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Issues of Gender and LGBT in the work of Lynn Flewelling

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se zaměří na dílo americké spisovatelky Lynn Flewellingové z pohledu genderu. V úvodu práce studentka charakterizuje tvorbu zvolené autorky a zasadí ji do širšího literárně-historického kontextu. Dále bude definovat žánr fantasy a spisovatelčinu tvorbu v tomto žánru. Svůj výběr děl zdůvodní. Studentka rovněž definuje gender a vztah genderových studií k literární teorii a přiblíží teoretický rámec, který bude pro své analýzy používat. Jádrem práce bude analýza zvolených děl, v níž se studentka soustředí především na způsoby zobrazení problematiky genderu a sexuální orientace v tvorbě autorky. Své vývody bude vhodně ilustrovat primárními texty a konzultovat se sekundárními zdroji. Závěrem své analýzy přehledně shrne a zhodnotí a pokusí se vyslovit obecnější závěry o způsobu práce Flewellingové s touto tematikou v rámci žánru fantasy.

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Title

Issues of Gender and LGBT in the work of Lynn Flewelling

Annotation

This thesis aims to analyse the work of Lynn Flewelling to conclude how she works with LGBT elements and gender issues within the fantasy genre. A theoretical framework used in the analysis is also included. This theoretical framework focuses primarily on the definition of fantasy as a literary genre and on gender theories. The main body of this work is a detailed analysis of the first three books in *the Nightrunner series* as well as the entirety of *The Tamir Triad*, centred around the characters and the portrayal of their differences from the societal norms.

Key words

gender, LGBT, fantasy, popular literature, Lynn Flewelling

Název

Otázka genderu v díle Lynn Flewellingové

Anotace

Cíle této práce je analyzovat dílo americké spisovatelky Lynn Flewellingové a zjistit, jakým způsobem pracuje s otázkou genderu a sexuality v rámci žánru fantasy. Součástí práce je kromě analýzy samotné též teoretický rámec (zaměřený na definici žánru fantasy a genderové teorie), z něhož analýza vychází. Jádrem práce pak tvoří detailní analýza prvních tří knih ze série Noční běžci a všech tří knih tvořících Trilogii Tamír, soustředěná na způsob, jakým jsou v knihách zobrazeny odlišnosti hlavních postav od společenských norem.

Klíčová slova

gender, LGBT, fantasy, populární literatura, Lynn Flewellingová

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyse the work of Lynn Flewelling to conclude how she works with LGBT elements within the fantasy setting of her stories. The paper is split into two parts: the theoretical framework used in the analysis and the analysis itself.

The first chapter provides some background information about the author since Lynn Flewelling, as a writer of popular literature, is not well-known. The information is taken primarily from the books she wrote (in the printed Czech version, each book includes a short note about the author) as I could not find another reliable source (the social media Flewelling uses provide little to no relevant information at all). The chapter also briefly touches the subject of labelling and marketing Flewelling's books.

The two following chapters provide theoretical framework of this thesis; first of which attempts to define and characterise fantasy as a literary genre. It is only an attempt because the debate about the definition of fantasy is by no means closed, and this work does not aim to resolve this debate. This chapter also classifies Flewelling's work within the genre.

The other theoretical chapter, which is the third chapter of this paper, deals with gender theories. It introduces ideas relevant for the upcoming analysis of Flewelling's books, as well as defines the terms used, such as LGBT. The primary source for this chapter is *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed online, as it provides a comprehensible overview of the various gender theories in existence. The definitions of the other terms are assembled together from various entries in various dictionaries (both online and printed).

The fourth chapter briefly explores the usage of LGBT themes and queer characters in the fantasy genre. It provides examples of other authors and books with such a content and tries to conclude why the authors of fantasy novels may be inclined to use LGBTQ characters in their works.

The fifth chapter marks the beginning of the analysis, starting with *The Nightrunner series*. The analysis goes book by book, focusing on the relevant themes and elements. The choice of the books is explained at the beginning. This chapter also provides a brief analysis of the world the stories are set in, focusing on the traditional fantasy tropes and stereotypes.

The sixth and final chapter analyses the other book series by Flewelling, *The Tamír Triad*. Like with *The Nightrunner series*, the analysis goes book by book, focusing on the relevant themes.

The symbolism found throughout the series is also analysed as it is an important component of the story's setting.

Majority of the sources used in this thesis are in English language. If any Czech sources are cited, it is a direct translation by me.

1. The Author

Lynn Flewelling is contemporary American fiction writer, which means that there are not many sources critically dealing with her work. This paper will therefore make use of various non-critical sources, mainly online book reviews.

On her twitter page, Lynn Flewelling introduces herself as „fantasy author, editor, copywriter, tea reviewer, knitter, Buddhist, ukulele player.“ This brief intro shows two things: the author is openly reaching out to her audience (which is not always a given thing, especially considering her age) and that Flewelling’s journey to writing was a long one and is, to a certain degree, reflected in her work. Because Flewelling is not all that well known, a succinct summary of her life is necessary.

She was born on 20th of October 1958 in Maine. She studied several subjects at the university, from English language to history, ancient Greek, literature and veterinary medicine. She also went through a plethora of jobs, including teaching, room painting, laboratory work; she also worked as a necropsy technician, a freelance editor and journalist. She’s been working full time as a write since 1996. To this day she has written two major series of books: *The Nightrunner*, which consist of 7 novels and a collection of short stories, and *The Tamír Triad*, a book trilogy which can be taken as a prequel of sorts to *The Nightrunner*, however the stories are not linked directly and each can be read without knowing the other.

As the list of jobs indicates, she went through a lot of different environments and tried out many very distinctive activities. This may be the reason why the heroes of her first book series are jacks of all trades, and all of her protagonists are artist, as well as skilled fighters. Flewelling is also a Buddhist convert, which most likely influenced the way religion is presented in her books, as will be demonstrated later.

Flewelling’s novels are marketed as “young adult”, at least in the USA. This label is not so common in the Czech Republic, although some bookstores do use it, either in the original form/wording or as “mladí dospělí”. Books labelled as such do not contain graphic description of sexual content (sex can still happen in them, but it is off-screen) and are thus considered to be safer for the intended audience. The protagonist is also often going through the hardships of early adulthood and there is an emphasis on the protagonist’s growth and maturing. This labelling is of course a result of the USA laws and regulations and Flewelling’s books are labelled as fantasy novels in the Czech Republic. I am using the word “label” here to show that such categorisation is an artificial one; just because someone thought these books are more

appropriate for younger audience does not mean adults can not fully enjoy them or that they do not contain adult themes.

2. Fantasy as a genre

In terms of genre, Flewelling's books are typical fantasy novels, just discussing some atypical issues. There are many 'definitions' of fantasy as a genre, some of which don't even differentiate between science-fiction, fantasy and horror. Taking into consideration the history of American literature, this may not be surprising; these three genres are interwoven into each other, often giving birth to several subgenres (e. g. dark fantasy, paranormal romances).

As I have stated before, there is no single definition of fantasy even though there have been attempts to unify the existing ones. It does not help the case that there is no canon of fantasy literature and the range of works which can be labelled as 'fantasy' or 'fantastical' is wide. Sometimes, even a non-fantasy work can be read as such by a specific audience and vice versa. In *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, the authors liken this genre to a "row of terraced houses (...). There are shared walls, and a certain level of consensus around the basic bricks, but the internal décor can differ wildly (...)." ¹ This illustrates that while all fantasy works share some tropes, they differ greatly. This is also the core of a theory proposed by Brian Attebery in his book *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992). He views the fantasy works as a 'fuzzy set' where at the core are the works which share most of the tropes and towards the edge the works share less and less of the tropes, including works which can be read as fantastical, but aren't necessary viewed as such by general public. This once again shows that unified definition of what a fantasy work is is nearly impossible, seeing as the only trope critics agree that fantasy books share is the trope of impossible.

For many, this is what fantasy is all about and what separates it from sci-fi. While science-fiction may deal with the seemingly impossible, it is almost always just very improbable and everything in sci-fi is somehow explainable. True, the explanation may be odd or 'unrealistic,' but it makes sense in the context of the story. Sci-fi also deals almost exclusively with technology, scientific progress and discoveries and adventures in outer space.

It is harder to differentiate fantasy and horror, especially since some authors do not separate these two at all. This may be because horror is as hard to pin down as fantasy is and, especially in American literary history, these two genres go hand in hand (great example of this is H. P. Lovecraft, whose work gave birth to a term 'lovecraftian horror' but is at the same time labelled as fantasy). Again, the difference is usually based on the tropes found in the books, but there

¹ Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

are works in which fantasy and horror tropes mix, creating various subgenres (such as dark fantasy). Strangely enough (or maybe not, when you think about it) fantasy and horror mix more often than fantasy and sci-fi, probably because most attempts to mix the latter two ends up not working as a literary work.

There is also the issue of how the books are labelled by the booksellers. They usually add more confusion into the attempts to define fantasy as a genre, when they label the books seemingly randomly. You can find fantasy books under the label of ‘romance’ or ‘horror’ and sci-fi books under ‘fantasy’, usually depending on latest trends and what the most selling label is. It does not help that most people judge the books by their cover, and as long as there is a wizard, dragon or an elf on the cover, they will see it as a fantasy book.

