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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná diplomová práce se bude věnovat literatuře pro dospívající, tzv. young adult literature (YA), konkrétně trilogii *The Abhorsen* australského autora Gartha Nixe, kterou bude analyzovat z pozic feministické literární kritiky. V úvodní části diplomantka stručně uvede do literárního kontextu YA literatury a YA fantasy a zvolené dílo do něj zasadí; zmíní rovněž přístupy kritického studia YA literatury. Dále nastíní teoreticko-kritický rámec, v němž bude primární text analyzovat (tj. přístupy feministické literární teorie a kritiky) a případně definuje další pojmy, s nimiž bude pracovat (genderový stereotyp, empowerment, ap.). Jádrem práce pak bude analýza trilogie z hlediska zobrazení genderu, genderových rolí, společenského postavení. V závěru práce diplomantka své analýzy shrne a zhodnotí, zda zvolená trilogie posiluje či naopak podřívá patriarchální pojetí společnosti a hodnotový systém a jak toho dosahuje prostřednictvím žánru fantasy.

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Title

Female characters in the *Abhorsen Trilogy*

Annotation

This thesis examines the representation of female characters in the *Abhorsen Trilogy* by Australian author Garth Nix, focusing on the portrayal of gender. Through the lens of feminist literary criticism, it explores themes such as gender roles, gender stereotypes, and female empowerment. Simultaneously, the analysis is informed by theoretical frameworks related to young adult literature and the fantasy genre, as well as psychological theories on adolescent development.

Key words

female characters, feminist literary criticism, gender, gender roles, gender stereotypes, female empowerment, young adult literature, fantasy genre

Název

Ženské postavy v *Trilogii Abhorsenka*

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá prezentací ženských postav v *Trilogii Abhorsenka* od australského autora Gartha Nixe, přičemž se zaměřuje na zobrazení genderu. Z pozic feministické literární kritiky zkoumá témata jako genderové role, genderové stereotypy a posilování postavení žen. Současně se práce opírá o teoretické rámce související s literaturou pro mládež a fantasy žánrem, jakožto i o psychologické teorie vývoje dospívajících.

Klíčová slova

ženské postavy, feministická literární kritika, gender, genderové role, genderové stereotypy, posilování postavení žen, literatura pro mládež, žánr fantasy

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Introduction

The representation of female characters in young adult literature is a vital element in influencing the way readers think about gender and identity. This thesis explores the ways in which female protagonists are constructed and developed within Garth Nix's *Abhorsen Trilogy*, which consists of novels *Sabriel*, *Lirael*, and *Abhorsen*. Through the lens of feminist literary criticism, this thesis focuses on themes such as gender roles, gender stereotypes, and female empowerment. This thesis explores how the three novels portray gender and whether this portrayal and actions of the heroines Sabriel and Lirael contribute to the reinforcement or challenge of the patriarchal conception of society and value system.

In order to contextualize the themes listed above, the thesis begins with an overview of young adult literature and its history, as well as fantasy literature and its history, as *The Abhorsen Trilogy* belongs to both categories. This discussion provides a foundation for situating the trilogy within both frameworks. Additionally, an introduction to key ideas of feminist literary theory as well as feminist literary criticism is provided.

The main focus of this thesis relates to the female protagonists and the way they navigate the notions of gender roles, gender stereotypes, and female empowerment. The analysis considers how Nix's female heroines navigate their femininity, while shouldering responsibilities that are typically attributed to male characters in fantasy fiction.

The thesis examines the *Abhorsen Trilogy* through the lens of feminist literary criticism while being mindful of the time the trilogy was published. Therefore, concepts aligning with post-feminist frameworks are also mentioned. It also provides a perspective of fantasy hero stories, where the protagonist is a woman, and how Nix deals with issues raised in this framework.

The research is guided by the following questions: How do the *Abhorsen Trilogy's* texts construct and develop their female protagonists? Does the trilogy challenge or reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes? How does this reinforcement or challenge reflect within the fantasy genre?

Methodologically, this thesis employs literary analysis informed by feminist literary criticism and its concepts, alongside insights from post-feminism and works focusing on female protagonists in YA fantasy. Using inductive reasoning, it aims to uncover whether the trilogy reinforces or challenges the patriarchal conception of society, its value system, and its connection to the fantasy genre.

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that the *Abhorsen Trilogy* not only provides a compelling vision of female heroism but also engages with contemporary debates about gender.

1. Young Adult Literature

Aleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson define young adults as “those, who think they’re too old to be children but who others think are too young to be adults.” From this, they determine that young adults are people who attend junior high as well as those graduating from high school. Therefore, Young Adult literature is defined as any book that readers in the age range from twelve to eighteen read for either leisure purposes or the completion of school assignments.¹ The age range of readers is not universal, however. For example, Marci Glaus widens it to as early as ten and extends it a year making the age range ten to nineteen.²

Although Šárka Bubíková agrees with the notion that Young Adult literature is intended for teenagers and adolescent readers, she goes on to say that it is almost impossible to distinguish adult and Young Adult literature from one another. The experience of librarian Betty Carter is used to further this claim as she notes that the real difference between the categories lies in the commercial marketing of the individual book. It is also suggested that YA novels are sometimes distinguished from adult novels by the assumption that such books are of lesser value. Stories for young adults are further described as shorter in length with a chronological narration and a limited number of characters. At the same time, Bubíková states that many pieces of YA literature break these conventions, having elaborate plots, time shifts, and a great number of characters.³

Besides being marketed for young adults, writer David Levithan argues that teens should “find themselves within the pages” of a YA fiction book. The readers “finding themselves” could mean they should experience the plot with the protagonist.⁴ Additionally, the protagonists of literature for young adults are often teenagers themselves; therefore, “finding one’s self” gains a more literal meaning.⁵

¹ Alleen Pace Nilsen, Kenneth L. Donelson, *Literature For Today’s Young Adults* (New York: Pearson, 2008), 1-3.

² Marci Glaus, “Text Complexity and Young Adult Literature,” *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 57, no. 5 (February 2014): 408.

³ Šárka Bubíková, “Who Reads This and Why?,” *Hradec Králové Journal of Anglophone Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 12-14.

⁴ Mathieu Donner, “Introduction: Reading the Body, Reading (YA) Fiction,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 28, no. 3 (2017): 339.

⁵ Katie Rybakova, Rikki Roccanti, “Connecting The Canon to Current Young Adult Literature,” *American Secondary Education* 44, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 32.

Young Adult literature is also described as having didactic elements.⁶ Mathieu Donner describes the category as “fundamentally didactic”. At the same time, he mentions that predominantly fantasy and sci-fi YA writers are subversive in their tone. These writers take their readers outside of the reality they know to better question and challenge the norms established within their known reality.⁷ According to Rachel Falconer in Routledge’s *Companion to Children’s Literature*, YA fiction has become more challenging and morally ambivalent in the past decades due to the appearance of topics like violence, genocide, or the apocalypse.⁸ Still, even with subversive and morally conflicting views, the writers of such genres are in a place of authority which makes their books didactic again. Ultimately, it is determined that young adult fiction serves as a tool for empowerment and repression of teenagers simultaneously.⁹

As indicated above with the mention of sci-fi and fantasy writers, Young Adult literature contains many themes, genres, and styles.¹⁰ Chris Crowe takes this fact into account with his definition that describes YA as “all genres of literature published since 1967 that are written for and marketed to young adults”.¹¹ Besides mentioning that the Young Adult category can vary in genres, he mentions the year 1967. This year is significant because of three books. The novels in question are Susan Eloise Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, Ann Head’s *Mr. a Mrs. Bo Jo Jones*, and Robert Lypsite’s *The Contender*. Their significance then lies in the fact that they were written expressly for the young adult demographic and started a publishing movement of literature for young adults in the United States.¹²

For the purposes of this work, Young Adult literature will be defined as literature of all genres that is marketed for and read by people from the age of ten to the age of nineteen that contains didactic elements, even if the writer is subversive in their tone. YA literature will also be defined as shorter in length, and chronological. Additionally, the book of YA must have a protagonist within the same age range as the readers.

⁶ Bubiková, “Who Reads This and Why?,” 13.

⁷ Donner, “Introduction: Reading the Body, Reading (YA) Fiction,” 340.

⁸ Rachel Falconer, “Young Adult Fiction and The Crossover Phenomena,” in *The Routledge Companion to Children’s Literature*, ed. David Rudd (New York: Routledge, 2010), 89.

⁹ Donner, “Introduction: Reading the Body, Reading (YA) Fiction,” 340.

¹⁰ Falconer, “Young Adult Fiction and The Crossover Phenomena,” 89.

¹¹ Chris Crowe, “Young Adult Literature: What Is Young Adult Literature?,” *The English Journal* 88, no. 1 (September 1998): 121.

¹² Kathy Latrobe, Trisha Hutcherson, “An Introduction to Ten Outstanding Young Adult Authors in the United States,” *World Literature Today* 76, no. ¾ (Summer-Autumn 2002): 68

1.1 History of YA literature

The roots of young adult literature can be traced to the 19th century, according to Bubíková. At that time, literature for children was divided based on gender. For girls, there were domestic novels. The best-known example of a domestic novel is Luisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. These novels emphasized the importance of homemaking and piety in a girl's or a woman's life. As they were inspired by 18th and early 19th-century moral tales, therefore, they would be considered too didactic for today's readers' standards. For boys, there were juvenile adventure stories. These stories portrayed resourceful young adult men who were celebrated for their prowess and assertiveness. Aside from these joint characteristics, British and American adventure stories were not the same. The protagonists of British adventures were future builders of the British Empire, whereas American adventures portrayed the American dream through which the financially unfortunate protagonists rose to employment and social acceptance. Prominent authors of these stories were British G. A. Henty and American Horatio Alger.¹³

Despite the early roots of the category, society was essentially divided into children and adults only. That, however, changed in the year 1904 when G. Stanley Hall, the first president of the American Psychological Association, in his work *Adolescence: Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, invented the new category of being called "adolescence". This theory was flawed because of a notion Hall called "recapitulation", which said that children's development mirrors that of the human race. Suggesting that children are savage-like, and throughout their development, they become more and more civilized. Although discredited, the theory was very influential at that time, creating organizations like the Boy Scouts. Additionally, this term covered today's accepted age range of twelve to nineteen, making the term similar in meaning to today's young adults. This theory also inspired a movement of "parents' manuals" on how to deal with teenagers in middle-class and upper-middle-class environments, which hinted at the future economic importance of this age bracket.¹⁴

Before, children became adults "overnight" as they were often put into full-time workforce at as early age as ten. Hall's invention, however, brought forth a new interest in the needs of adolescents; therefore, by 1910, the number of young people in the education system increased. This also caused a change in the system from a six-year high school to one lasting only four

¹³ Bubíková, "Who Reads This and Why?," 12-13.

¹⁴ Michael Cart, *Young Adult Literature, Fourth Edition: From Romance to Realism* (Chicago: ALA-Neal Schuman, 2022), 3-4.

years, which was normalised by the 1920s. Compulsory education laws were issued as well, which resulted in half of the American youth being enrolled in some school institution by the 1930s. Adolescents were finally pushed out of the workforce after the Great Depression.¹⁵ The 1930s also produced the first literary works that come close to today's notion of young adult fiction, such as *The Tower Treasure* by Franklin W. Dixon and *The Secret of the Old Clock* by Carolyn Keene.¹⁶

The relocation of young people from the workplace to school institutions had a significant impact on the evolution of young adult literature because it led to the emergence of "youth culture". This culture centred around high-school life and social functions like dances and dating, which produced literary works like 1936's new column in the *Scholastic* magazine called "Boy Meets Girl". The column's author, Margaret L. Hauser, with a pen name Gay Head, would later produce books *First Love* and *Hi There, High School*, which, as the titles suggest, also focus on the adolescent demographic. Even though "Boy Meets Girl" mentions a "boy" in its title, the column was mainly about moral instructions for girls. One example of such instruction is that girls should not correct their date, as boys do not like "brainy girls". This clearly shows that in its early days, youth culture was male-centred.¹⁷

Furthering this, up to the 1930s, the books marketed for girls were perceived as less valuable. This then led to the belief that girls were far more interested in reading and, therefore, would read even fiction primarily aimed at boys. In reality, girls' fiction was just of far worse quality than that of boys, which resulted in girls reading boys' books simply because they wanted to read a compelling book.¹⁸

The first book ever to be called "juvenile" or "junior" was produced during the 1930s. It was Rose Wilder Lane's *Let the Hurricane Roar*.¹⁹ Still, it was also the year 1930 when the American Library Association published its Young People's Reading Roundtable, which was a list of the best books for "young readers". "Young readers" here refers to today's young adults. Nevertheless, this list contained a mixture of adult and children's literature.²⁰

Another milestone in the decade was the year 1936 because of publishing Helen Boylston's *Sue Barton Student Nurse*. The book enjoyed great success, eventually gaining six sequels. As

¹⁵ Cart, *Young Adult Literature, Fourth Edition: From Romance to Realism*, 3-4.

¹⁶ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 7.

¹⁷ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 4-5.

¹⁸ Nilsen, Donelson, *Literature For Today's Young Adults*, 50-51.

¹⁹ Nilsen, Donelson, *Literature For Today's Young Adults*, 52-58.

²⁰ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 7.

evident from the title, the character Sue studies to be a nurse in the book. Boylston was a nurse herself; therefore, the book succeeded in portraying the environment of a nursing school and eventually a hospital quite accurately. By this, the *Sue Barton* series became a prototype for a popular subgenre of the earliest young adult fiction, career books.²¹

Evidently, because of her gender and plot points like marrying at the end of the series, *Sue Barton* was aimed at a female audience. For boys, there were authors like Montgomery Atwater, Stephen W. Meader, and Henry Gregor Felsen, who wrote fiction about more masculine occupations like avalanche patrolling, earth-moving, and automobile mechanics. In the years after, many other less influential authors created fiction about almost every career imaginable. These fictions were often “dreadfully didactic”.²²

The 1940s were a difficult time for the world because of the Second World War. Due to this, the growth of young adult literature was uncertain and hesitant. Additionally, paper was a scarce commodity.²³ Still, it was at the start of the decade, in 1941, when the term “teenager” was first used in the magazine *Popular Science Monthly*. This term became normalised in the following ten years. Additionally, the term “young adult” was not a foreign concept at that time either. It was first used in a professional setting as early as 1944 by a librarian Margaret Scoggin. Twenty years later, the director of the School Library of Science at Simmons College, Kenneth R. Shaffer, regarded this time as a time when it was professionally discovered that the “young adult” was a “special library client”.²⁴

What is more, it was also the start of the 1940s, when writing for teenagers became established. The novel *Seventeenth Summer* by Maureen Daly is credited for this establishment. The story is told through a first-person narration of a seventeen-year-old Angie Morrow, therefore adding to the authenticity of the work, which made it very successful at the time. Furthermore, Daly published the book when she was only twenty-one years old herself. Also, the topics appearing in the novel are uniquely bold for the time. For example, the characters smoke and drink in some scenes.²⁵ Traditionally, these topics were introduced only by implication or served the role of a bad example that young adults reading the work should not follow.²⁶ Despite its supposed responsibility for establishing teenage-aimed literature, the author was not pleased to

²¹ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 7-8.

²² Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 8.

²³ Nilsen, Donelson, *Literature For Today's Young Adults*, 61.

²⁴ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 5-6.

²⁵ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 9.

²⁶ Nilsen, Donelson, *Literature For Today's Young Adults*, 62.

discover that her novel was not read by adults. She wrote that she intended for *Seventeenth Summer* to become a “full adult novel,” and the work was reviewed as such.²⁷

The 1940s were a decade for girls. To be more specific, the majority of content for young adults was primarily targeted at girls. They even had magazines and radio programs dedicated to them. On the other hand, the 1950s were a decade dedicated to boys. This is attributed to America being “car-crazy” at that time. It is even suggested that the age of sixteen, meaning the age one gets their driver’s license, was regarded as more important than the age of twenty-one, the age at which one is allowed to vote. Because of this obsession, boys would read fiction about cars. Another genre that was marketed mainly to boys was science-fiction with titles such as *Star Man’s Son, 2250 A.D.* by Andre Norton. Less important boy genres were adventure, sports, and animals. For girls, romance remained the most popular genre.²⁸

Although widely read, young adult fiction was quite disconnected from the reality of teenage life. For example, Oregon was the only state in that taught Sex Education at the time. Teenagers could get only a limited amount of information on the subject in certain books. This situation was a perfect opportunity for the introduction of a realistic novel.²⁹ This opportunity was seized in 1951 by J. D. Salinger and his book *Catcher in the Rye*.³⁰ Although it is still one of the most censored books in the US, it is considered honest and human by young adults and continues to win their hearts.³¹ Additionally, it is said to be standing behind the birth of the 1960s American wave of writing for teenagers.³²

The sixties were a pivotal time in education. Nilsen and Donelson argue this was because of Russia’s Sputnik launch, which brought fear upon Americans. Therefore, they decided to counteract by encouraging education in high-tech fields putting aside funds for science. However, they soon realised that students would first need to learn to read to be proficient in science and mathematics. The educational focus was broadened as a response.³³

With a desire to improve students’ reading ability, there came some advocates for young adult literature saying that YA might prepare young adults for “something stronger, harder, and more adult.” This belief was, however, rejected by The College Entrance Examination Board. The

²⁷ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 9.

²⁸ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 9-14.

²⁹ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 13.

³⁰ Bubíková, “Who Reads This and Why?,” 13.

³¹ Nilsen, Donelson, *Literature For Today’s Young Adults*, 63.

³² Bubíková, “Who Reads This and Why?,” 13.

³³ Nilsen, Donelson, *Literature For Today’s Young Adults*, 65.

Board justified its view by emphasizing the need to elevate students' reading levels which YA is "rarely" capable of, further saying: "Maturity of thought, vocabulary, syntax, and construction is the criterion of excellence in literature, and that criterion must not be abandoned for apparent expediency."³⁴

A very significant year within the sixties was the above-mentioned 1967 with the release of *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. The novel is said to be revolutionary for two reasons. The first of them is that Hinton herself was a teenager when she wrote the book. Therefore, the book was considered more realistic when depicting the young characters, which is the second reason for being considered revolutionary. Before her, writers would often ignore the basic realities of a teenage person's life. Hinton, however, decided to reject, at least in her mind, this romantic display of the turbulent adolescent years. For example, she incorporated violence in the novel, which she justified by saying: "Violence, too, is part of teenagers' lives." Despite the work's impact at the time of its release, Michael Cart claims the realness of the plot is challenged by today's reader, calling it an "odd hybrid" of realistic fiction and romantic fantasy.³⁵

In the seventies, there were many significant works published. Cart, however, regards *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier as the most significant. His reasoning for this view is that it does not have a happy ending.³⁶ Before Cormier's novel, YA books were criticised for being "written to a formula," which Elaine Simpson describes as: "...they all [YA novels] have pat, sweetness and light resolutions that instil false conceptions of life..."³⁷ She goes on to criticise this formula by saying: "They fail to deal with fundamental problems of personal and societal adjustments that are of immediate concern to young adults, etc."³⁸

This need for young adult novels to tackle the problems mentioned above produced the "problem novel". These novels were very subject-oriented. Therefore, they focused more on the topic than on the storytelling. The topics were usually adult ones, such as divorce, drugs, disappearing parents, and death.³⁹ Still, the novels were criticised by adults who assumed young adults were not ready for such topics.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the problem novel is seen as far too one-dimensional and as a "degeneration" of the realistic novel by Cart. Despite the criticisms, problem novels were widely read by young adult audiences, which Cart attributes to their

³⁴ Nilsen, Donelson, *Literature For Today's Young Adults*, 69.

³⁵ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 24-29.

³⁶ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 33-34.

³⁷ Nilsen, Donelson, *Literature For Today's Young Adults*, 73

³⁸ Nilsen, Donelson, *Literature For Today's Young Adults*, 73.

³⁹ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 34-35.

