

UNIVERSITY OF PARDUBICE
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Women's Empowerment in YA Fantasy
Master's Thesis

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta filozofická
Akademický rok: 2022/2023

ZADÁNÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: **Bc. Kateřina Kuntová**
Osobní číslo: **H22278**
Studijní program: **N0231A090011 Anglická filologie**
Téma práce: **Women's Empowerment in YA Fantasy**
Zadávací katedra: **Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná diplomová práce se bude věnovat problematice silných ženských postav ve vybraných dílech současné literatury pro mládež (YA literature). V úvodu práce diplomantka nastíní teoretická a metodická východiska (feminism, queer studies, narratology, případně character analysis). Dále definuje základní pojmy, s nimiž bude pracovat (YA, fantasy, etc.) a uvede zvolená primární díla do tohoto kontextu. Jáderem práce bude analýza primárních textů, v nichž se zaměří na aspekty/ motivy jako krev, výcvik, boj, ne/přítomný rodič, mytologie, spiritualita, apod. Závěrem své analýzy shrne, díla porovná a zobecní způsoby, jimiž se ženské postavy stávají silnými.

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:

Rozsah grafických prací:

Forma zpracování diplomové práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Younger, Beth. *Learning Curves: Body Image and Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature*. Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2009.

Cipriani, Mária. Representations of Gender in Young Adult Novels, 1960–2010. PhD diss, Stony Brook University, 2014.

Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson. *Literature for Today's Young Adults*. Pearson Education, 2009.

Traci B. Baxley and Genyne Boston. *(In)Visible Presence: Feminist Counter-narratives of Young Adult Literature by Women of Color*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014.

Bittner, Robert. *Theorizing Trans Readership: Examining Ways of Reading Trans Themed Young Adult Literature*. PhD diss, Simon Fraser University, 2017.

Vedoucí diplomové práce:

doc. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D.

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Datum zadání diplomové práce: **14. února 2023**

Termín odevzdání diplomové práce: **14. února 2024**

doc. Mgr. Jiří Kubeš, Ph.D.
děkan

Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

V Pardubicích dne 14. února 2023

Prohlašuji:

Práci s názvem "Women's Empowerment in YA Fantasy" jsem vypracovala samostatně. Veškeré literární prameny a informace, které jsem v práci využila, jsou uvedeny v seznamu použité literatury.

Byla jsem seznámena s tím, že se na moji práci vztahují práva a povinnosti vyplývající ze zákona č. 121/2000 Sb., o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon), ve znění pozdějších předpisů, zejména se skutečností, že Univerzita Pardubice má právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití této práce jako školního díla podle § 60 odst. 1 autorského zákona, a s tím, že pokud dojde k užití této práce mnou nebo bude poskytnuta licence o užití jinému subjektu, je Univerzita Pardubice oprávněna ode mne požadovat přiměřený příspěvek na úhradu nákladů, které na vytvoření díla vynaložila, a to podle okolností až do jejich skutečné výše.

Beru na vědomí, že v souladu s § 47b zákona č. 111/1998 Sb., o vysokých školách a o změně a doplnění dalších zákonů (zákon o vysokých školách), ve znění pozdějších předpisů, a směrnicí Univerzity Pardubice č. 7/2019 Pravidla pro odevzdávání, zveřejňování a formální úpravu závěrečných prací, ve znění pozdějších dodatků, bude práce zveřejněna prostřednictvím Digitální knihovny Univerzity Pardubice.

V Pardubicích dne 1. 3. 2025

Kateřina Kuntová

Annotation

This thesis analyzes the empowering nature of women in contemporary young adult high fantasy novels. The theoretical part defines the genre and introduces different points of view on the topic as well as offering its own definition. Furthermore, it deals with women's role in the world in the terms of showing their emotions as a reaction to injustice, stereotypes, as well as the representation of queer people. The larger part of the paper deals with four novels and analyzes aspects of these novels that are used to empower the main characters. First, it focuses on secondary worlds and the circumstances heroines deal with. In the last section, characters themselves are described along with their powers, qualities, imperfections and empowering nature.

Key Words

young adult fantasy, feminism, high fantasy, representation.

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce analyzuje moc a sílu žen v young adult vysokých fantaziích. Teoretická část definuje tento žánr a představuje různé přístupy i názory odborníků a nabízí vlastní definici, která byla použita v analýze. Dále se zaměřuje na roli žen ve světě se zaměřením na jejich reakce na nespravedlnost, stereotypy a reprezentaci queer lidí. Větší část práce se soustředí na čtyři knihy a analyzuje aspekty, které dodávají hlavním postavám kontrolu nad jejich vlastním životem. Poslední část této práce se zaměřuje na samotné postavy a jejich schopnosti, nedokonalosti a moc.

Klíčová slova

young adult fantasy, feminismus, vysoká fantasy, reprezentace.

Trigger warnings

violence, faith manipulation/religious oppression, queerphobia, drug addiction, emotional child abuse from mother

brief mentions: sexual and physical abuse, domestic abuse, death of a loved one, fatphobia

TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction	7
1. Young Adult Fantasy	10
2. Women's World	21
3. World-building	30
4. Women's Empowerment	46
Conclusion	66
Resumé	70
Bibliography	73

Introduction

Literature's influence on young minds is often undervalued and underrated. This paper aims to convey its importance by highlighting different tools authors use to empower their stories. Although all fiction has its impact on the world, this thesis focuses solely on young adult high fantasy and uses its characteristic elements to display the value of this genre in regards to representation in fiction. Books chosen for this analysis are *Throne of Glass*, *The Gilded Ones*, *The Final Strife*, and *Beyond the Black Door*.

Genres are constantly evolving as new ones emerge and old ones merge, creating unique mix of elements which ensures that literature can be experimented with and prevents repetitiveness. In the first chapter, young adult high fantasy genre is introduced with its themes, techniques, settings, and overall originality that is characteristic of this genre and the way it can be used to send a message to its readers. Firstly, it discusses fantasy itself and its limitlessness. With the aid of Tzvetan Todorov's theory, different types of approaches to fantasy are introduced. Secondly, otherworlds—also called secondary worlds—are explained. Secondary worlds are one of the key points that separate high fantasy from low fantasy; what is more, they play significant role in political subplots in the books chosen for this paper. Undoubtedly, there is a need for the analysis of young adult category as well since it is a genre which does not have a clear definition at this point in time. Part of the first chapter is dedicated to various points of view and different opinions on age range, explicitness, and themes. Young adult high fantasy is a genre that has been present for decades, nevertheless, it has shifted drastically which sparks a discussion about the nature of the genre.

Contrastingly, the second chapter focuses on the 'real world' as it discusses several aspects of the society. With women as the main focus, it briefly touches on the stereotypical views on the differences between women and men and continues to describe common gender expectations and stereotypes. As a result, the chapter continues with the phenomenon 'female rage' and examines anger as an emotion, its purpose, and how it responds to inequality. The topic is followed by the analysis of faith manipulation and how religion can be used as a tool of oppression, especially in young adults and its affect on women. It must be noted that it does not speak ill of religion but focuses on the ways manipulators use it to harm its believers and consequently non-believers who are part of the same society. Abuse of power is a topic discussed in relation to not only religion, but

also greed, politics, and law. As there are prominent political subplots in the chosen novels, rebellion and war are mentioned as well.

The last two chapters focus on the analysis of *Throne of Glass*, *Gilded Ones*, *The Final Strife*, and *Beyond the Black Door*. As previously mentioned, world-building and young adult high fantasy are inseparable; therefore, the third chapter is dedicated to this topic. It introduces the worlds that the main characters are set in and the way they are introduced. It dwells into the usage of maps as both illustrations and objects within the story. Once the stories are introduced, the analysis explores topics mentioned in the first theoretical chapter. As the characters are exposed to colonization and erasure of cultures and truths, the topic of female rage reoccurs and showcases how the emotion can be used in such situations. What is more, the dilemma of the privileged upper class side characters is presented as they are considering or even enacting rebellion against their parents and rulers of the otherworlds. Overall, it considers the usage of secondary worlds as a critique of society and its injustice while providing support and understanding.

The last part of "Women's Empowerment in YA Fantasy" focuses on the characters and their empowerment. It examines different elements the authors used to give power to their characters and represent those who do not have their voices heard. Character's personality is crucial for their actions against patriarchy and abuse of power; therefore, self-esteem, anger, and determination are closely analyzed as well. Most of the main characters start lonely and abused, although each in a different way. Abuse of power is apparent in these novels; therefore, the notion of not only politics and privilege is questioned, but also religious oppression and manipulation. Blind obedience and brainwashing—of not only the society as a whole, but the main characters as well—is showed in relation to the injustice and violence towards women. As the stories continue, the reader follows the characters on different paths towards empowerment which are recorded in this chapter. Nonetheless, it also mentions the positive side of being a woman thanks to friendships with mutual support and representation. Furthermore, it portrays queer characters and their place in literature.

In conclusion, the aim of this paper is to present how settings, characters' personalities and skills, and relationships can empower characters in young adult high fantasy novels. It focuses on aspects of this genre and their unique ability to not only present political ideologies and highlight injustice in this world, but also to offer representation of those whose voices have been silenced and censored. Empowerment means that people have control over their lives. These novels give their women the power to influence their destiny and achieve their goals by giving them the ability to

wield swords and magic, friendships, confidence, and hard-working determination. Literature has been shaping young minds for generations, it is the authors and readers responsibility to make sure they are supporting representation, self-love, education, and empowerment.

1. Young Adult Fantasy

Even though genres tend to have one general definition, it cannot be denied that throughout the years the borders have blurred, causing genres to blend into one another to the point where it is difficult to easily summarize their characteristics. Undoubtedly, young adult fantasy is the perfect example. Between stories that do not contain any supernatural elements but are set in secondary worlds and teen fiction targeted at young adults, definitions started to vary and became more intricate.

According to Rosemary Jackson, compiling genres is done by comparing different works with similar structural characteristics based on similar unconscious desires.¹ Such desires may include coming-of-age advice, immersing into another reality, and extraordinary adventure. Although all stories have their own meanings, for a story to truly make an impact, the authors should present characters to which readers can relate and admire. The fantasy genre is not strictly bound to reality, which allows it to create a world of its own that is full of opportunities and desires; combined with young adult themes, it has a potential to become an empowering story that affects readers of all ages.

Pamela S. Gates, the author of *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults*, explains the extensive possibilities of fantasy books by describing them as "imaginative fiction that allows us to explore major life mysteries without being limited by size, time, or space."² They further add that they consider fantasy any story that contains elements that cannot exist in our world.³ This definition widens the genre's range and allows it to add, for example, a high fantasy book without any paranormal elements. Rosemary Jackson extends this idea and states that fantasy books achieve their limitlessness by refusing to submit to three-dimensionality, chronology, and rigid distinctions between animate and inanimate objects, self and other, and life and death.⁴ In other words, it consciously escapes mundane reality. In *Fantasy: Literature of Subversion*, Jackson also states that, in many cases, fantasies fulfill multiple readers' desires:

[Fantasy] characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss. In expressing desire, fantasy can operate in two ways: it can tell of, manifest, or show desire (expression in the sense of portrayal, representation, manifestation, linguistic utterance,

¹ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), 8.

² Pamela S. Gates, Susan B. Steffel, Francis J. Molson, *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults* (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 2.

³ Gates et al., *Fantasy Literature*, 8.

⁴ Jackson, *Literature of Subversion*, 1.

mention, description), or it can expel desire, when this desire is a disturbing element which threatens cultural order and continuity (expression in the sense of pressing out, squeezing, expulsion, getting rid of something by force). In many cases, fantastic literature fulfills both functions at once.⁵

Although John Clute and John Grant in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* agree that defining fantasy is a matter of constant critical speculation, they offer their own plausible definition, claiming that not every story with fantastic elements should be considered a work of fantasy.⁶ It is necessary to separate the terms 'fantastic' and 'fantasy' since the purpose of fantasy is to tell stories about the fantastic.⁷

Tzvetan Todorov, a Bulgarian-French structuralist literary critic, published *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, which presents his theory about the marvelous, fantastic, and uncanny. According to Todorov, stories can be divided into five categories: pure fantastic, pure marvelous, pure uncanny, fantastic uncanny, and fantastic marvelous. The 'pure marvelous' category mainly includes fairy tales, in which the characters are familiar with the fantastic and do not have any particular reaction to it, such as a surprise, which transfers to the reader as well.⁸ Authors also discouraged readers from participating in the story by minimizing the functional narrative whose narrator is omniscient and has absolute authority.⁹ On the other side stands 'pure uncanny' which maintains the laws of reality by explaining the supernatural phenomena at the end of the story. Since the book's opening, the author presents the fictional world as an equal to the real world through a knowing third-person voice. Rosemary Jackson suggests that this category should be called "mimetic" instead since the story imitates external reality.¹⁰ Lastly, 'pure fantastic' combines elements of both the marvelous and the uncanny (mimetic). Both the protagonist and the reader are confused by the fantastic since it does not comply with their apparent familiarity and security of their everyday world. Rosemary Jackson states that pure fantastic stories "assert that what they are telling is real—relying upon all the conventions of realistic fiction to do so—and then they proceed to break that assumption of realism by introducing what—within those terms—is manifested

⁵ Jackson, *Literature of Subversion*, 3–4.

⁶ Clute, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 337.

⁷ Clute, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 338.

⁸ Carmen Martín Santana, "The World of the Fantastic as a Literary Genre. The Trace of a Quest in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*" (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2006), 190. https://accedacris.ulpgc.es/bitstream/10553/3913/1/0234349_00002_0011.pdf.

⁹ Jackson, *Literature of Subversion*, 33.

¹⁰ Jackson, *Literature of Subversion*, 33–34.

unreal."¹¹ In contrast to pure uncanny, there is no explanation of the origins of supernatural or natural presences.¹²

The last two categories 'fantastic marvelous' and 'fantastic uncanny' are combinations of these pure elements. The former contains inexplicable effects, just like in pure fantastic; however, it borrows the aspects of marvelous as it, at the end, accepts the supernatural. Meanwhile, even though the latter provides a logical explanation for the miracles, they are so extraordinary, surprising, or unexpected that they provoke similar reactions to that of the fantastic.¹³ Todorov's theory can be applied to the low fantasy genre as well. Without a doubt, most young adult fantasies navigate towards the fantastic marvelous category since the supernatural is both given and accepted. Applying the uncanny effect would snap the reader back to reality and dismiss the fantastical adventures in the book. Even low fantasy, which operates in the 'real' world, does not explain the supernatural in such a logical way that would erase it. It could be argued, whether high fantasy fits into any of these categories. The otherworld is not tied to our familiar surroundings; therefore, it is not possible to surprise the reader by suddenly introducing a supernatural element. However, from point of view of the character who sees the otherworld as their reality, unnatural and unfamiliar occurrences may arise, and finding the explanation becomes the story's primary mission. In this case, both the uncanny and marvelous elements may occur. Fantastic uncanny within the high fantasy's otherworld would offer an explanation that would arise from the already present lore and, therefore, would not present any new fantastic elements. However, the subcategory fantastic marvelous within the high fantasy otherworld would introduce supernatural effects that would surprise even the characters within an already existing supernatural world since that is their 'reality'. It is possible to provide fantastic marvelous in high fantasy for the reader as well; however, it would demand that the reader is perfectly familiar with the otherworld and understands which things are out of the ordinary and cannot be explained through the otherworld's familiar.

Books that are set in a secondary world (otherworld) are labeled as high fantasy. Clute and Grant explain narratives' connection to the secondary world: "A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we receive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be

¹¹ Jackson, *Literature of Subversion*, 34.

¹² Jackson, *Literature of Subversion*, 32.