Seeing as my main source of information on this topic were the books by Farah Mendlesohn, I will work with her division of fantasy literature. Mendlesohn works with Attebery’s ‘fuzzy set’ but distinguishes four modes of fantasy literature, defined by how the fantastic enters the text and what words does it create. These modes are: the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusion and the liminal. *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* describes these categories as follows: “In the portal-quest, the protagonist enters a new world; in the immersive, the protagonist is a part of the fantastic world; in the intrusion, the fantastic breaks into a primary world (which might or might not be our own) and in the liminal, the magic may or may not be happening.”²

Now, the classification of Flewelling’s work. Her books fall into the immersive category and can be also seen as quest fantasy. This subgenre will be defined (as much any fantasy subgenre can be) later, first I will explain what tropes makes Flewelling’s work fit into the Mendlesohn’s category of immersive fantasy.

All of Flewelling’s stories take place in a fantastic world, where magic is an established phenomenon, with rules and limitations. All of the protagonists are a part of the world, there is no travelling through different planes of reality, no primary and secondary worlds. None of her books ever break this pattern, so it is easy to put them all into the “immersive fantasy” category as proposed by Mendlesohn.

Trying to classify Flewelling’s books more precisely than just as a ‘fantasy’ is significantly more problematic. Not only do the books oscillate between a few subgenres, but the subgenres

² Edward James et al., *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, 2.

themselves do not have clear definitions or terminology. Even the term ‘subgenres’ is sometimes replaced by ‘clusters’, which illustrates that there is no distinct border between the subgenres.

That being said, I would personally classify Flewelling’s work as ‘quest fantasy’, at least for the most part. This subgenre (or cluster) goes by several other names, some quite misleading (such as ‘epic fantasy’, ‘fantastical journey’, I have even seen this type of books being referred to as ‘Tolkien-like’, though mostly in non-critical sources). *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* summarizes this subgenre in the following way: “The structuring characteristic of quest fantasy is the stepped journey: a series of adventures experienced by the hero and his or her companions that begins with the simplest confrontations and dangers and escalates through more threatening and perilous encounters.”³ Quest fantasies usually begins with a simple task that gets more complicated as the story progresses, the risks get higher and everything becomes more convoluted. This certainly applies to Flewelling’s books as well. *Luck in the Shadows*, the first book in *The Nightrunner series* starts rather simple: Alek, one of the books protagonists, is being imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. He meets his future companion and friend here, Seregil, and their first “quest” is to escape. Once they manage that, they decide to stay together and spend about half of the book travelling across the countryside. Journeying across massive and wild landscapes is one of the key characteristics of quest fantasy, together with a protagonist that seems plain and ordinary but often has a hidden power or abilities (which in a way applies to both Alek and Tobin, the protagonist of *The Tamír Triad*). Magic items, another important feature of quest fantasy, play an important role in all Flewelling’s stories. In fact, both series share a group of magical items crucial for the overall plot but not always important for the specific book. In *Luck in the Shadows*, Alek and Seregil discover a mysterious magical disc during their travels which later leads to a conspiracy and a more dangerous and complicated journey, and Tobin, the hero of *The Tamír triad*, has a doll which can certainly be seen as a magical item. There is also an evil Dark Lord with a tremendous power, threatening the whole world (more obviously and explicitly evil in *The Nightrunner series* than in *The Tamír Triad*) and a wizard or a witch that guides the protagonists and helps them on their journey.

However, not all of Flewelling’s books follow this pattern closely, sometimes even leaning towards a different genre (the seventh book in *The Nightrunner series*, *Shards of Time*, is more

³ W. A. Senior, “Quest Fantasies,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 190.

of a mysterious detective story with a few fantastical elements than a quest fantasy) or subgenre (her books seems to oscillate between typical quest fantasy with travelling and magical items and urban fantasy where there is usually more politics than magic going on, e. g. the third book of *The Nightrunner series*, *The Traitor's Moon*, and the second books of *The Tamir Triad*, *Hidden Warrior*).

3. LGBT as a term

LGBT is an initialism, meaning **Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transsexual**. Other variants of this initialism exist, the most common are LGBTQ (in which Q stands for queer) and LGBTIQ (in which I is intersexual and Q is queer). This is an umbrella term encompassing all the groups of people with sexuality other than heterosexual. This term is rather new, in use since 1990's, and it became an alternative to the term "Queer". Queer, originally meaning strange or peculiar, is still used in academic writing and some people still refer to themselves in such a way even today, however this term was originally used as a derogatory insult and for many, it still has a negative connotation.

3.1 Gender theories

There are many gender theories out there and each of them defines the term 'gender' differently. This paper will work with feminist gender theories which differentiate between 'sex' and 'gender'. However, even among feminists, there is no agreement on what 'gender' actually is. With that in mind, the distinction between sex and gender in these theories is usually as follows: "sex' denotes human females and males depending on *biological* features (chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and other physical features); 'gender' denotes women and men depending on *social* factors (social role, position, behaviour or identity)."⁴ The difference between sex and gender is also used by psychologists interested in transsexuality, it helps with the explanation of such phenomenon: transsexuals 'sex' and 'gender' (which should normally complement each other) simply don't match.

Such an approach then considers the term 'gender' to be socially constructed, and thus changeable or at least flexible. Society determines the social roles of each 'gender', this in turn influences the upbringing of children. The society expect the children to play the appropriate gender role (based on their 'sex') from a very young age; girls are taught to behave in certain way and are given toys associated with femininity (e. g. dolls), the boys are raised in a way typical for their gender. Regardless of whether one agrees with the feminist way of thinking or not, the influence society has on the gender roles is undeniable; not only feminist theories point this out. For example, Marin Fatejta in his book states that: "In the contemporary Euro-American culture, it is impossible to socialise children outside of the predefined gender

⁴ Mari Mikkola, „Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender,“ in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, (Metaphysic Research Lab, Strato University, 2017), chapter 1.1.

categories.”⁵ And while a number of critical sources acknowledges the connection between society and gender identities, the implications of such a revelation are unclear. Whether the borders between the predefined gender categories are flexible and can be crossed (as the majority of feminist theories suggest) or how it could be crossed are questions that remain unanswered.

This approach is, of course, opposed by people claiming that there is no need to make such a distinction, because sex and gender are all the same thing. Such a point of view suggests biological features as the only determining factors of one’s gender. One example of this way of thinking can be the submissive position of women in the society, which was for a long time derived only from the biological factors, for instance the brain size. The fact that human males usually have slightly bigger brains (there’s about 10% more bulk to a man’s brain on average) was seen as a confirmation of women’s inferiority. It was thought that because of their smaller brain, women are less capable of deep thoughts or rational judgement. Therefore, it was supposed to be natural for women to be submissive and inferior to men. While this reasoning has been surpassed, society expectations for both of the traditionally acknowledged genders (man and woman) stayed the same. There are norms and taboos associated with each gender, as well as socially acceptable behaviour. These gender stereotypes, while varying from culture to culture, are deeply embedded in society; this in turn leads to disdain (or in some case even hatred) for people who do not fit the traditional gender categories or want to cross the unspoken “dividing line” between men and women. This is also reflected in Flewelling’s books and will be discussed further.

There is, of course, a sound critique of these gender theories, one of the most prominent being that these theories fail to take into account cultural (such as class) and racial differences. While I acknowledge this critique, the solidity and reliability of feminist gender theories is not important for this work, the distinction between ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ found in these theories is.

There are two prominent LGBT themes found in Flewelling’s work: homosexuality and transsexuality.

3.2 Homosexuality

This word is a Greek-Latin hybrid, with the first part ‘*Homo*’ derived from Greek (meaning ‘same’) and the second part derived from Latin ‘*sexus*’ (meaning sex, gender). As a whole this

⁵ Martin Fatejta, *Sexualita a Sexuální identita: Sociální povaha přirozenosti*, (Praha: Portál, s. r. o., 2016), 170.

word implies an intimate affection and, but not necessarily, sexual acts between members of the same sex. It is also one of the most popular terms (together with heterosexuality) used for describing sexual orientation today. This term is applicable to both male-male and female-female relationships. The word homosexuality is sometimes seen as a more academic synonym of the word 'gay'; however, this word originally described only the relationship between two men, and the word 'lesbian' was used for relationship between women. Nowadays, both 'gay' and 'homosexual' appear to be equal in meaning, though in some countries, the word 'homosexual' is considered to be the more proper one.

The way this term is understood today in the western society differs greatly from how it was understood in the past or in different cultures. For example, homosexual relationships between men in Ancient Greece were vastly different in form and social meaning from how such relationships are perceived today (they were often educational in nature, a matter of social prestige or status and rarely permanent). Flewelling, despite setting her stories in a fantasy world reminiscent of medieval society, uses the 'modern' understanding of homosexuality: as a romantic and sexual partnership between two people of the same sex. This will be discussed further in the context of Flewelling's books.

3.3 Transsexuality

This term is closely associated with the term 'transgender' and, to a certain degree, with the term 'intersexual.' The term transgender is seen as a broader, umbrella term for anyone whose gender identity varies from the one traditionally associated with their sex. Transgender (or sometimes 'queer transgender') can also refer to people that identify with the opposite gender but choose not to undergo any surgery or hormonal treatment to change their biological sex. Nowadays, the term 'genderqueer' is often used as the umbrella term, instead of 'transgender'.

'Transsexuality' refers to people that identify with the opposite sex. Unlike the 'transgender' people (who do not undergo any physical change in their sex), however, 'transsexuals' opt for hormonal treatment and often also the surgery to change the sex they were born with. It is possible to say that this phenomenon occurs when person's 'sex' (as determined by the biological factors) and 'gender' (as a bundle of social factors) do not match. It is important to note that sexual orientation has nothing to do with transsexuality; transsexuals or transgender people are not necessarily homosexual.