⁴⁰ Nilsen, Donelson, *Literature For Today's Young Adults*, 73.

having a similar appeal to horror fiction. They allowed one to read about darkness from the comfort of a well-lit room.⁴¹

After the seventies focused on the darker aspects of life, there was a renaissance of romances in the eighties. These romances replicated the content of the fiction of the forties and fifties. Because of this, Cart deems them unrealistic. It is not only the contemporary view of Cart that is critical, however. Just two years after the romance boom, in 1981, it was criticised by the Council on Interracial Books for Children saying that: “[these romances] teach girls that their primary value is their attractiveness to boys; devalue relationships and encourage competition between girls, discount the possibility of non-romantic friendships between boys and girls; depict middle-class, white, small-town families as the norm, and portray adults in stereotypical sex role.” This coincides with the description of the heroines of such romances provided by editor Pamela Polack:

The heroines—shy, inexperienced, small-town girls—live in happy homes and tend to have names that end in ‘ie.’ Their primary interest in life is boys; having a steady ensures a place in the high-school hierarchy. They are not interested in college or career and are not involved in the women’s movement. Their mothers are their role models. Their fathers are shadowy but benign breadwinners. There are no grandparents—in fact, there are few elderly, black, or handicapped people to be found.⁴²

Despite her criticism, Pollack explained that according to market research, this was the type of literature young adults wanted to read during the 80s. Additionally, the books were not to reach the adolescent through school or the library. Books were now sold directly to the teen consumers. This created many successful books and book series. The most successful romance series of this time was Francine Pascal’s *Sweet Valley High*. One of its countless spin-offs, *Perfect Summer*, was even the first ever YA book to reach *The New York Times* paperback best-seller list.⁴³ Another by-product of the marketing change was the creation of shopping malls and subsequently the invention of bookstore chains.⁴⁴ The 80s also gave a voice to a new generation of writers who started a new body of young adult literature called multicultural.⁴⁵

Sweet Valley High series continued to enjoy success even in the early nineties. Besides romances, the genre of horror was popular. Ken Tucker attributes its success to “...a combination of youth’s eternal desire to shock its elders and a budding interest in all things odd

⁴¹ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 35-36.

⁴² Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 41-43.

⁴³ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 42-43.

⁴⁴ Michael Cart, “Young Adult Literature: The State of a Restless Art,” *SLIS Connecting* 5, no. 1 (August 2016): 35.

⁴⁵ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 45-46.

and uncomfortable.”⁴⁶ This interest was also reflected in slasher movies like *Friday the Thirteenth* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* which dominated the box office at the time. Something else that changed was the age of the protagonists. Before, the characters of YA were typically between sixteen and seventeen years old. During this time, their age decreased to as young as twelve to fourteen. This branch of YA acquired the title Middle-school literature. As the name suggests, this branch came into existence because of the rise of middle schools, unique institutions specifically designed to suit the specific developmental needs of students from the age of eleven to fourteen.⁴⁷

By 1994, young adult literature was “at a risk of extinction”. At risk were, in fact, the young adults themselves.⁴⁸ One person between the ages of fifteen to nineteen was murdered at a shocking rate of 3.5 hours in 1991.⁴⁹ Teens of the early nineties faced a variety of different challenges, such as poverty, homelessness, or fractured homes. There was also an exponential increase in teenage suicides.⁵⁰

Thankfully for YA, though, the high school-aged population grew by 4.5 million in the second half of the decade, and because of the buying power in this demographic, so grew the market targeted at young adults. In fact, the market expanded to young adults “as old as thirty”.⁵¹ This expansion landed the name the crossover phenomenon.⁵² Another factor in this might be the fact that young adult literature started to be put back in classrooms, which heightened their importance and popularity.⁵³

Exactly at the start of the second half of the 1990s, the first book of the *Abhorsen Trilogy*, *Sabriel*, was published. Although it was not Garth Nix’s first young adult fiction, it was the book that brought him prominence. The same year it was published, 1995, *Sabriel* won the Aurealis award as well as was chosen as the Australian Book Council Notable book. Additionally, it was chosen as an American Library Association Honor book in 1997.⁵⁴ *Sabriel* would be considered a YA fiction because the heroine is eighteen years old at the start of the novel. Therefore, her age is within the age range set for this thesis. Additionally, the plot runs

⁴⁶ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 56.

⁴⁷ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 55-58.

⁴⁸ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 61.

⁴⁹ Cart, “Young Adult Literature: The State of a Restless Art,” 36.

⁵⁰ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 61.

⁵¹ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 68-70.

⁵² Falconer, “Young Adult Fiction and The Crossover Phenomena,” 87.

⁵³ Cart, “Young Adult Literature: The State of a Restless Art,” 35.

⁵⁴ Alice Mills, “Fixity and Flow in Garth Nix’s *Sabriel*,” *Papers: Explorations in Children’s Literature* 11, no. 3 (December 2001): 15.

chronologically and is of a relatively short length of 311 pages, consistent with this work's definition of the term. Lastly, the book contains didactic elements which are also needed to fulfil the YA definition within this work.

The two sequels of *Sabriel*, *Lirael* and *Abhorsen*, came in 2001⁵⁵ and 2003, concluding the trilogy.⁵⁶ *Lirael* introduces a new heroine under the same name who is fourteen years old at the start of the novel. She, therefore, fits into the age range of YA fiction defined for this work. *Lirael*'s plot is chronological, although divided into parts that do not seem like it at first glance. Lengthwise, it is the longest of the trilogy with 646 pages. Still, it is not an extraordinarily long novel and could be classified as short. *Abhorsen*, the final addition to the trilogy, expands Lirael's story, now being nineteen. The plot is in chronological order once again, and with its length of 340 pages, it fits into the definition of this thesis once more.

In his speech, Cart says that at “the dawn of the 21st century, [...] young adult literature took off like a rocket.”⁵⁷ He continues to explain this by identifying twenty-two trends that hallmarked the expansion of the field. Two of the most significant ones are the multigenerational appeal of new YA books, making them crossover fiction, and the renaissance of fantasy works.⁵⁸ The multigenerational appeal is relevant because Falconer deems *Sabriel* an example of a crossover fiction.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the character Sabriel makes appearances in the two sequels as well, which might help this label because by then, she is a mother and might be closer to the adult audience. The trilogy is in the fantasy genre, which is why its so-called renaissance is important.

2. Fantasy genre

Fantasy is a genre of literature with many definitions. An aspect most of them seem to agree on is that it “contains magic or other elements that cannot be understood by the rules of reality.”⁶⁰ Besides the imaginary settings, Ria Cheyne adds that: “Fantasy is a genre of overcoming

⁵⁵Mills, “Fixity and Flow in Garth Nix's *Sabriel*,” 15.

⁵⁶ American Library Association, “News Fronts: ALA,” *American Libraries* 35, no. 1 (January 2004): 10.

⁵⁷ Cart, “Young Adult Literature: The State of a Restless Art,” 37.

⁵⁸ Cart, “Young Adult Literature: The State of a Restless Art,” 37.

⁵⁹ Falconer, “Young Adult Fiction and The Crossover Phenomena,” 95.

⁶⁰ Charlotte Butcher, Neil Hollands, Andrew Smith, Barry Trott, Jessica Zellers, “Core Collections in Genre Studies: Fantasy Fiction 101,” *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 227.

obstacles and achieving goals.”⁶¹ According to her, the genre is structured around a quest or a task the hero of whatever gender must overcome, which brings a resolution to the plot. This task is not always known from the start and might be revealed, for example, later in a series. The time of the resolution also varies. For some resolutions, the reader is obligated to wait only a few pages, while for others the wait is possible to be whole volumes.⁶²

The author of a fantasy genre must convince the reader that the completion of the quest at hand and the survival of the hero is not impossible. Even though the characters often find themselves around grim circumstances like death, despair, horror, and betrayal, “they must not be the final word.”⁶³ Hope is encouraged within this genre which is a key part in the genre’s appeal. Furthermore, good usually wins over evil the villains of which are defeated forever. On the other hand, the success of this task may come at a cost such as losing a loved one or a friend. Because of this, fantasy does not always provide straightforward happy endings. At the same time, it notices the possible sacrifices made by those lost and affirms them as worthwhile.⁶⁴ Happy endings in contemporary fantasy, besides completing the task, usually involve spiritual maturation rather than enthronement and marriage.⁶⁵

Additionally, fantasy often operates with notions of prophecy or destiny. This can complicate the characters’ ability to change the plot. Fantasy, however, affirms the possibility of achievement if this prophecy relates to the quest. Moreover, hard work is appreciated in this genre, and its value never goes to waste.⁶⁶ Other themes of fantasy tales include honour, love, war, revenge, responsibility, and loyalty. Sometimes, it is able to subtly critique subjects such as bigotry, politics, religious extremism, abuse, or addiction without being offensive to cultural sensitivities.⁶⁷

The protagonists of fantasy do not have to be typical heroes. They can be scared or reluctant to perform the quest that the plot is structured around. Sometimes, they can even fail. As was mentioned before, the heroes of fantasy can also be heroines. The genre is tied to the notion of modernity, therefore allowing freedom and experimentation with gender transgression.

⁶¹ Ria Cheyne, “Fantasy: Affirmation and Enchantment,” in *Disability, Literature, Genre: Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 110

⁶² Cheyne, “Fantasy: Affirmation and Enchantment,” 110-111.

⁶³ Cheyne, “Fantasy: Affirmation and Enchantment,” 111.

⁶⁴ Cheyne, “Fantasy: Affirmation and Enchantment,” 110-111.

⁶⁵ Maria Nikolajeva, “Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern,” *Marvels and Tales* 17, no. 1 (2003): 140.

⁶⁶ Cheyne, “Fantasy: Affirmation and Enchantment,” 110-111.

⁶⁷ Charlotte Butcher, Neil Hollands, Andrew Smith, Barry Trott, Jessica Zellers, “Core Collections in Genre Studies: Fantasy Fiction 101,” 227.

Additionally, the traditional supernatural aspects can be transformed and modernized to whatever form the author desires.⁶⁸

The fantasy genre has many types. Some of them include epic high fantasy, historical fantasy, realistic fantasy, literary fantasy, dark fantasy, and scientific fantasy. For the purposes of this work, however, the relevant type is contemporary fantasy. These books include paranormal characters such as vampires, fairies, werewolves, or wizards in contemporary settings like a city.⁶⁹ In the *Abhorsen Trilogy*, the paranormal beings are necromancers, the Dead, the creatures of Free and Charter Magic like Maggot and the Disreputable Dog, and possibly the Clayr. The urban setting is Ancelstierre.

Other types of fantasy include immersive, intrusion, liminal, and portal-quest fantasy. From these, the trilogy is concerned with three types. Firstly, it is the intrusion fantasy that has a baseline of the “normal world” to which the magical and paranormal bring chaos.⁷⁰ The “normal world” in the *Abhorsen Trilogy* is considered Ancelstierre. People living there usually cannot master Charter Magic and are comparable to people in the real world. Furthermore, at the beginning of *Sabriel*, Sabriel learns of her father’s disappearance by a Dead servant appearing in her school.

At the same time, the trilogy is also a portal-quest fantasy. That is a type of fantasy where the magical world is entered through a portal. The aim of this type of fantasy is for both the protagonist and the reader to gain experience in the fantastic world. At the end of the quest novel, the reader should be able to navigate through it as well as the protagonist, who typically leads a mundane life before entering. Also, the magic stays behind the portal and does not leak into the normal world.⁷¹ In the trilogy, the portal is the Wall. It is important to mention, though, that the magic is stronger the closer one gets to the Wall. There has been a military-controlled zone set up half a mile parallel to the Wall to prevent the Ancelstierran public from harming themselves, called the Perimeter. The quote “In fact, the Perimeter was much more successful at keeping people from Ancelstierre out of the Old Kingdom, than it was at preventing things from the Old Kingdom going the other way”⁷² suggests that the magic from the Old Kingdom leaks, which does not align with the definition. Additionally, Sabriel grew up behind the Wall;

⁶⁸ Nikolajeva, “Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern,” 139-140.

⁶⁹ Charlotte Butcher, Neil Hollands, Andrew Smith, Barry Trott, Jessica Zellers, “Core Collections in Genre Studies: Fantasy Fiction 101,” 227-228.

⁷⁰ Farah Jane Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 21-22.

⁷¹ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 19-20.

⁷² Nix, *Sabriel*, 21.

therefore, she was not completely unaware of what the Old Kingdom was like. Despite this, she still experiences confusion once she is on her journey and therefore allows the readers to uncover the secrets of the Old Kingdom with her.

Lirael's type is immersive fantasy. This type of fantasy presents the magical without the previous setting of the normal. She does not know Ancelstierre. She only knows the inside of the Clayr community living space behind the Wall called the Glacier, until she is sent off to her special mission.

For the purposes of this work, fantasy will be defined as a genre of literature involving magic and paranormal characters whose plot is centred around a quest or a task that, although difficult, must be believed not to be impossible to resolve. The resolution of this task should lead to the victory of good and the defeat of evil. The protagonists of the genre do not have to adhere to traditional notions of gender but can comply with some form of prophecy or destiny.

2.1 History of the fantasy genre

The fantasy genre was traditionally thought of as stemming from Medieval Romances and fairy tales. From fairy tales, its development could be traced even further to the past, to ancient myths and legends. Matthew T. Dickinson and David O'Hara, in their work *From Homer to Harry Potter: A Handbook on Myth and Fantasy*, are even said to have suggested that the contemporary writers of fantasy are “part of a long tradition dating at least back to Homer.” According to Dickinson and O'Hara, the influence of Germanic legends and Romance is shown in *The Lord of the Rings*, which is regarded as “the ancestor of all later fantasy novels.” Therefore, all novels succeeding *Lord of the Rings* are influenced as well.⁷³

Nikolajeva, while agreeing that fairy tales and fantasy are “generically related” and that fantasy might have grown out of fairy tales, argues that their origins are different. Fairy tales are the successors of myths and are rooted in archaic society, whereas fantasy (and literary fairy tales) are products of modern times. Nikolajeva also agrees that, for example, the work of Homer could be viewed in terms of fantasy. Some prominent features of fantasy can also be traced far into the past. However, Romanticism is the period that is mostly responsible for the pilot stages

⁷³ Kelly, Kramer. “A Common Language of Desire: “The Magicians,” Narnia, and Contemporary Fantasy,” *Mythlore* 35, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2017): 153-154.

of the creation of the fantasy genre, according to Nikolajeva. The reasons are attributed to the rejection of the rational, interest in the folk tradition, and the idolisation of the child.⁷⁴

Brian Stableford summarizes the dispute on the history of fantasy literature in his work *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*: “Although it is the most recent genre of literature to acquire a marketing label, it is also the most ancient genre that is readily identifiable.”⁷⁵ Fantasy, as a genre of popular commercial adult literature, became established as late as 1970.⁷⁶ Previously, the term, when concerning literature, was used strictly for children’s fiction. It was because of a belief that adults ought to concentrate on “the realities of existence” and set fantasizing aside with “other childish things.”⁷⁷

To destigmatize fantasy literature as fit for adults, its defenders insist that it is something relatively new that needs to be distinguished from folk tales and children’s fantasy. The main argument for this is that fantasy literature is a contradictory notion to the “realistic” Enlightenment. Therefore, it could not have existed before it, as it would not have had anything to oppose. Before the Enlightenment, the realistic and the fantastic had supposedly existed in mutual harmony. The fantastic was also not distinct or separated from other devices of story-making and thus, could not be qualified as a genre of its own.⁷⁸

Now the distinction between the fantastic and fantasy needs to be made. Although it is an older work, Theodore Ziolkowski defines the two terms pointedly:

...the fantastic is a mode whose effect is an epistemological perplexity stemming from the momentary irruption of the seemingly supernatural into our world. In contrast fantasy is a literary genre whose effect is the ethical insight stemming from our contemplation of an otherworld governed by supernatural laws.⁷⁹

The terms originated from the discussion opened by Joseph Addison, which was printed in his magazine *The Spectator* in 1712. Originally, the expressions were called “the poet’s fancy” and “the reader’s imagination.” Addison felt the two words had an overly “loose and

⁷⁴ Maria Nikolajeva, “Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern,” *Marvels and Tales* 17, no. 1 (2003): 138-139.

⁷⁵ Brian Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 38.

⁷⁶ Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, 41.

⁷⁷ Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, 37.

⁷⁸ Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, 41-42.

⁷⁹ Theodore Ziolkowski, “Otherworlds: Fantasy and the Fantastic,” review of *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy*, by W. R. Irwin, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies*, by C. N. Manlove, *The Fantastic in Literature*, by Eric S. Rabkin, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, by Tzvetan Todorov and Richard Howard. *The Sewanee Review*, Winter, 1978.

uncircumscribed sense” and aimed to resolve this issue by determining the notion of these two words. According to his study, both fancy and imagination had to do with the reaction of people or memories of objects or nature, or art. This view aligned with an already existing idea that imagination is like a mirror of the outside world. A similar definition of imagination originated in *Elements of Criticism* by Lord Henry Home Kames published in 1762: “This singular power of fabricating images without any foundation in reality is distinguished by the name of imagination.”⁸⁰

With the turn of the century came Romanticism which “the fantastic” was already claimed to be a characteristic of. More significant, however, for the aforementioned discussion was Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s 1817 work *Biographia Literaria*. In this work, he distinguished the terms imagination and fancy, which sparked a debate lasting much of the nineteenth century. This distinction also aided in the creation of the modern fantasy narrative. At first, the terms were seen as identical and at most two degrees of the same concept. Coleridge, however, defines imagination as: “the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception,” whereas fancy “is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space.”⁸¹

By this distinction, Coleridge determined the terms in which fantastic literature would be discussed, and what is more, he gave legitimacy to the vocabulary of the fantastic. However, the critics in major English journals remained “sceptical” of the appearance of the fantastic in fictitious works. It was regarded as superstitious and ought to be tolerated only if the elements were supported by actual belief or served a moral or didactic purpose. An 1853 essay that appeared in the *Westminster Review* went as far as to claim that the fantastic is inappropriate in an age of morality and science, as it belongs to the set of “the marvels which delighted our ruder ancestors.”⁸²

Despite the attitude of former critics, this time was “one of the greatest periods in the development of fantasy literature. That is why Wolfe attributes the origins of the fantasy genre to the Romanticism period and mentions three elements of this genre that started their traditions at this time. The first of them is the emergence of the first early novels called “private histories.” These include, for example, Daniel Defoe’s *The Life and Strange Suprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* from 1719. The second element is the narratives that called themselves

⁸⁰ Gary K. Wolfe, “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7-8.

⁸¹ Wolfe, “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany,” 7-9.

⁸² Wolfe, “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany,” 9-11.

“romances” including the early Gothic ones such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Romance* by Ann Radcliffe, which was published in 1794. As mentioned by Nikolajeva at the start of this section, Wolfe also mentions the renewal of interest in fairy tales that led to their literary form as his third element.⁸³

Wolfe’s second element, the Gothic romances, led to a breakthrough in the fantasy genre by creating a new “mode of literature”. The Enlightenment made the world be seen as something humans can understand and subsequently control. However, at the end of the eighteenth century, there was a growing “sense” that there is something below our world, that the world on the surface is a delusion. This “sense” created the idea of the Gothic. This can be seen in Radcliffe’s romance and its more “fantastic” equivalent, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole.⁸⁴

The interest in folk tales led to another breakthrough in the genre as it is known today. In 1827, a two-volume collection of folk tales called *German Romance* was published. The most significant tale from the collection, “The Golden Pot” by E.T.A Hoffmann, foreshadows the development of modern fantasy. It is set in contemporary Dresden. From then on, it became almost a standard for English fairy stories to be set in Germany. Another influential figure of this time is George MacDonald, who is credited with writing the two earliest modern fantasy novels, *Phantases* (1858), and *Lilith* (1895).⁸⁵

Many more pieces of literature that contributed to the rise of fantasy as a genre were published in the nineteenth century.⁸⁶ It was, for example, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1863) which was suggested to be published after the success of *The Water Babies* by Charles Kingsley (1863).⁸⁷ Robert Louis Stevenson also pioneered a “psychological fantasy” with his work *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in 1886. Another significant story is William Morris’ “The Hollow Land” which helped to develop the idea of a “fully realized secondary world.”⁸⁸

At the end of the 19th century, the fantasy genre was built around its specific subgenres. Animal stories, previously considered a subcategory of fable, employed a more “sophisticated” role with works such as Rudyard Kipling’s *Jungle Book* (1894),⁸⁹ and *Just So Stories* (1902). This

⁸³ Wolfe, “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany,” 11-12.