¹³ Santana, "Fantastic as a Literary Genre," 189.

possible in its terms."¹⁴ Writers achieve realistic second worlds by giving them their own history, mythology, places, and social structures. After all, as a modern literary genre, fantasy is related to the magical stories of myth, legend, fairy tale, and folklore from all around the world.¹⁵ Compared to low fantasy, which contains supernatural intrusions into the 'real world', authors of high fantasy face a greater task. Since for a work of high fantasy to be taken seriously, the author has to create a world that feels real, a world of logical internal cohesives, within the pages of the story.¹⁶

Even though otherworlds are non-existent places, it is common for them to be based on real cities or countries because, in order to be understood by the reader, the secondary world cannot be totally fantastic.¹⁷ Rosemary Jackson states that "fantasy re-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that 'real' world, which it seems to find so frustratingly finite."¹⁸ The main goal of fantasy books is to combine common aspects of life and abstract fantasies to create a story that enhances the reader's everyday life, making it both relatable and impossible. And yet, compared to genres like science fiction, gothic horror, or utopian fiction that depend on and utilize the conventions and context of realism, fantasy consistently incorporates a radical departure from the real.¹⁹ In their chapter on high fantasy, C. W. Sullivan explains the differences between these genres in further detail: "Unlike science fiction, however, which departs from contemporary consensus reality by extrapolating that reality into the near or far future where it has been significantly changed by discovery, invention, and development, high fantasy departs from contemporary consensus reality by creating a separate world in which the action takes place."²⁰ In other words, the unique element of fantasy is its departure from real life and entering an entirely imaginative one with a unique landscape, society, culture, and history. Even though fantasy books depend on reality, it still must be clear that their supernatural elements are impossible; otherwise, they would be classified as, previously mentioned, science fiction. However, infinite possibilities are not the only thing distinguishing fantasy as a genre. Fantasy books have their own plot themes, topics, and overall fantastic atmosphere. Since they tend to be centered around adventurous discoveries, they

¹⁴ Clute, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 338.

¹⁵ Richard Mathews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

¹⁶ C. W. Sullivan III, "High Fantasy," in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (Routledge, 2004), 437.

¹⁷ Sullivan, "High Fantasy," 437.

¹⁸ Jackson, *Literature of Subversion*, 20.

¹⁹ Mathews, *The Liberation of Imagination*, 4.

²⁰ Sullivan, "High Fantasy," 436.

are the perfect base for young adult themes that focus on discovering young people's lives. Young adult and fantasy create an innate combination that imprints on readers' minds and influences their lives.

Clute and Grant note that one of the most critical aspects of the fantasy genre is that readers are co-inhabiting the story along with the characters.²¹ Young adult fantasy is a genre that is highly immersive and helps its readers to escape reality. Pamela S. Gates writes that "it is no exaggeration to state that to be human is to fantasize."²² Yet, escapism has been wildly critiqued. Young adult fantasy literature used to be viewed as a short sidetrack instead of a sophisticated literary work. In the past, writers claimed that separating adolescents from reality is damaging and presents a "false impression of the world they live in."²³ However, according to Ursula Le Guin, adults fear fantasies because they might threaten the value system based on Puritan ethics and financial success.²⁴ As previously mentioned, fantasy otherworlds create a setting that is highly unpredictable when it comes to its morals, idealization, and values, which some may feel and be threatened by.

Needless to say, scholars who criticized supernatural worlds did not fully understand the importance of escapism and the lessons these books give their readers. There are many reasons for young adult literature to be taken seriously. Gates explains that fantasy or fantasizing helps young people to "foster skill in designing scenarios whereby individuals can pursue alternatives or try out new roles without actual risk."²⁵ Gates' argument can be applied to another anti-fantasy sentiment that warns against violence in young adult novels. These critics argue that fantasies for young adults contain too much hostility and battles. C. S. Lewis replies that sheltering children from such things "would indeed be to give children a false impression and feed them on escapism in the bad sense. [...] Since it is so likely that they will meet cruel enemies, let them at least have heard of brave knights and heroic courage."²⁶ These novels are not simply about battles and suffering but hope and empowerment of those who find themselves in such precarious situations.

²¹ Clute, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 338.

²² Gates et al., *Fantasy Literature*, 3.

²³ C. S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," in *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, ed. Sheila Egoff (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), 214.

²⁴ Meghan A Fitzgerald, "Young Adult Fantasy Fiction in Recent Years" (Master's paper, University of North Carolina, 2008), 7.

²⁵ Gates et al., *Fantasy Literature*, 3.

²⁶ Lewis, "Writing for Children," 216–217.

Escaping problems through fantasizing is healthy and productive and should be encouraged. Karen Coats pushes this point further and explains that young adult fantasies can be deeply therapeutic for young people who have, for example, lost their parents or a loved one. Reading stories about protagonists who are dealing with similar problems helps young readers create a mental defense against real-life occurrences.²⁷ Young adult fantasies offer comforting reassurance that no matter how bad the situation is, it is ultimately surmountable. Adult writers, whose audience is young people, have already experienced their teen years and can offer their wisdom and metaphors that teach young people how to navigate this vulnerable time in their lives.²⁸ Every adult went through teenagehood, whether calm or turbulent, and understands young adult stories on a different level than those who have not overcome this exhausting and puzzling time of a person's life.

Adolescence is a state that is fraught with angst, drama, and change, and the escape young adult high fantasy offers is invaluable.²⁹ During the teenage years, readers create their own identity, build their self-esteem, and find their purpose in this world, which is achieved through experimenting with their self-image. Karen Coats shares their personal experience with literature: "I realized how much of my own everyday speech, expressions, thought patterns, and values had been influenced by their words and ideologies. Young adult literature exerts a powerful influence over its readers at a particularly malleable time in their identity formation."³⁰ Markus Zusak, the author of *The Book Thief*, affirms Coats's arguments in his desire to write "the right book at the right time in that ridiculously raw period of a person's life."³¹ In contrast to realistic young adult genres, young adult fantasy is profoundly immersive and, especially high fantasy, allows readers to escape their own reality completely while still learning how to navigate it. Not only do fantasy books help young readers overcome their day-to-day situations, but, as John Timmerman writes, fantasy books provide us with hope:

Much of the appeal of modern fantasy resides in its optimism for humankind. The human spirit may be maligned, but it will endure. It may be tested, but it will be found worthy. In an age acutely pessimistic about the human race, fantasy remains adamant in its belief that man

²⁷ Shelby A. Wolf., Karen Coats, Patricia Enciso, Christine A. Jenkins, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 323.

²⁸ Wolf et al., *Handbook of Research*, 325.

²⁹ Wolf et al., *Handbook of Research*, 325.

³⁰ Wolf et al., *Handbook of Research*, 315.

³¹ Wolf et al., *Handbook of Research*, 315.

is worthy. There may be bad men among us—fantasy never denies this—but somehow, even the feeblest of creatures can individually confront them.³²

After all, fantasy is a literature of empowerment. According to Tamora Pierce, making the main characters struggle through various trials is what makes them good heroes. Such books show that even individuals who are not considered attractive or intelligent can be empowering. In books for young readers, even though they are more fantastic, heroes and heroines contend with their wishes as readers do in their normal lives. It is the normally perceived as unimportant young characters that are vital to these stories, which is another element that helps young readers to feel hopeful and seen.³³

Once fantasies are enriched by dystopian elements, the story clearly implies that there is a way to change our present reality.³⁴ The main character's hope and optimism "borrowed cup of courage, this acting out in fantasy, frees the readers from the fear of failing, the fear of powerlessness, the fear of fearfulness and shame."³⁵ Moreover, Jane Yolen notes that for young readers who have accepted various races and cultures in fantasy books, encountering such things in real life is more manageable. As Yolen writes: "A child who can love the oddities of a fantasy book cannot possibly be xenophobic as an adult."³⁶ Jackson agrees that fantasy hints towards which lies outside of dominant value system. They explain: "The fantastic traces the unsaid and unseen of culture: that which has been silences, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'."³⁷ Overall, representation in books is vital for a person's development and acceptance of the world and people in it.

As a genre, fantasy has appealed to and been nourished by young people since the nineteenth century; therefore, the popularity of young adult fantasy is not surprising. However, it was not until the 1960s that it turned fantasy into one of the most popular fiction genres.³⁸ According to WordsRated, a non-commercial international research data and analytics group, in 2022, the top 10 most sold fantasy books, 4 of them are categorized as young adult; what is more, 9

³² John G. Timmerman, *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular press, 1983), 101–102.

³³ Tamora Pierce, "Fantasy: Why Kids Read It, Why Kids Need It," *School Library Journal* vol. 39 (October 1993): 50–51.

³⁴ Mathews, *The Liberation of Imagination*, 5.

³⁵ Jane Yolen, *Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie and Folklore in the Literature of Childhood* (New York: Philomel Books, 1981), 79.

³⁶ Yolen, *Touch Magic*, 79.

³⁷ Jackson, *Literature of Subversion*, 4.

³⁸ Mathews, *The Liberation of Imagination*, 37.

of them are high fantasy.³⁹ Overall the young adult sector was the most popular out of fantasy books.⁴⁰ Even though these statistics are limited to 2022, they prove that alternative realities and young adulthood are still a popular mix for escaping a person's daily life.

Since young adult literature is traditionally defined by its audience and not authors, the question of readers' age arises. According to the National Library of Medicine (NLM), an official website of the United States government, young adulthood spans approximately ages 18 to 26.⁴¹ Therefore, young adult as a book category is not based on a person's stage of life and maturity. Educationalist Sarah Trimmer is believed to be the first person to determine young adulthood as a separate category and drew a line between the ages 14 and, at least, 21.⁴² The comparison of views from the early 19th and 21st centuries shows how much the view of stages of life has shifted and suggests that they constantly do. Although Trimmer's findings are over 200 years old, when it comes to YA as a literary genre, her estimate is closer than NLM. The American Library Association defines young adults as readers between 12 and 18 years old.⁴³ Therefore, the YA category is closer to teenagers rather than adults, which is why 'YA' and 'teen fiction' tend to be used interchangeably. Such differences between the ages of actual young adults and the literature's targeted audience may be the reason for inconsistent definitions of the genre.

Marie Pabelonio, an associate editor at Goodreads, points out that young adult literature is far more inclusive than it may seem and that a reader's age might not be a factor at all.⁴⁴ In their article "Can You Be 'Too Old' for YA? Our Expert Opinion: No," they quote Meghan Harrington and Emma Kantor who both agree that YA readership includes everyone who enjoys reading these books and that there is not one way to define a YA reader.⁴⁵ Their argument is supported by Goodreads' statistics that show that older readers represent a "healthy portion of the young adult audience, if not the majority."⁴⁶ One of the reasons why adults are drawn to fantasy books written

³⁹ "Fantasy Book Sales Statistics," WordsRated, October 2, 2022. <https://wordsrated.com/fantasy-book-sales-statistics>.

⁴⁰ "Fiction Books Sales Statistics," WordsRated, January 30, 2023. <https://wordsrated.com/fiction-books-sales/>.

⁴¹ "Investing in the Health and Well-Being of Young Adults," Books, National Library of Medicine, last modified 2015. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK284791/>.

⁴² Julia Eccleshare, "High Fantasy," in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 2004), 542.

⁴³ "Young adult," American Library Association, accessed August 4, 2023, <https://www.ala.org/ala/protocolsbucket/usersvcbucket/youngadulthoodbucket/youngadult.htm>.

⁴⁴ Marie Pabelonio, "Can You Be Too Old for YA? Our Expert Opinion: No," *Goodreads*, July 15, 2019. <https://www.goodreads.com/blog/show/1632-can-you-be-too-old-for-ya-our-expert-opinion-no>.

⁴⁵ Pabelonio, "Too Old for YA?"

⁴⁶ Pabelonio, "Too Old for YA?"

for teenagers is the vast range of topics, such as romance, drugs, gender issues, and bullying, which make these stories relatable personal experiences. Even though young adult fantasy may include serious topics, YA books tend to be more light-hearted and easier to read than books targeted at adults.

The age range is constantly changing since young adult is an abstract term without clearly set boundaries. One of the reasons is technological development. Karen Coats mentions these shifts in their book *Handbook on Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* and explains that creating believable teen characters does not require cell phones, brand names, and computers of contemporary young adult novels. However, it is the technological development that caused teens to be more mature than they were ten years ago, meaning that their sense of identity and relationships have changed.⁴⁷ Cell phones and other modern technology in fantasy books, especially high fantasy, could ruin the escapist element and make the story less believable. Characters in secondary worlds usually communicate through a messenger and wait days or weeks for a reply. Writing letters offers storyline possibilities, such as spy's coded language, delayed news, or even false messages. These tropes play a significant role in both contemporary high fantasies, such as *Bridge Kingdom*, and low fantasies, such as *Harry Potter*. Since many high fantasy stories are inspired by European late medieval period, contemporary means of communication would be inappropriate. What is more, fantasy authors are able to create new magical ways for their characters to communicate with each other.

One of the more recent elements in young adult fantasies is sexual content. Some scholars, such as Anita Tarr or Roberta Trites, state that such content should be one of the criteria that sets boundaries between preadolescent literature and young adult.⁴⁸ Even though sexual content can be seen in young adult fantasies, there is still a level of explicitness that needs to be set; otherwise, the book is classified as adult or new adult. Katee Robert, an author of adult high fantasy romance books, shared her views on this subject. In her opinion, it is not the age of the reader that establishes how the book should be categorized. Just because teenagers read books that are written for adults does not make them YA books. She explained the importance of classifying adult books correctly as a response to a group of people who put her books in the young adult section and called them "morally reprehensible." Her caption adds that "categories and genres and age [recommendations]

⁴⁷ Wolf et al., *Handbook of Research*, 323.

⁴⁸ Wolf et al., *Handbook of Research*, 322.

exist for a reason, to allow readers to make educated decisions about the content they consume."⁴⁹ Robert's video not only explains the importance of a genre and categorization but also the need to separate sex scenes in young adult and adult books.

Therefore, according to some writers, YA books should either be closed door (i.e., no on-page sexual scenes) or use the fade-to-black method (i.e., the reader is informed that characters are about to have sex, but the author cuts it before it gets too explicit). Nevertheless, a healthy and positive representation of intimate topics written by women has the potential to help coming-of-age readers learn about taboo topics in a safe way that is not centered around men's pleasure. That is especially true for high fantasy, where the author has the possibility to set their own societal views and taboos. In other words, they are able to showcase an inclusive, idealized version of today's world where no one is shamed for their desires.

However, the importance of representation does not necessarily distinguish a specific genre. Karen Coats states that in their own distinctions, sex does not play the main role. In their opinion, young adult novels "tend to be more interrogative of social constructions as well as critical of the notion of a responsive universe beyond what might be readily identified as a social institution." Nevertheless, all of these critics agree that the age of the protagonist is the primary distinction.⁵⁰ They also focus on characters and their role in literature:

As a body of literature, YA fiction is organized around the same sorts of tensions that preoccupy the physical bodies and emotional lives of its intended audience: tensions between growth and stasis, between an ideal world we can imagine and the one we really inhabit, between earnestness and irony, between ordinary bodies and monstrous ones, and, perhaps most importantly, between an impulsive individualism and a generative ethics of interconnectedness.⁵¹

This explains why young readers relate to these stories more than adult literature. Still, it is not a question of sacrificing richness in character portrayal that still has the depth of thematic significance.⁵²

In more recent years, according to Clute and Grant, many high fantasies focus on the main character's development, ignoring the existence of the otherworld. In high fantasy, it is the

⁴⁹ @katee_robert, "There's this take going around Twitter right now," *Instagram Reel*, December 28, 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CmsPkh2uiVV/>.

⁵⁰ Wolf et al., *Handbook of Research*, 322.

⁵¹ Wolf et al., *Handbook of Research*, 316.