4. LGBT and queerness within the fantasy genre

Flewelling is not the first fantasy author to include such themes into her work. Anne Balay mentions two other fantasy novels with gay couples as protagonists in her essay⁶, namely *Last Herald Mage* by Mercedes Lackey and *Weetzie Bat* by Francesca Lia Block. This is not all, of course. Rick Riordan introduces a genderfluid character in one of his series (*Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard*), Ricardo Pinto's trilogy *The Stone Dance of the Chameleon* has gay people in it, *Carry on* by Rainbow Rowell includes a gay romance; the list goes on. There are also authors that, while not explicitly including LGBT themes, can be read as queer by certain audiences.

The question then is why authors (often those targeting 'younger' audiences) tend to use fantasy settings for gay couples or genderqueer characters. One of the reasons can be that it is safe. Literature targeting younger audiences cannot afford to show much sexuality, much less any 'deviant' sexuality (the focus here is more on young-adult fantasy books because Flewelling's work is mostly labelled as such). While there is number of books featuring for example gay character in realistic settings, these characters often follow gender stereotypes and norms, are socially isolated and often meet very abrupt and very tragic ending (car accidents being very common, as observed by Christine Jerkins⁷). This trend⁸ may be waning nowadays but it is nevertheless still very prominent in books firmly grounded in reality. "Fantasy fiction for young adults has more room to include queer characters, and to suggest queer reading styles, than can more realistic fiction for young adult audiences, precisely because it is not taken seriously,"⁹ is how Anne Balay puts it. It is true that fantasy genre can include these themes without too much worry. Mainly because by definition, fantasy is about expanding the limits of possibility, about new realities, about 'the impossible' and thus is deemed 'safer' for the younger audience even if it contains 'deviant' sexualities. "It is not completely grounded in reality, thereby it is impossible and not real, therefore it does not affect us," is how this approach can be

⁶ Anne Balay, "'Incloseto Putbacko:' Queerness in Adolescent Fantasy Fiction," *Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 5 (2012): 923 – 942.

⁷ For more information see: Christine Jerkins, "From Queer To Gay and Back Again: Young Adult Novels with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969–1997." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 68, no. 3 (1998): 298-334.

⁸ This trend is also observed and described by Roman Trušník in "Dying Protagonists in Two Gay Southern Novels: Randall Kenan's *A Visitation of Spirits* and Jim Grimsley's *Dream Boy*", *American and British Studies Annual* 7 (2014): 90-97.

⁹ Balay, "'Incloseto Putbacko,'" 925.

summarised. In plain terms this means that fantasy writers can afford to include queer characters in their books without having to worry about the books selling well.

Also, the fantasy setting allows for even the 'Other' to have a happy ending, and many authors would much rather write a story that ends well, instead of dramatical death of all the characters that defy the norm.

Clearly, this is not always the reason why queer characters are included. Sometimes they serve narrative purposes, other times the author tries to make a point. Or they are used as a metaphor for real life issues. There may be many reasons for LGBT themes to appear in fantasy novels, but it is nonetheless possible to conclude that this genre and queerness very often go hand in hand.

5. *The Nightrunner series*

This work focuses on the first three books in the series (*Luck in the Shadows*, *Stalking Darkness*, *Traitor's Moon*), where the relationship between the protagonists develops and establishes. However, the relationship is pushed into the background in *Traitor's Moon* (the book focuses solely on the political machinations and the relationship “floats” in the background, established but not developing), therefore the book is not analysed in any detail.

Flewelling does not say much about the world her stories are set in as a whole but she paints a clear picture of the individual kingdoms. The Kingdom of Skala, where majority of the plot takes place, is a medieval-themed fantasy kingdom traditionally ruled by a warrior queen. Skala's main enemy, Plenimar, is a rather stereotypical ‘evil nation’ – it is belligerent, its warriors are men (as opposed to Skala, where women are a standard part of the army) and it is known for practicing necromancy, the ‘forbidden’ dark arts. Also, an evil dark lord (who was defeated but never destroyed) called this place home.

This is a surprisingly Tolkien-like layout of the world, with the evil Plenimar situated east of Skala, and the magical Aurënen situated south-west (in *the Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien uses similar layout – the evil Mordor is to the east, the blessed lands are to the west). This in turn reflect reality; western people tend to fear the eastern nations, because the culture is so vastly different. There was, for a long time, the conception of the East as a home to many beast and monsters. Christian missionaries brought back to Europe stories of wild jungles full of dangerous creatures and of the pagan practices of the Easterners. Today, it is more of a caution than fear, but the eastern part of the world is still viewed as foreign. This is very interesting approach cemented by the influence of Christianity. In traditional beliefs, east symbolises hope, sun, beginning and overall positive things; west on the other hand present death, the end, and mostly negative things.

When it comes to the mythical creatures inhabiting the world, Flewelling is surprisingly down to Earth. All the kingdoms are populated mostly by humans (who have slight ethnic variants, e. g. wild mountain-folk and ‘civilised’ white people living in the lowlands), with the exception of Aurënen, which is the home of the faie, elven-like, or more fay-like creatures (meaning fay traditionally found in Irish folklore, less wise and more cunning and vicious than the standard fantasy elves by Tolkien), that are reminiscent of humans (at least in appearance), but live for hundreds of years and have magic. Other than that, there are dragons (but for the most part just mentioned) and centaurs. This is rather curious choice of ‘magical’ creatures, for a few reasons.

First of all, there is a certain duality associated with all those creatures: dragons can be evil and vicious (mostly in western mythologies) but also calm and wise (in eastern cultures), fay (of fairies) are as helpful as they are mischievous and spiteful and centaurs can be wild and dangerous as well as wonderful teachers (in Greek mythology, the hero Achilles is taught by Cheiron, a wise centaur). This plays into the traditional fantasy tropes, which are usually dual as well (good and evil, chaos and order). It is the paradox of fantasy as a genre where the imagination can be freely unleashed, yet it usually still clings onto a world of binary divisions.

Surprisingly enough, Flewelling does not seem to use the “rule of three”, a trope so very often found in quest-fantasies. As the name of this trope indicate, events or things significant for the plot tend to happen in three: three magical items, three quests the hero has to complete, three companions, three main gods of a specific pantheon, etc. Flewelling, in contrast, appears to be taking the binary approach: there are two main gods to her pantheon (more on them in the section discussing *The Tamír Triad*), two protagonist of the story (Tobin’s ghostly twin in *The Tamír Triad* is as much of a protagonist as she is), the heroes usually have two important quest (which can consist of several smaller tasks) – a personal one and one designed to save the kingdom.

This binary may stem from Flewelling’s beliefs as a Zen-Buddhist¹⁰. Zen-Buddhism, a school of the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, came into existence in China and is therefore heavily influenced by Taoism. While the details of the specific beliefs are not important here, Taoism is often represented by the symbol of *tchaj-i*. To be more specific, it is usually only a part of this symbol, the yin-yan. This symbol consists of two contrasting powers: yin and yan, representing the duality found in everything, according to Chinese beliefs. I will talk more about this symbolism in the chapter about *The Tamír Triad*, as the symbolism is more prominent there.

5.1 Luck in the Shadows

It is important to note that the romance between the two protagonists is not the main focus of the story. In the first book, *Luck in the Shadows*, there are only a few hints signalling the upcoming relationship. It is most likely due to the nature of the story Flewelling is trying to tell – a story about a teenager growing up to be a man. The main theme of the book is change, both

¹⁰ Flewelling is a Zen-Buddhist convert, this information can be found for example on her twitter page.

good and bad, as well as coming-of-age. Any romantic endeavours have to wait until the end of the second book.

Both of *The Nightrunner series*' protagonists, Alec and Seregil, meet at the very beginning of the book and go through the story together. However, it can be said that the first book has only Alec as the 'main character', since it is a story of his journey to adulthood. Seregil plays the role of a mentor rather than a friend, much less a possible love interest. Both characters come from different backgrounds and this not only creates a certain dynamic between them but also serves as a base for the story. The reader follows Alec who sees the wonders of the world for the first time, often with almost childish glee and excitement. The reader, in turn, gets an introduction of how the world works, wrapped in the dialogues between characters.

The story starts to escalate very early on, and while Alec has to revise majority of his beliefs and morals, he does not have time to question his sexuality until the second book. There is, however, a chapter in the book where he is thoroughly confused about not only sexuality but genders as well. The story goes that both heroes are fleeing from pursuers and to avoid suspicion (because their enemies are looking for two men), they board a ship pretending to be a lady with a manservant. Alec mentions several times during this chapter that Seregil creates a very convincing illusion of a woman. "From this angle, Alec was uneasily aware of the completeness of Seregil's disguise. Throughout the day, watching from across the deck as Seregil played Gwethelyn for the captain and crew, he'd been halfway taken in himself."¹¹ The easiness with which Seregil destroys the border between male and female unnerves Alec, as he is from the north, where the gender roles were strictly defined. Yet Seregil is clearly unbothered by the whole ordeal and even jokes about "not letting the eager captain see what's under his skirt just yet."

However, while Alec is confused it is because Seregil makes a pretty woman and not because he would consider him sexually desirable. In fact, Alec does not think outside of the traditions and rules of the society he grew up in until the latter half of the book, when a girl asks whether he and Seregil are lovers. Alec is shocked but still writes it off as the southerners' way of thinking, therefore not something that could happen to him. The story then escalates even more and there is no more pondering about this subject from Alec's side until the next book, where the nature of his relationship with Seregil becomes an important subplot.