⁸⁴ Farah, Mendelsohn, Edward, James, *A Short History of Fantasy* (Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing, 2012) 14-15.

⁸⁵ Wolfe, “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany,” 12-13.

⁸⁶ Wolfe, “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany,” 14.

⁸⁷ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 19.

⁸⁸ Wolfe, “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany,” 14-15.

⁸⁹ Wolfe, “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany,” 18-19.

story created a tradition of animal and trickster stories, which would be influential at the beginning of the 20th century. However, they are not quite considered fantasy, despite being related to the genre.⁹⁰

Edith Nesbit and her story *Five Children and It* (1902) came with a more contemporary style of children's fantasy.⁹¹ It is one of the first children's books, where the reader is supposed to "ally" with the child rather than to be "amused" by them. She also introduced an "urban fantasy" which is a subgenre, where magic can enter and disrupt the urban environment. The magic in her stories can invade the known world at any given time; however, it is not necessarily "scary". Another influential author of fantasies for children of this time was L. Frank Baum. His book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1901) was one of the first portal fantasies, while at the same time, Oz could be seen on maps. This began a tradition of introducing fantasy trilogies with maps.⁹²

Another author, Lord Dunsany, introduced immersive fantasy and invented the worlds that "high fantasy" would later be associated with. His works are *The Gods of Pegana* from 1905, *The Book of Wonder* from 1912, and *The King of Elfland's Daughter* from 1924.⁹³

The end of the nineteenth century marks yet another significance. It is the birth of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien and Clive Staples Lewis⁹⁴, the two men who "stand together at the origins of modern fantasy."⁹⁵ Tolkien's major work *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) is considered the book where the modern fantasy genre emerged. Edward James goes as far as to say that "most subsequent writers of fantasy are either imitating him or else desperately trying to escape his influence."⁹⁶ While not as impactful as Tolkien, his friend Lewis also garnered large audience for his *Space Trilogy* (1938-1946) and seven-book series called *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956).⁹⁷

Tolkien established many characteristics of the fantasy genre that are still used today, for example, the need for a "quest" that the heroes of a fantasy book begin or "eucatastrophe" which is one last turn of the plot that brings "a lifting of the heart". To introduce his thoughts on the genre, he wrote an essay titled "On Fairy-Stories" in which he emphasizes that fairy

⁹⁰ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 13.

⁹¹ Wolfe, "Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany," 19.

⁹² Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 25-26.

⁹³ Wolfe, "Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany," 18-19.

⁹⁴ Wolfe, "Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany," 19.

⁹⁵ Edward James, "Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendelsohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 62

⁹⁶ Edward James, "Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy," 62.

⁹⁷ Edward James, "Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy," 62.

stories, in his terms, such as *Lord of the Rings*, should take themselves and their magic seriously. Additionally, he contradicts the notion that fairy stories are reserved for children as it “indeed demeans the fairy story to think that it needs a child, with credulity based on lack of experience, before the marvels of a fairy story can be appreciated.”⁹⁸

According to Tolkien’s essay, a fairy story needs to have four essential elements. The first of them, Fantasy, is the result of constructing something that is not present in our world but consistent with reality. Recovery, the second element, is the purifying of one’s eyes so that they can see the existing world more clearly. The third element is Escape, which is the mental escape from “the ugliness and evil around us” that the book can grant its readers. The last element that fantasy brings its readers is Consolation, a happy ending.⁹⁹

The influence of Tolkien and Lewis was partly positive and partly negative. In the development of new genres, such as fantasy, however, commercial success plays an important role. Both *Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* enjoyed great success selling as paperback versions, which led publishers of that time to realize the potential fantasy had commercially.¹⁰⁰

Fantasy literature of the 1960s is divided between the US and the UK. British books influenced America at least a decade later, thus their success will be seen later. Also, far more American books were published in the UK than vice versa, therefore, the development of the two countries was not the same. An influential American writer of this time is Andre Norton, who originally wrote science fiction and juvenile fiction but transferred to fantasy for adults. Her most significant work of fantasy is called *Witch World* (1963), which would later become a series and ultimately continue to be published until the 1990s. In the *Witch World* series, conflicts are resolved through “careful application of magic” which is mastered almost universally by women. Strong female characters appeared very rarely in the 1960s fantasy works which is why these books are loved by many.¹⁰¹

The 1960s were the “golden age” for children’s fantasy and children’s literature in general. The most potent of British children’s writers was Roald Dahl. He would produce famous works like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), *the BFG* (1982), and *Matilda* (1988). In his works, he gives power to the child protagonists and highlights “the absurdities of the adult world” through fantasy. Dahl’s books are considered some of the best children’s fantasy which may be

⁹⁸ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy,” 64-65.

⁹⁹ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy,” 66.

¹⁰⁰ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy,” 72.

¹⁰¹ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 76-78.

the reason why movie versions of some of them were made. *Charlie and the Charlie Factory* landed three movie adaptations, one in 1971, the second in 2005,¹⁰² and the most recent in 2023 under a changed title of “Wonka”.¹⁰³ His book, *Matilda*, also has its film adaptation which was released in 1996.¹⁰⁴

By the 1970s, “the fantasy boom” emerged. The readers of Tolkien and Lewis became adults and, in some cases, authors. Book publishers, therefore, realized the commercial potential of fantasy, and it became a recognizable genre. So much so that it influenced other genres like horror¹⁰⁵ or science fiction.¹⁰⁶ The horror genre was also experiencing its boom with the publication of Stephen King’s *Carrie* in 1974. Although a horror story, it contains elements of the fantastic,¹⁰⁷ namely Carrie’s supernatural powers, which the readers are familiar with from the start of the novel. Other King’s novels like *The Shinning* (1977) also contain features of the fantastic, such as telepathy and supernatural coercion.¹⁰⁸ Nix’s trilogy contains elements of horror as the main villains are the Dead and necromancers with a grim appearance of rotting flesh, and fires instead of eyes.

The writers of science fiction in this period were also influenced by the fantastic. For example, the otherwise science fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin’s most successful books are from her fantasy series *Earthsea*. The first book, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, was published in 1968 and was enriched by two sequels in 1971 and 1972.¹⁰⁹ Although originally intended as a trilogy, *Earthsea* has three more sequels.¹¹⁰ These three sequels, however, follow a trend that started already in the 1970s, which Farah Mendelsohn and Edward James describe as: “We go from fantasy in which women barely exist or are prizes, to independent Amazons [...] almost overnight.”¹¹¹ Le Guin’s female characters of the last three sequels, even though released much later, also evolve from “relatively weak women, whose influence on their world is negligible

¹⁰² Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 88-89.

¹⁰³ “Wonka,” Movie Official Website, last modified 2023, <https://www.wonka.com/wonka-movie>.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Schulman, “A Problem Like Matilda,” *The New Yorker*, March 25, 2013.

¹⁰⁵ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy,” 73.

¹⁰⁶ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 91.

¹⁰⁷ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy,” 73.

¹⁰⁸ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 112-113.

¹⁰⁹ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 91.

¹¹⁰ Melanie A. Rawls, “Witches, Wives, and Dragons: The Evolution of Women in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Earthsea*-An Overview,” *Mythlore* 26, no. 3/4 (Spring/Summer 2008): 129.

¹¹¹ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 103.

and suspect, into powerful women who are the agents, subjects, and representatives of radical change in Earthsea.”¹¹²

Additionally, it is “generally accepted” that many readers of fantasy in the 70s were women. Therefore, female writers had the opportunity to explore “ideas about feminism and utopian feminist possibilities” in their works. One of the first to do so was Elizabeth Anne Lynn with her novel *Watchtower* from 1979¹¹³ which later developed into a series of books called the *Chronicles of Tarnor*. In this book, two previously assumed to be hermaphroditic creatures, Sorren and Norres, are revealed to be women in a relationship together. On top of that, they live in a village society that has no leaders and no warriors, and women are respected alongside men equally. Lynn was voted for the World Fantasy Award for the first book which showed that “radical ideas” were accepted within the community of fantasy. A less radical example of feminist fantasy writing of this time is Angela Carter’s rewritings of fairytales collected in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979). Although “feminists frequently get short shrift in her work,” she still points to important female issues such as rape.¹¹⁴

In the 1980s, quest fantasies dominated the field. This phenomenon was present in both films such as Jim Henson’s *The Dark Crystal* from 1982, and pieces of literature such as Jennifer Robinson’s *Shapechangers* from 1984.¹¹⁵ At this time, the first quest fantasies with emphasized elements of a Bildungsroman appeared. Mendelsohn and James summarize these works as a protagonist rising or falling from power while “great events” are in the background. This type of novel is, for example, Tamora Pierce’s *Alanna: The First Adventure* written in 1983. Alanna, the main young female protagonist, refuses to accept her destiny and instead trains to become a knight. The book contains extensive directions in training one’s strength, which is the main appeal for its young adult female readers as well as a source of empowerment for them.¹¹⁶

The 1980s also brought publication of parodies that assume the knowledge of the fantasy field. The parodies in question are *The Colour of Magic* (1983) and *The Light Fantastic* (1986) by Terry Pratchett. Pratchett’s secondary world is called the Discworld and has almost every feature of fantasy possible. It is carried through space on the back of four elephants

¹¹² Rawls, “Witches, Wives, and Dragons: The Evolution of Women in Ursula K. Le Guin’s Earthsea-An Overview,” 129-130.

¹¹³ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy,” 75.

¹¹⁴ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 104-105.

¹¹⁵ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 119-122.

¹¹⁶ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 119-122.

standing on the back of a turtle and has magic, dwarves, trolls, vampires, and werewolves. Yet, the world still resonates with the Earth somehow. Altogether, it creates the ideal environment for the ridicule of fantasy¹¹⁷, most notably the pulp magazine-originated character Conan the Barbarian,¹¹⁸ and satirical comments on the real world.¹¹⁹ The series now consists of forty-one books,¹²⁰ the last published in 2015, almost six months after Pratchett's death.¹²¹

Another addition to the genre in the 1980s was the modernizing of “the vampire mythos.” The significant works of this type were *Blood Games* (1980) by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro and Anne Rice's *The Vampire Lestat* (1985). This modernization was dealt with in an unexpected way in the UK. *Misty*, published from 1978 – 1984, was a comic that published stories with supernatural or horror elements. Additionally, its masthead, after which the whole comic was named, looked very similar to a vampire. Because of its uniqueness for the time, the comic also contributed to the ultimate disappearance of the previously standard “nice” girls’ comic stories.¹²²

The 1990s recorded a “British Boom” initially in the science fiction genre but later in fantasy. Additionally, Canadian and Australian “fine writing” has become increasingly available.¹²³ Australian women, in particular, dominated this field. One of them, Sara Douglass, published her first novel *BattleAxe*, in 1995. Other Australian writers include Cecilia Dart Thornton (*The Ill-Made Mute*, 2001), and Glenda Larke (*Havenstar*, 1999).¹²⁴ Garth Nix, the author of the examined trilogy in this thesis, could also be counted as a part of this group because he is Australian,¹²⁵ and *Sabriel*, the first book from the trilogy, was published in 1995.¹²⁶

Another “significant development” for the genre is the appearance of the series of novels on best-seller lists.¹²⁷ The most successful and best-selling authors of this time wrote medievalist

¹¹⁷ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy,” 75.

¹¹⁸ Christopher Dowd, “The Irish-American Identities of Robert E. Howard and Conan the Barbarian,” *New Hibernia Review* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 15.

¹¹⁹ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy,” 75.

¹²⁰ “Where to Start with Discworld,” Discworld, Sir Terry Pratchett, accessed December 3, 2024, <https://www.terrypratchettbooks.com/book-series/discworld/>.

¹²¹ “Final Terry Pratchett novel The Shepherd’s Crown on sale,” Entertainment & Arts, BBC News, last modified August 27, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-34067207>.

¹²² Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 140-141.

¹²³ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 143.

¹²⁴ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy,” 76.

¹²⁵ “Garth Nix,” Bibliography, Austlist, accessed December 4, 2024, <https://www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/A7425>.

¹²⁶ Mills, “Fixity and Flow in Garth Nix’s *Sabriel*,” 15.

¹²⁷ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy,” 76.

fantasy. The major writers of this kind in the 90s were Robert Jordan with his novel *Eye of the World* (1990), Terry Goodkind with *Wizard's First Rule* (1994), and George R. R. Martin with *Game of Thrones* (1996), which developed into *A Song of Ice and Fire* sequence. *A Song of Ice and Fire* was later taken up by HBO and made into a TV series that aired from 2011¹²⁸ to May 2019.¹²⁹

Eye of the World is, as well as a medievalist, considered to be an epic high fantasy. The features of epic high fantasy include rootedness in Celtic or Norse mythology, large casts of characters, elegant prose, arduous quests, and a lot of magic. In such stories, objects like swords or rings play an important role. The stories then take place in an area that is visualized on a map. This map is usually at the opening of the printed book.¹³⁰

The *Abhorsen Trilogy*, although still considered contemporary fantasy, shares some of these features, especially when focusing on the Old Kingdom. The Old Kingdom is full of magic, or rather The Charter and Free Magic, as it is called in the trilogy. The object of the utmost importance is the Abhorsen's bells because they are essentially the source of the Abhorsen's power. Swords are also used as the main source of protection for close fight. Additionally, each of Nix's books that are part of the Old Kingdom series, therefore the trilogy included, introduces itself with a map of the secondary world.¹³¹

In 1997, a book that would influence the next decade of fantasy books was published.¹³² It was *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone* (in the US *Sorcerer's Stone*) by J. K. Rowling. Because of its accessible writing style and a hole to be filled within the children's fantasy market, it enjoyed massive success and eventually developed into a seven-book series. At the end of the 90s, J. K. Rowling became a best-selling author and, thanks to the internationalization of the fantasy market, the twelfth richest woman in Britain.¹³³ The success of the series was further emphasized by creating movie adaptations of all seven *Harry Potter* books starting in 2001.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Sandra Laugier, "Spoilers, Twists, and Dragons: Popular Narrative after Game of Thrones," in *Stories* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 143.

¹²⁹ Inbar Shaham, "The Wheel of Power in HBO's Game of Thrones," *Mythlore* 40, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2022): 54.

¹³⁰ Charlotte, Burcher, Neil, Hollands, Andrew, Smith, Barry, Trott, Jessica, Zellers, "Core Collections in Genre Studies: Fantasy Fiction 101." *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 227.

¹³¹ Brittani, Ivan, "Countries of the Mind," *Mythlore* 36, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2017): 60.

¹³² Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 205.

¹³³ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 167-175.

¹³⁴ James, "Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy," 76.

Thanks to Rowling's success, the children's and teen's fantasy market had more opportunities than ever in the 2000s. This resulted in many new authors emerging or gaining attention. Also, new features were introduced to enrich the genre.¹³⁵ One of those is that the main character is sent on a quest or is associated with a mentor, and in the process, learns to be an adult. Garth Nix's sequence, *The Keys to the Kingdom* (2003), is presented as an example of a work with such features.¹³⁶ However, it can be seen in the *Abhorsen Trilogy* as well. Both Sabriel and Lirael are sent on a quest and have their respective mentors Mogget and the Disreputable Dog. Additionally, both find themselves mature throughout their journey as well as get physically older.

Since the first book of the Trilogy, *Sabriel*, was published in 1995, and the last novel of it, *Abhorsen*, in 2001, similar features to both decades can be seen. Ancelstierre represents the contemporary setting of a city which brings the feel of a contemporary fantasy. At the same time, the Old Kingdom, as is already suggested by the name, has a more medievalist setting. In Ancelstierre, cars, and ranged weapons can be used whereas, in the Old Kingdom, the means of transportation are more old-fashioned such as walking or sailing on a boat. For protection, swords or Charter Magic are used. The Abhorsen, of course, can use their bells as well. The separation of the Old Kingdom and Ancelstierre is further established by their differing political system. The Old Kingdom experiences a time of interregnum at the start of *Sabriel*. At the end, Sabriel and Touchstone become the royal leaders of it. This once again suggests the medieval feel of the area. On the other hand, Ancelstierran government is very similar to that of Britain, emphasising its contemporary character.

It is because of the Wall, which serves the role of a portal, that this binary opposition is possible. The Charter and Free Magic can be used only in the Old Kingdom or very close to the Wall. The Perimeter is essentially the only zone, where the notion of contemporary fantasy is fully applicable as it is in the urban setting of Ancelstierre with all its features comparable to today's world. At the same time, thanks to the close proximity of the Old Kingdom, those mastering the art of the Charter Magic can enjoy its powers while still technically occupying the area of Ancelstierre.

The two worlds mutually exclude each other because the gadgets used in Ancelstierre cannot be used in the Old Kingdom and vice versa. For example, cars stop working close to the Wall

¹³⁵ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 205.

¹³⁶ Mendelsohn, James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 207.

because the magic stops them. Similarly, one cannot use Charter Magic in Ancelstierre unless very close to the Wall. The disappearance of magic is gradual, though. That is why Sabriel is taught the Charter at Wyverley College. It is close enough to the Wall that some Charter can be mastered, and at the same time not as close for it to be dangerous if the Dead creatures escape the Old Kingdom.

3. YA fantasy

Young Adult Fantasy is a subgenre where the two previous chapters meet. Previously, young adult literature was defined as “of all genres.” These genres can include fantasy. The *Abhorsen Trilogy* is considered to be a part of the fantasy genre because it adheres to the characteristics defined in the previous chapter. It involves The Charter and Free Magic as well as magical or paranormal characters such as the Dead, necromancers, and the Clayr clan. The Abhorsens themselves are beings with magical powers. Additionally, the works include non-human creatures of Free Magic, such as the Disreputable Dog and Mogget.

Furthermore, the YA features of this work include its targeting of YA readerships and having a YA protagonist. As stated before, both Sabriel and Lirael belong to the same age category. Thus, both of them are considered young adults.

In the definition of Young Adult fiction, it is asserted that it often contains didactic elements. In Nix’s trilogy, these manifest in the form of the mentors Mogget and the Disreputable Dog. Sabriel meets Mogget in the Abhorsen’s house and because she is the next Abhorsen, he is obligated to help her on her journey. Throughout it, he explains the workings of the Old Kingdom and the role of the Abhorsen itself. This leads Sabriel to the ultimate realization of what her destiny brings and makes her mature. The Disreputable Dog, Lirael’s mentor, is her only friend at the start of the novel. The two are always together, and once Lirael is sent on her mission; it is clear that the Disreputable Dog will come with her. Additionally, the Disreputable Dog can be seen subtly correcting Lirael’s behaviour or suggesting a better course of action.

For example, when the two explore the Old Levels of the Clayr’s Library, they find a room they have never seen before. In this room, there is a door that Lirael feels drawn to and subsequently wants to open them. In this situation, the Dog yells: “Don’t!”¹³⁷ and encourages Lirael to approach in her human form, as she was wearing a Charter skin.

¹³⁷ Nix, *Lirael*, 188.

The mentors of the characters help them on a quest they set out to go on. Both of the quests lead to the victory of good and the defeat of evil, which is a feature defining fantasy for this work.

For Sabriel, the quest is to find her father and defeat the main villain of this book, Kerrigor. Although at first, the quest seems difficult to achieve, as is part of the definition again, with the help of her mentor and Touchstone she successfully defeats Kerrigor and fulfils her role of the Abhorsen. By this, she restores the balance of the two worlds once again. On top of that, because she saved Touchstone, the monarchy is restored as well, and the Old Kingdom becomes politically stable.