⁵² Wolf et al., *Handbook of Research*, 317.

secondary world that is under the threat rather than the heroes themselves, and it is caused by an envious Dark Lord.⁵³ However, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* was published in 1997, and the genre has evolved since then. Examples of books that do not contain world-threatening Dark Lord can be seen in both high (e.g., *Throne of Glass*) and low (e.g., *Twilight*) fantasies.

For the purpose of this paper, young adult fantasy novels will be defined as books with main characters between the ages of 15 and 21. Main themes of these books are action and adventure, coming-of-age elements, self-discovery, political conflict between the good and evil—no matter which side the main characters stand on—and mystery. The books portray characters who are determined, hard workers, have inner conflicts, and are actively improving themselves physically, mentally, and spiritually. Lastly, the stories are set in secondary worlds that portray oppression, injustice, unique culture and society, and magic system.

⁵³ Clute, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 942.

2. Women's World

Without a doubt, the portrayal of women in literature has improved. They participate in male-dominated fields and roles, not only when it comes to work, but also around home responsibilities, such as repairing. However, the same cannot be said about the representation of men who "have not assumed significantly greater responsibility for caretaking or household work, which continue to be performed disproportionately by women."⁵⁴ While women are not prohibited from showing a certain amount of masculine traits, the portrayal of men rarely encourages femininity and equal division of labor.

The inequality of feminine and masculine traits also projects to the perception of emotions. In her book *Rage Becomes Her*, Soraya Chernaly stresses that "it is important to note how deeply female denigration can shape the lives and emotions of children and adults who do not conform to traditional gender expectations."⁵⁵ According to this author, these expectations are closely related to childhood bullying which stems from "variations of gender policing, in the form of homophobia, transphobia, and sexist harassment. Disciplining children who don't conform to binaries—gender or sexual—is harshest, for example, for boys who willingly choose femininity or for girls who renounce it to claim male prerogatives."⁵⁶ Although all genders are subjected to these gendered binaries in various degrees and contexts, anger is an emotion which targets women in a unique way.

Recently, "female rage" has become a frequently sought-after literary theme in all forms of entertainment, such as books, movies, and even music. Undoubtedly, women expressing anger without any restraints is empowering and satisfying for women whose rage has been censored and suppressed. Since childhood, women are told that crying is acceptable but yelling is unfeminine. Soraya Chernaly explains the reasoning behind women censoring their anger: "A cultivated feminine habit of prioritizing the needs of others and putting people at ease frequently puts us at a disadvantage. In particular, girls and women learn to put aside anger in order to de-escalate tension or conflict, lowering the temperature of encounters or situations that put us or others at risk."⁵⁷ The author states that women abandon their anger to protect themselves from male violence, in her

⁵⁴ Amanda B. Diekman, Sarah K Murnen, "Learning to Be Little Women and Little Men: The Inequitable Gender Equality of Nonsexist Children's Literature," *Sex Roles* 50 (March 2004): 374. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226670406>.

⁵⁵ Soraya Chernaly, "Nice to Meet You, Rage," in *Rage Becomes Her* (New York: Atria Books, 2018).

⁵⁶ Soraya Chernaly, "Mad Girls," in *Rage Becomes Her* (New York: Atria Books, 2018).

⁵⁷ Chernaly, "Nice to Meet You, Rage."

words "we can only trust, hope, and minimize risk."⁵⁸ Chapter "Nice to Meet You, Rage" reminds the reader that women are programmed to prevent conflicts not only from their care-taking point of view but also out of self-preservation. Chemaly states that

Anger and power are always entangled. Women are just as motivated by the desire for power as men; it's just that our cultural ideas about power don't associate it with femininity. If you are a girl or woman, chances are you have grown up unwittingly associating ideas about power with masculinity. Our primary roles as caretakers make the idea of power, associated as it often is with masculine behaviors like competition, conflicting. Power is, for example, associated in implicit bias studies with domination and not nurturing. Powerlessness is, on the other hand, implied in femininity.⁵⁹

Anger is seen as a negative emotion; however, it is "one of the most hopeful and forward thinking of all our emotions"⁶⁰ because it manifests our passion and keeps us invested in the world. Chemaly explains that "anger remains the emotion that is least acceptable for girls and women because it is the first line of defense against injustice"⁶¹ as it "warns us viscerally of violation, threat, and insult."⁶² Anne Witte Garland adds to this point by sharing her true story about forced relocation, noting that even though women went through the same emotions, as men, "women understood immediately. They were the first to recognize the injustice."⁶³ When it comes to discussing anger, injustice is a common topic. "Mad Girls" agrees with Garland and explains that believing that you have the right to use your anger with power reflects multiple, overlapping social entitlements."⁶⁴

Such power can be used in numerous ways. In *Use and Abuse of Power*, John A. Bargh and Jeannette Alvarez mention that all people have the basic need to be respected and are "strongly motivated to react against a system or treatment by individual members of that system when they perceive they are not being treated fairly."⁶⁵ Soraya Chemaly, disputes this argument by writing that under a certain treatment, people may not be aware of such needs. She states that "we are so busy teaching girls to be likeable that we often forget to teach them, as we do boys, that they should be

⁵⁸ Chemaly, "Nice to Meet You, Rage."

⁵⁹ Soraya Chemaly, "The Drip, Drip, Drip," in *Rage Becomes Her* (New York: Atria Books, 2018).

⁶⁰ Chemaly, "Nice to Meet You, Rage."

⁶¹ Chemaly, "Mad Girls."

⁶² Chemaly, "Nice to Meet You, Rage."

⁶³ Anne Witte Garland, *Women Activists: Challenging the Abuse of Power* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1988), 31.

⁶⁴ Chemaly, "Mad Girls."

⁶⁵ Annette Y. Lee-Chai, John A. Bargh, *The Use and Abuse of Power* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2001), 44.

respected."⁶⁶ Even though Chemaly focuses on the mistreatment of women, this sentiment can be applied to all people in powerless positions.

One of the means to suppress the need for respect and just treatment is through reducing the amount of information available to the target of influence. This is easily achieved in closed communities where people are only introduced to one culture and set of beliefs only. In his article "Fear Mongering Religious Manipulation on Children," Edwin Bii describes blind obedience which is asserted in a household where one is discouraged from thinking for themselves. He connects this phenomenon with religion and states that "with blind obedience, there is an unquestioning compliance without critical thinking or moral consideration. When you see your parent as the second God, you will have no option but to listen to them because you see them as the gateway to 'pleasing' the lord."⁶⁷ Similarly, Suyeon Ryu explains the connection between religion and young adults, claiming that for many children, including himself, "religion remains a tool of oppression, as many of our beliefs are rejected for being shameful. People often take advantage of children's emotion-driven natures to pressure them into joining a religious community."⁶⁸ Undoubtedly, children are the most susceptible to blind obedience since they have not developed emotional maturity which is needed for critical thinking. Such findings highlight the importance of young adult literature and its influence on young minds.

One of the outcomes of using religion as a manipulation tool has been the justification of social classes, especially in American societies. In his article "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," Karl Marx wrote that religion is "the opium of the people" and asserted that it is an illusionary happiness that blinds people against the pain and suffering they are enduring against the higher classes.⁶⁹ Being at the top of the social hierarchy, priests were feared by lower classes. They prevented people from confronting the injustices in the social system by administering punishments to those who rebelled. Suyeon Ryu mentions that many choose to believe that America has moved past this inequality, including religious freedom.⁷⁰ Many young

⁶⁶ Chemaly, "Nice to Meet You, Rage."

⁶⁷ Edwin Bii, "Spiritual Manipulation: When They Use Religion and Cultural Beliefs to Manipulate You," *Medium*, January 22, 2024.

⁶⁸ Suyeon Ryu, "Fear Mongering Religious Manipulation on Children," *The Spectator* issue 7, vol. 112 (December 10, 2021). <https://pdf.stuyspec.com/112/7.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, 7 & 10 (February 1844). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.

⁷⁰ Ryu, "Fear Mongering," 11.

adult fantasy writers remind us, however, that the lower classes and minorities continue being mistreated around the world. High fantasy has the capability of creating secondary worlds that showcase social systems which are either filled with justice, or highlight the injustice we experience in real life. All of the books in this paper deal with abuse of power, sometimes associated with with religion, and portray numerous ways a person can react to it.

It cannot be said that religion is inherently malevolent as it can be healing, create a community, and hope; however, it is a powerful tool if someone chooses to use it to manipulate, coerce, or even abuse its believers. Kathryn Echele explores the relationship between religion, politics, and conflict. She claims that "political violence often results when leaders manipulate religious messages and institutions to fit their own agenda."⁷¹ Furthermore, she explains that the similarities between religion and political ideology are noteworthy because they are both ordered around shared set of beliefs that motivate people to act and provide a sense of belonging. Since they are intimately related in this manner, leaders can manipulate religion as means of political end.⁷² The way religion and politics are structured is also comparable as they are both codified through institutions. In the past, religious teachers "were given leadership positions in government because the people already saw them as authority figures. Religious buildings came to serve a dual purpose of housing religious services and political meetings. [...] Thus, over time historical and social tradition contributed to the fusion of religion and politics."⁷³

According to research and field studies, power can be corrupting. For example, *The Use and Abuse of Power* speaks of 'nPower' which are values and actions of individuals high in need for power. The research proves that these people are primarily motivated by the potential of impacting others and for taking an advantage. Furthermore, men high in nPower "have been found to oppress and control female romantic partners to a greater degree than men lower in this motivation."⁷⁴ Such behavior could be linked to their low self-esteem as they are trying to elevate their feelings of superiority.⁷⁵ Jess Zimmerman explains that men fear women who resist them: "Men fear our chaotic rage, but not nearly as much as they fear our focused grievances about very real injustice.

⁷¹ Kathryn Echele, "Weaponization of Religion: The Manipulation of Religion in the Pursuit of Political Power in Yugoslavia and Syria (Senior Theses, Fordham University Fordham University, 2023), 12–13.

⁷² Kathryn Echele, "Weaponization of Religion: The Manipulation of Religion in the Pursuit of Political Power in Yugoslavia and Syria (Senior Theses, Fordham University Fordham University, 2023), 12–13.

⁷³ Echele, "Weaponization of Religion," 10.

⁷⁴ Annette Y. Lee-Chai, John A. Bargh, *The Use and Abuse of Power* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2001), 265.

⁷⁵ Lee-Chai, *Abuse of Power*, 201.

There is little more threatening to the social order than a woman who's angry. The only thing scarier is a woman who's angry about something. The only thing scarier than that is a woman who's right."⁷⁶ People high in power expect their targets to no longer control their own behavior and that they are the ones who dictate their purpose in life; however, if they are proven wrong, they are willing to use whatever tactics to assert their dominance, even if it leads to violence towards their loved ones. Nihal Jayawickrama claims that "corruption is a pervasive cancer which infests both the private and public sectors of society."⁷⁷ According to them, greed is not the only reason why powerholders resolve to corruption. They may be driven by poverty or inability to match their expenses to their legitimate incomes.⁷⁸ In the end, whether corruption is a result of greed, desperation or natural cause of power, does not erase the abuse being done on the lower classes and minorities.

Another outcome of abuse of power is stereotyping. People in power are portrayed as the norm and their social standing allows them to mistreat citizens who do not fit into their image. Susan Z. Fiske explains that "powerful groups that lack outcome dependency and are entitled to control the resources of others may be especially pernicious sources of bias. At the societal level, all groups stereotype each other, and indeed the groups on whom no one depends and whose resources society controls receive the worst stereotypes (incompetent and not warm)."⁷⁹ Stereotyping is a chain reaction which is engraved in many communities and groups. Abuse of power damages the ability of the state to reach its stated purpose.⁸⁰ For example, qualified people do not get promoted based on their race, gender, and religious beliefs, which hinders the organization as it lacks talented individuals which could offer valuable contributions.

Analyzing stereotyping through a feminist point of view, the prejudice against women is influenced by which sexist category they belong in. Susan T. Fiske identified four subtypes of women: traditional housewives, business and career women, lesbian/feminist/athletes, and sexy women. She explains that

Different kinds of prejudice turn against these different types, and the primary marker is hostility toward nontraditional women and paternalistic benevolence toward traditional women. Both hostile and benevolent sexism explicitly incorporate power dynamics [...]. Hostile sexism entails dominating power relations, competition across gender roles, and tension over heterosexual control—in each of these domains, nontraditional women challenging mens societal and cultural

⁷⁶ Jess Zimmerman, "Social Justice Warriors," in *Women and Other Monsters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021).

⁷⁷ Lee-Chai, *Abuse of Power*, 281.

⁷⁸ Lee-Chai, *Abuse of Power*, 281.

⁷⁹ Lee-Chai, *Abuse of Power*, 191.

⁸⁰ Lee-Chai, *Abuse of Power*, 43.

power. Benevolent sexism entails paternalistic power relations, cooperation around complementary gender roles, and idealized heterosexual intimacy. Moreover, hostile sexism predicts the ascription of negative traits, and benevolent sexism predicts the ascription of positive traits to women. Sexism directed toward men is highly correlated with sexism directed toward women [...], suggesting that both represent ideological stances regarding the societal roles of men and women as reflected in the structure of interpersonal relationships.⁸¹

Sexism is present in both women and men's lives and affects not only their personal lives, but the flow of the whole society and its intended purpose. Nevertheless, the source of abuse of power is not solely in a form of personal discrimination. Kathryn Echele explains that rational-legal legitimacy stems from enacted laws and legal orders. The result is that obedience is now owed to a system of rules and regulations. Those who mastered the rules of the system are in charge.⁸² Without a doubt, law-makers have the most power to use for their personal gain as it is supported legally and puts citizens into a position where they either follow the rules or are deemed rebels and criminals.

Jess Zimmerman explains women's role in injustice set in law. She says that women have been disconnected from their anger as they are told it is not natural or attractive, as a result they repress it to accommodate men. However, she defends it by writing that "[women's] anger comes from injustice, and has justice as its aim. When its presence is the most painful—when we know the law will not protect us, when each indignity is more wounding than the last, when we are almost overwhelmed with it—that is when we need it most."⁸³ Law is meant to protect people and keep order in society. Although that is true at its core, rules for justice are still set by the privileged and reflect their ideologies.

John A. Bargh and Jeannette Alvarez warn that once people perceive the relationship between the powerful and powerless unjust, which happens when the powerholders abuse their power to attain their selfish goals, people will seize the opportunity to engage in resistance, create a movement or even start a revolution that overthrows the powerholders in a violent manner.⁸⁴ One of the power techniques that white patriarchy uses to prevent such things from happening is censoring literature written by minorities. Literature classes consist mostly of white male authors whose works are praised as more worthy of mentioning, while the voices of women, people of color, and queer

⁸¹ Lee-Chai, *Abuse of Power*, 190.

⁸² Echele, "Weaponization of Religion," 7.

⁸³ Zimmerman, "Social Justice Warriors."

⁸⁴ Lee-Chai, *Abuse of Power*, 44.

authors are often available as elective classes only. It cannot be said that women are not included in the curriculum at all; however, especially in lower levels of education, they are not as discussed.

Lois Tyson agrees that there is a "long-standing silence of many literary critics who have minimized or ignored the sexual identities of lesbian and gay writers and distorted or overlooked the representations of gay and lesbian characters in literary works."⁸⁵ Nevertheless, in 1990, Bonnie Zimmerman recorded an increasing number of queer literature and highlighted their importance in fiction:

I will argue, it has helped shape a lesbian consciousness, community, and culture from the movements beginning. Fiction is a particularly useful medium through which to shape a new lesbian consciousness, for fiction, of all literary forms, makes the most complex and detailed use of historical events and social discourse. By incorporating many interacting voices and points of view, novelists give the appearance of reality to a variety of imaginary worlds. Novels can show us as we were, as we are, and as we would like to be. This is a potent combination for a group whose very existence has been either suppressed or distorted. Lesbian novelists, then, have taken on the project of writing us into our own version of reality.⁸⁶

In the recent years, queer women have been visible in the mainstream media and literature, however, it is largely directed by straight people, notably men. Such representation can be harmful for various reasons, one of which being young women who are discovering their sexuality.