¹¹ Lynn Flewelling, *Luck in the Shadows*, (A Bantam Spectra Books, 1996): 108, <https://read.amazon.com/>

Where Alec represents someone tied down by the social expectations, Seregil is the free-spirited individual who does not care about social rules unless it is convenient for him. This is clearly visible in the chapter where he cross-dresses; he shows no discomfort in his disguise. Because that is what the woman dress is for him – a disguise. And though he shamelessly flirts and jokes around, he is comfortable in his gender identity as a male. I am pointing this out now because there is a somewhat similar scene in *The Tamír Triad* that will later be compared with this one.

Flewelling lets the reader know about Seregil's sexuality early on through a nightmare about his past. And though he always acts the way that suits the persona he is wearing at the time, he never really hides his preferences. In fact, it is implied Seregil kept Alec with him because of Alec's looks, even if he was not looking for any kind of relationship with the boy. Upon discovering that Alec also has skills necessary for Seregil's line of work, he takes the boy in as an apprentice. The relationship that develops in the first book is that of a master and an apprentice that morphs into deep friendship towards the end of the book.

Overall, the hints signalling the upcoming romantic subplot are very subtle, and therefore it is easy to dismiss them. The relationship that develops in the second book may be surprising. So much so that some of the reviews of the second book (sometimes even the first book or the whole series) warn the future readers about the relationship between two men. Interestingly enough, the official summaries¹² of the books never really mention anything about the romance between the two characters. And while it is not the main focus of the story, it can be off-putting for some people and should at least be hinted.

5.2 Stalking Darkness

The second book in the series, *Stalking Darkness*, is a straightforward sequel to the first one – it is longer, darker, and expects the reader to know who is who and what is going on. And while the main storyline is undoubtedly about stopping a great evil from rising, the relationship between the two protagonists is undeniably an important subplot. Unlike the subtle and sometimes vague hints that were in *Luck in the Shadows*, the romance in *Stalking Darkness* is more obvious. Not only to the reader, but also to the other characters within the story itself, as is shown in a scene where the wife of Seregil's best friend notes: "I was watching Seregil's face, tonight. (...) He's in love with Alec, you know. He wasn't last time they were here, or

¹² This conclusion is based on the summaries I had available (several online sources, such as Amazon, and the printed versions in Czech), there may be a version that mentions the relationship.

even at the Festival, but he is, now.”¹³ By making other characters notice the changes, Flewelling anchors the relationship to the story and to reality (within the books) and at the same time makes it feel more natural. What I mean by natural here is that the romantic relationship develops gradually, as the characters get to know each other better. It is not love “at first sight” nor some kind of predestined, holy bond meant to be. The trope of “being bound together by fate” is common within same-sex romances in fantasy settings, to the point it is used as an excuse or even legitimisation of the relationship. And while Alec’s and Seregil’s relationship (once established) is presented (and also viewed by other characters in the books) as a sacred bond between soulmates, it seems to avoid this particular pitfall; they are not together because of some sacred bond already existing, they get together and only after the bond comes to existence is it viewed as sacred. I will return to the trope of sacred life-bonds later in the analysis.

As mentioned above, the change of the relationship between Alec and Seregil from friendship to love is gradual and happens on the background of a world-threatening crisis. The reader is given insight into the minds of both characters, Alec’s more so than Seregil’s. Again, this is because the emphasis is on Alec as he is trying to understand the change within himself. To put it bluntly, in this scenario Seregil is the self-tormenting fool in love he believes is unrequited and Alec is the confused fool in love he does not yet recognize.

Seregil, at first thinking that what he feels for Alec is simply lust and desire, tries to reject his own feelings, afraid that he would lose the friendship he treasures. However, he soon realises that he is in love with Alec and such a thought leaves him scared and tormented. He had his feelings hurt more than once before and he does not dare to approach Alec, believing the love is one-sided (based on the fact Alec is from the north and never expressed interest in men before). Thus he stays passive for majority of the story and in the end it is Alec who cements their relationship.

Alec, on the other hand, spends the book trying to figure his own feeling and desires and his struggles serve as an extended metaphor for coming-out. He is from a small secluded village located in the northern part of the kingdom. This means he grew out in a very conservative, strict and traditional society, in which men and women have their roles pre-defined; anything that would challenge these stereotypes is viewed with mistrust or disgust and hate. Therefore, Alec is visibly shocked when he sees the free-spirited nature of the southern cities. The gender

¹³ Lynn Flewelling, *Stalking Darkness*, (A Bantam Spectra Books, 1997): 137, <https://read.amazon.com/>

boundaries are less absolute than in the conservative north and same-sex couples appear to be perceived as normal as the male-female couples. At least, this is what the reactions of various characters to Alec and Seregil's relationship imply; in *The Nightrunner series*, there is not another gay couple aside from the protagonists. There is one in *The Tamir Triad* and one of the scenes in *Hidden Warrior* shows the acceptance of gay couples: "Ki shook his head: 'For Hell's sake, doesn't anyone like girls but me?'"¹⁴

The existence (and acceptance) of same-sex desire is best illustrated in the chapter in *Stalking Shadows* where Alec visits a Red-light district, aptly named 'The Street of Lights.'

The coloured lanterns – rose, amber, green and white – glowed softly through the mist, each colour signifying what sort of companionship was available within. Rose meant women for men, he knew, and white was women for women; amber meant a house for women, too, but the prostitutes there were male. Most enigmatic of all, however, was the green lantern, signifying male companions for male patrons. Worse yet, some houses showed several colours at once.¹⁵

This event not only shows the reader that the kingdom of Skala is surprisingly accepting of its gay inhabitants (considering this is a medieval themed fantasy kingdom) but also shows Alec's first real encounter with same-sex desire. Up until then, although he was aware that such a thing exists, he never considered it could concern him in any way. He was taught that liking girls is the only possibility and in his northern homeland, it was. Staying true to his upbringing, Alec does not seem to regard his feeling for Seregil as anything else than a deep friendship until their visit to the brothel. Upon seeing Seregil seeking comfort in the arms of another male, Alec is left with confusion not only about his friend's preferences (though he already suspected that Seregil is at least bisexual) but about his own. And thus begins a long period in which Alec tries to make sense of his own feelings as well as save the world.

Alec's journey to understanding himself serves not only as a story of coming-of-age, but also as a clear metaphor for coming-out. Generally speaking, gay people often do not even know they are gay until they encounter the existence of same-sex desire, though they are usually aware that there is something different about them. Granted, in the 21st century, this awareness comes at a young age. Considering the story setting, however, Alec's lack of thought about his own preferences makes perfect sense. Human society does not encourage thinking outside of its norms but that is exactly what Alec has to do in order to understand himself. And even when

¹⁴ Lynn Flewelling, *Hidden Warrior*, (A Bantam Spectra Books, 2003): 111, <https://read.amazon.com/>

¹⁵ Flewelling, *Stalking Darkness*, 149, <https://read.amazon.com/>

he accepts his own difference he does not act on his feeling until a world-ending crisis is averted.

The trope of soulmates that is very prominent in fantasy genre has already been mentioned and I am now going to discuss it in more detail together with the nature of Alec and Seregil's relationship. Anne Balay points out the main features of this trope in her essay about queerness in Young Adult fantasy: "The YA emphasis on love rather than sex is further heightened (if that's even possible) in the fantasy genre. Typically, queer couples exist not only in permanent relationships, but in quasi-sacred, immutable pairings. Any sex that happens fits within these supernaturally sanctioned bonds."¹⁶ Majority of fantasy writers chooses this approach and Flewelling is no different. The relationship Alec and Seregil have is a very romantic one, emphasising love above all else. Sex happens sporadically (at least in the first three books of the series, the sexual content increases as the story goes) and always off-screen and nobody seems to mind because Alec and Seregil are soulmates, which makes their relationship socially acceptable. Even in the third book, *Traitor's Moon*, when the pair visits Aurënen, their relationship is (for the most part) accepted. Any problems the Aurëfaie have are with Seregil alone and it is because of his past, not because of his sexual orientation. Though as a whole, the land of faie appears to be less accepting of anything queer when compared to the kingdom of Skala. This is unique approach within the fantasy genre – usually, humans are the non-accepting ones and other races are more open to anything LGBT.

It is important to note that while Flewelling uses the trope of soulmates to make homosexuality socially acceptable and normal – there are straight couples that are addressed as soulmates – the only gay characters in the books are men. No lesbians are shown or even mentioned in neither of the series. The lack of female gay couples is common in the fantasy genre (especially so in YA fantasy) and while there are exceptions like Merry Shannon's *Sword of the Guardian* or Laurie Marks' *The Elemental Logics Saga*, they are few and far between. This could of course be because fantasy, especially quest or epic fantasy, is male dominated. The stereotypical fantasy hero is a straight white man, often a brave warrior. If a quest fantasy book has a female protagonist, there is a risk of falling into one of the two extremes – a damsel in distress (that in spite of being the main character still has a brave knight to protect her) or a "she-man", overly masculine woman. However, even if the female protagonist is well-written and balanced, like Tobin from *The Tamír Triad*, she is still tough, assertive and not very feminine. She has to be,

¹⁶ Balay, "Incloseto Putbacko," 927.

her life and situation she finds herself in all demand her to be that way. She is still outside of the comfortable gender norms, however, which could be another reason for the lack of lesbian heroines in fantasy, as Anne Balay suggests. According to her essay, for people (and teens specifically, the essay deals primarily with YA fantasy) today “being gay is ok, but being weird isn’t.”¹⁷ Since the female heroes are violating the gender norms in a way that makes them close to the stereotype of lesbian women, they may not be as appealing or as fun to write as gay men. Be it as may, the only remaining fact is that there are significantly more homosexual men than women in the fantasy genre.

