captain" (251).

Temeraire's relationship to gender representation is as complicated as its relationships to its genres and influences. Through its heterotopic spaces, and the aviatrixes hidden within those

spaces, *Temeraire* presents fantastical women along side their fantastical dragons while respecting the confines of the historical period that serves as the series' setting.

Works Cited

Clute, John and John Grant. “*Encyclopedia of Fantasy (1997): History in Fantasy.*”

Encyclopedia of Fantasy, http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=history_in_fantasy

---. “*Encyclopedia of Fantasy (1997): Alternate World.*” *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, [http://sf-](http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=alternate_worlds)

[encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=alternate_worlds](http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=alternate_worlds)

Cranny-Francis, Anne. *Feminist Fiction*. St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1990.

Foucault, Michel. *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Edited by James D. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley and others, The New Press, 1998.

González Bernárez, Sara. “Escapism and the Ideological Stance in Naomi Novik’s *Spinning Silver*.” *Brumal*, vol. 7, issue 2, 2019, pp.111-131.

Hellekson, Karen. *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time*. Kent State University Press, 2001.

McCaffrey, Anne et al. *The Dragonriders of Pern*. 1967-2018.

Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

Mendlesohn, Farah and Edward James. *A Short History of Fantasy*. 2nd edition, Libri Publishing, 2012.

Novik, Naomi. *His Majesty’s Dragon*. Del Ray Books, 2006.

---. *Spinning Silver*, Del Ray Press, 2018.

---. *Throne of Jade*, Del Ray Books, 2006.

---. *Uprooted*, Del Ray Press, 2016.

O’Brian, Patrick. *The Aubrey-Maturin Series*, 1969-1999.

Rowland, Alexandra, Freya Marske and Jennifer Mace. "Episode 15: My (Psychic, Firebreathing) Little Pony." *Be the Serpent Podcast*, published through Podbean, Aug. 15, 2015, <https://betheserpent.podbean.com/2018/08/>

Scheurer, Timothy E. and Pam Scheurer. "The Far Side of the World: Naomi Novik and the Blended Genre of Dragon Fantasy and the Sea Adventure." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2012, pp. 572-591.

Unknown. "Naomi Novik Talks Fanfic-Inspired Fantasy and Ending Temeraire in Her Reddit AMA." *Tor.com*, Feb. 25, 2016, <https://www.tor.com/2016/02/25/naomi-novik-reddit-ama-highlights/>