Jess Zimmerman shares her unpleasant experience in regards of misrepresentation: "Maybe most importantly, the idea of being attracted to women feels somehow tainted, a compromised scientific sample. How can I tell what I feel about women when every single aspect of my culture, from advertising to ancient Greek myth, is telling me I want to fuck them?"⁸⁷ Exploring ones sexuality is a journey of soul, mind, and body and should not be underestimated. Current empowerment might assist queer people 'coming out of the closet' and disregard denial, suppression as they free themselves from internalized homophobia. The word homophobia refers to pathological dread of same-sex love, however, Lois Tyson's analysis expands it to the institutionalized discrimination. Furthermore, she adds that patriarchy has same-sex love discrimination build into culture's laws and customs.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 318.

⁸⁶ Bonnie Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 2.

⁸⁷ Jess Zimmerman, "Singing for Bread," in *Women and Other Monsters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021).

⁸⁸ Tyson, *Critical Theory*, 320.

The anti-queer propaganda that comes from the outside and promotes heterosexual love as the only kind of normal, healthy love there is well-known. However, its consequences are not only reflected in laws and overall injustice, but also as internalized homophobia. As societies preach that queer people are sick, dangerous, and should be considered abnormal, queer people may develop self-hatred and suppress their feelings and disregard their happiness and freedom. The topic of gender and sexuality is mentioned multiple times in the chosen works, including internalized homophobia, as the authors found the importance of telling stories through the lens of sapphic women as these books are not only for entertainment but also education and inspiration.

Representation is one of the key elements of empowering young adult high fantasy novels. Such diversity can be accomplished through not only queer characters, but also people of color, people with disabilities, different backgrounds, cultures, and religions. All four chosen books offer a wide range of characters that celebrate minorities and highlight their importance and the way they are treated in society. Since high fantasy is set in an imaginary world, the authors get the chance to create their own societal values; their empires can be either inclusive or highly homophobic, racist, and patriarchal. Building a radically exclusive world allows for putting inequality in the spotlight, and lets the message be clear and obvious. Saara El-Arifi shares why fantasy is the best genre for empowering stories: "The possibilities of the fantasy genre are what make me love it so much. I chose to tackle and parallel certain themes like class structure, racism, and colourism, and yet at the same time, I was able to create a queernormative world that is accepting of all genders and sexualities. There is no other genre that could give me the flexibility to create and contour a world in this way."⁸⁹ However, that might only be a point of view from a Western-countries since there are many cultures in which such practices happen daily. *The Gilded Ones* are based on the author's experience and is the perfect example of this approach.

Namina Forna, the author of *The Gilded Ones*, is a Sierra Leonean-American author of young adult fiction who based her series on her childhood in West Africa. In interviews, Forna talks about her motivation for writing a feminist narrative. In her monologue for Pequot Library, she shares her experience with growing up in West Africa and its obsession with purity. She stated that she wanted her book to explain in easy and clear terms what it means to live in a patriarchy.⁹⁰ The

⁸⁹ "Author Interview: Saara El-Arifi (The Final Strife, The Battle Drum)," Author Interviews, The Fantasy Review, accessed January 14, 2024. <https://thefantasyreviews.com/2023/05/18/author-interview-saara-el-arifi-the-final-strife-the-battle-drum/>.

⁹⁰ Pequot Library, "Meet the Author: Namina Forna," posted February 3, 2022, YouTube video, 59:19, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=762psuhbA5U>.

community that she grew up in still supported practices such as FGM, which not only puts young women's lives in mortal danger but also determines their value in society. Forna shares her gratitude that her parents forbade their relatives to involve her in such customs and moved to America. However, she was disappointed after she found out that racism and inequality are just as strong, even if better hidden, as in Africa. In her interview on Tamron Hall Show, she summarized the need for feminist young adult fantasy books: "I wanna write a book that explains [...] what it means to live in a patriarchy, what are the systems that support it, and [...] I thought it was really important for [...] teenagers specifically to see and to understand because I always had questions growing up, and there weren't really any answers for me, and so I wanted to sort of make it easier for the next."⁹¹ Her books are dedicated to young women who are growing up in similar conditions and show other readers what some women's lives look like.

In conclusion, representation in literature serves to unite people in their existence and experience. People conceive 'normal' to be what they see the most often; therefore, the more we expose ourselves to the suppressed and censored, the more we accept it as the usual. Once the under-represented start consuming literature that includes characters who think, love, or look like them, they feel less alone and accepted. Female rage is a direct reaction to the oppressive patriarchy and starts appearing in literature, especially young adult fantasy, more frequently, encouraging women to use their power and fight for their rightful place in this world.

⁹¹ Tamron Hall Show, "Author Namina Forna Escaped a War as a Child & Later Became a Best-Selling Author," posted May 27, 2022, 5:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=re-AaAhvxvM>.

3. World-building

Constructing a universe that is based on pure imagination is a crucial element of every young adult high fantasy book. Although authors of all genres face the challenge of altering the world for practicality, high fantasy writers base their books on a non-existent setting that, although may be inspired by a real place, is entirely imaginary. However, one must not forget that the unreal settings do not have less value simply because they do not exist. Eric S. Rabkin shares his opinion on this topic as he writes: "It is important that we recognize that the fantastic comes not from mere violation of 'the real world,' but from offering an alternative to the real world."⁹² High fantasy is a world that cannot be comprehended without using one's imagination for the entirety of the story which is what makes it highly immersive and beneficial for your physical and mental health. This chapter not only comments on the authors' use of world-building but also introduces the universes for the following chapter.

Even though sketching a high fantasy setting is a challenging task, it is not the main obstacle. Introducing the world and consistency is what determines whether the book's world-building is successful or not. Secondary worlds do not necessarily need to be extensive. The reason for creating them is what determines their vastness. Some authors follow the standards of the real world and only create new cities which allows them to introduce paranormal phenomena without being tied to the historical and cultural background of already existing places. However, there are books ruled by unique magic systems and political subplots that need to be built in an entirely unique universe from the very beginning. This chapter will examine the world-building in chosen young adult high fantasy books including their intention and the techniques the authors used.

Even though the fantasy worlds are introduced at the beginning of all chosen works, the main characters in *Throne of Glass* and *The Gilded Ones* learn the most important information that leads them to discover not only their true heritage but also the lies they have been told about the world they live in, throughout the story. Such lies were manufactured by the leaders of kingdoms to manipulate the society and ensure their reign. Since the truth was kept by a small or a secret group, the characters could have not found the answers themselves without help from a person of power who wishes to rebel against their class.

⁹² Eric S. Rabkin, *Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales, and Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 19.

All books chosen introduce a side character that fulfills this role of a helper. With help from these characters, the main character is tasked with learning how to act according to these new laws and discrediting world-building in the first half of the story. Changing the laws of the high fantasy otherworld as the story progresses makes the previous world-building untrustworthy and forces the reader to be cautious about their expectations and speculations. This technique lessens the probability of the story being predictable. As the reader is not familiar with the world beyond what has already been revealed to them by the author, they are unable to anticipate the events that follow. Releasing information throughout the story is also a valuable instrument for introducing a large world since explaining every aspect of it at once would confuse the reader.

Namina Forna, the author of *The Gilded Ones*, introduced a character that lives in a conservative religious village that oppresses and abuses women. Only once it is revealed that the main character, Dekka of Irfut, has gold blood of an alaki, a near-immortal 'monster' with supernatural speed and strength, she is able to leave the village and start embracing her true heritage. Although the author used subtle foreshadowing to suggest the nature of the final plot twist, Namina Forna hid the truth behind a deadly monster called Deathshriek. Even though the story hints at a hidden connection between Dekka and the Deathshrieks, it does not reveal its true nature until the third act, where the author explains the creation of these creatures and their history. Even though the reveal slowly builds up and gives the reader more clues about who Deathshrieks are, the truth is hidden under unshared knowledge that even if they have guessed that Deathshrieks are actually reborn alaki, Forna still surprises the readers with a plot twist that could not have been predicted.

From a feminist perspective, this plot twist bears a clear message. The powerholders lied to alaki—who are all women—and trained them to kill Deathshrieks who are actually their sisters. They manipulated women to kill each other, doing the work for them. Nevertheless, once the truth is revealed, the women reunite and work together to free the Gilded Ones. The author has utter control over the reader's knowledge of the world-building and can manipulate the story accordingly. There are many aspects of high fantasy universes that can be used for such purposes as they are not based on shared knowledge. Constructing a new paranormal monster is merely one of the options that are used in *The Gilded Ones*; however, it is prominent throughout the whole trilogy as more supernatural entities are introduced to surprise the reader.

Contrastively, in *Throne of Glass*, Sarah J. Maas mentions the key magical phenomena at the beginning of the book during world-building, but proclaims it extinct. Therefore, the main character

Celaena Sardothien, Adarlan's Assassin, does not provide essential information about this aspect of the universe as she finds it insignificant. What is more, during her journey to discover the truth, she dismisses many clues because she assumes that magic is gone. However, rejecting magic as a possible solution leads her to inspect other resources and reveal many possible outcomes and, eventually, crucial evidence to the Castle of Glass's murder mystery. This way of story-telling not only eases the reader into the book's lore but also makes the characters seem smart and resourceful, proving that the character deserves to be admired and respected. Since *Throne of Glass* is a massive universe with its own map, supernatural beings, society, and magic system, Maas grasped the possibility of turning her story into a series. The book mentions pieces of information about multiple places and magical beings without being too specific; therefore, there is groundwork for the following books without overwhelming the debut.

Describing every city and its scale would exhaust the plot and add unnecessary exposition; therefore, writers of high fantasies tend to add a map at the beginning of the book to help the reader visualize the kingdom and refer to it during reading. Phillip C. Muehrcke and Juliana O. Muehrcke explain that "writers may be especially attracted to maps because they are well acquainted with the limitations of written communication dealing with forms, processes, and relationships in the space-time continuum. Written language is linear. It has a beginning and an end and between the two flows predictably, according to the role of grammar."⁹³ They characterize fictional maps mainly as controlled abstraction when they write that maps "involve far less transcript from reality and less formatting than idioms do, primarily because the position of maps on the gradient between reality and abstraction is closer to reality. Maps appeal in a natural and logical way to our visual sense and to our need for conceptualization."⁹⁴ Providing an illustrated map allows the reader to imagine the world in greater detail than if it were described by words and to reference it throughout reading.

Overall, it not only organizes the book but also leaves room for the reader to express their own creativity and imagine the kingdoms as a whole instead of pieces of a puzzle. Author Saara El-Arifi shared that as a reader she likes to immerse herself "in the map at the beginning to get a sense of atmosphere and place names."⁹⁵ She notes that as a reader she refers "back to maps a lot while

⁹³ Phillip C. Muehrcke and Juliana O. Muehrcke, "Maps in Literature," *Geographical Review* 64, no. 3 (July 1974): 318. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/213556>.

⁹⁴ Muehrcke, "Maps," 319.

⁹⁵ Tacye, "Saara El-Arifi Chats Worldbuilding Behind The Final Strife," Interviews, *United by Pop*, last modified August 9, 2022, <https://www.unitedbypop.com/young-adult-books/interviews-young-adult-books/saara-el-the-final-strife/>.

reading."⁹⁶ Moreover, as an author, she is experienced in world-building and designing a map as a writer. In an interview, she shared her experience with writing *The Final Strife*: "The first draft was chaos; locations were pretty much a stab in the dark, but as I started to finesse the worldbuilding, I began to pin positions down. It was during draft two or three that I actually put pen to paper and drew out the whole scope of the world with specifics like transport, main exports, harbours and populations. Readers only see the tip of the iceberg of the map that I refer to while writing."⁹⁷ Writers make their personal notes while writing and only decide which part of it is important for the readers which gives them extra control over the story and readers alike. For example, at the end of *The Final Strife* is a multiple-page long glossary of people, places, and other terms, which aids both the author and the readers. Glossaries and maps tend to co-occur in not only YA fantasies but also adult novels, such as *Night of Death and Flowers* and *Ninth House*.

Moreover, authors' fascination with maps translates into their characters. In *The Final Strife*, Saara El-Arifi used the visual representation of the empire not only for convenience but also as an object crucial to the plot. The Empire has very distinctive social classes that are characterized by the color of people's blood; the author explains their significance at the very beginning of the book:

A Duster is built for labor. Their submissive nature, which I believe to be an element of their blue blood, means they are best suited for the plantation fields. Ghostings, stripped as they are of communication, make the best servants, their translucent blood a clear indicator of adaptability, although a Duster may be substituted if needs must, given the rarity of Ghostings. Embers continue to be the superior race, proving without a doubt that those with red blood are born to lead.⁹⁸

The main character is of red blood; however, as a child, she was kidnapped by rebellious Duster group Sandstorm who trained Ember children to become the next rulers, the Wardens, overthrowing the Embers. However, Sandstorm was discovered and its members massacred, leaving Sylah alone with guilt that only drugs would diminish. The reader meets the main character at her lowest, stealing to be able to afford her next Joba seeds so she could get high.

The map the main character, Sylah steals in an abandoned building is one of the most important elements in the story, as it proves that the authorities were lying about the size of the empire. When Sylah first encounters the object, she deems it inaccurate and considers painting over the part of the map that she finds faulty, hoping to sell it. Just like Celaena she does not distrust

⁹⁶ Tacye, "Saara El-Arifi."

⁹⁷ Tacye, "Saara El-Arifi."

⁹⁸ El-Arifi, *Strife*.

what she has been taught and dismisses its secrets. These characters follow their leaders with blind obedience. Although they are not as brainwashed as other characters in these novels, they have been taught not to think outside of what they have been told and never question the powerholders. Blind obedience controls women's lives and takes power from them as they are weakened by lies and do not seek their empowering nature. It is not until Sylah's love interest and future Warden Anoor finds it in her bag and convinces the unwilling Sylah to take it seriously that they start searching for the Unknown the map hides. This is an example of the previously mentioned helper who has better means than the main character, such as having access to restricted parts of the castle, and wants to uncover their peers' lies. In this instance, it is women's friendship and mutual support that breaks blind obedience. This is a reoccurring instance in other novels as well and is discussed in chapter four.

Similarly, *The Gilded Ones'* map portrays an area in the corner of the map which is labeled as Unknown Lands. However, in the story, the map of Otera is only mentioned briefly as it is carved into the library's floor and used for war strategies. It is not an important object within the story, only an illustration at the beginning of the book to aid the reader in navigating the high fantasy. However, it indicates that later in the Deathless series Dekka might discover what the black spots on the map hide. This shows that gaps in world-building can be made by the author intentionally to create a cohesive series; for example, Unknown Lands are not revealed until *The Eternal Ones*, the third and last book in the series.

Even though the map of the kingdom does not play any role in Celaena's story either, she mentions her fascination with it multiple times: "Maps had always interested her; there was something bewitching in knowing one's precise location in relation to others on the earth."⁹⁹ Similarly to El-Arif, Maas takes advantage of her illustration and does not write a lengthy description of Erilea. She only allows the main character to trace her finger over the object and name various cities to show that she is acquainted with these places and they might eventually be of significance.

Celaena is not the only character interested in maps, however. *Beyond the Black Door* is the only book in this paper that does not include a map illustration as the author did not find it important for a standalone. Nevertheless, the main character is fascinated with maps, calling them

⁹⁹ Sarah J. Maas, *Throne of Glass* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 226.