I will conclude this chapter with a note regarding Anne Balay’s essay. When talking about *The Nightrunner series*, Balay likens the Aurënfaie to the gay subculture, because of the stereotypes that are mentioned: the Aurënfaie are pale and beautiful, naturally artistic, lithe, have magical power and do not grow facial hair. She also sees the name as a pun faie = fay = gay. And while the scene in which Seregil tells Alec that he is a faie is undoubtedly a parallel to a coming-out (with Alec’s reaction being, aside from the initial shock, feeling that “it all fell into place”¹⁸), I do not agree that the faie of *The Nightrunner series* are necessarily a pun on the gay stereotypes. The Aurënfaie can easily be a parallel to the faie (also written as fae, fay or fey) of Irish folklore. The faie, or the “fair folk” come in many shapes and forms but when they resemble humans, they are usually pale, pretty, magical and with no facial hair. The faie are also vicious, mischievous and do not like humans – this can be said about the Aurënfaie as well, the best example being the messy political endeavour is the third book of *The Nightrunner series*, *Traitor’s Moon*. Therefore, the faie may very well be just another fantasy race aside from the centaurs, that is supposed to make the world feel more diverse and alive.

¹⁷ Balay, “Incloseto Putbacko,” 937.

¹⁸ Flewelling, *Stalking Darkness*, 227, <https://read.amazon.com/>

6. *The Tamír Triad*

The Tamír Triad consists of three books, *The Bone Doll's Twin* (2001), *Hidden Warrior* (2003) and *Oracle Queen* (2006). The story is set in the same world as Flewelling's other series, *The Nightrunner*, just about a hundred years prior. It serves as a prequel to *The Nightrunner*, but the stories are connected very loosely so there is no need to know one to understand the other.

The protagonist of this series, Tobin (who is named such throughout the story and only adopts the name Tamír when she accepts the role of a queen) is essentially a trans-gender, though her case is a bit different from what is usually associated with this term. Either way, her character challenges the gender norms and Flewelling makes a good use of the fantasy setting. For the purpose of this analysis, I will use she/her pronouns for Tobin, since that is the gender identity she ends up adopting in the end.

6.1 *The Bone Doll's Twin*

The first book in the series explores for the most part Tobin's childhood. It starts with her birth, which happens in secret, because the current king (and her uncle) would kill her if he found her. This is because the kingdom in which the story is set, Skala, is traditionally ruled by females. And as it happens, the king (who killed his own mother who was crazy and thus legitimised his rule) does not want anybody challenging his claim to the throne. The trope of a warrior queen is not uncommon in fantasy, but it is more accented in here. According to a prophecy, the kingdom must be ruled by a female, otherwise a calamity will occur. This is already happening by the time the story starts (the crops are dying, people are getting sick) and gradually gets worse (to the point of a famine and even plague) until Tobin ascends the throne. This can be seen either as a way to further warrant Tobin's claim to the throne as a warrior queen, blessed by the gods as well as an inconspicuous critique of a male-only court and politics run exclusively by men.

There are several tropes of interest, starting with the warrior-queen. This trope is as old as the ancient Greece but can be considered older (though then it was often a warrior-goddess, rather than a mortal queen). Hippolyta, the queen of the Amazons, is perhaps the most famous example. She appears in several myths (most often these linked with Heracles and Theseus) but is always portrayed as a strong, independent woman; a warrior first and foremost. Another example of a warrior queen is Boudica, the queen of the Iceni tribe (that resided somewhere in today's Essex), who is famous for leading a rebellion against the Romans, the Emperor Nero

specifically. She was defeated around 60 AD but her legend is still one of the best examples of a warrior-queen.

Then there are two tropes linked together in the character of Tobin, the divine/blessed ruler and the foretold/prophesised hero. Both of these tropes are very common in fantasy literature but they are also found in various myths and legend, especially the trope of a divine/blessed ruler. The most famous example of this trope would probably be king Arthur, who is sometimes referred to as ‘the Once and Future King’ in various versions of the Arthurian mythos. Beside him, there are many figures, mythical or historical, across the literary history; starting with the humanity’s oldest literary hero, Gilgamesh. His case takes the phrase ‘divine ruler’ literally, as he was a demi-god. Demi-gods, strangely enough, are not as common in quest fantasies as one might think; protagonists of this type of stories are usually mortal men/women, blessed by the gods. This legitimises the protagonist’s claim to the throne and very often bestows them with a variety of skills, abilities or items. Much like Arthur’s magical sword Excalibur marks him as the blessed king, divine rulers in fantasy books tend to have some kind of a mark that indicates the god’s favour. In Tobin’s case, it is not only her gender that makes her fit into the line of Skala’s blessed queens but also a scarlet birthmark on her left forearm.

The foretold hero trope is an old-time fantasy classic. More often than not are the heroes of fantasy books ‘the chosen ones’, prophesised to save the land, defeat the Dark Lord or just ascend the throne (usually theirs by birth right). Prophecies play a crucial role in a number of quest fantasies and Flewelling’s books are no exception.

The king’s attempts to get rid of any potential female competition is not the only example of violence on women in the books. Flewelling uses one of her side characters, a girl named Nalia, to show the reader a form of home-abuse. Nalia is a plaything to an ambitious wizard, even if she is not aware of this in the beginning. When she realizes this, it is already too late to escape, and she is wed to a young prince purely to give him a female heir. This relationship stands on obligation, not love and Nalia is abused by her husband on daily basis. It is not a physical kind of abuse (since the prince is worried about the child’s health) but an emotional and verbal one. Nalia’s un-ability to escape is made more literal by the fact she is locked in a tower. Only after her husband’s death is she able to regain her freedom. Though she is not completely free – her child is of royal blood, which leaves her at the queen’s mercy. Tobin lets Nalia live and acknowledges her as a member of the royal family which means another set of expectations

from the society. The tragedy of Nalia's story is in the fact she never has a chance to make her own decision; her life is decided for her by her abusers from the very beginning.

Another form of abuse, unusual but no less harmful, is shown in Flewelling's other series, *The Nightrunner*. In the second book of the series, *Stalking Darkness*, a sorceress enchants Alec and basically rapes him:

(...), he found Ylinestra crouched over Alec, who appeared to be asleep, sprawled on his back among the disheveled blankets with a blissful smile on his face. In contrast, Ylinestra's face was a hard mask of concentration as she wove an unfamiliar sigil in the air above him. As it took form, the peaceful expression drained from Alec's face. At first he simply looked blank, then his brow furrowed as he unconsciously turned his face away, a low sound of protest rattling in his throat.¹⁹

The situation is amplified by the fantasy setting but this form of rape (female forcing herself onto an unwilling male) is real, albeit very rare.²⁰ It is also more "socially acceptable", as the reactions of other characters to Alec's traumatic experience show: "You're whisked away and made love to by the most exotic woman in Rhíminee and it gives you nightmares?"²¹ Or rather, since this is a medieval fantasy world, it is unthinkable that a woman could force herself on a man or that the man would not enjoy such an act. However, this mindset prevails even today, making this kind of abuse even harder to uncover than for example marital rape. It is possible that Alec's traumatic experience is supposed to be a reminder that no form of abuse should be socially acceptable.

This is the base on which Flewelling builds up her story, adding the LGBT elements.

The whole transgender issue occurs because Tobin has to be hidden from her female-children murdering uncle. Because this is a fantasy novel, the mages who wish to ensure the future of the kingdom decide to use magic to achieve this; by essentially killing Tobin's twin brother and hiding her in his body. To do this, they ask a 'wild' witch for help; the 'civilised' mages have no magic that could do such a thing, but the wild people living in the mountains do. The mountain folk creates an interesting contrast to the prudent and strict mages from the 'civilised' society. They can very much be seen as old pagans, living in harmony with nature, keeping the old customs and drawing their power from the Earth as opposed to the mages who are not unlike the catholic church, living in celibacy, looking down onto the 'savages' from the

¹⁹ Flewelling, *Stalking Darkness*, 85, <https://read.amazon.com/>

²⁰ I did not manage to find any official numbers, but the percentage is so low this kind of rape was considered a myth.

²¹ Flewelling, *Stalking Darkness*, 88, <https://read.amazon.com/>

mountains, even assuming that their magic is the only true form of magic, and later in the story, there is even an inquisition established. This may seem unrelated to the topic of this work, but Flewelling's narrative is complex and both magic and religion play a crucial role in her stories, since Tobin's claim to the throne is sanctified by one of the Skala's two main deities.

It is magic, a standard fantasy plot device, that turns Tobin's body into that of a boy's, but the 'ritual' is interrupted by the king, which results in Tobin's twin brother soul being misplaced and becoming a rather vengeful ghost. Tobin's ghostly brother plays a crucial role in the story, from the plot point but also in a symbolic way (this will be discussed further when analysing the second book). Hiding Tobin into a body not of her own is presented as something unnatural, which negatively affect her closest family (her brother is a ghost, her mother goes mad and at one point tries to kill Tobin and her father, who knowingly took a part in this has to live with the guilt). Even though she is raised as a boy, and thinks of herself as a boy, deep inside, she remains a girl. Anne Balay calls her a 'female boy' in her essay *They're Closin' Up Girl Land: Female Masculinities in Children's Fantasy* and is not wrong to label Tobin as such. Tobin does not question her apparent masculinity (she has no reason to do so, she was raised as a boy) but at the same time she does things that challenge the stereotypical gender roles, albeit unconsciously. A good example of this is when she wants to get a doll for her birthday instead of a traditionally male toy and is promptly scolded by her father who says: "Dolls... They're silly, filthy things. Boys don't play with them, especially not boys who want to grow up to be brave warriors. Do you understand?"²² It is interesting to see even though the kingdom of Skala has the tradition of warrior-queens and allows girls into the army, there are still traditional gender roles, things and activities associated exclusively with a certain gender. It is much more prominent in *The Tamir Triad*, because the king and his court promote masculinity to the point where women are seen as inferior to men, at least in the upper society.