Lirael's quest is to find Nicholas and save him from the hands of the evil Hedge. Hedge is a part of an intertwined group of villains who are led by Orranis. Once more, the defeat of Orranis seems to be very difficult at first because its power was so great that the only entities capable of stopping it were the Free Magic entities that created the Charter. At the end, however, with the help of all her companions, Lirael is able to successfully defeat Orranis and ultimately save Nicholas.

4. Feminist Literary Theory

To understand what a feminist literary theory is, it is crucial to define what feminism is.

Patrick Colm Hogan acknowledges the difficulty of defining feminism because it “just means too many different things.”¹³⁸ According to him, it is “impossible” to determine a “minimal program” that all people calling themselves feminists would agree on. However, he identifies a cluster of political goals that is shared by most authors, activists, and common people who identify as feminists. These include access of women to “basic physical rights” such as nutrition, and the ability to assert control over their sexual and reproductive lives. Hogan adds that the feminists also believe that women have experienced a deprivation of these rights in a manner and degree that is incomparable to men.¹³⁹

Martha Easton first turned to the Oxford Dictionary when trying to define the term. The Dictionary defines feminism as “advocacy of the rights of women based on the theory of equality of the sexes.” Then, she adds her own definition stating that “Feminism itself can be defined as the struggle for equal rights, and as a political and social movement it has been

¹³⁸ Patrick Colm Hogan, “Feminism: efforts at definition,” *Critical Survey* 5, no.1 (1993): 45.

¹³⁹ Hogan, “Feminism: efforts at definition,” 46.

described in terms of ‘waves.’”¹⁴⁰ In agreement with the previous definition, Karen Offer defines feminism as “a theory and/or movement concerned with advancing the position of women through such means as achievement of political, legal, or economic rights equal to those granted to men.”¹⁴¹

Stephanie Hodson-Wright tries a different approach, by defining feminism in comparison with another term, patriarchy. She defines feminism as “any attempt to contend with patriarchy”.¹⁴² For the definition of patriarchy, the one used in the work *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* from 1987 by Chris Weedon is employed here:

The term ‘patriarchal’ refers to power relations in which women’s interests are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take on many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organisation of procreation to the internalised norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on social meaning given to biological sexual difference.¹⁴³

While the two initial definitions emphasize equality in rights to men, the latter, Weedon’s definition, focuses on overcoming the subordination of women’s interests in comparison to those of men by power. In their meaning, however, all definitions suggest the elevation of economic, legal, and political rights or interests of women.

When it comes to literature and academic literary studies in particular, the notion of feminism has had an extensive impact. This is reflected by Lisa Maria Hogeland who described feminism “as a kind of literacy, a way of reading both texts and everyday life from a particular stance.”¹⁴⁴ Deborah L. Madsen in her work *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice* also emphasizes the interconnectedness of women’s writing and feminist theory because they both tackle ideas such as the unique experience of women in history, the definitions of gender that limit and oppress, the notion of female consciousness, and a cause of women’s liberation from their restrictions.¹⁴⁵

According to Mary Eagleton, however, some are suspicious of or reject the notion of theory within feminism altogether. Theory, in “many feminist’s” eyes is, “if not innately male - women

¹⁴⁰ Martha Easton, “Feminism,” *Studies in Iconography* 33, (2012): 99.

¹⁴¹ Karen Offer, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach”, *Signs* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1988): 123.

¹⁴² Stephanie Hodson-Wright “Early Feminism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

¹⁴³ Stephanie Hodson-Wright “Early Feminism,” 3.

¹⁴⁴ Jill Lebihan “Feminism and Literature,” in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (New York: Routledge, 2006), 103.

¹⁴⁵ Deborah L. Madsen, *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), ix.

are capable of doing it - then certainly male-dominated in its practice and masculinist in its methods".¹⁴⁶ This is justified by a "long history" of theories that decisively proved that women are inferior to men. Theory masks the partiality and needs of the theoretician by pretending to be impersonal and disinterested. It is also accused of participating in a "hierarchical binary opposition" of theory and experience, where theory is described as "impersonal, public, objective, and male". In contrast, experience is "personal, private, subjective, and female." Eagleton, therefore, suggests that it should be an experience that is valued over theory because feminism strives for the "collective and supportive" (experience) rather than the competitive (theory). At the same time, she acknowledges that feminists who are involved in a discourse discussing other critical theories believe there is no other alternative for them than to theorize.¹⁴⁷

5. Feminist Literary Criticism

Gill Plain and Susan Sellers in *A History of Feminist Literature* describe feminist literary criticism as a dimension of feminism emphasizing literary criticism and textuality.¹⁴⁸ In *Critical Theory Today*, Lois Tyson provides a more explicit definition, stating: "Broadly defined, feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural production) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women."¹⁴⁹

Plain and Sellers admit that the borders between literature, politics, the academy, and activism are difficult to distinguish at times. However, they believe that it is exactly the textuality's dimension that differentiates the other spheres of feminism from literature. They argue that:

Across the centuries woman has been the subject of innumerable reconfigurations, and with every reinscription comes the necessity of re-reading. In the space of the text woman can be both defamed and defended, and it is here that the most persuasive possibilities can be found for imagining the future of the female subject.¹⁵⁰

Sue Thornham marks the year 1970 as the one where the "explosion of feminist theoretical writings" happened.¹⁵¹ This explosion is intertwined with the second wave of feminism because it happened in the aftermath of it. The term "second wave of feminism" is associated with the

¹⁴⁶ Mary Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Criticism* (New York: Longman, 1991), 5.

¹⁴⁷ Mary Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Criticism*, 5-6.

¹⁴⁸ Gill Plain, Susan Sellers, "Introduction," in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

¹⁴⁹ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 83.

¹⁵⁰ Gill Plain, Susan Sellers, "Introduction," 2

¹⁵¹ Sue Thornham "Second Wave Feminism," in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (New York: Routledge, 2006), 28.

emergence of women's movements in the USA and Europe during the 1960s. Although these movements are counted as the deciding moment, they are not the only factor contributing to the heightened creation of feminist theoretical writings.¹⁵²

Plain and Sellers claim that feminist literary criticism is a result of culminating women's writings for centuries. For centuries, there were works by women and women writing about women's writing. Also, there were works of men writing about the ideas, the art, the minds, and the bodies of women. Pointedly, a text regarded as "formative" for feminist literary criticism called *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf is used by Plain and Sellers to explain this culmination. According to Woolf, a woman is¹⁵³ "the most discussed animal in the universe."¹⁵⁴

Another contributor to this culmination, and a more direct one, according to Thornham, is Simone de Beauvoir with her work *The Second Sex*, published in 1949. In this work, de Beauvoir claims that one is not born a woman since there are no biological, psychological, or economic factors determining that. Rather, one becomes a woman because it is determined by civilization. Furthermore, she assigns women to the cultural construction of Other. This Other category is created, she argues, because the human sense of Self can only be created in opposition to something that is not Self. Men, however, claimed Self for themselves. Therefore, women are left to the classification of Other – not Self, not men. "Woman" according to de Beauvoir has no substance other than fulfilling the desires and fears of men. However, she hopes that women seize the opportunity for economic emancipation and with that will exist for themselves.¹⁵⁵

The Second Sex presented a cornerstone for more theoretical works that culminated in the 1970. In the USA, the works include Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, or Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*. In Britain, it was Germain Greer's *The Female Eunuch* and *Patriarchal Attitudes* by Eva Figes.¹⁵⁶ Another older but significant theoretical work is called *The Feminine Mystique*. Its author, Betty Friedan, founded the National Organization for Women, an organization fighting for equal rights of women to men which represented one direction of American feminism then. The other direction was represented in the Women's Liberation

¹⁵² Gill Plain, Susan Sellers, "Introduction," 2.

¹⁵³ Gill Plain, Susan Sellers, "Introduction," 2.

¹⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1929), 27.

¹⁵⁵ Sue Thornham "Second Wave Feminism," 29.

¹⁵⁶ Sue Thornham "Second Wave Feminism," 28-29.

Movement which had its roots in civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements of students during the 1960s.¹⁵⁷

These organizations and theoretical frameworks contributed to the inclusion of female authors into the universities' curriculums. Until the 1980s, the curriculums of universities were filled with predominantly male-authored books. The core courses included Jane Austen and George Elliot but others like the Bröntes or Virginia Woolf were often omitted. And, if these authors were included, their analysis within classrooms often lacked discussion about feminist issues. Because there were so few female-authored works on the curriculum, the students and teachers started to implement feminist-oriented approaches to pieces of literature authored by men.¹⁵⁸ These representations of women in literature are nearly always critiqued for being inadequate.¹⁵⁹

This approach is criticized by Jill Lebihan as she asserts it is used as a tool for “hunting down stereotypes of women and using them as a means of identifying the ways in which these restricted cultural representations underpin women’s oppression.” At the same time, she admits that this kind of criticism is common.¹⁶⁰ This thesis will be no different. The analysed trilogy, the *Abhorsen Trilogy*, also consists of male-written novels. Therefore, in this work, this strategy of submitting a male-authored text to feminist literary criticism will be applied.

At the same time, the previously mentioned texts are canonical and the analysed Nix’s trilogy is not.¹⁶¹ Additionally, the trilogy, as was already mentioned, was published in 1995 and 2001, therefore, it is assumed that the discourse has shifted from the 1970s.

The shift occurred towards something called post-feminism. The word “something” is used because even those associating themselves with it are in little agreement when it comes to its core issues or discourse. Sarah Gamble attempts to describe it as follows:

Very generally speaking, however, postfeminist debate tends to crystallise around issues of victimisation, autonomy and responsibility. Because it is critical of any definition of women as victims who are unable to control their own lives, it is inclined to be unwilling to condemn pornography and to be sceptical of such phenomena as date-rape: because it is skewed in favour of liberal humanism, it embraces a flexible ideology which can be adapted to suit individual needs and desires. Finally, because it tends to be implicitly heterosexist in orientation,

¹⁵⁷ Sue Thornham “Second Wave Feminism,” 25-26.

¹⁵⁸ Jill Lebihan “Feminism and Literature,”103.

¹⁵⁹ Mary Eagleton, “Literary representation of women, ” in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 106.

¹⁶⁰ Jill Lebihan “Feminism and Literature,”105.

¹⁶¹ Jill Lebihan “Feminism and Literature,”103.

postfeminism commonly seeks to develop an agenda which can find a place for men, as lovers, husbands and fathers as well as friends.¹⁶²

While Gamble outlined a general summary of the themes surrounding postfeminism, it is further divided into two opposing sides. Those who reject the past ideas of feminism and those who believe postfeminism is a continuation of feminism of the 60s and 70s. Susan Faludi with her *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1991) belongs to the category of rejecting the past efforts of feminism, saying “we’re all “post-feminist” now [...] meaning not that women have arrived at equal justice and moved beyond it, but simply that they themselves are beyond even pretending to care”.¹⁶³ Another post-feminist voice is Katie Roiphe’s who in her book *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism* (1993) criticizes the “feminist preoccupation” with rape and sexual harassment as it portrays women as the very thing they fought to not be portrayed as – victims.¹⁶⁴

The counter stream’s representative is Naomi Wolf with her work *Fire With Fire* (1993). In this work, Wolf asserts that feminism failed to acknowledge its gains, much less to capitalise on them. For this, she blames the portrayal of “lies, distortion, and caricature” that the popular media gives to feminism. At the same time, feminism has “bad habits” within itself causing the inability to counteract this media campaign full of stereotypes, according to Wolf. All of this, Wolf says, resulted in the term being “ideologically overloaded” and including only a “narrow set of endorsements” as opposed to its past flexibility in definition according to the needs of all individuals.¹⁶⁵

At about the same time another branch of feminism called the third wave emerged. This movement mainly differs from the others by the fact that it accepts plurality and contradiction.

We know that what oppresses me may not oppress you, that what oppresses you may be something I participate in, and that what oppresses me may be something you participate in. Even as different strands of feminism and activism sometimes directly contradict each other, they are all part of our third wave lives, our thinking, and our praxes: we are products of all the contradictory definitions of and differences within feminism, beasts of such a hybrid kind that perhaps we need a different name altogether.¹⁶⁶

This movement arose mainly from the critique of women of colour towards white feminists. According to the criticism, oppression is dependent on more factors, and no incident of it is true

¹⁶² Sarah Gamble “Postfeminism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (New York: Routledge, 2006), 36.

¹⁶³ Sarah Gamble “Postfeminism,” 38.

¹⁶⁴ Sarah Gamble “Postfeminism,” 36-38.

¹⁶⁵ Sarah Gamble “Postfeminism,” 40.

¹⁶⁶ Sarah Gamble “Postfeminism,” 43-44

for all women all the time. Simply, the third wave asserts that feminism cannot be homogenous.¹⁶⁷

The subsequent analysis, although it follows the second-wave model of focusing on male-authored works, will attempt to take into consideration the core of feminist discourse and issues at the time of publishing. Therefore, the lens of post-feminism will be applied as well. For the purposes of this work, the concepts gender roles, gender stereotypes, and female empowerment from the feminist literary criticism standpoint will be chosen. *Abhorsen Trilogy*'s main female heroines, Sabriel and Lirael, will be confronted with the concepts to determine how the books tackle the issues raised by the individual concepts. Ultimately, the analysis of the ways in which the trilogy deals with the concepts will determine whether the *Abhorsen Trilogy* reinforces or challenges the patriarchal conception of society and value system. Its connection to the fantasy genre will also be mentioned.

6. Gender: roles, stereotypes

The term gender was first introduced because of the growing interest in women's issues in the 1970s. Previously, researchers concerned with the differences between men and women have used the term sex differences. This term, however, became controversial for two reasons. The first was that the use of the term indicates that any differences between men and women can be traced back to biology. The second reason was that some critics of the term felt that it was used too extensively and therefore had many different meanings. These meanings could range from chromosomal configuration and reproductive physiology to behaviours and characteristics associated with men and women. To combat the ambivalence, Rhonda Unger proposed an alternative term, gender.¹⁶⁸

Unger explained that "this term describes the traits and behaviours that are regarded by the culture as appropriate to women and men".¹⁶⁹ It is also a set of sex-related characteristics that people assign to themselves. Unger then associates the term sex with biological differences only. Linda Brannon, however, points out that some researchers use the terms interchangeably or do not make any distinction at all. She concludes by saying that researchers who wish to emphasize the social nature of the differences between men and women use the term gender.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Sarah Gamble "Postfeminism," 43-44.

¹⁶⁸ Linda Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 9.

¹⁶⁹ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 9.

¹⁷⁰ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 9-10.

The term gender role is then a role an individual should fulfil within a society according to their gender.¹⁷¹ Similarly, Mandy Boehnke defines gender roles as “shared expectations that apply to individuals on the basis of their identified gender”.¹⁷² Traditionally, the “natural role” for men is the role of a breadwinner, while for women, the role of a caretaker is considered “the best option.” The views opposing this traditional view of gender roles are called “modern” or “egalitarian”. Egalitarian views stress the equality of the genders.¹⁷³ While traditionally, women are viewed as caretakers who should stay at home with the children and care for the household, individuals holding an egalitarian view of gender roles believe women should work for a living.¹⁷⁴ By that, they would be closer to the breadwinner and ultimately be equal to men.

From the traditional notion of gender roles rose gender stereotypes. Brannon defines them as consisting of “beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of, as well as activities appropriate to, men or women”.¹⁷⁵ Often, this set of beliefs is connected to the typical behaviour performed by the sexes in a particular culture. At the same time, gender stereotypes are said to be more general ideas about femininity and masculinity. Because of the association of patterns of behaviour with either men or women, gender stereotypes overlook the fact that there might be significant variations in behaviour in terms of individuals. Some, therefore, might come to believe that stereotypes are the norm for the respective genders. Thus, stereotypes are said to go beyond behaviour and instead form a category that may not correspond with real women and men. Despite that, Brannon deems them very influential as they are said to affect the conceptualization of women and men.¹⁷⁶

In addition to describing “how people think about men and women”,¹⁷⁷ gender stereotypes provide instruction on what men and women should be. They place limitations and evaluate which traits are allowed for each gender. The process of stereotyping ultimately forms cognitive categories one of which is regarded as the norm while the others are seen as deviant. For example, between men and women, men are regarded as the norm.¹⁷⁸ Research confirms this notion with both children and adults. With children, it is more desirable for girls to engage in

¹⁷¹ Leeni Hansson, “Gender role attitudes” in *The Russian Second Generation in Tallinn and Kohtla-Järve: The TIES Study in Estonia*, ed. Raivo Vetik, Jelena Helemäe (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 184.

¹⁷² Mandy Boehnke, “Gender Role Attitude around the Globe: Egalitarian vs. Traditional Views,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 39, no. 1 (2011): 58.

¹⁷³ Hansson, “Gender role attitudes”, 184-185.

¹⁷⁴ Boehnke, “Gender Role Attitude around the Globe: Egalitarian vs. Traditional Views,” 58.

¹⁷⁵ Boehnke, “Gender Role Attitude around the Globe: Egalitarian vs. Traditional Views,” 58.

¹⁷⁶ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 46.

¹⁷⁷ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 53.

¹⁷⁸ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 53.

male-stereotypic activities like playing with trucks than it is for boys to participate in stereotypically female activities such as playing with dolls. This is because gender-associated activities for boys are perceived to have a higher status. The same is true for adults. In adulthood, men face more difficulty in choosing a non-stereotypical activity that would not lower their status, that is, would not be considered feminine. At the same time, women face more barriers in moving upward in status.¹⁷⁹

As late as 1984, Miriam Lewin asserted that the stereotypes about women of “today” are based on the beliefs that appeared in the 19th century. Previously, men and women would work on farms together. The Industrial Revolution, however, changed the division of labour by forcing men to earn money outside the home and leaving women at home to care for the household and children. This phenomenon gave birth to the belief of the Doctrine of Two Spheres, which promotes the idea that women and men have different areas of influence. For women, it is the home and children, while for men, it is work and the outside world. The second most important belief of the 19th century, described by Barbara Welter, is called The Cult of True Womanhood. It is a criterion by which “a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbours, and society...”¹⁸⁰ This belief has four main virtues – purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity.¹⁸¹

Looking at the definition of gender roles by Boehnke, the character Sabriel certainly is not traditional. Firstly, as mentioned before, she is only eighteen years old at the start of *Sabriel* and is a student.¹⁸² Therefore, she does not have any children to take care of to fulfil her role of a caretaker. In addition, she does not have a home. Her home is technically Wyverley College. If she does not have a traditional home, then her traditional gender role cannot be fulfilled either because she does not have a home to take care of.

The role she has to fulfil in the Trilogy is the role of the Abhorsen which is pointedly described in the prologue by Sabriel’s father, who fulfils this role before her: “I am a necromancer, but not of the common kind. Where others of the art raise the dead, I lay them back to rest. And those that will not rest, I bind – or try to. I am Abhorsen...”¹⁸³ The Abhorsen status, however, does not have anything to do with gender as both men and women can be destined to take on

¹⁷⁹ Kelly Lynn Mulvey, Melanie Killen, “Challenging Gender Stereotypes: Resistance and Exclusion,” *Child Development* 86, no. 3 (May/June 2015): 681-682.

¹⁸⁰ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 47.

¹⁸¹ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 47.

¹⁸² Nix, *Sabriel*, 11.

¹⁸³ Nix, *Sabriel*, 7.

this role. This is suggested in a passage talking about a previous Abhorsen.: “But she was a great weather-witch and could work with the winds.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, women have fulfilled this role in the past, as will Sabriel in the future. Now, however, the position belongs to her father. One is destined to fulfil this role through a line of ancestry rather than gender.

This role, however, cannot be considered in alignment with the egalitarian views either. Being Abhorsen does not come with any financial gain and therefore does not constitute working for a living. Subsequently, this role does not bring Sabriel any closer to the title of a breadwinner. At the same time, it cannot be said that her husband, Touchstone, is a breadwinner either. He is a king which is slightly similar to the Abhorsen. In essence, both of those roles are jobs since Sabriel and Touchstone are doing something in the realm of their role every day. Both, however, were chosen for this role by destiny and ancestry rather than choosing a job position for themselves. Financial gain is not mentioned for either of them; therefore, neither Sabriel nor Touchstone can be considered a breadwinner.