"a type of magic" capable of transporting her "somewhere else, even if it was only to other places in Eopia."¹⁰⁰ She also traces her finger alongside the mountains and describes various forests and beaches, thinking that they made her "feel small with how little [she] knew of them and breathless with the potential they held."¹⁰¹ In contrast to the three previously mentioned books, Kamai describes the edges of her map as The known world. Although the romantic aspect is left open-ended, in comparison to the other authors, A. M. Strickland tries to answer vital questions since the story is at its end.

Similarly to *Throne of Glass*, *The Gilded Ones* and *The Final Strife* mention cities other than the main capital they reside in but do not provide any specific information other than their culture and beliefs. These books suggest that the sequel will be about different parts of the land where the characters are either escaping to or conquering; therefore, mentioning these places in the first book makes the transition between sequels more smooth and natural. At the end of *The Gilded Ones*, along with the four Goddesses, Deka shares their plan of restoring matriarchy and teases the plot of the second book as she says: "Otera may be vast, but we intend to take back every last inch of it. It's time to reclaim the One Kingdom and make it ours again."¹⁰² Although the result of their conquer is in sequels, it is evident that awakening the Goddesses was the most important deed. The main character is celebrated as they are seen as a skilled warrior and an irreplaceable key to the story's success giving her the power an empowered main character needs.

On the contrary to Deka, Sylah's plan of overthrowing Wardens and the entire upper class was unsuccessful. At the end of the book, she escapes Sandstorm by killing their leader and disappears into the desert. Saara El-Arifi does not hint at what the second book is going to be about, as the main character is not aware of other kingdoms existing until the end of the book. Moreover, she is separated from other escapees and there is no guarantee that she will reunite with people she can trust. This book has an example of a cliff-hanger, what is more, it may be considered an unhappy ending. In many ways, *The Final Strife*, is on the verge between young adult and adult and this ending gives a point to the latter. The other books in this paper have a happy-ending—although this point could be argued in Celaena's case—making this the only work that might leave the reader wounded and eager to continue the series in search of happiness.

¹⁰⁰ AdriAnne Strickland, *Beyond the Black Door* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Group, 2019), 18.

¹⁰¹ Strickland, *Black Door*, 18.

¹⁰² Namina Forna, *The Gilded Ones* (London: Usborne Publishings, 2021), 412.

Meanwhile, the main characters in *Beyond the Black Door* and *Throne of Glass* plan on briefly visiting other cities but still permanently live in the capital. Kamai leaves the main city to spread the word about the Soulwalkers Guild, which she founded after her regicide: "Lenara had strongly hinted that it would be good for me to leave the city for a while, royal pardon aside, to let the murmurs die down. At least I would get to explore the land I had so long dreamed of seeing."¹⁰³ These moments lead back to the theory on maps in literature. As previously mentioned, this book does not include an illustration at the beginning of the book; therefore, the reader cannot visualize where she will be traveling. While Kamai is excited about discovering new places in Eopia, Celaena is worried about where she will be sent and hesitant about her first job. Winning the tournament was only the first step to gaining her freedom as she moved from a slave camp to the castle of her enemy. Her freedom has been stripped from her; therefore, this character is trying to maintain her power in areas she can control, such as her assassin skills and her confidence, until she takes the control again. As a king's assassin, she must eliminate every target to gain her freedom and has no say in who it is. Maas purposely does not reveal where that might be and ends the book with the final line: "Tell me tomorrow,"¹⁰⁴ hoping that the reader will be tempted to buy the next book in the *Throne of Glass* series, *The Crown of Midnight*.

Nevertheless, the four novels are connected by their urban setting. They are set in the capital, where the main character lives or is forced to move to. *Beyond the Black Door* and *Throne of Glass* are both kingdoms; however, the complex world of *Throne of Glass* includes multiple kingdoms and continents. Similarly, *The Gilded Ones* only have one empire, while *The Final Strife's* Warden's Empire has neighbors overseas. Many young adult high fantasy novels have medieval settings and these chosen works are no different. All traveling is done on horses, messages are written in letters, and all labor is done by hand. Abandoning technology encourages escapism and severs reality from fiction.

The complexity of the world is closely associated with the length of the series. As a standalone, *Beyond the Black Door* works with only two cities. The reader is first introduced to Kamai Nuala's childhood home, a villa in the countryside, where she lives freely without any societal expectations while her parents deal with their clients in secret. Kamai is a soulwalker, meaning that she can visit other people's souls, which are illustrated as interiors and reflect the

¹⁰³ Strickland, *Black Door*, 390.

¹⁰⁴ Maas, *Throne*, 403.

owners. Since soulwalkers are strictly illegal, her mother built a safe space for them to practice their powers. Nevertheless, her mother is assassinated, and Kamai escapes the burning house to find her estranged father. The main character does not encounter strict rules and expectations until she moves into the main city, Shalain. In this way, Kamai has the exact opposite experience from Deka who encountered freedom once abandoning her small village. At first, however, Kamai is delighted and bewildered as the center of the kingdom and home to the king, Shalain has street markets, Temple, and prestigious neighborhoods which she has not seen before.

Apart from providing geographical information, high fantasy maps can support political subplots of the story. All the chosen works contain the theme of occupation, most significantly in *Throne of Glass*. The main character grew up in one of the colonized areas, and later, she meets Princess Nehemia, whose country is currently under attack. Celaena's childhood memories emerge whenever someone mentions Terrasen. She reveals that when she was eight years old, she woke up covered in her parents' blood and sought revenge for all the things that had been lost during the king's colonization, such as ancient knowledge of magic: "She could still smell the fires that had raged throughout her eighth and ninth years—the smoke of burning books chock-full of ancient, irreplaceable knowledge, the screams of gifted seers and healers as they'd been consumed by the flames, the storefronts and sacred places shattered and desecrated and erased from history."¹⁰⁵ The moment the king seized the country, magic disappeared and was thought to be destroyed completely. The colonizers destroyed any evidence of magic and killed anyone who was associated with sorcery in any way.

When Celaena first encounters the King of Adarlan, she is overwhelmed with rage: "He should be hanging from the gallows. He had killed many more than she—people undeserving and defenseless. He'd destroyed cultures, destroyed invaluable knowledge, destroyed so much of what had once been bright and good."¹⁰⁶ Her rage fuels her and gives her confidence she needs as she is continuously underestimated and excluded. Celaena is prime example of a female rage as her story shows anger in numerous ways. Mostly, she craves vengeance; however, her tantrums come from her pride, as well as from the inequality and injustice she witnesses. However, as the story progresses, the heroine starts to feel small and frail to the point that whenever she meets the king, she feels sick. Chaol recalls one of the meetings and says that Celaena "looked like a frightened

¹⁰⁵ Maas, *Throne*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ Maas, *Throne*, 69.

animal when the king appeared."¹⁰⁷ Although one might assume that her other responsibilities and worries subdued her anger, it is revealed that her feelings were caused by magic—which ignites new wave of rage within her. King's dark powers are yet another example of abuse of power from powerholders, in this case based on privilege and high social standing.

Although her pain and hatred are ever-present, her yearning for vengeance is consequently subdued, and all she cares about is her freedom. Celaena's story provides an example for previously mentioned situation in which one emotion overpowers another, especially in extreme situations in which the person has limited options to choose from. Even though this heroine is known for her determination and invincibility, after being tortured, disrespected, and heart-broken, she proves that she is, after all, an eighteen-year-old woman. Without a doubt, it does not undermine her empowerment, exemplifying the fact that emotions and vulnerability do not make a person weak as it is a natural part of all human minds. Celaena's selfish wish to gain her freedom does not take power from her does not undermine her as a character. Nevertheless, Dorian sees through her obedience and wonders why Celaena befriended him: "Perhaps she'd spent so long in Adarlan that she'd stopped caring. Somehow, Dorian didn't think that was the case—not when she had the three giant scars on her back to forever remind her of his father's brutality."¹⁰⁸ Celaena's scars are symbolic as she got them in the slave camp where she killed 24 guards on the anniversary of her parents' death. The lashings were given to her for showing her anger and pain. Nevertheless, none of the punishments given to her suppressed her character and she was as invincible as before, to the point that all the guards were afraid of her. Celaena is a heroine that always pushes forwards and even in her weakest moments, she never lets the powerholders to break her.

On the contrary, relentless rebellion is what Princess Nehemia Ytger of Eyllwe is known for. Her country is still one of the few that are currently resisting Adarlan's aggression. However, they have already suffered similar losses as the rest of the colonized countries. She shares with Celaena that most of their books were burned five years prior, no matter if they were about magic or history; she explains that "'they burned the libraries whole, along with the museums and universities."¹⁰⁹ During this scene, Celaena and Nehemia form a bond through the pain they have endured. Their mutual support and friendship helps the main character not only in winning the tournament and unfolding the murder mystery, but also in surviving as a young woman living with her enemies.

¹⁰⁷ Maas, *Throne*, 327.

¹⁰⁸ Maas, *Throne*, 259.

¹⁰⁹ Maas, *Throne*, 99.

Nevertheless, they are experiencing it in a different way. While Nehemiah is actively fighting for her country, Celaena portrays a character who deals with the trauma caused by these actions. They share their passion for saving their countries and innocent lives. As a Princess, however, Nehemia has more political power and has a reputation for using it to save her country. After meeting her for the first time, Celaena reminisces about the stories she has heard of her in the slave camp Endovier. While Adarlan sees the Princess as a rebel and a threat, her own people admire her and call her 'the Light of Eyllwe' as they believe she is going to be their savior.

The reader truly sees her devotion to the citizens of Eyllwe when she receives a letter stating that five hundred rebels were massacred by Adarlan's soldiers. When she shares the news with Celaena, she cries: "What is the point in being a princess of Eyllwe if I cannot help my people? How can I call myself their princess, when such things happen?"¹¹⁰ Even though, as previously mentioned, Nehemia has abundance of power and resources, she is still suffering losses, showing that even when a person sacrifices all of their energy and power, they might not succeed and it should not be seen as a personal failure. At the end of the book, she admits to the main character that she has come to the capital of Adarlan to spy on her enemy. When Celaena praises her bravery and devotion, she says that her love for Eyllwe drowns her fear of the King: "There is nothing I wouldn't do for my country—no sacrifice too great to keep my people alive and out of slavery, to keep another massacre from happening."¹¹¹ Once again, there is a mention of one feeling overpowering another; however, in this case, it is based on an action and does not necessarily imply that she does not feel scared, she is simply overcoming it. The Eyllwe princess is one of the powerful characters that aid the main character in obtaining secret knowledge about the Throne of Glass universe.

However, Nehemia only provides background to the countries that are outside of the capital Rifthold. The characters that are the closest to the king's plans are his son Dorian Havilliard and Captain of the Royal Guard Chaol Westfall. As a future king, Dorian was raised to become a colonizer just like his father; however, after meeting Celaena and Nehemia, his views on the matter change, and he refuses to become like his father.

He acknowledges that Celaena's hate for Adarlan is justified and admits that his father's actions were inexcusable. Just as Nehemia, he feels powerless: "I don't want to be a part of that. I

¹¹⁰ Maas, *Throne*, 252.

¹¹¹ Maas, *Throne*, 382.

can't call myself a man when I allow my father to encourage such unforgivable atrocities. Yet even if I pleaded for clemency on behalf of the conquered kingdoms, he wouldn't listen. Not in this world."¹¹² His guilt follows him throughout the book as he tries to get closer to the assassin. Even though his father is careful about the information he shares with his son, Dorian consults what he knows with her and provides essential knowledge on the king's plan and the state of Erilea. Similarly to Nehemia and Celaena, he mourns the rebels: "They hadn't spared a single life. Five hundred people—all dead. How could he ever look Nehemia in the face again? And how could he someday rule a country whose soldiers had been trained to have so little compassion for human life?"¹¹³ Those unmarked graves represent the brutality of colonizers and their true purpose.

Providing an example brings compassion from both the reader and the characters and highlights the political subplot of the story and its world-building. Even though Dorian is the king's son, the Captain of the Royal Guard is more directly involved in the kingdom's crimes. Although he does not trust Celaena at the beginning and pushes her aside as a cold assassin, he recognizes her potential and involves her in the castle's plans. Celaena is acknowledged for being smart and educated, even though she is a teenage girl. Such element is common in young adult novels as the characters are entering and welcoming the world of adults. Even though Celaena has been treated as an adult when she was growing up with the assassins, with strangers in the castle, she has to prove herself to be seen as equally competent. This element is part of building her image and place in the world and serves as a part of world-building. World-building and the characters's roles in it are inseparable and developed simultaneously to make a cohesive concept that holds the story together. Each character is formed to serve a purpose in the story, whether it is political, educational, or supplements the plot, and for the story to be successful, they must be used intentionally and included in the world-building.

Fulfilling multiple of these roles at once promotes the character to one of the main or side characters and adds depth and diversity to the story. An example of such a character is Chaol, who, along with the main character and Dorian, also praises the Princess for her rebellious actions: "I'd like to think that if my country was conquered, I would stop at nothing to win back my people's freedom, too."¹¹⁴ He is a character who has been trained to protect and love his country and support the king. He sympathizes with the seized countries and is devoted to his own which cages him in

¹¹² Maas, *Throne*, 260.

¹¹³ Maas, *Throne*, 259.

¹¹⁴ Maas, *Throne*, 255.

the middle between the two parties. *Throne of Glass* shows colonization from multiple points of view. Celaena, who is traumatized and seeks revenge; Nehemia's current strategies; Dorian as a future king who does not want to follow in his father's footsteps; and Chaol, who is trying to find a way to serve his country without endangering others.

In *The Final Strife*, the author introduces a colonization so successful that the inhabitants do not know that they are not the original inhabitants. It is only at the point where Sylah finds the other half of the map that she discovers that she is a descendant of a colonizer. The world-building introduces Ghostings as servants without tongues or hands and suggests that it is a question of classism. Although the three classes are a significant part of the story, the history of Ghostings is rooted before the other two classes, Embers and Dusters, entered the land. About 400 years prior, ships manned by red and blue entered the land. Ghostings welcomed them and taught them how to practice magic, which then the invaders used to massacre indigenous peoples and cut off their tongues and hands to prevent them from saying or writing the truth. Without a doubt, the author is referencing real-life practices that occurred in Congo in the late 19th century. Mutilation of hands served not only as a torturing tool but also to prevent slaves from attacking the colonizers.

While such practices are more targeted at slaves, spreading foreign illnesses has been documented around the world in multiple colonized communities, such as Native Americans. Similarly, *The Final Strife* presents a deadly 'sleeping sickness' brought by Dusters and Embers which has killed hundreds of Ghostings. The Wardens manufactured a story of an Ending Fire that destroyed the whole world except for the Empire that they allegedly saved. However, one of the elder Ghostings signs to Sylah: "They lie. Every day they breathe out the lie and everyone inhales it. The Ending Fire was them, they caused the chaos and destruction of our land."¹¹⁵ Ancient drawings in their den show the illnesses that the colonizers brought in and the Ghostings' peaceful protests which ended in bloodbaths. Hassa, a Ghosting side character, is part of an organization that uses the disguise of the illness to smuggle her friends into safety, using the pain the colonizers brought, to her advantage and taking back some power and control.

Even though Ghostings were defeated by their apprentices, they managed to stop them from stealing more: "Our knowledge was lost to us long ago. Our descendants burned all the Books of Blood, thirteen volumes, all told. The Embers salvaged one; their bloodwerk is stunted, ugly."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Saara El-Arifi, *The Final Strife* (London: Harper Collins, 2022), 421.

¹¹⁶ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 422.