Not much else relevant to the topic of this work happens in the book up to the very end, when Tobin one day wakes up menstruating. She panics and flees, thinking she has a plague and visits a witch from the mountain folk, who tells Tobin that she is in fact a girl, hidden in a male's body. (The way this is presented may reminisce of an intersexual being told they are genetically the opposite gender). Tobin refuses to accept this, even though there is enough evidence to support the witch's claim (she shows Tobin a reflection of her true self) and spends a large

²² Lynn Flewelling, *Bone Doll's Twin*, (A Bantam Spectra Books, 2001): 77, <https://read.amazon.com/>

portion of the following book coming to terms with her own gender identity, while forcefully clinging to the privileged male social role she has been raised in.

There is an interesting symbolism in here. The spell hiding Tobin's true face and body should have held for much longer, but partially breaks prematurely. This causes Tobin's at the time male body to behave as female's, hence the menstrual blood. This is all tied to the symbol of moon, which is very often linked with femininity. And it is also visible in Skala's pantheon of Gods. The male-dominant society under the rule of Tobin's uncle worships mostly Sakor, the god of war, sun and bravery; the patron of warriors. He has all the attributes associated primarily with masculinity, and the king sees him as a patron of his court. In contrast, the god the mages mostly speak about and with is Illior, called the Lightbearer, who is associated with moon and magic. This moon deity has been the patron of the kingdom for ages, and the prophecy about the warrior queens stems from him as well. Tobin, who is raised a boy and a warrior and thus primary prays to Sakor starts to pay respects to Illior upon learning about her true gender. Flewelling takes advantage of the fantasy setting and hides the symbolism all over her books.

6.2 Hidden Warrior

The second books in *The Tamir Triad* has more to offer in the terms of LGBT. It shows Tobin, trying to come to terms with her true gender but also her sexuality – she finds herself falling in love with her best friend. All those elements are layered on top of the actual story; Tobin has to deal not only with her own body and feelings, but also with the expectation of the society around her.

Upon discovering that she is in fact a girl, Tobin's first reaction is a firm denial: “No! You're lying! I want to be who I am! I'm a warrior!”²³ Being a girl would mean having the utmost right to the throne and Tobin does not want to rule at all. She is content with being the future king's cousin, which is a rather privileged position, especially since the royal court believes her to be a male. In fact, the idea of usurping the throne disgusts Tobin until she sees her cousin atrocious leading skills during a dangerous military operation. His mistakes cost lives and this is an eye-opening experience for Tobin, however it happens towards the end of the book.

After the initial denial, a deep sense of betrayal follows. Tobin's teacher and friend knew about her condition, her nurse and handmaiden did as well. Even worse, her own father allowed the

²³ Flewelling, *Bone Doll's Twin*, 515, <https://read.amazon.com/>

gender-changing ritual to happen. Her own brother-ghost hates her. Tobin feels betrayed by the whole world which is not unlike how many other trans-gender people may see their situation.

This sense of betrayal is quickly replaced by fear. Once Tobin fully realises what it means to be a girl (though well-hidden one) in the king's court she is filled with dread. If anybody suspects anything, she will be executed. Once this realisation settles in, Tobin starts to be somewhat paranoid whilst still not fully accepting her true gender. This is an interesting contrast: Tobin dreads being exposed as a girl and at the same time she feels she has nothing to hide, because she does not see herself as a girl. Yet she is afraid to show weakness or anything that could label her as feminine – this is best illustrated in a scene where the king executes a few mages and Tobin is unable to watch²⁴. Seeing first-hand the cruelty of her uncle leaves her shaken while simultaneously she feels ashamed and dreads that someone might suspect she is not a male.

All of Tobin's feeling eventually settle into uncertainty. On one hand, she sees the atrocities her uncle, the king, commits and thinks that perhaps she could stop the suffering of innocent people. On the other, she is afraid to lose her privilege as the crown prince's cousin and the male privilege in general. Her inner struggle is best illustrated in the chapter where she visits her father's house and sees her parent's old room. The room was kept clean and pristine and all her parent's clothes are still there. Tobin first goes to try on her father's armour to see if it finally fits her. It does not; despite having a body that looks male, Tobin is way more petite than a boy her age should be. Feeling sad that she is still not big enough to wear her father's armour she then looks at her mother's dresses. What is a mere curiosity at first morphs into an irresistible desire to try one of the dresses on. She almost does but then she stops herself, scared and embarrassed. But as she is returning the dress back into the wardrobe, she knocks down a coat. The coat is distinctively feminine and Tobin can not resist, she tries it on, together with a pair of earrings. What she sees in the mirror surprises her but not unpleasantly – in a way, she is seeing herself for the first time. For a moment, everything is clear to her. But then her ghostly brother addresses her as "Sister", and Tobin panics. Ashamed and embarrassed, she throws the coat back into the wardrobe and flees from the room (and all the things associated with femininity) back into her room (and the illusion of masculinity that makes her feel safe).

This cross-dressing scene might feel controversial. Cross-dressing is stereotypically linked with homosexuality and often wrongly interchanged with transvestitism. Men dressing up in

²⁴ Flewelling, *Hidden Warrior*, 256, <https://read.amazon.com/>

women's clothes is ridiculed in literature and movies alike, therefore using such an act to portray Tobin's feelings about herself is a risk. However, it is important to remember the context – Flewelling does not intend for the cross-dressing to be a cliché. Instead, it would appear that she wants her readers to realise how key part of the gender identity clothing is. Which is a fair point, especially considering that clothing in a medieval themed fantasy world is no mere fashion statement. It not only shows to which gender a person belongs (even the female soldiers in Skala wear dresses or skirts outside combat) but also their social status. One of the well-known fantasy stereotypes are mages wearing long robes, usually with ornaments or colouring indicating their position within the society (e. g. the “inquisition” formed by the ambitious mages serving the king in Skala wears distinctive grey robes).

This is not the first time Flewelling dresses her character in the clothes of the opposite gender, however Tobin's situation is vastly different from Seregil's in *Luck in the Shadows*. For Seregil, the woman dress he puts on is just a disguise – however perfect it has to be, it does not affect Seregil's identity as a male in any way. He is a man in a woman's clothing, both physically and mentally. Once the disguise is no longer needed, Seregil takes it off and dons the clothes appropriate for his gender – and that is it. No doubts about his own gender identity, no sense of uncertainty. He knows who he is when he puts the dress on, he still knows it when he takes the dress off. Tobin's situation is different. She is already uncertain about her own identity when she stumbles across her mother's coat. When she puts it on she is not just putting on a woman's clothing, like Seregil does, she is putting on a different gender identity. She sees herself as a woman for the first time and she ponders that maybe the mages are right, she is indeed a girl hidden in a boy's body. And in the privacy of her home, the female gender identity she dons for the moment feels natural. However, once her ghostly twin reminds Tobin that people around her view her as male and expect her to identify as one, she tries to switch back to male identity by returning the coat and with it, the female gender identity she tried on. But the act of putting the coat back into the wardrobe is more significant than in Seregil's case – Tobin basically closets herself again. This means that she does not truly “switch back” to male. Even if she tries to tell herself that she is a boy: “*I'm a boy*, he told himself quietly, squeezing his eyes shut. *I'm a prince.*”²⁵, she remains somewhere in between, desperately clinging to the identity she was raised in while realising it is not who she really is.

²⁵ Flewelling, *Hidden Warrior*, 189, <https://read.amazon.com/>

The complexity of Tobin's feelings is essential – it gives her character depth and makes her more “real.” If she just accepted her gender-change straight away, she might end up looking like a puppet in the hands of the mages or even worse, a parody of a genderqueer person. That would in turn undermine Flewelling's attempts to portray Tobin as a normal, natural person – her queerness is not her defining characteristics, it is just another part of her character. The whirlwind of contradicting feelings also shows another important thing: what Tobin fears the most is not her uncle, the gods, or even the enemy forces attacking the kingdom, it is her own femininity. She was raised a male and is comfortable in her masculinity. Everything associated with females is new, different and therefore terrifying for Tobin.