The Abhorsen role permits and also forces Sabriel to be more of a fighter. Her first fight scene comes right in the First chapter of *Sabriel* when a Dead servant is sent to her school with a message from her father to come to rescue him. As no one in the school has the abilities, she has she is forced to protect the others and go to Death. During the course of her journey to save her father, she fights even more. Later in *Abhorsen*, Touchstone even notes it is “weird to see Sabriel in Ancelstierran clothes, particularly their court clothes, as she was wearing today,”¹⁸⁵ because he is so used to her wearing her armour. This perception of his further promotes the narrative of Sabriel being a fighter rather than a woman who is concerned mainly with the home.

At the same time, the saving of other people that Sabriel routinely takes part in suggests some caretaking qualities. However, the justification given for this behaviour is the role of the Abhorsen rather than Sabriel’s own desires or any connection with her gender. For example, when Touchstone encourages Sabriel to save herself and run away from the final fight, she says: “‘I can’t,’ [...] ‘I am the Abhorsen.’”¹⁸⁶ The role encourages Sabriel to put the greater good of other people above her own all the time. Without the Abhorsen, the Old Kingdom as well as Ancelstierre would collapse. The Dead, necromancers, and evil Free Magic creatures would rise and destroy both worlds.

¹⁸⁴ Nix, *Sabriel*, 106.

¹⁸⁵ Garth Nix, *Abhorsen* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 2.

¹⁸⁶ Nix, *Sabriel*, 302.

Unfortunately, this attitude extends to her family as well. She must serve the people and send the Dead back to Death; therefore, she is away from the Old Kingdom castle (her later home) most of the time. Subsequently, she does not spend much time with her children. Touchstone takes most of the responsibility for them. Naturally, Sabriel is not satisfied with this situation. However, being the Abhorsen is her duty that must be fulfilled.

In this, Sabriel ultimately defies the traditional notion of gender roles as defined by Boehnke. Although she takes care of people, she is obliged to do so because she is the Abhorsen. Furthermore, she is not primarily taking care of her children; in fact, their needs are being pushed aside to the greater good of the Old Kingdom and Ancelstierre communities, respectively. The Abhorsen role also causes that she is away from her home most of the time, therefore, she does not care for the household either. When it comes to the egalitarian view of gender roles, neither Sabriel nor her husband is a breadwinner. In essence, both work but do not have any financial gain from their occupations. It could, therefore, be said that they are equal.

Unlike Sabriel, at least at the start of *Lirael*, Lirael has a place to call home, which is the Clayr Glacier. Since the Glacier is described as a community living situation, everybody does something for the others. This caretaking, however, is in the form of division of labour. All Clayr must have an occupation, be useful to the community. Additionally, Lirael never has any children throughout the trilogy; therefore, she is unable to fulfil the traditional notion of gender roles as described by Boehnke.

Lirael has more than one role to fulfil in the trilogy. First, she is the Third Assistant Librarian. This occupation has no tie to gender; everybody can do it. It is, however, important to note that Lirael does not have any male coworkers as the Clayr are mostly female. At the same time, there has been no indication that one gender is better for one job or the other.

Being an Assistant Librarian has a similar purpose to other occupations of the Clayr. It enriches the community. In addition, Lirael enjoys having something to do every day, and it is very important for her character development. Getting this job serves as a stepping stone to her confidence. Although she works in the Library every day, it entails no financial gain for Lirael; therefore, this position is not bringing her closer to the breadwinner title.

Secondly, after she leaves the Clayr Glacier, she discovers she is a Remembrancer, which is a person with the ability to go into Death and see the past through a special mirror. Lastly, she is the one to take the Abhorsen duty after Sabriel, the Abhorsen-in-Waiting. The Remembrancer

and Abhorsen-in-Waiting positions are, as mentioned above, about destiny and ancestry more than one's chosen line of work, even though she does something in the realm of these positions every day. Same as the Abhorsen Sabriel, these positions are not bringing Lirael closer to the title of breadwinner. Therefore, they are not in alliance with the egalitarian view. However, her male counterparts Sam and Nick are not breadwinners either. Sam is a prince, so similarly to Touchstone, his position is acquired through ancestry and does not generate financial gain. Nicholas was still a student before his journey in the Old Kingdom, therefore, he did not get any money. After his journey, his fate is uncertain, and no future occupations are mentioned for him.

Neither the Remembrancer nor the Abhorsen-in-Waiting is connected to gender. Both positions are a question of ancestry. One can become the Abhorsen if they are related to one and only a child of Abhorsen and the Clayr can become the Remembrancer. Amusingly enough, Sam, Sabriel's son, was first considered to be the Abhorsen-in-Waiting, but in the end, Lirael acquired the title. This shows the apparent unpredictability of the chosen people and a total disregard for the gender of the chosen. As for the Remembrancer title, the neutral expression "child" is used for the description of the acquisition of this role. Additionally, the last person to have this ability lived many years ago. Therefore, there is rather an emphasis on the specialness of this title in general than a focus on the bearer of the title, Lirael.

From the time Lirael was "only" the Assistant Librarian, she would explore the forgotten parts of the Clayr Library and sometimes stumble across Dead and Free Magic creatures. These creatures would often be dangerous, but as Lirael is a skilled Charter Mage and fighter, she would deal with them. Therefore, this position in connection to Lirael's personality required physical and mental strength to be able to take care of herself if endangered.

Both the Remembrancer and Abhorsen-in-Waiting roles require courage, mental and physical strength as well. Both roles involve facing difficult tasks such as going to Death and fighting Dead creatures. This allows Lirael to be seen as a strong and active hero, rather than someone staying at home taking care of others in a traditional way. Her identity is shaped by responsibility, action, and resilience rather than domesticity and passivity.

Lirael is a servant to multiple communities – the Clayr, the Old Kingdom, and Ancelstierre – which adds complexity to her role. Her servitude creates a desire to protect them. This desire, however, is tied to her Abhorsen and Remembrancer duty rather than her emotional wants. This shows that care and protection in the trilogy are driven by responsibilities and not gender.

Additionally, the greater good of the world often comes with sacrifices of individuals. For example, when she chooses not to save Nick, it is a difficult but necessary decision to save as many others as possible. This contrasts with Sameth's emotional reaction and shows Lirael's dedication to her duties despite her feelings. This differs Lirael from the traditional notion of a caretaker.

Her servitude is also what made her leave her home, the Clayr Glacier. Her Clayr cousins have Seen her in a vision of the future near the Red Lake. Lirael, therefore, had to go there and fulfil their vision. This subsequently obliged her to help Sam on his journey to save Nicholas, the man with whom Lirael was Seen in Clayr's vision. After this quest to save the world, Lirael's future is uncertain, and no place to call home is mentioned in connection with her.

Lirael ultimately defies Boehnke's traditional notion of gender roles. She is a caretaker of the people of the Old Kingdom and Ancelstierre. However, she is obliged to do so because of being the Remembrancer and Abhorsen-in-Waiting. This caretaking also often requires sacrifices of individuals such as Nick for the greater good of the masses. Moreover, she was forced to leave her home to become aware of the duties she has, and as of now, she has no home. Additionally, she has no children or partner. Therefore, she is unable to take care of her children or the household. When it comes to the egalitarian view on gender roles, she is not a breadwinner. Although she fulfils her obligations every day, she gains no financial compensation for it. At the same time, no men or women mentioned in the novels have paying jobs; therefore, she can be considered equal to everyone.

Another way of looking at gender and gender roles in the *Abhorsen Trilogy* is through the male/female binary opposition specific to hero-stories. Both Sabriel and Lirael are heroes of their stories. However, Leah Phillips argues that it is almost impossible for female adolescents to be heroes because all hero stories are reinforcing patriarchal duties such as heterosexual relationships and normative gender roles. According to her, adolescent heroes are considered adolescent because of the bodily changes associated with puberty, while at the same time, becoming heroes because of their body's strength and potency. At the same time, the fleshiness of this body is refused. Phillips blames this refusal on the binary opposition tied to male/female, which is the mind over body opposition. The body, therefore, is dismissed because it is not the mind, despite its importance in the process of puberty.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Leah Phillips, "Impossible Journey," *The Roundtable* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 2.

Based on these oppositions, Phillips introduces “in betweenness” represented by the adolescent girl who is reconceiving her body as which is the reason for her othering. Usually, adolescent female heroes produce a silence in relation to their bodily development. It is firstly, because the hero is neither adult nor a child, which is between the oppositions not-hero/child and hero/adult, and tailored to male adolescents only, excluding the adolescent girl. Secondly, the silence occurs because the heroine is not yet a woman, but not a man either. Moreover, woman is the subordinate position in this opposition. Through relation of heroes consisting of connection and repetition, Phillips presents a “Relational Model of Self”. This model serves as a tool to read heroes in relation to and interdependent on other selves while showcasing that this relationality to others can produce the uniqueness that the hegemonic narratives of self strive for without the exclusions of the binary oppositions.¹⁸⁸

Regarding Phillips’ description of hero stories as reinforcing heterosexual unions and normative gender roles, it is required to be said that the *Abhorsen Trilogy* does not fit this description. As could be seen in the analysis above, the trilogy does not reinforce normative gender roles. However, the only relationship dynamic that can be seen in the trilogy is heterosexual. Sabriel is married to a man, and Lirael is sought after only by men. Any other sexuality is not represented in the novels. However, heterosexuality is also not explicitly stated to be the only allowed sexuality, and other sexualities are not devalued. Furthermore, there are no explicit scenes of sexual endeavours. Additionally, many characters, including Lirael, simply do not have a partner and do not wish to form a relationship with anyone. This may lead to the conclusion that Nix prioritizes the portrayal of gender roles and the heroines over their sexuality. Nix’s approach can also reflect the post-feminist framework, which is trying to develop a place for men as lovers, husbands, fathers, and friends.

In the trilogy, the female body and physical attributes of the heroines are mentioned rather briefly. However, it is not because of the binary oppositions presented by Phillips but because it is simply not important enough to the story. At the same time, it is not completely ignored. The more important aspect of the Relational Model of Self for the *Abhorsen Trilogy*, however, is the relations to others that ultimately produce uniqueness.

Sabriel’s appearance is, amusingly enough, briefly mentioned right in the first chapter. She is described as tall, pale, and having black hair. At first glance, this might seem like a not-so-important description. However, later, the reader discovers that her physical features

¹⁸⁸ Leah Phillips, “Impossible Journey,” 6-18.

correspond with the Abhorsen bloodline. Therefore, all Abhorsens are tall, have black hair, and pale skin. By having the features she has, she is connected to all of the other Abhorsens. Therefore, in addition to the blood connection she shares with them, as the Abhorsen position is hereditary, she is connected to them by something all others see the first time they lay eyes on her. Furthermore, the Abhorsen bloodline had existed for many years before Sabriel. A new one is chosen every time the old one dies, which signals repetition Philips stresses in her model. Being Abhorsen is an integral part of the identity and expectations others have of Sabriel. This position, however, is not tied to gender as both males and females have been Abhorsens before her.

Another piece of information the readers receive about Sabriel's appearance is that she wears "no makeup or jewellery."¹⁸⁹ The fact that she wears no jewellery could be traced back to her father again. In Lirael's vision of her and Sabriel's father meeting her mother for the first and only time, he is also described as not wearing jewellery. Through this, Sabriel is connected to her father. They share a habit of not wearing jewellery. Additionally, this forms a sense of repetition as it could be said that Sabriel repeats the habits after her father.

When it comes to makeup, it is traditionally associated with women, as it helps them maintain their beauty. In her book, Naomi Wolf introduces the notion of The Beauty Myth, which says that it is imperative for women to be beautiful because of its correlation to their fertility. The more beautiful a woman is considered to be, the more fertile she is considered to be. Therefore, this is also connected with sexual selection as men chase after beautiful and fertile women.¹⁹⁰ Wolf asserts that although this myth might seem like a sexual fantasy, it is actually driven by the political fear of male-dominated industries that are threatened by women's liberation in an attempt to keep them submissive. The unconscious anxieties of women about not being beautiful enough then feed highly profitable industries such as the cosmetics industry.¹⁹¹

Based on this, it could be assumed that even this small piece of information about the absence of makeup on Sabriel's face might suggest that she does not submit to men. This notion can be detected several times in the book as she is the Abhorsen and therefore, on her own, most of the time. She certainly does get help from others, but in the end, it is she who must defeat Kerrigor as no one else has the abilities she possesses.

¹⁸⁹ Nix, *Sabriel*, 9.

¹⁹⁰ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2002), 12.

¹⁹¹ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 16-17.

Unfortunately, there is no other mention of makeup to fulfil the relationality aspect of Philips' model. However, there is a mention of beauty about Lirael. Precisely, the word used is “attractive.” In this scene, Sameth sees Lirael without a headscarf and compliments her hair. In his internal monologue afterwards, he calls her “attractive” but finds her “forbidding” at the same time because she reminds him of someone.¹⁹² This sense of Lirael being forbidden to Sam is later revealed to have manifested because they are related. The person Lirael reminds him of is his mother, Sabriel. Therefore, it could be said that Sabriel is also considered beautiful, even if it is not stated explicitly. Through this subtle hint, the connection of the heroines through looks is manifested again, circling back to their relationality within Philips' model. By this, Lirael is also connected to other Abhorsens based on looks in addition to blood. This subtle assertion also offers a fresh perspective for girls outside of the text that heroes, even if they are female, do not need makeup to be beautiful.

Despite this, Nix seems not to care about the appearance of his heroines. His focus is not so much on the beauty of the heroines but rather on their abilities and character. While their physical appearance is discussed only in the two instances above, their feelings and abilities are mentioned a lot more frequently. After all, it is their skills and courage that help save Ancelstierre and the Old Kingdom.

The most “fleshiness” that Phillips refers to is present in a moment between Sabriel and a helpful spirit her father encouraged her to seek. As Sabriel was the first of her friends to reach puberty, she did not have anyone to ask about menstruation. Therefore, “in fear and desperation,”¹⁹³ she asked this spirit about it because all her older classmates had stories about it that were “often meant to scare”.¹⁹⁴ This represents the connection and repetition cycle with the older girls. By this experience, they are connected. Furthermore, there will also manifest an additional connection with other attendees of Wyverley College who experience their menses in the future. Additionally, Sabriel believes that this spirit is her mother or a residue of some protective magic by her. As this spirit explains it to her, there is an additional connection to her mother, as she has probably experienced menses for herself. The cycle also repeats itself because Sabriel's mother probably learned about her menses from her mother. Now Sabriel is asking about her menses. Eventually, Sabriel also has a daughter, so there is a hint of further continuation.

¹⁹² Nix, *Lirael* 450.

¹⁹³ Nix, *Sabriel*, 58.

¹⁹⁴ Nix, *Sabriel*, 58.

Furthermore, as Phillips asserts in her analysis, when a menarche happens to a female hero, she is often unable to tell what it signifies. Her physical female body is not enough because she lacks the ability to read it and to understand it. Without this ability, menstrual blood will remain the horror it is in homogenic regimes. In these instances, a rearticulation of the body and neutralisation of this horror must come,¹⁹⁵ which is precisely what this instance with Sabriel's mother represents. The horror represented by Sabriel's classmate's scary stories is neutralised by her mother's answers to "all her questions".¹⁹⁶

When it comes to Lirael, she is not described as having experienced anything of the fleshy. However, since she is living in a mostly female-occupied Glacier, there is no reason to think that menstruation would be considered a horror. Even with the topic of sex, the Clayr seem to be open-minded as Lirael herself asserts, "she knew all about sex in theory".¹⁹⁷ Additionally, her other young coworkers from the Library are said to speak "freely of men, sometimes even in detail".¹⁹⁸ Based on this attitude of the Clayr towards sex, and the compulsory sex education Lirael and her peers received, it is probable that Lirael did not have to be afraid of her menarche and was educated about it sufficiently ahead of time.

Although Nix seems to put the personality of his heroines above their bodies, he does not shy away from it completely. By this, he successfully manages to rearticulate his heroines' bodies. Subsequently, this discussion of their body and appearance is successful in completing the repetition and connection criteria within the Relational Model of Self. Therefore, the *Abhorsen Trilogy* can be deemed to have escaped the exclusions of binary oppositions that hero stories typically portray.

Looking above, the analysis of stereotypes that are present in the *Abhorsen Trilogy* according to Miriam Lewin's Doctrine of Two Spheres model should be quite straightforward.

In Sabriel's case, the stereotypes do not apply because they are essentially in reverse. Sabriel, although she is a mother, is not home most of the time because of being the Abhorsen. In the Old Kingdom, the Dead and other dangerous creatures are always on the run and need to be fought off by the only capable person, Sabriel. She is the one being in the outside world more so than her husband, Touchstone. His occupation, the king, requires him to be at the Old Kingdom castle (their home) and available to his subjects. Because of this, Touchstone is the

¹⁹⁵ Leah Phillips, "Impossible Journey," 11.

¹⁹⁶ Nix, *Sabriel*, 58.

¹⁹⁷ Nix, *Lirael*, 183.

¹⁹⁸ Nix, *Lirael*, 183.

one to stay home and care for their children more. For example, when Sam lies in the hospital after a fight with Hedge, Touchstone is the one to collect him. Sameth is disappointed by this as "...he could have died, and apparently that still wasn't enough for his mother to come and see him."¹⁹⁹

Because of this, the Doctrine of Two Spheres does not apply to Sabriel, and therefore, she ultimately defies one of the models of stereotypes for women. On the other hand, the stereotypically male areas of influence work (the Abhorsen occupation), and the outside world are what fit her character.

At the start of *Lirael*, Lirael spends all her time at the Clayr's Glacier, her home. However, this is normal for the Clayr as all of them stay there unless they have a mission outside of it. Furthermore, it has no connection to Lirael's gender. As mentioned before, almost all Clayr are female; however, staying at the Glacier is not determined by gender but is tied to the customs of the community.

Later, because of the Clayr's vision of the future, Lirael is forced to leave her home. After that, she occupies mainly the outside world as she travels through the Old Kingdom to find Nicholas. It is not certain whether she returns to the Glacier once this journey is over or finds a different place to call home. As of now, she does not have a home. Also, the Abhorsen-in-Waiting title requires training from the current Abhorsen. Therefore, it could be suggested that Lirael will not return to the Glacier. During her quest to save the world, she is also fulfilling her multiple roles and occupations – Daughter of the Clayr, the Remembrancer, and the Abhorsen-in-Waiting.

Unlike Sabriel, Lirael does not experience any romantic relationship during the plot of the trilogy. Subsequently, she does not have any children. Because of this, the areas of influence stereotypically prescribed to women do not apply to Lirael. As of the current state of the story, she does not have a home, nor does she have children. To the contrary, for the better part of the trilogy's plot, she explores the Old Kingdom's outside world during the quest to save the world that is tied to her duty and work – the Remembrancer and the Abhorsen-in-Waiting.

When it comes to the first virtue of The Cult of True Womanhood criterion, piety, it is not discussed much. In the 19th century, piety was seen as natural for women, claims Brannon.

¹⁹⁹ Nix, *Lirael*, 164.

Religious education was also considered appropriate for women as opposed to other forms of education, which are said to diminish the value of women's femininity.²⁰⁰

According to the national curriculum of the United Kingdom, religious education must be taught in British schools. Students, however, can be withdrawn from these lessons partly or entirely by their parents. Once the pupils are eighteen years old, they can decide for themselves whether to withdraw or take the lessons.²⁰¹ Ancelstierre, although said to resemble modern-day Britain, does not mention religion at all. Sabriel's school, Wyverley College, does not teach religion either. Besides the usual subjects like English, Mathematics, Science, and Music, Wyverley provides Sabriel with education in the fields of Etiquette, Fighting Arts, and Magic. The subject of Magic operates on the same principles as religious education, as it is only taught to those who have obtained permission from their parents.