While the Fae in *Throne of Glass* tried to save all their books and other written knowledge, Ghostings were the ones who destroyed theirs to protect it. Although they formed their own sign language using arms and feet, no one from the upper classes cared to learn it and so the truth was buried along with the indigenous peoples. The fact that the main character Sylah, descendant of the colonizer, learned their complicated sign language sends a message against discrimination and gives her a quality that the author finds important to teach her readers.

In *The Gilded Ones*, a kingdom was also taken by force, however, it came from within. Although jatu, the Goddesses' sons, ruled along with their sisters and mothers, they were unsatisfied with being the minority: "The jatu desperately wanted to rule Otera, so they imprisoned our mothers and killed us, their sisters, along with all our children."¹¹⁷ They represent greed and pride that has been mentioned in the second chapter. They used multiple techniques to achieve their superiority. One of which being limiting information by attempting to erase their Mothers and presenting Oyomo as their only God. The memory of the true Goddesses is passed down by daughters who witnessed their imprisonment. Even though overthrowing the government is not as expansive as colonization that can be seen in *The Final Strife*, it bares similarities when it comes to erasure of culture, language, and religion. Another step the jatu took to claim the country was setting laws which enforced their rule. They engraved their beliefs in the justice system, ensuring obedience. Similarly to the leaders in *The Final Strife*, the Emperor seized the land that was not theirs and preserved the truth within the royal family. It is one of the Goddesses' first daughters, White Hands, who tells Dekka what she has seen the day jatu overthrew their mothers and reveals what none of the other characters could have. Just like Anoor and Nehemia, White Hands is the powerful helper and friend that provides resources the main character could not have obtained themselves and expands the world-building.

Even though Otera has been claimed by men for thousands of years, Dekka and her friends are confident in achieving their task: "The emperors of Otera have oppressed our kind for too long. Proclaimed us demons. But now their turn has come. Once you wake the goddesses, they'll make Otera what it once was: a land of freedom, a land where men and women ruled equally."¹¹⁸ As the series progresses, however, the reader is taught that misandrous matriarchy is not the appropriate way to live neither and we should seek equality where men and women cooperate to ensure justice,

¹¹⁷ Forna, *Gilded Ones*, 369.

¹¹⁸ Forna, *Gilded Ones*, 374.

safety, and love. However, the first book in the Deathless series only focuses on world-building and discovering the truth; war with the oppressors is a topic in the following book, *The Merciless Ones*.

Beyond the Black Door approaches occupation in an entirely different way. In this young adult high fantasy, it is the entire planet threatened to be stolen by the Darkness, one of the gods in their religion. According to their mythology, the Darkness has been trying to seize Earth since it was created which is protected by the other gods Heshara, Tain, and Ranta. In the third act, Kamai finds out that she has unintentionally released Vehyn, Darkness incarnate, who has a plan to claim the world. Since A. M. Strickland has not built a vast universe, she uses other symbolisms to create tension. Vehyn explains it through a metaphor:

"The light of your world is like a candle in a small room." Vehyn cupped his hands as if around a weak, sputtering flame. "You're able to see so well only for being so close to the candle, in a tiny enough space for its light to fill. But in actuality, Darkness is *everywhere* else, *everything* else, pressing in"—he gestured at the windows, the thick inky blackness beyond—"ready to enter...especially now that the door to that room is open."¹¹⁹

In contrast to the other books, Darkness would not seize any specific parts of the land, massacre rebels, or manipulate inhabitants, its goal is to absorb the entire planet and—after Kamai refuses his offer to become his dark queen—become its only master. Out of all the previous books, he is the only one whose plans are unsuccessful and since Vehyn never shares his vision in full, it is not clear how people's lives would change. Nevertheless, moments before the main character saves the world, she feels that the Darkness is winning and the reader gets a slight insight: "As he spoke, the room began to darken, and I realized it was the sunlight outside, through the study's windows, beginning to dim."¹²⁰ Nonetheless, she murders the king and reclaims her soul, saving the Ranta's bond with the Earth and watching the Tain's light return.

At the end of the book, Kamai asks Vehyn to abandon the Darkness and join her side; he responds: "'And give up the source of my power? If I sever this part of me, I would be no more than a shell of my former self. A hand without an arm or body.' He shook his head, wincing, but it seemed the idea pained him more than his wound. 'Never.'"¹²¹ At that moment he resembles the king of Adarlan, jatu, and Wardens; they are all obsessed with power and willing to sacrifice other people's lives to have it. Overall, the power these men possess and the way they use it drives the

¹¹⁹ Strickland, *Black Door*, 269.

¹²⁰ Strickland, *Black Door*, 377.

¹²¹ Strickland, *Black Door*, 353–354.

plot of the story and the protagonist's adventures throughout the universe. These passages show how useful maps are to writers during their world-building and the possible reasonings for utilizing them as they aid reader to follow the progression of war.

As this chapter shows, world-building is a highly creative process that distinguishes one book from another. To avoid breaking the fourth wall, authors distance their story away from reality in different ways. For example, El-Arifi renamed hours, months, and birthdays as strikes, mooncycles, and name days. While the other authors either did not mention any holidays or created new ones, Maas borrowed a few pagan ones with less-used spelling, such as Yulemas and Samhuinn. These details make books imaginative and stand out from other young adult fantasy novels.

As every literary genre, young adult high fantasy books share common elements and characteristics, such as secondary worlds, magic, young heroes or heroins, action and adventure, and high stakes conflict between good and evil. These characteristics can be found in all books in this master's thesis. Young adult is a large scale and, undeniably, these books are not equal when it comes to age range. Since the definition of young adult is inconsistent it cannot be determined which book could be for the youngest audience as every scholar puts emphasis on different elements. For the purpose of this analysis, *Throne of Glass* will be used as an example of the lower age level. Sarah J. Maas's novel does not mention any sexual scenes, however, it mentions large amounts of explicit violence and deals with serious topics of slavery and colonialism. In this regard, *Beyond the Black Door* is more fit for younger readers as its darkest element is the mother's death, which is also shown on page. However, the book mentions sexuality often as the main character comes to terms with being asexual which could be a deal breaker for some scholars.

It is without a doubt, however, that *The Gilded Ones* is meant for older audience as it mentions and describes graphic physical and sexual abuse of women and children, talks about patriarchal oppression and includes detailed war scenes. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that it is a young adult novel. This cannot be said of *The Final Strife* which is the only book that may be seen as adult. Saara El-Arifi included explicit sexual scenes which some scholars insist does not belong in literature for younger audience. Nevertheless, it contains all other elements of young adult high fantasy novels and can be analyzed alongside them. It must be mentioned, however, that it is an example of a book that lies on the invisible border that people have trouble defining. Needless to say that this book also contains serious topics such as drug addiction, explicit violence and

discrimination. Although calm and adorable stories may be empowering in their own way, this paper focuses on power as a reaction to oppression which cannot be done without conflict.

None of the dark topics that occur in these novels are imaginary. Ursula Le Guin stresses that "fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom."¹²² Le Guin's comment summarizes the need for fantasy, especially in the young adult genre. Literature challenges the world and sets an example for readers to believe in themselves and stand up for their beliefs.

In conclusion, novel's setting plays a significant role in the portrayal of women. Secondary worlds have the unique opportunity to create a custom society which can be used to send a message about corruption, patriarchy, racism, oppression, and more. The authors actively think about their audience and create illustrations that help them imagine the world in greater detail without stealing their own creativity. Furthermore, they withhold information to lessen predictability, and create characters that hold values, skills, and personalities that can be used to strengthen empowerment and set an example for the young minds.

¹²² Ursula Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 40. https://manifestolib.org/files/2018/10/Ursula-K.-Le-Guin-The-Language-of-the-Night_-Essays-on-Fantasy-and-Science-Fiction-1993-HarperPerennial.pdf.

4. Women's Empowerment

Women have a powerful standing in literature and its analysis. These four stories put them in the center, portraying their importance and role. These characters are not necessarily all-powerful or perfect, on the contrary, this chapter shows that their humanity and 'weaknesses' are highlighted. Women main characters are introduced as well-rounded characters who confess their mistakes and encourage readers to learn from them. AdriAnne M. Strickland, Namina Forna, Sarah J. Maas, and Saara El-Arifi offer a wide range of characters who experience feelings, injustice, brainwashing and self-image in a different way, empowering characters through confidence, representation, and mutual support.

Deka, Celaena, and Sylah's journeys start when the main characters are living in terrible conditions. Although all of them come from different environments, they are proof that even neglected small young women can make a change and achieve great things. In *Throne of Glass*, the main character is described as frightfully pale from not seeing the sun for a year and wearing a torn and filthy tunic accompanied by giant scars. However, she is known for her unwavering pride; therefore, when she sees an imprint of dirt on the floor after she was thrown on it, she refuses to feel mortified: "But she'd been trained to be an assassin since the age of eight, since the day the King of the Assassins found her half-dead on the banks of a frozen river and brought her to his keep. She wouldn't be humiliated by anything, least of all being dirty."¹²³ Similar story is shared by Anne Witte Garland who writes that: "One thing I've got in my favor—the thing a lot of people here don't have—is self-confidence," she also mentions that she assumes it comes from her family and the way she was raised¹²⁴ which is very similar to Celaena's story. This shows that literature often reflects reality and even adults can relate to young adult fantasy books on personal level. The main character mentions her past accomplishments every time she faces frightening moments, showing that being proud of oneself is the greatest weapon a person can wield.

After all, it is her confidence and reputation that make her the longest survivor in the slave death camp Endovier. Everyone knew her true identity and respected her from the beginning, and after she murdered multiple guards and got closer to escaping than anyone ever before, she did not expect the guards to bother her again. Celaena is an enslaved teenager, and yet she is more powerful than any other character in that camp. The first book in the series is categorized for readers between

¹²³ Maas, *Throne*, 8.

¹²⁴ Garland, *Women Activists*, 11.

the ages of 14–18, therefore, women younger or the same age as the main character. Maas obviously knows her target audience and works with issues she assumes teenagers would resonate with, mainly the feelings of hopelessness and vulnerability. Nevertheless, older readers may have similar feelings towards different aspects of the book, such as confidence and resilience.

Sarah J. Maas continues with these topics throughout the whole book. After Celaena tells Chaol a story about how other women were abused, he asks her if she ever had to endure similar treatment, she replies: "They were afraid of me to begin with. And after the day I almost touched the wall, none of them dared to come too close to me. But if one guard tried to get too friendly...Well, he'd become the example that reminded the others I could easily snap again if I felt like it."¹²⁵ Nevertheless, Chaol finds it difficult to come to terms with the cruelty of the king he serves. When she continues her story about the horrors in Endovier, she remembers one day when she was lashed 21 times, which left three giant scars on her back. He reacts by asking what she did to deserve it. She laughs humorlessly and replies: "No one deserves to be whipped like an animal."¹²⁶ This quote is a reminder of not only the mistreatment of the weak but also that it is not seen as problematic and excused on many levels. As someone who was raised to fight enemies and serve the king, he has been programmed to believe that there are people who deserve such treatment. As a character, Chaol is kind-hearted and against violence and injustice, however, he has been brainwashed by the powerholders and puts them above Celaena whom he has been taught to hate for her profession.

In the end, the Captain admires her character's strength and resilience. As a royal guard, he struggles with the dichotomy between her being a "criminal—a prodigy at killing, a Queen of the Underworld" and "just a girl, sent at seventeen to Endovier."¹²⁷ He compares his sheltered life at the castle with "a roof over his head and good food and friends"¹²⁸ and acknowledges that he would never survive the death camp the way Celaena did. He admits that "he had never been whipped, never seen anyone die. He'd never been cold and starving;"¹²⁹ Therefore, he cannot imagine how a teenage girl could survive such conditions during the winter months. What surprises him the most, however, is the fact that she had "survived Endovier, and yet could still laugh."¹³⁰ Celaena

¹²⁵ Maas, *Throne*, 122.

¹²⁶ Maas, *Throne*, 121.

¹²⁷ Maas, *Throne*, 263–264.

¹²⁸ Maas, *Throne*, 264.

¹²⁹ Maas, *Throne*, 263–264.

¹³⁰ Maas, *Throne*, 263–264.

represents a woman who not only survived all hardships in her life but also did not let it break her mind and self-worth, proving that no matter one's age or status, it is possible to overcome it. After all, she says: "We each survived in our own way."¹³¹ And hers was vengeance, resilience, and hope.

Even though she is a strong woman, the author did not omit her weaknesses and the fact that no matter how confident or empowered she is, Celaena can be relatable to young readers. Her self-esteem empowers her throughout the book; however, her arrogance and pride occasionally ruin her plans. After being removed from Endovier, she is obliged to attend a competition to become King's Champion. Since no one in the empire knows that Adarlan's greatest assassin is a young woman, she competes under the false name Lillian Gordaina. They exploit the patriarchal degrading view of women and expect Celaena's competitors to underestimate her. Their plan is successful, and Celaena is ridiculed and insulted numerous times, proving that men see her as a lesser being, and no one questions her incompetence.

As Chemaly explains that anger and power are always entangled, she highlights that "women are just as motivated by the desire for power as men; it's just that our cultural ideas about power don't associate it with femininity. If you are a girl or woman, chances are you have grown up unwittingly associating ideas about power with masculinity."¹³² She even mentions competition, which is a large part of *Throne of Glass*, and states that such behavior is associated with masculinity and people may find competitive woman conflicting. Her point "power is, for example, associated in implicit bias studies with domination and not nurturing. Powerlessness is, on the other hand, implied in femininity"¹³³ is also very relevant as Celaena is bullied by sexist comments about not being feminine enough, repeatedly. However, she struggles with her pride as she loses multiple tests on purpose and watches other men being applauded for something she could do with her eyes closed; she calms herself by thinking: "I am Celaena Sardothien, Adarlan's Assassin. If these men knew who I was, they'd stop laughing. I am Celaena Sardothien. I am going to win. I will not be afraid."¹³⁴ As previously mentioned, this main character is the embodiment of female rage. Although Celaena portrays a reactive anger and acts upon it impulsively, female rage does not necessarily need to be experienced this way. Nehemia festers her rage quietly and plans her next move which does not make her any less of a powerful character. As a princess, she does not have as

¹³¹ Maas, *Throne*, 122.

¹³² Chemaly, "The Drip, Drip, Drip."

¹³³ Chemaly, "The Drip, Drip, Drip."

¹³⁴ Maas, *Throne*, 118.

much of a freedom of speech as Celaena, nonetheless, she uses the resources and privileges she has effectively, showing that people who want to make a change do not necessarily need to compare themselves to others but find their own ways to grow and use the power they already have, no matter how little.

After being insulted and belittled multiple times, she snaps and ruthlessly beats her competitor during one of the tests and threatens that if he does it again, she will "do that with [her] sword the next time."¹³⁵ Crystal L. Hoyt and Jim Blascovich's research found that people react to such stereotypes in two different ways. Women's performance either decreases as they are discouraged or they start outperforming those who insulted them.¹³⁶ Celaena is a clear example of the latter. Degradation motivates her to exhibit her abilities to their full extent. What is more, the article explains that these women react this way because they feel like their freedom is threatened and they attempt to reassert it.¹³⁷ Celaena's story examines freedom from multiple points of view as it is a key element in the story. However, one might argue that it is also closely connected to her egoistic personality. Even after beating the other Champion, her anger has not cooled, and she yells at the Weapon Master: "Give me real men to fight. Then maybe I'll bother trying."¹³⁸ Her outburst catches the attention she was avoiding and surprises all men involved since they have only seen her as weak and incompetent.

Empowering main characters are not supposed to be perfect idols and examples of a perfect woman. Young adult high fantasy novels capture women as humans with imperfections and multi-dimensional characters and are not afraid to show their imperfections. With Celaena, her weakness is her pride and readers may find her as narcissistic and egoistic. On the other hand, her unyielding confidence can be motivational for shy women who are afraid to stand up for themselves. What is more, it exhibits thoughts and feelings behind this facade which is something one ignores in real life. Maas's main character finally gets revenge in the final battle and proclaims: "My name is Celaena Sardothien, but it makes no difference if my name's Celaena or Lillian or Bitch, because I'd still beat you, no matter what you call me."¹³⁹ Even though the line between arrogance and

¹³⁵ Maas, *Throne*, 218.