It is important to realise that Tobin does not fear femininity in other girls, neither does she see them as anything less, on the contrary. She even helps to secretly train a group of female warriors. Tobin only fears the feminine traits when applied to her own person:

It [her hair] hung in smooth black waves around her face, she tried to imagine it braided with ribbons and pearls. ‘No!’ Fleeing the mirror again, she looked in vain for her clothes. She went to the closest wardrobe and threw it open. Her mother's velvets and silks caught the morning light. Slamming the door, she went to the next wardrobe and pulled on one of her father's dusty tunics, but it was too large.²⁶

Even as her body is magically turned into female at the end of *Hidden Warrior*, in public so no one could deny her true gender, she still does not feel like a woman. Therefore, Tobin spends a portion of the final book in the series learning how to be a woman and accepting her femininity. This is made harder by the simple fact nobody tells Tobin what being a woman is like. When she was still a boy, nobody told her because she was young and she did not need to know much about the female body yet. When she was older, she did not care, because she was not attracted to girls. And once Tobin becomes a girl, she simultaneously becomes a queen and nobody talks to her about “girl troubles” either.²⁷ She has personal experience with menstruation but that is all. Her lack of knowledge can be seen in this scene from *Oracle Queen*: “Baldus looked around the unfamiliar chamber. ‘What do I do, my lady? I've never attended a girl before.’ ‘I have no idea. Help me off with these boots, for starters.’”²⁸

²⁶ Flewelling, *Hidden Warrior*, 493, <https://read.amazon.com/>

²⁷ Best illustrated by the fact that throughout *Oracle Queen*, the only person talking to Tamir about this topic is her old maidservant who does so in a short instance in one single chapter.

²⁸ Lynn Flewelling, *Oracle Queen*, (A Bantam Spectra Books, 2006): 463, <https://read.amazon.com/>. Due to technical issues, the electronic version of the book I own does not display the pages properly, therefore the number in the citation does not equal the actual page in the printed version of this book. This applies to every citation from *Oracle Queen*.

Tobin's struggle to accept her feminine traits shows two things: that knowing one's own body and being comfortable with it is a crucial part of an identity and that the divide between the two genders is almost absolute, when it comes to sharing information. This almost non-existent information flow is further diminished by the male-dominant society that does not want to know more about the opposite gender; Tobin's cousin's frequent trips to the local brothels show he only cares for women for their body. Even after his forced marriage to Nalia, he cares only about her physical well-being (so she can bear him healthy offspring) but not about her mental state:

Nalia untied the silk drawstring and a long strand of lustrous sea pearls cascaded out into her lap. 'Thank you, my lord. They're very pretty!' 'They're said to bring luck to pregnant women and to keep the child safe in the waters of the womb. Wear them for me, won't you?' A shadow fell across Nalia's heart as she dutifully put on the necklace. (...) The necklace was a talisman, not an ornament.²⁹

Though he brings Nalia gifts, they are always to ensure the safety of his child, not to cheer Nalia during the difficult times they face.

6.3 Oracle's Queen

Tobin's task in the final book of the trilogy is to defend her country from the invading armies of the Dark Lord, dethrone her cousin and make sense of her new body and identity as a female warrior monarch.

The first step in Tobin's journey towards female gender identity is a change of name. It is common for transsexual people to adopt a gender-neutral name when their transition to the opposite gender begins. Once they are comfortable in their new gender identity, they may change the name to a more gender indicating form or keep it gender-neutral. Because of the fantasy setting of the book, magic transforms Tobin's body in matter of seconds and she jumps straight from the male "Tobin" to the female "Tamír". But even though her body has changed and she has a new name, indicating a new identity, Tobin does not feel like a woman, much less a future queen. She is very attached to her penis and the "comforting blanket" of masculinity it provides; the loss of which is far more than just a loss of a body part, it is a loss of (not only) gender identity. Therefore, Tobin first needs to persuade herself that she is indeed female now, before she can convince the other nobles of her rightful claim to the throne. For a

²⁹ Flewelling, *Oracle Queen*, 5416, <https://read.amazon.com/>

while, she seems to keep both genders – mentally, and even physically (when aroused, she feels a phantom sensation as if she still had a penis):

She caught her breath and her eyes widened as the feeling between her legs flared stronger. Just as before, she could still feel the phantom shape of her male body, but with something much deeper, in places only a woman had. If she had both bodies at once, male and female, then both were awakened by Ki's hands and his lips against her skin.³⁰

Tobin's desperate attempts to understand herself end up with her identifying as a soldier and warrior first and foremost. This identity is comfortable, because Tobin's always been a warrior even when she was still a male. As put by Anne Balay: "Her [Tobin's] gendered identity remains subordinate to her martial one, which reassures Tobin as a stable frame for identity (...)." ³¹ The warrior identity is not comforting only for Tobin, however. Her friend Ki, whom she loves, also finds it easier to see her as a warrior above all else. Looking at Tobin's sex change in *Hidden Warrior* from Ki's point of view it is easy to see why he would rather think about Tobin as a soldier than a girl. He appears to interpret the sex change as a castration since Tobin's penis and testicles fell off; he references this scene later in *Oracle Queen* when he asks Tobin if it hurt.³² His friend, prince Tobin, died at that moment³³ and Ki is left with a "familiar stranger" who is undeniably female, at least if judged by her sex. Gender-wise, Tamír is somewhere in between or perhaps both at the same time which terrifies Ki and further complicates their already complex relationship. The complexity of the relationship stems not only from the social restrictions of each gender that suddenly step into their interactions (e. g. sleeping together in one bed, which was not seem as a problem when they were both male, is now scandalous) but also from their sexuality. Tobin has always liked boys and all her friends, including Ki, assume she is gay. Ki can not reciprocate Tobin's feelings while she is a boy. However, even when her sex physically changes, Ki is still unable to desire her. Anne Balay offers well-constructed analysis of Ki and Tobin's situation:

The problem the characters are having is not that Ki likes girls, and thus doesn't respond to Tobin. Even when Tobin is Tamír, and she has been viewed and designated female by Ki, he still doesn't like her, and remains attracted to more traditionally feminine servant girls. For Ki, attraction is more about gender than it is about sex.³⁴

³⁰ Flewelling, *Oracle Queen*, 5802, <https://read.amazon.com/>

³¹ Anne Balay, "'They're Closin' Up Girl Land': Female Masculinities in Children's Fantasy", *Femspec* 5, (2010): 24.

³² Flewelling, *Oracle Queen*, 1051, <https://read.amazon.com/>

³³ Flewelling, *Oracle Queen*, 276, <https://read.amazon.com/>

³⁴ Balay, "'They're Closin' Up Girl Land,'" 25.

Tobin runs away from the femininity traditionally associated with her new gender to her warrior identity. She eventually learns how to be a woman but still seems to think about herself as a warrior first and a woman second; she fully embraces the trope of a warrior queen, with an emphasis on the warrior part. Ki also finds it easier to see Tamír as a warrior and by doing this, he eventually finds her attractive, even if she lacks the feminine delicacy Ki associates with girls. He also finds comfort in Tamír's martial identity; it serves as a connection to the person Ki used to know, prince Tobin. It affirms, in Ki's mind, that Tobin and Tamír are the same person, regardless of gender.

Tobin's story is about challenging gender norms and boundaries. The fantastical setting of the story allows for a unique way of exploring gender identity and crossing the boundary between what is perceived as "male" and "female". There is also a play on the traits associated with each gender; something of a reminder that masculinity is not exclusively male (and vice versa). Even as the female Tamír, Tobin still has more masculine traits than feminine, she is a warrior first and a queen second. Still, by the end of the series, she is no less of a woman than the soft and frail Nalia (who, beside being a victim of abuse, also embodies traits traditionally associated with females, even the "bad" ones like naivety).

The Tamír Triad is also about a journey to self-discovery, about understanding who you are and how do the other see you. This discrepancy follows Tobin throughout her whole story (it is, to a point, present also in *The Nightrunner series* but much more prominent in *The Tamír Triad*) and reflects many real-life issues, such as overly-ambitious parents pressuring their children (Tobin's gender change occurred because her father agreed to it, wishing for his daughter to be a queen) or the struggle to fill in the role the society decided for you (this problem in particular is very highlighted in the books seeing as Tobin goes through several "roles" – from a child to an adult, a prince to a queen, from male to female – with each change bringing its own struggles).

All these themes are carefully layered on top of an epic fantasy quest to save the kingdom and restore peace. And like with many other fantasy novels, this one is as deep as the reader wants it to be. It can be read as a feminist narrative or as a traditionally-structured fantasy story with a few unusual elements.

Conclusion

Flewelling makes good use of the setting of her books and the various tropes the fantasy genre offers. For example, she uses the magical bond of soulmates to strengthen a relationship in *The Nightrunner series* and she uses magic to both create and solve Tobin's gender issues in *The Tamír Triad*. But most importantly, Flewelling makes sure that as a reader, you like the characters for themselves, not for their "weirdness". You end up rooting for Tobin, not because she is a trans-girl, but because she is a better warrior, better ruler than her cousin. You like Alec and Seregil not because they are male lovers, but because they are adventurous fools that go from one set of trouble to another. Flewelling makes sure that her main characters are interesting and queer, not interesting because they are queer.

The way Flewelling works with the LGBT themes, especially the transgender issue in *The Tamír Triad*, is enough within the context of the story and the books genre. If the setting was anything non-fantasy (maybe beside sci-fi) it would not work as well; there is a lack of psychological insight into the minds of other characters (the reader is shown only a little of Tobin's inner musings). Majority of the side characters just accept the change, no questions asked, which is okay within the fantasy context of the story (a foretold warrior queen, blessed by the gods, hidden by magic) but is completely unrealistic if taken out of the fantasy setting.

It is possible to conclude, then, that the LGBT element complement Flewelling's stories precisely because of the fantasy setting. What exactly she intends by adding these elements into her story, however, is up to debate. According to an internet interview, when asked why she chose such themes for her novels, Flewelling's answer was: "I've always believed that people are people, and it's wrong to discriminate against them just because of what gender or group they fall into. Anyway, long story short, I wanted to explore sexuality and gender identity in a fantasy setting because they mean a lot to me personally and on a societal level."³⁵ While it is up to each individual reader how much will they read into the queerness of the protagonists, Flewelling's belief that people are not defined by their gender or sexual preferences is clearly reflected in the way she portrays her characters (as mentioned above). I consider this to be the author's main aim – to show that the queerness of the protagonists does not make them less human – even in *The Tamír Triad*. This particular series can of course be interpreted as a

³⁵ Accessed online at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130921053359/http://michelefogal.com/blog/author-interview-lynn-flewelling>.

challenge of the gender norms (which it undeniably is) and a reminder that masculine traits are not male-exclusive, as analysed by Anne Balay.