Like Sabriel, Lirael is taught Charter Magic. She also attends lessons in the Hall of Youth within the Clayr Glacier. However, except for sex education, it is not specified what subjects exactly she is taught there. By working in the library, she also chooses to self-educate extensively, even mentioning that other librarians go seek other activities after they finish their work, but Lirael chooses to go to her study. During this time, she and the Disreputable Dog roam through the forgotten parts of the library and learn new things about the past and things hidden in there. Lirael is also advancing her skills in Magic as she learns to transform into various animals.

Because the virtue of piety is not mentioned at all in the books, it cannot be said that it is evaluated as natural for women. The same goes for the appropriateness of religious education for women. It is not mentioned. On the other hand, the lack of appearance of this topic can be interpreted as Nix seeing it as irrelevant for his heroines. Thus, this perception of irrelevance can also be interpreted as a form of subversion of the stereotype.

The surprising constituent of Sabriel's education is the Fighting Arts subject. She even "came second" in it on her graduation certificate.²⁰² Being second in Fighting Arts, however, does not constitute the stereotype of women being delicate. In fact, it coincides more with the traditionally masculine characteristic – strength.²⁰³ This is where Sabriel breaks the traditional stereotype of being delicate associated with women and exchanges it for strength, which is

²⁰⁰ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 47.

²⁰¹ "The national curriculum," Other compulsory subjects, GOV.UK, accessed January 10, 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/other-compulsory-subjects>.

²⁰² Nix, *Sabriel*, 11.

²⁰³ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 48.

traditionally attributed to masculine stereotypes. Therefore, this feature challenges the patriarchal views on women.

Despite Lirael not being educated in the Fighting Arts, she is also not a typically delicate woman as she fights various creatures even during her time at the Glacier. She embodies the stereotypically masculine strength, especially in comparison with her companion, Sameth. Generally, she is regarded as the stronger of the two by other characters and ultimately is more ready to be the Abhorsen than he is in spite of the fact that, at the start of *Lirael*, he is the supposed chosen one to take over the title after his mother.

The second virtue of The Cult of True Womanhood is purity. Purity and piety are closely intertwined, according to Brannon, as a lack of religious education might lead women to “lose their virtue or purity”.²⁰⁴ This assertion is a part of a binarity with men. Men were, to the contrary of women, seen as “prone to seduction and sin” and even as “brutes.” Women were supposed to resist their advances and demonstrate their virtue.²⁰⁵

In 2003, Beth Younger states that: “for young females in a patriarchal society, sexuality (particularly sexual desire) is often represented by educators, parents, and authors as a primitive, taboo drive that must be regulated”.²⁰⁶ Younger then uses this argument to suggest that YA fiction is read by teenage girls because they want to see a representation of their peers as sexual beings. In addition, these books that YA readership chooses for themselves, Younger claims, are often challenged or even censored by librarians, teachers, and parents. Again, this suggests that even two centuries later after The Cult of True Womanhood, the topic of female sexuality and loss of purity is controversial, especially among adults rather than the teenage girls themselves.²⁰⁷

Truly, adolescent sexuality was, until recently, considered only through a risk framework which, as the name suggests, considers only the possible negative outcomes of teenage sexual encounters. The risks considered include possible health risks, such as contracting a disease, or psychological damage, such as depressive episodes or problems in education. This framework contributed to teenage sexuality being viewed as deviant, morally corrupt, and socially problematic. Sexual behaviour was seen as appropriate only within marital relationships, which

²⁰⁴ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 47.

²⁰⁵ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 47.

²⁰⁶ Beth Younger, “Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature,” *NWSA Journal* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 45.

²⁰⁷ Beth Younger, “Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature,” 45.

naturally excluded sexually active adolescents as in modern societies, sexual encounters of teenagers happen “almost always” outside of marriage, according to K. Paige Harden.²⁰⁸

Literature, however, shows a shift from this attitude. In 2014, Harden calls out a “small but persistent” group of voices that call for a new understanding of teenage sexuality. One that regards the sexual experience of adolescents as normal and potentially healthy. This understanding is called sex-positive. Within this framework, sexuality is considered a part of human development that is normal and essential. Harden supports this with a statement:

Indeed, from an evolutionary perspective, sex is the point of adolescence: the overarching function of the biological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal changes of adolescence (pubertal maturation, increased novelty seeking, and social reorientation away from parents and toward peers) is to facilitate reproduction.²⁰⁹

This is furthered by highlighting the possible positive outcomes of sex, such as pleasure, intimacy, competence, and well-being.²¹⁰

The sex-positive framework continues to be studied further. One of the more recent articles by Anna Kågesten and Miranda van Reeuwijk regards romantic and sexual relationships as standard in most cultural settings. Kågesten and van Reeuwijk justify this by the emergence of new contraceptive methods and abortion, which separated sexual experience and pregnancy.²¹¹ Already in Harden’s 2014 article, she labels the teen birth rate a “historical low” in both the United States and Europe.²¹²

Furthermore, Kågesten and van Reeuwijk assert that programs targeted at adolescents that highlight the dangers and risks of adolescent sexuality, including abstinence programs, have not been shown to be effective in preventing the discussed risks. Additionally, these programs are said to conflict with the needs of adolescents as well as their human rights to explore their sexuality and obtain information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Also, the programs rarely acknowledge the act in terms of relationships, feelings, and even other

²⁰⁸ K. Paige Harden, “A Sex-Positive Framework for Research on Adolescent Sexuality,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 9, no. 5 (September 2014): 456.

²⁰⁹ Harden, “A Sex-Positive Framework for Research on Adolescent Sexuality,” 457.

²¹⁰ Harden, “A Sex-Positive Framework for Research on Adolescent Sexuality,” 455-457.

²¹¹ Anna Kågesten, Miranda van Reeuwijk, “Healthy sexuality development in adolescence: proposing a competency-based framework to inform programmes and research,” *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* 29, no. 1 (December 2021): 105.

²¹² Harden, “A Sex-Positive Framework for Research on Adolescent Sexuality,” 456.

sexual practices outside of penile-vaginal intercourse, which ignores adolescents who are a part of sexual minorities.²¹³

All of these factors, according to Kågesten and van Reeuwijk call for a positive approach to adolescent sex. They note that this perspective shows that the sexuality of adolescents involves more factors than just the ones that should be avoided and the unwanted consequences of it. They emphasize that the need to have the tools to navigate information and interpersonal relationships is essential for the development of adolescents. At the same time, this framework does not encourage adolescents to engage in sexual acts, but does not aim to withhold information about it. It respects the right of adolescents to choose what is best for them.²¹⁴

In *Sabriel*, the first mention of a topic remotely related to sexuality is at the start of the novel, where Sabriel contemplates going to university. She considers this option because her social pool would expand to young men who there was a “shortage” of in Wyverley. This statement suggests Sabriel’s discontent with the lack of young men in her social circle. It can, then, be assumed that Sabriel would potentially be interested in the company of young men, which can point to her being interested in the possibility of male suitors. Due to her interest in contact with the opposite gender, it could be said that she fails at the criterion of purity.

Later in the book, Sabriel meets a person of the opposite gender. Along Sabriel and Mogget’s journey, they come across a set of wooden statues, one of which seems just too realistic to Sabriel. The statue depicts a young naked man carved perfectly. Sabriel is described to be blushing because she had only seen naked men in biology textbooks before. Eventually, she deciphers that it is truly not only a statue and decides to save this young man from his long confinement in a wooden prison by going to Death and putting his spirit back into his body.

However, after she returns from Death, thinking the mission was successful, she finds that the man is still only a statue. That is where Mogget interferes with: “‘A kiss,’ [...] ‘Actually, just a breath would do. But you have to start kissing someone sometime, I suppose.’”²¹⁵ This statement seems to encourage Sabriel to experience things connected to sexuality, which combats the purity virtue altogether. This statement makes it seem like it is even desirable for a woman to have experiences of such nature. At the same time, Mogget leaves a window of

²¹³ Anna Kågesten, van Reeuwijk, “Healthy sexuality development in adolescence: proposing a competency-based framework to inform programmes and research,” 105.

²¹⁴ Anna Kågesten, van Reeuwijk, “Healthy sexuality development in adolescence: proposing a competency-based framework to inform programmes and research,” 105.

²¹⁵ Nix, *Sabriel*, 137.

choice for Sabriel by adding that a breath will be sufficient to bring the statue back to life. Therefore, to an extent, this interaction shows an alliance with the sex-positive framework. Sabriel is encouraged to experience an intimate moment with the opposite sex, but only if she wants to. In the end, Sabriel opts for the breath as “a kiss might seem very forward” and “he might remember it and make assumptions.”²¹⁶

Despite her initial hesitation, right after the wooden statue, later introduced as Touchstone, awakens, he is immediately positioned as Sabriel’s potential love interest despite her trying to ignore the “curiously fond feelings that appeared from somewhere.”²¹⁷ This position of his is solidified later when the party of three makes a stop on their journey at an inn. While there, Sabriel takes a bath because she has not washed herself since the time she visited her father’s house, which, at this time in the book, is almost a week ago.

When Sabriel is bathing, she thinks she can hear Touchstone having sex with a maid of the inn. Upon hearing this, Sabriel is described to have “flushed and gritted her teeth at the same time.”²¹⁸ She then proceeds to bury her head under the bath water, not to hear anything. While there, she denies thinking of Touchstone romantically, saying that “sex was the last thing on her mind.”²¹⁹ She also blames the fact that Touchstone is the first young man she met after being out of school. However, even with all this denial, she is described to be crying over the incidents in the other room. She is distracted from the train of thought by Mogget, who informs her that Touchstone’s room is, actually, on the other side of her room.

This scene, once more, shows that Sabriel is interested in male, particularly Touchstone’s attention in a romantic and possibly sexual way. It also shows that sex, although rejected by Sabriel momentarily, is accepted in her world and, to a certain extent, since she is quite shy about the subject, normalized. In addition, Sabriel’s rejection of sex comes more from a place of jealousy and anger at Touchstone’s possible choice of another woman to have sexual relations with. This all points to the fact that Sabriel is not concerned with the concept of purity. She accepts sex as a part of growing older and, to a certain point, is interested in it with a person she is fond of. This representation ultimately aligns with the sex-positive framework as Sabriel is not pushed into sex while also not being actively discouraged from it.

²¹⁶ Nix, *Sabriel*, 137.

²¹⁷ Nix, *Sabriel*, 138-139.

²¹⁸ Nix, *Sabriel*, 202

²¹⁹ Nix, *Sabriel*, 203.

At the same time, this scene is not overly explicit. In fact, the narration relies heavily on suggestion, using vocabulary such as water gurgling, splashing, giggling, and moans. The word sex is mentioned just once in the novel's entirety, and it is in this very scene. When it comes to Sabriel and Touchstone, they do not engage in sexual activity at all during *Sabriel*. At the start of *Lirael*, which is set fourteen years after the restoration of the monarchy, therefore roughly fourteen years after the events of *Sabriel*, the reader is informed that Touchstone is the king of the Old Kingdom and has made Sabriel his Abhorsen Queen, suggesting a marriage between the two. It is also revealed that they have two children, Sameth and Ellimere. Thus, any potential scenes portraying sexual acts are avoided by the skip in the trilogy's timeline.

The closest to sex Sabriel and Touchstone ever get is a kiss they share after they attempt to save Sabriel's father from his trap in Death. For Kerrigor's defeat, Sabriel's father suggests using Astrael, which is the bell that "calls everyone who hears it into Death."²²⁰ In *Life*, Sabriel's body is guarded by Touchstone and Mogget for whom the bell is dangerous as they risk death by hearing it. Although Sabriel is instructed by her father to lead them away, Touchstone still manages to hear its ring.

At this moment, Sabriel can feel Touchstone's spirit going to Death. Out of desperation, she kisses him. The kiss is described as savage-like because she bites his lip in the process and makes him bleed. This can be explained as her desperate call to him to wake up from Death. Eventually, the kiss is returned by Touchstone; therefore, he does not seem to mind the bleeding. Overall, the kiss is positioned in a highly emotional moment in the book, after the death of Sabriel's father and now the possible death of her love interest. Therefore, even though it is quite unusual because of the biting, it is still supposed to be viewed as romantic and consensual by the reader. Also, the fact that they rest their head on each other's shoulders and hold each other after this encounter brings the romance out even more.

Overall, Nix's approach to sex and intimacy in *Sabriel* tends to fall within the sex-positive framework, ignoring the concept of purity. Possible interaction with young men, romance, and sex is talked about, while not shamed or pushed. Sabriel is encouraged to engage in romantic actions like kissing only if she wants to. These actions are also normalized within the novel. Sabriel is not shamed or regarded as not pure once she has kissed Touchstone. It can, therefore, be said that in the aspect of sexuality, Sabriel challenges the gender stereotypical view and thus undermines the patriarchal conception and values of society.

²²⁰ Nix, *Sabriel*, 247.

Lirael has even less scenes mentioning the topic of sex than *Sabriel*. In the *Abhorsen Trilogy*, Lirael has no romantic interest. This could also be the reason for the lack of appearance of this topic. Overall, the topic is discussed only once in relevance to Lirael. At this point in the book, it is her nineteenth birthday, and she receives a kiss from the Disreputable Dog. To this, she expresses her mild disappointment with “that’s all I get, a dog kiss.”²²¹ A narration follows this statement: “Lirael did not know it, but there were a number of other people who would have liked to give her a birthday kiss.”²²² Many merchants and guards visiting the Clayr are referred to as the “number of other people.” Lirael, however, prefers to spend time by herself and shows no interest in speaking to them.

The lack of interest on Lirael’s part is justified by her low self-esteem. First, she is described as being too shy to approach the visitors, even the ones she was familiar with. She does not consider any of the Clayr’s men as her potential partners either, as there are very few of them. Later, however, it is revealed that she does not believe that anyone could be romantically interested in her as she had not gained the Sight yet and therefore is not a real Clayr. According to her, real Clayr would always be more interesting and attractive than she. She sees the Sight as a sort of measure of her self-worth. Without it, she is unworthy of a romantic partnership. However, once she gains the Sight, she might start thinking about bringing a man to dinner, walk, or her bedroom.

Despite Lirael’s disinterest in romantic relationships, in the Clayr culture, it is common and accepted that some of the visitors get invited to their bedrooms. As mentioned before, some of Lirael’s Clayr librarian colleagues are quite open about their romantic and sexual encounters with these visitors. Additionally, the Clayr are taught about sex in their compulsory education classes. Therefore, even though Lirael has not taken advantage of this opportunity, sex and romantic relationships are considered normal by the Clayr, which follows the sex-positive framework. Lirael has access to information about sex and is allowed to experience it if she wishes to do so. This approach to the sexual activity of women challenges the purity criterion and, therefore, the stereotypical view of women. Thus, the patriarchal conception of society and its values are subverted.

The next criterion in the set of The Cult of True Womanhood values is submissiveness. Brannon describes this criterion as a part of a binary opposition. Women, according to The Cult of True

²²¹ Nix, *Lirael*, 183.

²²² Nix, *Lirael*, 183.

Womanhood, were expected to be “weak, dependent, and timid.”²²³ This, however, meant that these characteristics were not desirable in men. Men were supposed to be “strong, wise, and forceful.”²²⁴ Pairings that would arise from such beliefs would then operate on the principle that the man is superior and dominant, and the woman does not question his authority, ultimately submitting to his will.²²⁵

Right from the start of *Sabriel*, the heroine displays a great sense of bravery when her younger schoolmate Owlyn goes to her first when she finds a scary-looking creature in the school building. Sabriel goes to help Owlyn and all the others at the school without a second thought. When it comes to the quest of finding her father, she does not display fear either. She accepts the pleas of her father to come save him with a simple “Yes,” when the Magistrix, the principal of Wyverley College asks her whether she would be leaving them.²²⁶ She solidifies the acceptance of the journey by saying “...but I’ll find him...so I swear by the Charter I bear,”²²⁷ which is especially brave considering that she has not been to the Old Kingdom since the age of five. She, therefore, does not know the inner workings of the area, which makes the completion of her journey even more difficult to achieve.

This continues to be a pattern for Sabriel throughout the book. She portrays courage and bravery at every obstacle she faces. Furthermore, she knows she is the only one that can save her father. She takes the mission as a duty. This approach then requires bravery. From this, it can be determined that Sabriel is not weak, which is the first component of submissiveness, according to Brannon. At the same time, due to the fact that Sabriel is the only one who can complete the task of saving her father, she cannot afford to be dependent. In the end, it is only herself that she can depend on. Only she can travel to Death and undo his entrapment. By this, Sabriel also challenges the second component of Brannon’s submissiveness.

On the other hand, since Sabriel is the main character, luck seems to be on her side at least most of the time. Therefore, her lack of knowledge of the area is not as big of an inconvenience for her as it could seem at first glance. She always somehow finds somebody to help her. First, it is a soldier guarding the Wall, Colonel Horyse, who gave her a little insight into the Old Kingdom. Then, it is her “guide” whom she learnt to summon to answer “all of her

²²³ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 47.

²²⁴ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 47.

²²⁵ Brannon, *Gender: psychological perspectives*, 47.

²²⁶ Nix, *Sabriel*, 19.

²²⁷ Nix, *Sabriel*, 19.

questions.”²²⁸ The guide points her to the house of Abhorsen. At the Abhorsen’s house, to which she gets thanks to a mysterious sending, she finds Mogget. Later, she stumbles upon Touchstone, who swears to serve her. Lastly, even in his last moments, Sabriel’s father buys her more time for destroying Kerrigor.

The struggle to save her father is, in fact, the only fight, even though it is not physical per se, that Sabriel is truly only by herself. It is because it happens in Death, where only she and her father can go. The current of the river of Death gets increasingly stronger the further into Death one goes. The more challenging it is to return to Life as well. Since Sabriel’s father is trapped within the Fourth Gate, he is quite far away. She, however, manages to get to him only to find out that his body has been away from his soul for too long. The win for Sabriel in this battle is the emotional journey she goes through. Her father not only answers her questions, clearing up all confusion on her part, but also encourages her in her future role of Abhorsen. This last conversation serves as a consolation for Sabriel as well as a tool for maturity. For Sabriel, this is the moment when she becomes an adult. Ultimately, she accepts her fate as the Abhorsen and the fact that there is no way for her father to survive.

It may seem that Sabriel is weak because she frequently needs her companions to help her win battles. Sabriel’s main strength, however, lies in her psychological resilience and bravery. Although she is not always capable of defeating her enemies just by herself, she is determined to not give up the fight, which ultimately leads to her victory. The most significant example of this is the very last scene in the book. In this scene, Sabriel is wounded, bleeding from the stomach. Still, in her seemingly last moments, she manages to wrap a binding ring around Kerrigor’s neck, ultimately defeating him. This supports the idea that Sabriel is not weak and by extension, submissive, but on the contrary, displays a great deal of strength, especially mentally and psychologically.

The psychological strength also manifests itself in the fact that Sabriel is wise beyond her years, which aligns with the stereotypes for men. The Abhorsen title requires that she carry the burden of reading *The Book of the Dead* and knowing that one day, she will have to shoulder the responsibilities of binding the Dead like her father. Her maturation, as said above, is complete once she accepts the title bravely. At the same time, she does not rely on her smarts only, as is usual for female heroes. Usually, male heroes are those to use physical strength and women

²²⁸ Nix, *Sabriel*, 58.

rely on arguments and coercion.²²⁹ When it comes to a fight, she showcases great physical strength, which is a stereotypical feature of men and is more common for male heroes in fantasy.

As for the third component of submissiveness, according to Brannon, timidity, Sabriel is quite the opposite of that. As mentioned before, she is quite courageous. Additionally, she is quite confident. She very rarely allows herself to feel doubt. The first moment where doubt is indicated is in only one sentence after she finds out her father is trapped in Death. She wonders what she could “really hope” to do about his entrapment, “even if she did get to the Old Kingdom.”²³⁰ This doubt, however, stems from the fact that she has not been to the Old Kingdom in a very long time and understands that saving her father is a challenging task.