¹³⁶ Crystal L. Hoyt, Jim Blascovich, "Leadership Efficacy and Women Leaders' Responses to Stereotype Activation," in *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 10 (October 2007): 597. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1368430207084718>.

¹³⁷ Hoyt, "Women Leaders' Responses," 597.

¹³⁸ Maas, *Throne*, 218.

¹³⁹ Maas, *Throne*, 352.

confidence is very thin, Celaena shows that women should be unapologetically proud of themselves and their accomplishments, even if those in a high fantasy may seem greater than in the real world.

Similarly, Sylah has also been raised as a warrior and trained since childhood. In comparison to Celaena, however, she has given up. After the death of her step-siblings and step-father, she stopped eating, sleeping, and talking. To forget her grief, she started taking joba seeds and lost herself to drug addiction. When Jond accuses her of giving up, she defends herself; however, in her inner monologue, she admits that after her family died, she had not just given up but "suppressed every memory of them with the aid of the joba seeds."¹⁴⁰ Even though she walks through her life in a daze of guilt and drugs, she never loses her confidence when it comes to fighting. In comparison to Celaena, who was an assassin, there is only one place where Sylah can fight at her full strength where she makes money by winning the duels. She gloats that she mastered all forms of combat by the age of ten and claims that "this was what she was born to be: a fighter."¹⁴¹ In comparison to Celaena, Sylah did not have any future or purpose that would motivate her. As a result, she was the person who held herself hostage and abused her. Readers who feel that they have nothing to live for may connect with this main character, especially those fighting addiction, depression, and grief. Therefore, reading about a character who overcomes these struggles may give them hope that there is a way for them to find their own empowerment.

Sylah finds her purpose again after she meets Anoor and gives up joba seeds to help her win the Aktibar, which would make Anoor one of the Wardens. Mentoring her new friend helps her remember who she was six years ago. Nevertheless, not being the one competing and being able to prove her worth, she reacts to being challenged just as badly as Celaena: "It made her rage. All she wanted to do was take the dagger and fling it into his treacherous Ember heart. She wouldn't miss; she was one of the Sandstorm."¹⁴² Like Celaena, Sylah relishes in the title she fights under. Being one of the Sandstorm and Adarlan's best assassin are powerful titles which indicate power and high standing within the infamous, yet respected, organizations. Undoubtedly, holding such titles gives them feelings of safety and superiority, and ensures a certain amount of power over their destiny. What is more, their social standing offers resources in terms of materials and social networking. The assassin and the fighter both find their worth and pride in the skills that make them feel powerful, strong, and safe; they are proud of who they have become and what they have worked hard for.

¹⁴⁰ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 230.

¹⁴¹ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 48.

¹⁴² El-Arifi, *Strife*, 156.

Young adult high fantasy offers the possibility to exaggerate points the authors are trying to make; being a witch or an assassin clearly shows that they are powerful characters. One might argue that it would make them irrelevant and make readers feel discouraged; however, since authors do not waste time on building the overall image, they can focus on smaller details and stress the main message of the story. What is more, the characters demonstrate that people who seem to be better than the reader still struggle and are human, just like them. Some readers prefer to pretend they are these formidable characters which helps them to understand confidence and self-esteem. As Celaena and Sylah proved, self-assurance is empowering.

However, both of these characters were raised to be grand since they were children. This is not the case for Anoor, one of the love interests in *The Final Strife*. She grew up as a daughter to a Warden, rich and spoiled, even though she yearned for an adventurous life that she has read about in her detective novels. When she first meets Sylah, she assumes that she is an assassin and wishes she was not afraid of people who bully her: "If only she had the strength to stand up to him, to her. Be as confident and as frightening as the stranger in her room. She was tired of being the victim in the story."¹⁴³ Her yearning for strength is evident, in contrast to Sylah, which shows how limiting one's self-doubt is. Nevertheless, Anoor represents the biggest change in confidence and overall character development in the book, proving that improving oneself is possible if one works hard enough. The main character describes the woman's journey: "Over the weeks Sylah had developed a grudging respect for the girl. She was a hard worker, and sometimes Sylah caught the spark of unwavering determination flickering like fire in her eyes."¹⁴⁴ When the main character wonders what fuels Anoor and asks her why she is so determined, she answers: "Because no one thought I could. Because I want to prove them wrong."¹⁴⁵ Unquestionably, their friendship plays a large role in the side character's self-love journey.

Janice Raymond states that meaning of friendship between women "is that women affect, move, stir, and arouse each other to full power. One task of feminism has been to show that 'the personal is political'. Female friendship gives integrity to that claim."¹⁴⁶ This sentiment can be compared to previously discussed topic of mixing power, politics, and religion. In this case, if one is on women's side, power is seen in a positive light as it empowers them. It might be argued, however, that it is a reaction to previously mentioned abuse of power and—outside of this

¹⁴³ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 85.

¹⁴⁴ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 164.

¹⁴⁵ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 164.

¹⁴⁶ Janice G. Raymond, "Gyn/Affection and Hetero-relations," in *A Passion for Friends* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2001).

narrative—might be damaging as well. With her friends help, along with Anoor's bodily strength and a new set of skills, Sylah's self-confidence materializes, and she sees hope for the first time. El-Arifi's characters show the importance of self-improvement and how empowering it can be for young women.

Uka Elsari had been belittling her daughter her entire life; however, after weeks of training, Anoor decides to overcome her mother's abuse. In her mother's journal, the Warden of Strength not only comments on Anoor's body, stating that "the girl grows wider instead of higher," but also wishes for her death and is determined to harden her punishments to turn "the maggot" into someone worthy of her love.¹⁴⁷ Undoubtedly, Uka is the main source of Anoor's insecurities and lack of confidence. This time, however, she roughly closes the book and proclaims that "her mother hadn't looked closely enough," because "she was a caterpillar, and at some point, she would fly."¹⁴⁸ Body image is a sensitive topic for many readers, however, the author decided to include it to express her fight against fatphobia. An entry in the journal explains that Anoor's negative feelings about her body come from her mother. Sylah, however, is unable to comprehend the notion of fat-shaming altogether. When Anoor shares that she was not allowed to swim because her mother said she was embarrassing her, Sylah asks: "why would that embarrass her?" because she was "confused at why anyone would be embarrassed by Anoor's curves."¹⁴⁹ She compliments her body multiple times, and slowly, Anoor stops wishing for her friend's willow frame and starts loving herself.

This character arc highlights the importance of childhood upbringing. Her mother bullied and starved her since she was a child. There are many studies on mother-daughter influence when it comes to fat-shaming with the outcome that "mothers have a particularly great influence on their young children's attitudes about their appearance."¹⁵⁰ One of the outcomes is girls' desire to lose weight, body dissatisfaction, and unhealthy weight loss behavior. Research done by Katherine W. Bauer, Michaela M. Bucchianeri, and Dianne Neumark-Sztainer provided evidence that negative weight talk that mothers directed towards their young daughter did not influence girls to participate

¹⁴⁷ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 183.

¹⁴⁸ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 184.

¹⁴⁹ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 121.

¹⁵⁰ Tomohiro Suzuki, "Mothers' Influence on the Body Dissatisfaction and Weight Loss Behaviors of their Preschool- to Junior-High-School-Level Daughters: The Case of Japan" in *Japanese Psychological Research* 65, issue 3 (September 2021): 263. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpr.12381>.

in healthy eating habits.¹⁵¹ *The Final Strife* does not focus on eating disorders, nor does it show or support starvation. On the contrary, Anoor's diet is changed by Sylah's command to give her strength in combat and support her friend's health. Nevertheless, Anoor's abusive childhood has marked her self-worth. In comparison, Sylah has never experienced such behavior and sees her friend's body realistically and admires it. The future Warden keeps her training a secret to surprise her bullies, especially her mother, and to prove that the hopeless little girl has become an empowering woman who achieved her goals through hard work and friendship. While Sylah and Celaena are portrayed as women who use their empowerment, the reader watches Anoor find hers. Her determination and journey of finding her worth and confidence is an important lesson for a young audience.

Physical strength is a reoccurring topic in all chosen works. *Throne of Glass* is the most straightforward when it comes to Celaena's skills. If one ignores the fact that she is a frail young woman, her fighting technique is the same as the ones in the real world. In contrast, the authors of *The Gilded Ones* and *The Final Strife* thought of their own. At the beginning of the book, Sylah explains the different disciplines that fighters are trained in, each focusing on different strengths the person has. She was taught the rarest kind, Nuba, which requires the fighter to settle into a battle wrath, a meditative state of pure rage. Therefore, her skills are not only about strength and intelligence but also meditation and level-headedness. She uses her anger effectively and lets it fuel her, instead of making her reckless.

Anger has a tendency to dominate other emotions which can be used effectively. In *Women Activists*, Garland explains that between activists it is a common knowledge that "anger overcomes fear" and is used when fighting for one's cause.¹⁵² Similarly, Sylah mentions that "the anger by Jond's betrayal eclipsed the shame she felt. Anger she could use."¹⁵³ It is Sylah's anger towards her friend and lover that alights her rage anew and she is determined to continue fighting for the cause. She used drugs to forget the injustice happening around her; however, once she returned to reality, she remembers the rage she grew up with. Anna Witte Garland shares that when "you look carefully at what's going on around you, you have to get angry. I got mad and that gave me courage."¹⁵⁴ She adds that "there's something wrong with the system that has to be changed. When I first realized

¹⁵¹ Katherine W Bauer, Michaela M Bucchianeri, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, "Mother-reported parental weight talk and adolescent girls' emotional health, weight control attempts, and disordered eating behaviors," in *Journal of Eating Disorders* 1, 45 (December, 2013): 1–45. <http://www.jeatdisord.com/content/1/1/45>.

¹⁵² Garland, *Women Activists*, xvii.

¹⁵³ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 46.

¹⁵⁴ Garland, *Women Activists*, xvii.

that, I got angry. And I've stayed angry."¹⁵⁵ Sylah's wrath comes from the injustice of the system and the maltreatment of the lower classes. On the other hand, Celaena's rage is mostly fueled by the mistreatment of women and colonization, and Sarah J. Maas presents a character who does not ignore inequalities and fights against them.

While Celaena gets consumed by her anger and snaps into a killing spree, Sylah conjures it on purpose and uses it to her advantage. In "Nice to Meet You, Rage," Chemaly explains that there are multiple types of anger; for example, a 'trait anger' that she assigns to a person who gets angry easily. In comparison, 'state anger' is trait of a person who is slower to anger and experiences it mainly when provoked.¹⁵⁶ With Celaena and Sylah one must mention that these types cannot be applied in black and white. Even though Celaena shows signs of "trait anger," it cannot be said that she does not have a reason to be angry; nevertheless, she is irritable by nature. On the other hand, Sylah fits into 'state anger' category which might correlate with 'battle wrath'. Battle wrath is contained and used strategically, supporting perceptive ways to channel one's anger. Fighters who have mastered this style of combat are more likely to win in battles, as they do not let their feelings overcome them and use them to better their skills. Sylah's female rage is contained and well-managed; in this instance she could be seen as a combination of Celaena and Nehemiah. This main character has Celaena's freedom of expression, however, she uses it wisely and is not as impulsive, just like Nehemiah.

The Sandstorm's motto is "a dancer's grace, a killer's instinct, an Ember's blood, a Duster's heart."¹⁵⁷ Sylah's fighting movements are compared to a dancer's numerous times, highlighting the importance of being graceful and deadly at the same time. Similarly, Deka's teacher, Karmoko Huon calls *The Gilded Ones*' unique combat style 'the dance of death'. All new alaki are making fun of the Karmoko for being adorable and sweet, underestimating her, up until she starts their lesson. Deka describes the teacher's movements as graceful and precise and recognizes that being pretty on the outside does not mean one is not deadly on the inside. Such comparisons to the gracefulness of dancers convey that women do not need to lose their feminine side to be good soldiers. The preconceived idea that women must be masculine to win a fight is discouraged multiple times in *The Gilded Ones*, *The Final Strife*, and *Throne of Glass*. Chemaly claims that "when a woman shows anger in institutional, political, and professional settings, she automatically violates gender norms."¹⁵⁸ As previously mentioned, Celaena uses these prejudices in her favor and lets men

¹⁵⁵ Garland, *Women Activists*, xvii.

¹⁵⁶ Chemaly, "Nice to Meet you, Rage."

¹⁵⁷ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 89.

¹⁵⁸ Chemaly, "Nice to Meet You, Rage."

underestimate her. Even though it is known that Adarlan's Assassin is a woman, everyone expects her to be masculine and much older, not a seventeen-year-old girl who loves jewelry, dancing, and is opinionated.

Although the characters needed to be able to win their battles, some of the authors did not give them supernatural abilities; rather, they highlighted their other strengths. Celaena uses the gracefulness of a young woman when training with the Captain and comments that as "strong as he might be, he was not as quick."¹⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Sylah's strength lies in her mind, she admits that she is "not always the strongest, but always the smartest in combat."¹⁶⁰ And Kihan relies on his training, which is what Kamai notices as she watches him fight her stepbrother, noting that "if Razim was stronger, [Kihan] was better."¹⁶¹ Although together they form a skillset a powerful woman can obtain, their personalities are not perfect. All of the main characters mentioned can be described as audacious, bold, and sarcastic which are personality traits that they usually display when they are facing people who are underestimating them or insulting them in any way. It is their verbal way of fighting and advocating for themselves.

Nevertheless, the main characters have many positive qualities that emerge when they are alone or talking to people who they feel deserve their kindness. Most of them love to read for both pleasure and education and to train to improve their abilities. Not only are they hard workers themselves, but they are also supportive of others. These moments mostly occur when they are talking to other women. Moreover, their support is never one-sided. According to Janice Raymond, compared to men, who valued common interest in activities, women placed greater emphasis on reciprocity, i.e. sharing and helping.¹⁶² Sylah, Anoor, Britta, Deka, Kamai, Kihan, Celaena and Nehemia are prime examples of this sentiment as they have built their friendship upon reciprocity.

Even though Anoor's training was the central focus of the plot, she was also helping Sylah overcome her joba seed addiction and took care of her during withdrawals. Contrastively, Deka and Britta helped each other during the training they were both part of. Deka protected Britta from people who were joking about her positive, energetic personality, while Britta took care of Deka while she was discovering her unnatural abilities and was assigned to her to protect her during their missions. White Hands describes Britta as the one who is "strong, loyal, and will do what must be

¹⁵⁹ Maas, *Throne*, 82.

¹⁶⁰ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 49.

¹⁶¹ Strickland, *Black Door*, 117.

¹⁶² Raymond, "Gyn/Affection and Hetero-relations."

done."¹⁶³ Unconditional friendship was a foreign concept for Deka as she grew up in a racist community where women saw each other as a competition. Even her best friend turned against her once she saw Deka's gold blood.

However, their friendship was not immediate. After Deka was saved from the Death Mandate, she had nightmares and grieved her old life, ignoring Britta who was nice to her and comforting her. Eventually, she regrets her past behavior as she realizes that she needs Britta just as much as Britta needs her. Deka recognizes that she was only focused on her pain and did not acknowledge that Britta is alone for the first time in her life and feels lonely and afraid. Deka decides to offer her friendship and seek the true love and loyalty she has always dreamed of. Such self-reflection is crucial for young adults as it strengthens their perception of human relationships and their role in them.