However, considering how the story is narrated and how much time Flewelling spends developing her characters and the relationships between them, I personally see the notion that “people are people, regardless of their differences” as the more prominent one. Be it in *The Tamir Triad* or in *the Nightrunner series*, the protagonists’ ‘differences’ never offer them any advantage (or disadvantage). They are just personal traits, nothing more, nothing less. The queer characters are flawed, just as regular people are, and they make mistakes. If the reader delves into Flewelling’s stories without any specific approach in mind, this is the most prominent element – characters different from the societal norms but otherwise ordinary. As I already stated in this thesis, the stories are as queer as the reader wants them to be. For example, they may be people for whom the “ghost-story” elements of *The Tamir Triad* are the most prominent ones and the gender-issues just “float” in the background. Or, in the case of *the Nightrunner series*, some readers may completely ignore the romantic subplot and focus solely on the world-threatening crisis.

A story interpretation may not always overlap with the author’s intentions. However, in this case, considering the emphasis on character development, I would say that Flewelling wants her readers to view the queer protagonists of her stories as ordinary people. The fantasy setting just makes it easier to portray them as such. Perhaps it is not the main theme of the stories from the author’s point of view. Nevertheless, it is clearly visible in all the books and what I, upon finishing this analysis, see as the most prominent message.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce rozebírá dílo americké spisovatelky Lynn Flewellingové z hlediska genderu a LGBT prvků se snahou zjistit, jakým způsobem spisovatelka s danými prvky pracuje v rámci žánru fantasy. K analýze jsou použity první tři knihy ze série Noční běžci a všechny knihy z Trilogie Tamír.

První kapitola obsahuje základní informace o autorce. Do práce je vložena proto, že Lynn Flewellingová je současnou autorkou populární literatury a v České republice není příliš známá. Informace vychází především z medailonku o autorce, který je součástí tištěných českých verzí knih, protože důvěryhodných zdrojů s údaji o Lynn Flewellingové není mnoho (a to navzdory tomu, že je autorka přítomná na nejrůznějších sociálních sítích). Závěr kapitoly se krátce věnuje způsobu, jakým jsou autorčiny knihy nabízeny na trhu a do jakých kategorií jsou řazeny. Konkrétně jde o kategorii „Young Adult“, v České republice někdy uváděné jako „mladí dospělí“.

Druhá kapitola se pokouší o definici fantasy jakožto literárního žánru. Nepodává žádný jednoznačný závěr, protože diskuze o definici fantasy není, a v dohledné době pravděpodobně nebude, uzavřena. Proto je z existujících definic vybrána jedna, v jejímž rámci je dílo Lynn Flewellingové charakterizováno.

Třetí kapitola se zabývá genderovými teoriemi. Z velkého množství různých existujících teorií jsou vybrány prvky a pasáže relevantní pro nadcházející analýzu. Hlavním zdrojem informací je internetová encyklopedie *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, jejíž přehled feministických teorií se ukázal jako nejpřínosnější. Kapitola také poskytuje definice takových termínů, jako např. LGBT, se kterými se bude následně v analýze pracovat. Definice jsou poskládané za pomoci několika různých slovníků, tištěných i internetových.

Čtvrtá kapitola zkoumá užití LGBT prvků v rámci žánru fantasy. Kapitola si klade za cíl zjistit, co může autory vést k zasazení příběhů s LGBT prvky do fantasy kulisy a jaké možnosti tento žánr nabízí ve srovnání s ostatními žánry, např. šťastný konec pro homosexuální pár (gay romance mívají velmi často tragické konce, pokud jsou psány v jiném než fantasy žánru). Součástí kapitoly jsou také příklady autorů a děl s danou tematikou. Jde především o příklady z kategorie „young adult“, kam se knihy Lynn Flewellingové často řadí.

Samotná analýza děl Lynn Flewellingové začíná v páté kapitole, a to sérií Noční běžci. Z této série jsou použity první tři knihy, přičemž pouze první dvě (Štěstí ve stínech a Příchod tmy)

jsou analyzovány detailně. Třetí kniha, Zrádcův měsíc, je pouze okrajově zmíněna, protože vztah hlavních postav, který je předmětem analýzy, je v knize výrazně upozaděn. Každá z knih je analyzována zvláště, hlavním předmětem zkoumání je vztah mezi oběma mužskými protagonisty. Z analýzy vyplývá, že ačkoli Flewellingová užívá stejných postupů, jako jiní autoři fantasy gay literatury, přistupuje k nim vlastním způsobem. Kupříkladu i velmi oblíbené žánrové klišé „spřízněných duší“, které často slouží jako legitimizace homosexuálního vztahu, je užito netradičně – důvodem pro navázání vztahu protagonistů není fakt, že jsou to spřízněné duše. Teprve až když se vztah plně vyvine, začne ho okolí vnímat tímto způsobem. Jinak je vztah prezentován způsobem, jakým gay romance ve fantasy bývají – jako trvalá záležitost, s velkým důrazem na lásku a romantiku před čímkoli fyzickým (pokud v knihách dojde na sex, je vždycky tzv. „off-screen“ - na pozadí a nikdy není explicitně popsán).

Flewellingová celkově vytváří prostředí, ve kterém je homosexualita normální součástí společnosti, což je vidět kupříkladu na tom, že vykřičené čtvrti v jižních městech mají domy barevně označené podle toho, jaký druh společnosti lze najít uvnitř. Přes velmi tolerantní společnost jsou však protagonisté jediným homosexuálním párem, který se v knižní sérii objevuje. V Trilogii Tamír je jich několik, přesto však jde vždy o dva muže. Flewellingová, stejně jako většina fantasy autorů pracujících s touto tematikou, nezařazuje do svých příběhů žádný lesbický pár.

V rámci této kapitoly je také analyzován svět, ve kterém se příběhy odehrávají; překvapivě je totiž rozložen způsobem, který využil se svých dílech mj. Tolkien – totiž nepřátelská „zlá“ země je na východ od království, v němž se děj odehrává, a „magická“ země je na západ. Tohle rozložení, vyplývající z křesťanského smýšlení, je překvapivé jednak proto, že se ve fantaskních světech nevyskytuje tak často, ale i proto, že Flewellingová je zen-buddhistka (a tato východní tradice nemá důvod asociovat s východním směrem cokoli negativního).

Kapitola šestá se věnuje Trilogii Tamír. Stejně jako v případě Nočních běžců je každá z knih analyzována zvláště a každé z nich je věnována jedna podkapitola. Protože je protagonistka těchto knih transsexuálkou, je analýza zaměřena především na otázku genderu.

V úvodu kapitoly jsou rozebrána žánrová klišé, na nichž je příběh vystavěn; protože je hrdinka „vyvolenou“ záchránkyní svého lidu, věnuje Flewellingová velkou péči tomu, aby hlavní charakteristikou protagonistky nebyla jen její odlišnost. Tyto snahy se projevují ve všech dílech trilogie – protagonistka dělá chyby, zatímco se snaží vyrovnat se s vlastní odlišností a tím, co od ní očekává společnost. Tato dvojakost provází hrdinku po celou dobu příběhu a vytváří

prostředí, v němž jsou napadány a zpochybňovány nejrůznější normy týkající se společensky přijatelného chování v rámci daného genderu.

V Trilogii Tamír je také dobře vidět, jak autorka využívá možností, které jí fantastika nabízí: fyzická změna pohlaví protagonistky je provedena za pomoci magie, a proroctví o „vyvolené“ královně-válečnici (které podkresluje celý příběh) zdůvodňuje, proč ostatní postavy tuto drastickou změnu bez řeči přijmou. Je jasné, že pokud by se měl příběh odehrát mimo fantasy žánr, nefungoval by; Flewellingová opomíjí psychologické hledisko u všech postav vyjma protagonistky (a i v jejím případě není dáno moc prostoru detailům). V rámci fantastického kontextu příběhu je přijatelné věnovat psychologii postav menší prostor, mimo něj však nikoli.

Závěrem lze konstatovat následující: cílem autorky je ukázat, že i lidé, kteří neodpovídají normám heteronormativní společnosti jsou normální lidské bytosti, k čemuž využívá možnosti, které jí fantasy žánr nabízí. Přestože lze Noční běžce vyhodnotit „jen“ jako další z mnoha gay romancí ve fantasy kulisách, Trilogie Tamír je s oblibou interpretována feministicky, tj. jako boj proti genderovým normám či jako kritika převážně mužské společnosti. Interpretace literárních děl je vždy komplikovaná, neboť nikdo nedokáže zachovat stoprocentní objektivitu, navíc se interpretace nemusí nutně shodovat se záměrem, s jakým autor dílo napsal. A přestože Trilogie Tamír bezesporu proti genderovým normám bojuje, nebo je přinejmenším zpochybňuje, troufám si v této práci tvrdit, že to není tou nejdůležitější rovinou knih. Za daleko důležitější považuji snahu Flewellingové ukázat, že „lidé jsou prostě lidé“ a neměli by se odsuzovat na základě odlišností od společenských norem.

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