Sabriel’s second expression of doubt comes after she finds her father in Death at the end of the book. Upon seeing him, she breaks down crying because she realizes she is unable to free him. Her father, however, reprimands her with “Sabriel! Hush, daughter! We have no time for tears.”²³¹ In this scene, Sabriel bombards her father with questions in a very anxious manner. However, as the scene and their conversation continue, her father calms her down, and she very quickly understands that her father must stay in Death while she has to take on the task of continuing his legacy and the burden of being the Abhorsen. In *Sabriel*, feelings of doubt are quickly dealt with. The character rarely feels doubtful of herself. Mainly, these feelings stem from the fact that the tasks, saving her father and taking on the role of Abhorsen, are very difficult. She, however, knows that she must complete them. Additionally, she does not have a lot of time to get in touch with her feelings, as her duty comes first. She, therefore, must always find courage. This ultimately paints Sabriel as very confident.

In addition, Sabriel is quite outspoken, displaying confidence even in her speech. Often, when she is not pleased with something, she is able to express her dislike quite openly. For example, when a sending at the Abhorsen’s house washes her without her consent, she protests, emphasizing her ability to perform the task herself. This could indicate she does not wish to be seen as incompetent and weak. Again, this challenges the presumption that Sabriel is submissive.

²²⁹ Lori M. Campbel, “And Her Will Be Done: The Girls Trump the Boys in the Keys to the Kingdom and Abhorsen Series by Garth Nix,” in *A Quest of Her Own: Essays on the Female Hero in Modern Fantasy*, ed. Lori M. Campbel (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014) 228.

²³⁰ Nix, *Sabriel*, 10.

²³¹ Nix, *Sabriel*, 231.

Another example of her outspokenness is one of her first conversations with Touchstone. Touchstone has been confined to his wooden prison for two hundred years. Therefore, he possesses mannerisms of an old-fashioned nature. He calls Sabriel “milady”²³² out of respect he has for her, the Abhorsen, for saving him. She, however, insists on being called by her name simultaneously standing firmly by the fact that she is not Abhorsen but a “stand-in.”²³³ She expresses her disapproval of “milady”²³⁴ multiple times. For this, she uses firm exclamations which express her annoyance with the label.

For one, it is suggested that the name makes Sabriel feel older than she is when she says: “I’ve only just left school! – I’m only eighteen! Calling me milady seems ridiculous.”²³⁵ Again, this sentence highlights that she is not afraid to express her feelings more colourfully and explicitly using strong words like “ridiculous.” When Touchstone blames his repeated usage of “milady” on habit because he knows his place in the world, Sabriel retaliates again, insisting on her name.

These conversations are also rooted in the fact that Touchstone feels like Sabriel’s servant. He, despite being a man, feels unequal to her. These feelings are expressed in a statement “Help is for equals. I’ll serve her. That’s all I’m good for.”²³⁶ Sabriel senses this and is discontented with the situation. She, in fact, requests, even demands equality when she says, “Don’t call me milady and stop acting like a halfwit! Just be yourself. Behave normally. I don’t need a valet, I need a useful... friend!”²³⁷ This is the turning point for them, as after this, Touchstone calls Sabriel only by her name. Also, these are the strongest words Sabriel has used. She is outspoken but not rude or vulgar.

In *Sabriel*, the heroine does not behave in a submissive manner and is not seen as submissive. Although she is not always able to win all battles without the help of other characters, her main strength comes from her mental resilience. Also, in the end, she can only rely on herself because she is the only one who can travel to Death. Therefore, she cannot be dependent on anyone. Lastly, she is not timid but rather outspoken, expressing her feelings clearly and sometimes firmly and loudly. Ultimately, Sabriel is not submissive. Because of her outspokenness and role of the Abhorsen, some characters, such as Touchstone, see her as superior. She, however, requests that other characters do not treat her as such, and she treats and views them as her

²³² Nix, *Sabriel*, 145.

²³³ Nix, *Sabriel*, 146.

²³⁴ Nix, *Sabriel*, 157.

²³⁵ Nix, *Sabriel*, 157.

²³⁶ Nix, *Sabriel*, 149.

²³⁷ Nix, *Sabriel*, 157.

equals. This attitude of hers challenges the gender stereotypical view that women should be submissive. Therefore, it challenges the patriarchal conception and values of society.

Surprisingly, according to Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair, characters like Sabriel were quite common in the last decade of the twentieth century. At that time, women slowly moved away from the stereotypical ways which are discussed above, and YA literature of that time reflected that. Sabriel fits into this time and attitude. More and more Young Adult heroines were assertive and confident, just like Sabriel.²³⁸ Therefore, Nix's heroine contributed to a wave of revolution within YA literature of that time, subscribing to an empowering message for girls outside of the text.

Lirael, on the contrary, is less confident and more timid than Sabriel. As was indicated above in the section about sexuality, Lirael's main source of insecurity is her inability to gain Sight. *Lirael*, at least at its start, has a much more sombre mood than *Sabriel*. Lirael is celebrating her fourteenth birthday. However, it is not a happy day at all. To illustrate the gloominess at the start of the novel, one of Lirael's first sentences of the novel goes "No mother, no father, no Sight."²³⁹ Not having Sight has many consequences for Lirael's life. Firstly, she is still compelled to wear the "blue tunic of a child,"²⁴⁰ which eliminates her from the company of her peers, who wear white robes. Adulthood is measured by the gift of Sight in the Clayr culture; therefore, age is irrelevant. Unfortunately for Lirael, she is the oldest to not possess the Sight yet, therefore her peers and even younger Clayr are already considered adults while she is still a child within the Clayr circles. This situation makes Lirael feel embarrassed and isolated.

Since the blue tunic is considered for children only, there are only small sizes of them. Therefore, in addition to being labelled a child, Lirael's tunic had been "let out so many times"²⁴¹ that it no longer has a hem. Thus, it does not look identical to the children's tunics either. Further, as Lirael is still growing, the tunic seems to be too short all the time. This contributes to her lack of confidence because, on top of being visually isolated from her peers and other Clayr, her clothes do not fit. Essentially, Lirael's tunic is unique among others, but the goal of the Clayr culture is to be like the others.

²³⁸ Joanne Brown, Nancy St. Clair, *Declarations of Independence: Empowered Girls in Young Adult Literature, 1990-2001* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 25.

²³⁹ Nix, *Lirael*, 11.

²⁴⁰ Nix, *Lirael*, 10.

²⁴¹ Nix, *Lirael*, 18.

Another eye-catching difference between Lirael and the other Clayr is her appearance. While the Clayr are described to have “brown skin that quickly tanned to a deep chestnut,”²⁴² Lirael’s skin is white, and instead of tanning, it burns. Most Clayr also have “bright blonde hair”²⁴³ and light blue or green eyes. When it comes to Lirael, she has “dark eyes and even darker hair.”²⁴⁴ Therefore, in addition to the visual differentiation by the tunic, Lirael has completely opposite features from the rest of the Clayr.

To outsiders, she looks like one of them which is described in a scene where Barra, a visitor of the Clayr’s Glacier, sits next to her while she eats. He attempts to strike up a friendly conversation, in which he offers to give her a tour of the Glacier since it is his second visit there. This offer hurts Lirael deeply because in her mind, it furthers the narrative that she is not “really a Clayr.”²⁴⁵ Due to this, she is embarrassed to talk to Barra and starts crying, which prompts Barra to leave. Even the Clayr themselves are sometimes unable to distinguish Lirael from a visitor. This is indicated in a scene where her cousin mistakes her for a visitor, too. It also suggests a sort of negligence of other characters, and the Clayr, especially, to Lirael’s feelings. Additionally, in most conversations, she is not responding, and nobody seems phased by that behaviour.

As if it were intentional, Lirael’s birthday is further tainted by unpleasant events when it is announced that the Gift of the Sight has awoken in another girl, Annisele. Lirael is upset by this as she thought that it would be her because she is older. Since Annisele has only recently celebrated her eleventh birthday, Lirael feels it is unfair that she got the Sight and not her. In addition, Lirael’s birthday was “Anniele’s day” now as the day of the Awakening is of higher importance than someone’s birthday.

The only one who congratulates Lirael on her birthday is Aunt Kirrith, who is Lirael’s mother figure. Unknowingly, it is she who puts the cherry on top of this day that has been filled with disappointments for Lirael. She gifts Lirael a present. Naturally, she is curious to know what it is, only to find out it is a tunic, a blue, children’s tunic. For Lirael, this is the last straw for this day. Of course, she does not show her disappointment but inside she is afraid and disappointed because to her, it looks like “Aunt Kirrith must expect her to never wear the white of the

²⁴² Nix, *Lirael*, 12.

²⁴³ Nix, *Lirael*, 12.

²⁴⁴ Nix, *Lirael*, 12.

²⁴⁵ Nix, *Lirael*, 16.

Awakening” as the gifted tunic would fit “even if she kept on growing till she was thirty-five.”²⁴⁶

All of these events are a climax of the years of disappointment for Lirael. It is this day, however when she decides that taking her own life would be “the best thing to do.”²⁴⁷ Luckily, at the same time that Lirael goes out on the Glacier, determined to jump, Sabriel decides to pay a visit to the Clayr with Touchstone in her Paperwing. Lirael is intrigued by Sabriel’s presence and tries to listen to the conversation she has with the Clayr, completely forgetting about her initial plan. As Sabriel is leaving, she points the Clayr talking to her to Lirael’s hiding place. The Clayr find her, and to Lirael’s surprise, understand her struggle with the lack of Sight. To forget about it, she is given a chance to work at the Library.

As indicated above, the reason Lirael is, at first, timid and shy is because of the isolation she faces at the Glacier. Because of her lack of Sight, she feels left out and insufficient. Additionally, the book seems to start at the climax of built up difficulties, and unfortunate events in Lirael’s life. Therefore, Lirael’s behaviour is at its worst.

Becoming the Third Assistant Librarian is the first step to Lirael finding her confidence. The title gives her a sense of belonging. She reads a lot of books in the Library through which she advances her skills in Charter Magic. She, of course, also explores the Old Levels of the Library. One of these trips around the Old Levels leads Lirael into a fight with a Stilken in which Lirael gets injured. In the Infirmary, she meets her great-great-grandmother, who encourages Lirael to go back and destroy the Stilken. At this time, Lirael also creates the Disreputable Dog, Lirael’s true friend. The Dog serves as a mentor and support for Lirael, ultimately awakening confidence within her.

Her confidence is solidified one day when she and the Disreputable Dog come across a door titled “Lirael’s path.”²⁴⁸ Again, even though Lirael wants to give up this journey, the Dog encourages her to move forward and find out more. Through this journey, she finds out that while she cannot see the future as her other Clayr sisters, she is a Remembrancer. As she is coming back, the Clayr inform her they had a vision of the future including her. Although they have not Seen what Lirael’s role is in this vision, she must leave the Glacier and find Nicholas. This mission, although Lirael is afraid, gives her a sense of purpose. She is the only one in the

²⁴⁶ Nix, *Lirael*, 23.

²⁴⁷ Nix, *Lirael*, 20.

²⁴⁸ Nix, *Lirael*, 197.

vision, therefore, she must complete the task alone. Ultimately, this forces her to be strong and find confidence within herself.

The quest to save Nicholas also represents a tie Lirael has with her male counterpart, Sameth. Sameth is one of the two children Sabriel had with Touchstone. He, as opposed to his sister Ellimere, is thought to be the Abhorsen-in-Waiting. When Sameth and his schoolmates, including Nicholas, are attacked by the necromancer Hedge, Sam tries to go to Death and defeat him. After this somewhat successful defeat, Sabriel feels he is ready to start his Abhorsen training; therefore, he is ordered to study *The Book of the Dead*. However, Sam is afraid of *The Book*.

Unlike Lirael, it is Sameth's own choice to begin the dangerous journey. Nicholas sends him a letter saying that he will be visiting and has hired a guide. Sam is distrustful towards the guide and worried about Nick. Therefore, decides to find him. While this decision might look courageous, in his mind, he knows that what he is "really doing" is "running away"²⁴⁹ from *The Book of the Dead* and the duties of being a Prince. Therefore, for Sameth, this journey represents an escape from responsibilities. For Lirael, in opposition, it is a responsibility. While it is an act of cowardice on Sam's part, it is an act of courage on Lirael's.

This pattern of Sam and Lirael continues throughout their whole journey, and when they first meet, it is clear who is the "hero" and who is the "sidekick" as expressed by Lori M. Campbell.²⁵⁰ Lirael sees Sam lying in a bathtub and wounded. Mogget is the first to suggest they merge their ways by saying "Could you rescue us please?"²⁵¹ by which he also suggests that Sameth is not capable of continuing his own. Lirael decides they "have to pick them up"²⁵² which also suggests Sameth's incapability. Lirael, as the true hero, takes care of his injured leg by Charter spells. This scene ultimately suggests that Sam is the one dependent on Lirael as he would not be able to continue his journey had he not met her. By this, Lirael subverses the gender stereotype of being dependent. In fact, Sameth is the one to be dependent on Lirael. In relation to Sameth, Lirael is closer to the male stereotype.

As seen above, Lirael displays great wisdom when accepting the mission. She understands her destiny, and accepts it maturely, even though she is not sure how to complete it. At the same

²⁴⁹ Nix, *Lirael*, 253.

²⁵⁰ Lori M. Campbell, "And Her Will Be Done: The Girls Trump the Boys in the Keys to the Kingdom and Abhorsen Series by Garth Nix," in *A Quest of Her Own: Essays on the Female Hero in Modern Fantasy*, ed. Lori M. Campbell (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014), 230.

²⁵¹ Nix, *Lirael*, 377.

²⁵² Nix, *Lirael*, 377.

time, similarly to Sabriel, Lirael does not hide when it comes to a physical fight, as is usual for female heroes.²⁵³ She exhibits both mental and physical strength.

Lirael's path to overcome her insecurity is at its end when she finds out she is the Abhorsen-in-Waiting. Through the Dark Mirror, she finds out about her heritage, a source of insecurity referred to right at the beginning of the book. She is the daughter of a Clayr mother as well as the daughter of Abhorsen. By this simple fact, she finally realises why she felt like an outsider all these years. It was because, as Mogget says "You belong here,"²⁵⁴ referring to the Abhorsen's house. This moment marks the end of Lirael being timid. From now on, she exhibits courage, resilience, and strength. Often, she gives orders to Sam and the others. In the end, she instructs even the older and more experienced Sabriel, which she accepts. This solidifies Lirael as a competent character in the eyes of others as well as her own, ultimately subverting the gender stereotype.

The fact that Lirael is the Abhorsen-in-Waiting makes more than one person, Lirael, happy. Sameth is also overjoyed. This discovery prompts him to express the desire to abandon Nicholas' rescue journey altogether. Lirael, aware that it is her duty to save the Old Kingdom, encourages Sam. After all, he is still a Prince and, therefore, has a duty to the Kingdom as well. In retaliation, he expresses his fear of Death and Hedge to which Lirael responds: "I'm afraid too, of Death and Hedge and probably a thousand other things. But I'd rather be afraid and do something than just sit and wait for terrible things to happen."²⁵⁵ This shows Lirael's determination to act, which defies the stereotype of being dependent.

Furthermore, as can be seen in all interactions of Sam and Lirael, Sameth is generally regarded as the weaker one of the pair. He threatens to abandon their mission multiple times, while Lirael does not have such thoughts at all. In fact, it is always she who encourages Sameth to continue their journey. Additionally, Lirael seems physically stronger than her male companion. While she fights vigorously with every enemy they meet, he seems to be running away most of the time.

Lirael's journey to confidence is a difficult one, especially at the start of the novel, where she is weak, timid, and isolated. However, as she matures, her confidence grows stronger. Ultimately, when faced with the task of finding Nicholas, she sees it as a duty she must

²⁵³ Lori M. Campbel, "And Her Will Be Done: The Girls Trump the Boys in the Keys to the Kingdom and Abhorsen Series by Garth Nix," 228.

²⁵⁴ Nix, *Lirael*, 454.

²⁵⁵ Nix, *Lirael*, 457.

complete, indicating a great amount of bravery. The same applies to the time when Lirael discovers she is the Abhorsen-in-Waiting. She accepts the title with courage, even though she fears what it entails, as shown in the last quote. Additionally, she spreads her positive attitude toward the journey to Sameth, uplifting him. This dynamic between Lirael and Sameth shows that while Lirael was able to extricate herself of her weaknesses, Sameth was not. That makes Lirael ultimately stronger than Sameth, which challenges the stereotypical views and values held by society.

Both Lirael and Sabriel subvert both traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Subsequently, it could be said they bend their gender. From the perspective of Roberta Seelinger Trites, Lirael and Sabriel could be considered tomboys, which is a distinct bodily identity that emerged from the materiality of women asserting their participation in a male-dominated world. While it is dependent on physical traits such as short hair, it is mainly dependent on bodily acts such as tree-climbing.²⁵⁶

Based on looks, the heroines do not fit the tomboy identity because they have long hair. However, when it comes to other physical traits, they seem in alliance with it. For example, both of them wear armour for most of the time of the trilogy, signifying their more masculine image. At the same time, for the battles they face, it is more of a practical choice. The more important aspect of tomboyism they follow, however, is their actions. As stated previously, Sabriel and Lirael are both resilient fighters and powerful Charter Mages. They are also competent in their duties as Abhorsen and Abhorsen-in-Waiting, therefore able to lead, make decisions, and protect the communities they serve.

7. Empowerment

Nripendra Kishore Mishra and Tulika Tripathi use Lynn Bonnet's definition of empowerment to say it is "the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence, and hold accountable the institutions which affect them".²⁵⁷ Similarly, Belinda Y. Louie and Douglas H. Louie define empowerment using an example of one of their

²⁵⁶ Trites, Roberta Seelinger, *Twenty-first-century feminisms in children's and adolescent literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 141.

²⁵⁷ Nripendra Kishore Mishra, Tulika Tripathi, "Conceptualising Women's Agency, Autonomy and Empowerment," *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no.11 (March 2011), 59.

students. They argue the student felt empowered because “he has increased his belief in his ability to act, often resulting in capable action”.²⁵⁸

If people are to be empowered, they must be disempowered currently. For women, it is generally accepted that they are disempowered compared to men.²⁵⁹ Additionally, women’s empowerment has some additive elements to it because a transformation of institutions that support the patriarchal structures is needed. Overall, women’s empowerment is surrounded by topics of options, control over one’s own life and resources, choice, power, ability to affect one’s own well-being, ability to make decisions, and make strategic life choices,²⁶⁰ meaning choices that are significant.²⁶¹

An important part of women’s empowerment is said to be agency. The goal of agency is for women to define self-interest and choice. Furthermore, they should think of themselves as not only able but also entitled to make such choices²⁶² and transform them into outcomes they desire.²⁶³ As choice and agency are often used interchangeably, Serene Khader introduces a distinction between control choice and option choice. Control choice is exercised. It occurs when someone wants something and takes steps to make it happen or does something that reflects that desire. Option choice is possessed rather than exercised. It comprises alternatives that the agent is to choose from. The more alternatives one has, the greater option choice they have. Options can increase one’s control choice, but not necessarily. For example, a choice one is disinterested in can be irrelevant to or even reduce their control choice.²⁶⁴

The current discussion about empowerment centres around control choice for which power needs to be defined. Power is defined as “individual ability to achieve goals one wants to achieve”.²⁶⁵ Disempowerment is then defined as “the presence of constraints on the individual ability to achieve”.²⁶⁶

²⁵⁸ Belinda Y. Louie, Douglas H. Louie, “Empowerment Through Young-Adult Literature,” *The English Journal* 81, no. 4 (April 1992), 53.

²⁵⁹ Kiran Chauhan, Anjali Capila, “Images and agency: Path to women's empowerment,” *Advance Research Journal of Social Science* 5, no. 1 (June 2014), 104.

²⁶⁰ Nripendra Kishore Mishra, Tulika Tripathi, “Conceptualising Women's Agency, Autonomy and Empowerment,” 59.

²⁶¹ Serene Khader, “Passive Empowerment: How Women’s Agency Became Doing It All,” *Philosophical Topics* 45, no. 2 (Fall 2018), 145.

²⁶² Nripendra Kishore Mishra, Tulika Tripathi, “Conceptualising Women's Agency, Autonomy and Empowerment,” 59.

²⁶³ Serene Khader, “Passive Empowerment: How Women’s Agency Became Doing It All,” 143.

²⁶⁴ Serene Khader, “Passive Empowerment: How Women’s Agency Became Doing It All,” 144.

²⁶⁵ Serene Khader, “Passive Empowerment: How Women’s Agency Became Doing It All,” 148.

²⁶⁶ Serene Khader, “Passive Empowerment: How Women’s Agency Became Doing It All,” 148.

The issue of choice is a complicated one in the trilogy. The Abhorsen, Abhorsen-in-Waiting, and Remembrancer titles are hereditary and therefore predestined. It is, subsequently, important to note that neither Sabriel nor Lirael has complete power over her life's path. The titles come with duties that the characters must fulfil, or their world will crumble. Therefore, much of their actions and decisions are controlled by these duties, and their individual wants are pushed to the side. It could then appear they only have option choices.

However, before Sabriel became the Abhorsen, she exercised her control choice quite freely. For example, when she chose to save Owlyn's bunny. Additionally, she was thinking about going to university after Wyverley College and wanted to discuss it with her father. This suggests she would probably be able to attend had she truly wanted to, while her father was the Abhorsen himself still.

Sabriel is also seen exercising control choice despite the obligations of her title, though. For example, redeeming Touchstone from his statue-like state was completely her decision. Although she was influenced by the fact that she thought her father would have saved Touchstone as well, it was not necessary to fulfil her journey or her position of Abhorsen. She did this out of her own sense of justice.

This is in alliance with Roberta Seelinger Trite's claim that:

The feminist character's recognition of her agency and her voice invariably leads to some sort of transcendence, usually taking the form of a triumph over whatever system or stricture was repressing her. The character defeats some sort of evil (sometimes magical, sometimes not) or succeeds at a typically male task, or she comes to believe in herself despite the doubts of those around her.²⁶⁷

By exercising her control power, she technically defeats evil because she serves justice to Touchstone. He was confined to his state unrightly by "unnatural necromancy,"²⁶⁸ and therefore, Sabriel felt it was her duty to undo it. It could also be said that she succeeds at a typically male task, as typically, female characters are saved by male characters and not the other way around. Additionally, this moment brings her closer to her father and, therefore, the archetype of what she hopes to become. She acts upon the assumption that he would save Touchstone, too. Moreover, Touchstone calls her "Abhorsen"²⁶⁹ which strengthens her

²⁶⁷ Roberta Seelinger Trite, *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 7

²⁶⁸ Nix, *Sabriel*, 133.

²⁶⁹ Nix, *Sabriel*, 138.

alignment with the role and belief in her abilities within it. Metaphorically, she transcends being only a girl and even without realising, accepts the role of the Abhorsen.

Lirael also exercised her control choice frequently as an Assistant Librarian. She unlocked most of the spells on her work bracelet, even though she was not supposed to. She also often explored the forbidden parts of the Library, which brought her her first test of heroism and exercise of agency. She was almost defeated by a Stilken on her journey and remembered that librarians should self-sacrifice. However, she realised that despite her previous suicide attempt, she wanted to continue living. Therefore, she used a very powerful Charter to escape the creature. At the same time, she knew that she must deal with the Stilken as it is a threat to the other Clayr. Ultimately, she was encouraged by her unknown dying great-great-grandmother to return and fight the dangerous creature to victory.

In this instance, Lirael took her fate into her hands when she decided not to sacrifice herself. More importantly, she decided to return to the deadly creature and defeat it to protect the other Clayr. This is in alignment with Trite's claim because this defeat of the Stilken ultimately brings Lirael the confidence to explore more. This hobby of hers brings her and the Disreputable Dog to an unknown part of the Glacier and a door with the title Lirael's Path. After taking this path, Lirael not only discovers she is a Remembrancer but also that the Clayr are sending her on a special mission.

Although Lirael feels sadness over the fact that she is leaving, she is ultimately redeemed from the feeling of inadequacy over not gaining the Sight. Additionally, it is implied that she has a greater task than the Clayr. In this moment, she transcends the Clayr position, and that empowers her. Additionally, she has previous experience with defeating the Stilken, which supports her belief in her ability.

Later, upon meeting Sam, Lirael, although not entirely confident yet, realises that Sam truly needs her help and therefore, his inadequacy in comparison with her. She, of course, does not make this known, but often feels like she has to encourage Sameth even though she is not entirely sure of her capabilities when it comes to defeating Orannis. Often, she deliberately hides her uncertainty in front of Sameth and voices it only in private to the Disreputable Dog. She, however, is determined to save the communities she serves even if it means her death.

However, even deciding to help Sameth ultimately was an exercise of her control choice because she could have just found Nicholas on her own. Therefore, even on her predestined path Seen by the Clayr, she exercises some level of her own agency and ability to choose.

Eventually, both girls come to claim and choose the Abhorsen, Abhorsen-in-Waiting, and Remembrancer titles as well. With Sabriel, her journey is at first only about saving her father, refusing to believe she could be the Abhorsen. Additionally, she feels unprepared for the role. She has studied *The Book of the Dead*; however, she has lived in Ancelstierre most of her life and relies on her mother's spirit, Mogget, and Touchstone to help her. She is even embarrassed to not know so many things about the Old Kingdom in her final moments with her father, saying, "I must be the only Abhorsen ever who doesn't have a clue about how everything works!"²⁷⁰ However, towards the end of the first novel, she generally starts to accept her duty, and is willing to sacrifice herself in the name of being Abhorsen. Ultimately, she defeats the evil Kerrigor, saving both Ancelstierre and the Old Kingdom. By this, she consolidates her role as competent Abhorsen both to herself and others. Later, in *Abhorsen*, Sabriel is respected and admired as Abhorsen Queen. Both Ancelstierre and Old Kingdom communities value her because, in addition to being a remarkable fighter, she is a skilled diplomat, establishing peace between the two areas.

Lirael also accepts her role of Remembrancer and Abhorsen-in-Waiting because, for her, it is a sort of redemption from her inability to See. At first, she is also not sure about her journey. However, once she meets Sameth, she knows she needs to be strong for him. At the same time, she is intrigued by *The Book of the Dead*, as opposed to Sameth, the supposed Abhorsen-in-Waiting, who is physically repulsed by it. Therefore, even if she does not know her position yet, there is a suggestion that she might be inclined to be the Abhorsen more than Sam out of her own interest. Eventually, she starts to believe in herself more and even gives orders to Sabriel, the Abhorsen, whose skills are above Lirael's. In the end, although she is willing to sacrifice herself to save the world, it is the Disreputable Dog who dies instead by which allows Lirael to prove that she is the right one for the Abhorsen training. In her final moments, the Disreputable Dog reassures Lirael of this fact by saying that she has "earned a high place in the world."²⁷¹

"Does the walker choose the path or the path the walker?"²⁷² is a recurring theme in the trilogy, discussing the characters' level of choice when taking on the Abhorsen role. As said already, this position is an issue of ancestry; therefore, it is already predestined who will fill the role. However, even for the characters of the trilogy, it can be confusing as the line of ancestry the

²⁷⁰ Nix, *Sabriel*, 234.

²⁷¹ Nix, *Abhorsen*, 337.

²⁷² Nix, *Sabriel*, 243.

title favours is seemingly unpredictable, just like in the case of Lirael and Sameth. Once one is chosen, though, he or she must comply with the title's obligations; therefore, is seemingly not endowed with much control choice. However, Sabriel and Lirael are proof that even Abhorsens can exercise some power over what he or she does. Despite their titles, it is they who shape their path and ultimately govern it. The Abhorsen title is hereditary, but what path they take with it is ultimately their choice.

Both heroines are also empowered as they perform increasingly tougher tasks successfully, which strengthens their belief in their own abilities. At the end of the *Abhorsen Trilogy*, Sabriel and Lirael are sure they are capable and on the right path for them, while shaping it, in moderation, as they like.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the ways in which female protagonists are constructed and developed within Garth Nix's *Abhorsen Trilogy*. Through the lens of feminist literary criticism, this thesis focused on themes such as gender roles, gender stereotypes, and female empowerment. In addition to feminist literary criticism, post-feminist frameworks are used. This thesis examined how the three novels portray gender and whether this portrayal contributes to the reinforcement or challenge of the patriarchal conception of society and value system.

By intertwining literary analysis informed by feminist literary criticism with frameworks of traditional gender roles, the thesis demonstrates that Nix's trilogy subverts this traditional notion. The main role the heroines have to fulfil is that of the Abhorsen, Abhorsen-in-Waiting, and Remembrancer which does not privilege one gender over the other and is unpredictable in which individual it will favour. Overall, neither Sabriel nor Lirael is traditional stay-at-home caretaker but rather a fighter who serves their communities.

As opposed to male-centric hero stories, the *Abhorsen Trilogy* does not reinforce traditional gender roles and heterosexual relationships. It successfully rearticulates Sabriel and Lirael with their bodies while completing the Relational Model of Self by Leah Phillips. Therefore, from the perspective of hero stories, Nix's novels are deemed to have escaped the exclusions of binary oppositions that hero stories typically portray.

Stereotypes about women are also subverted in the *Abhorsen Trilogy*. The heroines are encouraged to have sexual relationships as long as they wish to have one. They are not required to be submissive. To the contrary, Lirael and Sabriel are in a leading position in a lot of situations. Furthermore, their roles as Abhorsen, Abhorsen-in-Waiting, and Remembrancer permit them to spend more time outside of the home than inside it. Although the heroines identify as women, they partly fit the tomboy description.

Sabriel and Lirael are empowered characters, as their journey allows them to face increasingly difficult tasks which they complete successfully, strengthening their belief in their own abilities. Moreover, despite the obligations of their titles, both heroes are able to shape and ultimately govern the path they are on.

Ultimately, the *Abhorsen Trilogy* serves as a compelling example of subversion of the patriarchal conception of society and value system. It not only provides a progressive vision of

female heroism but also engages in contemporary debates about gender. Nix's ideas about gender also offer a fresh perspective for young adult female readership.

Resumé

Tato diplomová práce pojednává o reprezentaci ženských postav v *Trilogii Abhorsenka* od australského autora Gartha Nixe. Přesněji jde o postavy Sabriel a Lirael a knihy *Sabriel* (1995), *Lirael* (2001) a *Abhorsenka* (2003). Cílem práce je zjistit, jak je v trilogii zobrazen gender a zda toto zobrazení posiluje či naopak podřívá patriarchální pojetí společnosti a hodnotový systém. K tomuto cíli jsou využity tři koncepty z pozic feministické literární kritiky – genderové role, genderové stereotypy a posilování postavení žen (female empowerment). Vzhledem k době vydání jednotlivých knih je též využit teoretický postfeminismus. Dále práce přihlíží i k psychologickým teoriím o vývoji dospívajících a specifickým fantasy žánru.

Úvodní kapitola se věnuje vymezení pojmu literatura pro mládež a její historii. Období adolescence jako takové mělo trnitý vývoj, jelikož před a na úplném začátku 20. století se z dětí stávaly dospělí ze dne na den. Adolescenti se v těchto dobách již účastnili pracovního procesu, takže neměli na čtení čas. Nicméně v roce 1904 přišel G. Stanley Hall s termínem „adolescent“, což přispělo k přibývajícimu zájmu o potřeby právě jedinců v této věkové kategorii. Zároveň Hallův objev přispěl k zvýšení počtu těchto jedinců ve vzdělávacím systému a vytvořil „kulturu mládí“, jejíž epicentrem byl život na střední škole. Dále přibylo i autorů, kteří by pro tuto věkovou skupinu chtěli tvořit literární díla, ačkoliv někteří z nich původně cílili na kategorii dospělých. V rámci této kapitoly jsou zmíněna nejdůležitější díla každé dekády od vytvoření pojmu „adolescent“ do roku vydání *Trilogie Abhorsenka*, která je zasazena do kontextu YA literatury.

YA literatura je v práci chápána jako literatura všech žánrů, která je určena a konzumována čtenářům přibližně mezi desátým a devatenáctým rokem věku. Protagonisté literatury pro mládež jsou též ve stejném věkovém rozmezí. Dále jsou YA díla obsahově kratší a většinou plynou chronologicky. V neposlední řadě taková díla obsahují didaktické elementy.

Další část práce se věnuje žánru fantasy, a též představuje jeho historii. Ačkoliv je fantasy nejdéle působící koncept v rámci literatury, komerčně začal existovat až v roce 1970. Předtím byly elementy fantasy považovány za vhodné pouze pro dětské čtenáře. Tento pohled se však začal vytrácet v době romantismu, který sám o sobě je charakterizován mystickými a magickými elementy. Během devatenáctého a dvacátého století se vydávalo čím dál větší množství knih obsahující tyto prvky. Důležitým milníkem fantasy bylo vydání série *Pán Prstenů* od Johna Ronalda Reuela Tolkiena, a taktéž série *Letopisy Narnie* od Clivea Staplese Lewise. Tyto dvě knižní série ovlivnily vývoj a boom celého žánru v sedmdesátých letech

minulého století. Mnoho z děl, která Tolkiena a Lewise následovala dokonce zobrazovala v hrdinských rolích i ženy, namísto mužů.

Fantasy literatura je chápána jako žánr, jehož podstatou je narušení reality pomocí magie a nadpřirozených postav. Příběh knih v rámci fantasy žánru je soustředěn kolem úkolu a honby za jeho splněním. Tento úkol musí být viděn jako složitý, ale nikoliv nemožný splnit. Splnění tohoto úkolu potom vede k výhře dobra nad zlem. Protagonisté tohoto žánru mohou být vázáni proroctvím nebo osudem, který řídí jejich cestu.

Teoretická část dále představuje feministickou literární teorii a kritiku a postfeminismus. Feministická literární kritika zkoumá, jak jsou ženy v literatuře zobrazovány. V rámci feministické literární kritiky jsou pak vybrány tři koncepty – genderové role, genderové stereotypy a posilování postavení žen (female empowerment), se kterými jsou protagonistky konfrontovány. Vzhledem k období vydání jednotlivých částí trilogie, mimo feministického rámce je v práci reflektován i postfeminismus, který podporuje ženskou možnost volby, přijímá pluralitu v rámci feministického hnutí a snaží se v něm najít místo i pro muže.

Hlavní analytická část se zaměřuje na dvě hlavní hrdinky – Sabriel a Lirael. Obě jsou nositelkami významných titulů (Abhorsenka, Abhorsenka nástupkyně a Pamětnice), které zásadně ovlivňují jejich působení v trilogii. Tudíž, co se týče genderových rolí, ta hlavní role, kterou musí splnit jsou právě zmíněné tituly. Role Abhorsena/ky však není vázána na gender, ale je dědičná. Navíc, ani postavy samy neví, kdo z příbuzných by mohl titul obdržet. Tento osud je nepředvídatelný a na gender nositele zkrátka nedbá. Titul Pamětnice je potom natolik vzácný, že se dává důraz spíše na existenci tohoto jedince než na jeho či její gender. Tyto tituly pak nutí obě hrdinky trávit čas mimo domov, v případě Sabriel i na úkor vlastních dětí. Obecně tedy protagonistky podřívají představu o tradiční roli ženy jako pečující a domácí, jak je definuje Mandy Boehnke. Sabriel i Lirael jsou spíše bojovnice než ochránkyně domácího krbu. Přitom si však zachovávají ženskou identitu.

Pro zobrazení genderových rolí v žánru fantasy byla zvolena teorie Leah Phillipsové a její teoretický rámec Relational Model of Self. V rámci tohoto modelu byly hrdinky porovnány s hrdinskými narativy, které u ženských protagonistek ignorují tělesnost a podléhají hierarchickému schématu binárních opozit, kde je muž nad ženou. Skrz tuto analýzu bylo dokázáno, že Nixovy hrdinky podřívají klasické modely fantasy. Ačkoliv Nix dává do popředí osobnost hrdinek a ne to, jak vypadají, nestydí se ani mluvit o tělesných tématech jako je menstruace. Dále úspěšně vytváří kruh spojení a opakování mezi ženskými postavami.

Pro vyobrazení genderových stereotypů byly využity teoretické rámce „Doctrine of Two Spheres“ Miriam Lewinové a „The Cult of True Womanhood“ Barbary Welterové. Rámec Lewinové pojednává o sférách vlivu žen a mužů. Za ženskou sféru vlivu jsou považovány děti a domov, zatímco pro muže to je život mimo domov a práce. Obě hrdinky se převážně angažují mimo domov, čímž tento rámec nesplňují. Co se týče Sabriel, v rámci tohoto rámce vyměnila ženskou sféru vlivu za tu mužskou, jelikož je doma se svými dětmi jen zřídka. Naopak její partner Touchstone plní spíše ženské stereotypní aktivity, jelikož on se stará o jejich děti a zdržuje se nejvíce doma. Lirael žádné děti ani partnera v průběhu trilogie nemá. Dále stejně tak jako Sabriel plní povinnosti tvých titulů spíše mimo domov. Díky tomuto zobrazení Nixovy hrdinky podrývají teoretický rámec genderových stereotypů podle Miriam Lewinové.

Teoretický rámec Barbary Welterové obsahuje čtyři kritéria – zbožnost, čistota, podvolení a domáckost. Nejdůležitější z těchto kritérií jsou čistota a podvolení, jelikož téma zbožnosti se v trilogii nezmiňuje a domáckost již byla vyvrácena v předchozích kapitolách. *Trilogie Abhorsenka* obecně prezentuje pozitivní náhled na sex a intimitu, jelikož obě z hrdinek jsou povzbuzeny k tomu, aby okusily sexuální a intimní zkušenosti. Zároveň však nejsou do těchto zážitků nuceny, pokud se na to necítí. Nakonec si tyto zážitky z vlastního zájmu okusí pouze Sabriel.

Další významné téma „Cult of True Womanhood“ je podvolení či submisivita hrdinek. V této části jsou analyzovány konstituenty submisivity (nesmělost, slabost a závislost na jiných) proti kterým jsou hrdinky postaveny. Sabriel nesplňuje ani jeden z nich. Ve většině situací je sebevědomá a nebojí se vyjádřit. Dále je silná a nemůže si dovolit být na někom závislá – pouze ona je předurčena nosit titul Abhorsenka. Naopak Lirael na začátku jejího příběhu působí velmi nesměle. Novými zkušenostmi však nabývá více a více sebedůvěry, a nakonec svoje sebevědomí vybuduje. Podobně jako Sabriel si nemůže dovolit být slabá ani závislá na jiných.

Posledním konstituentem analytické části práce je kapitola o posílení postavení žen. V této části je použita teorie od Serene Khader o „control choice“ (neomezená volba na základě vlastního chtíce) a „option choice“ (volba z možností). „Control choice“ je v této teorii brána jako hodnotnější, jelikož možnosti nemusejí vždy vyhovovat tomu, co hrdinky opravdu chtějí a tím je limitovat. Ačkoliv je „stezka“ Lirael i Sabriel ovlivněna jejich rolemi Abhorsenka, Abhorsenka nástupkyně a Pamětnice, stále mají ve svém příběhu dost příležitostí dělat to, co skutečně chtějí bez omezení. Jejich postavení je též posíleno, jelikož v souladu s výrokem

Roberty Seelinger Trites, úspěšně plní čím dál tím těžší úkoly, což posiluje jejich víru sami v sebe.

Závěrem tato diplomová práce představuje *Trilogii Abhorsenka* jako příklad podrývání patriarchálního pojetí společnosti a hodnotového systému. Tato trilogie poskytuje nejen progresivní vizi ženského hrdinství, ale neignoruje ani současný diskurs ohledně genderu. Nixovy myšlenky též nabízejí moderní a svěží náhled na gender pro dospívající čtenářky.

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Statement

During the preparation of this thesis, I used Grammarly and ChatGPT to refine coherence, readability, and academic style. After using these, I reviewed and edited the content as needed. I take full responsibility for the content of the thesis.