By the second half of the book, Deka is not afraid to trust Britta fully and admit how much she loves her: "But Britta's the one who's forever there by my side, ready to support me, to push me when I'm being silly, to laugh with me when I need cheer. I've learned many things these past few months, and if there's one thing I know, it's this: Britta is my dearest friend, and my kinship with her is the foundation I stand on."¹⁶⁴ *The Gilded Ones* highlights the importance of friendships among all the girls in Warthu Bera, who unite to beat their enemies together instead of submitting to them. Portrayal of strong female friendships is vital for young women who are often taught to see each other as a competition and partake in the 'mean girl' trend.

Beyond the Black Door and *Throne of Glass* portray strong friendship bonds as well. The friendship between Kamai and Kihan, was strong from the very beginning. When they first met, he offers such an amount of kindness that it shocks Kamai and makes her cry. He protects Kamai whenever she leaves the house and offers support. After she is attacked, Kihan even offers to give her self-defense lessons, at which she fails miserably. Overall, Kamai is the only main character in this paper who does not possess physical fighting skills. Instead her arsenal consists of superpowers that she was either born with or given by Darkness, and intelligence. The story is partly a murder mystery; therefore, the main character's main goal is to collect secrets of the powerful and uncover their lies and cults.

¹⁶³ Forna, *Gilded Ones*, 195.

¹⁶⁴ Forna, *Gilded Ones*, 306.

On the contrary to Deka, Kamai's friendship faces challenges and nearly ceases to exist. Even though Kamai admits that she "owed [him] better,"¹⁶⁵ as she gets closer to discovering who ordered her mother's death, she slowly acquires secrets she cannot share with her best friend without uncovering her illegal powers. Her guilt follows her, and she admits that she mistreated her only friend because she had been a "coward in return, too afraid of what [he] might think of [Kamai] if [he] knew the truth."¹⁶⁶ It is revealed, however, that she never needed to worry about Kihan's reaction as she was only met with understanding. *Beyond the Black Door* contains a moment with indescribable connection that only women experience together. After seeing the soul of one of the men, Kamai warns Kihan, a trans side character, whom she just met, that one of his guards is 'sick' and he should be vary around him. He is surprised at first but asks with a hard deadly tone if he said or did something to her. Obviously, Kamai cannot reveal her power to walk through souls so she simply replies that she has a sickly feeling about him. At first, Kamai thinks Kihan, known as Nikha for most of the book, will not believe her: "She blinked, looking at me oddly, a ragged girl she barely knew, warning her, a grown and heavily armed woman, to be careful of one of her own men. For a second, I thought she might laugh at me. But then she nodded and slid out of the carriage, extending a hand afterward to help me down."¹⁶⁷ Although Kihan is a man, he has experienced life through the eyes of Nikha and was targeted as other women tend to be. Women's intuition is valued, what is more, a woman warning another woman about a man is not ignored by women who understand the dangers of patriarchy.

Their support, however, does not only involve the main storyline and achieving their goals. Especially in *Beyond the Black Door*, the characters deal with self-discovery in their gender and sexuality, and their internalized homophobia. Kamai's mother and her husband are pleasure artists, meaning that sex is not a taboo topic in their household and she feels the pressure to enjoy it as well. Nevertheless, it is clear that Kamai is not interested in any form of physical intimacy, what is more, it makes her uncomfortable. Needless to say, she feels broken. Her love interest is the first one she has an open conversation about her asexuality. At this point of the story Kamai still feels defensive, therefore, when he says that he is not bothered by her preferences and finds it interesting, she feels shame: "Yes, interesting. Like I'm some freak of nature. I'm all wrong, I don't feel things

¹⁶⁵ Strickland, *Black Door*, 152.

¹⁶⁶ Strickland, *Black Door*, 152.

¹⁶⁷ Strickland, *Black Door*, 225.

like...like...' *Normal people*."¹⁶⁸ Being an incarnation of Darkness, Vehyn's perception of "base mortal activity"¹⁶⁹ differs from those of a human being. When he informs Kamai that she is more like him, she is delighted: "This mysterious being who'd so fascinated me felt the same as I did, at least insofar as it came to sex. I wasn't alone."¹⁷⁰ Her thoughts confirm the importance of representation and sharing people's stories as it shows that there are others just like you.

However, it is not Vehyn, whose answers are too mysterious to be satisfying, who finally lifts Kamai's shame. The books offers a graph that the side characters use to explain gender and sexuality for both the characters and the reader. Once Kamai confesses that she feels no sexual desire—not to be confused with romantic attraction—she is accepted in a way she never guessed she would be. After the meeting she say that the "acknowledgment and support had already changed something within me. I felt stronger, lighter...brighter. Like a new moon floating in the sky, cloaked in secretive darkness, but with a glowing core. Not empty. Not broken. Whole and wholly myself."¹⁷¹ Although there are many queer characters in current young adult fantasy books, demi-biromantic asexuals are not commonly represented. The importance of such books is expressed by readers themselves. Under A. M. Strickland's comment on Goodreads, multiple readers thank the author for writing about them. Andi, a Goodreads user, writes: "Currently reading this book and the demi ace I am is jumping around in joy [right now]. Only 37% in but I need to tell you that this is some well done [asexual] representation. God I needed this book as a teen."¹⁷² Undoubtedly, empowering queer young adult fantasy is a phenomenon of recent years and generations who have grown without it see value in such literature and support its existence for younger people.

Nevertheless, Kamai is not the only person to come out during that scene. In this paper, the main character's best friend is referred to as Kihan, however, for most of the book, the reader knows him as Nikha. When asked: "And how do you feel *yourself*, Nikha?"¹⁷³ he points at the full moon which, in the illustration provided, symbolizes a man. Kamai's thoughts are non-judgmental and understanding as she thinks: "She'd had more to hide, more judgement and misunderstanding to

¹⁶⁸ Strickland, *Black Door*, 137.

¹⁶⁹ Strickland, *Black Door*, 64.

¹⁷⁰ Strickland, *Black Door*, 63.

¹⁷¹ Strickland, *Black Door*, 232.

¹⁷² Andi, "Currently Reading This Book," review of *Beyond the Black Door*, by AdriAnne Strickland, *Goodreads*. December 2019. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2392552942?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1.

¹⁷³ Strickland, *Black Door*, 224.

fear, than even me. Nikha didn't just dress and seem more like a man at times. Nikha *was* a man."¹⁷⁴ He is obviously nervous and defensive as he expected discrimination and hatred as a response; however, he was met with support and understanding. Priestess Lenara explains that "outward appearances don't always reflect matters of the soul."¹⁷⁵ This sentiment could be also used in conversations other than transsexuality as humans are commonly labeled according to their looks. Nevertheless, the issues of gender is a massive part of a people's lives and part of their identity, which is crucial for their happiness and well-being. In Kihan's case, he refuses his friends' insistence to refer to him as a man since he has been hiding his true self his entire life; nevertheless, other characters respect his decision and do not rush him and explain that "the thought of revealing the truth takes some getting used to"¹⁷⁶ which is a sentiment which may be applied to previously discussed 'coming out'.

Since Kihan has been seen as a woman his entire life, he has experienced sexism and patriarchy in the same way as women do. His position as a bodyguard is a sensitive topic for him as he was disqualified from joining the royal guard—although he came second in the tournament—on the basis of being a woman. Although Kamai's father employed him as his bodyguard because he was against such prejudice, his dream was still to be an official royal guard. When the best friends met for the first time, Kamai expressed her bewilderment over a woman ordering men as a head bodyguard to let the reader know what sexist qualities exist in the universe. As previously mentioned, law is a very powerful tool and has been used to abuse and kill those who do not follow set rules, nevertheless, power in the right hands can be used for good. Lenara, a priestess, surprises Kihan with her offer to officially declare him as a trans man: "I have the legal means to see and proclaim the truth in your soul. The law is bound to acknowledge those proven to be soul-crossed. With a signed declaration from me, you could be formally recognized as a man and take your place as a royal bodyguard."¹⁷⁷ The story has a 'happy ending' for Kihan as he accepts her offer at the end of the book, giving hope to young generation who might feel the same; however, it cannot be forgotten that trans people are still a target in our society and their journey is not as seamless as Kihan's.

¹⁷⁴ Strickland, *Black Door*, 224.

¹⁷⁵ Strickland, *Black Door*, 225.

¹⁷⁶ Strickland, *Black Door*, 227.

¹⁷⁷ Strickland, *Black Door*, 226.

Although friendships are more prominent, the books contain romance as well. *Throne of Glass* and *The Final Strife* contain a love triangle, however there are a couple of differences. Celaena is choosing between two men and does not make up her mind before the book ends, romancing both characters. Contrastingly, Sylah's love interests are of different genders as she is reunited with her lost love Jond and meets Anoor. Although she is secretly leaving the compound to spend time with Jond, she is starting to fall in love with the woman she is training. In this book, the main character chooses her final love interest; however, the ending is ambiguously open as she escapes the Warden's Empire with Jond by her side, abandoning Anoor. These authors' decision not to commit to a single love interest gives them wider possibilities for following books as the main character struggles to find her true love.

Future romantic storylines are not an aspect that Strickland and Forna sought. Dekka finds her love during the war and their relationship is steady and unwavering the entire series. Namina Forna ensured that the main focus of the series is on the main character and the message she was attempting to send to her readers. Nevertheless, she gave her heroine a male love interest to further her point about the equality between men and women, making sure men are not shown as inherently bad. Contrastingly, Kamai falls in love with the villain, portraying a toxic relationship. Strickland tells a story about the strength of love and its irrationality. At the end of the book, Kamai proclaims: "Vehyn was evil, but I loved him anyway."¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Strickland does not excuse toxic relationships and creates a character who uses her power against the man she loves to protect herself and the world around her. Still, she never lost hope that once the Darkness has left him, he will embrace the goodness in him:

Now, without it, perhaps he could truly grow. Become something new and different and...good. But he would have to do that on his own, first, without me. That didn't mean I didn't love him. I'd learned another of my mother's teachings for myself: you couldn't help loving whom you loved. Or *how* you loved. I loved Vehyn, despite who he was, despite the dark power over me that he shouldn't have had. Maybe I even loved certain shades of *that*. That didn't make me evil, or wrong. But I also knew I needed to pull away before I got hurt too badly. Or when I needed to heal. And now I trusted myself to know exactly when that was.¹⁷⁹

Kamai's self-discovery journey has come to an end and this section summarizes how she has grown into an empowering woman. Not only she knows how to stand up for herself, she is self-aware enough to recognize when it is necessary. She recognizes that everyone needs to go through their

¹⁷⁸ Strickland, *Black Door*, 380.

¹⁷⁹ Strickland, *Black Door*, 392.

journey alone as it cannot be done for them. The main character leaves her lover with the promise to return once he is ready to treat her right. However, it must be mentioned that the focus of these stories are the characters personal growing journeys, not the romantic aspect.

Vehyn was unsuccessful in his plans to seize the planet but that cannot be said about the other villains. However, to gain absolute control of a city or a continent, the change must be done not only geographically and politically, but socially as well. Leaders of the nation have the power to change laws, one of the most useful ways of manipulating and controlling people is through religion. Except for Sarah J. Maas, who is the only one who scarcely mentioned gods in her debut, the other three authors created their own theology. As previously mentioned, the citizens in *Beyond the Black Door* believe in four gods: Heshara, goddess of the moon, guardian of souls and the sleeping realm; Tain, god of the sun and guardian of spirits; Ranta, earth goddess and daughter of Tain and Heshara; and Darkness which is the only one who is not depicted as a person, but as eternal darkness. Ranta is the official queen of Eopia, meaning that there is no human queen to rule with the king. The king's wife is a queen consort who has no power and only serves the king to produce heirs. Kihan is the only character who criticizes the Gods, claiming that they never offered anything good, and explains his lack of devotion to Ranta by saying:

"Ranta could have stood on her own, for one, and for two, now all we humans have is a queen consort, not a real queen with power equal to the king's. No, the 'true' queen is Ranta, who isn't exactly around to exercise her power. Convenient, that. Oh, but if one were to question it, then we're told that's not the king's fault, because that's how the goddess wanted it, so we can't complain. Yes, thanks, Heshara, thanks so much."¹⁸⁰

Even though Kihan disagrees with the inequality of power, he does not question the gods' existence. Compared to highly religious *The Gilded Ones*, characters in *Beyond the Black Door* do not have strict rules of worship. Nonetheless, many women wear scarves out of respect for Heshara, who hid her bright self during the day. Since Heshara is the goddess of the moon, it is common for women to go without scarves in the evening. The main character also states that scarves are practical for the beating sun.¹⁸¹ This shows that the characters covered themselves out of their free will.

Nonetheless, the priests and priestesses were still prominent figures with a lot of power over the country's citizens. In the final plot twist, it is revealed that the High Priest Agrir was the one who worked with Darkness and let it enter Kamai's soul when she was a newborn. Using his power

¹⁸⁰ Strickland, *Black Door*, 163–164.

¹⁸¹ Strickland, *Black Door*, 62.

and authority, he worked against the king and founded a Guild that followed Vehyn's orders. While temples and priests are presented as positive figures, Agrir is a character who abuses his power and works against the other gods. It was not any temple's teachings that were shadowing people's minds but the corruption within the system.

Although religion plays a role in *Beyond the Black Door*, it is significantly more important in *The Gilded Ones*. The citizens of Otera pray to Oyomo, their one and only God. Jatu, acting on behalf of Oyomo, wrote a set of rules called the Infinite Wisdoms, to ensure their dominance over women. When Deka's father asks her what being pure means, she replies with a passage from the Infinite Wisdoms: "Blessed are the meek and subservient, the humble and true daughters of man, for they are unsullied in the face of the Infinite Father."¹⁸² She adds that every girl knows it by heart and recites it whenever they enter a temple as it serves as "a constant reminder that women were created to be helpmeets to men, subservient to their desires and commands."¹⁸³ Throughout the book, the characters cite Infinite Wisdoms numerous times; all refer to the impurity and inferiority of women and their status in society. Contrastively to Strickland's book, covering oneself is mandatory. Women above the age of 16 wear masks that cover the top half of their face, to prove their chastity. The masks also mark people's class. Rich citizens, make them out of expensive materials and decorate them with gemstones. These masks are a form of oppression, yet, women use it to divide themselves even further, on the basis of money and status. Staking women against each other is a valuable instrument in ensuring their obedience and preventing revolts.

Similarly to *Beyond the Black Door*, priests test people to discover illegal gifts the person might have been born with and kill those who are found guilty. Every girl in the village goes through the Ritual of Purity, in which the priests test whether the girl bleeds red or gold. Women with gold blood are called alaki and possess multiple supernatural abilities, including surviving up to 3 deaths. While in Strickland's book, they have the opportunity to work with priests and priestesses, in *The Gilded Ones*, the character is immediately sentenced to the Death Mandate. The Infinite Wisdoms ensure that every girl in Otera undergoes the Ritual of Purity, and those who are alaki or anyone who aids them will not survive another day. The book mentions women executed in various ways multiple times, either as a distant memory of a woman who "was dragged away by the priests, never to be seen again,"¹⁸⁴ or explicitly, as Deka is imprisoned and murdered nine times,

¹⁸² Forna, *Gilded Ones*, 10.

¹⁸³ Forna, *Gilded Ones*, 10.

¹⁸⁴ Forna, *Gilded Ones*, 9.

including beheading and dismembering, by the men in the church who subsequently sell her gold blood to enrich themselves. In the small village, priests were seen as judges, leaders, and, in some cases, even law enforcers. Considering that they saw women as objects that belong to men, it is not surprising that they saw an alaki as a gold mine. Selling Deka's blood while trying to kill her in the name of their god is the utmost representation of corruption within the system which mixes politics and religion.

In spite of that, Deka's devotion to Oyomo never wavers and she prays to him for forgiveness for being an impure demon. She submits to priests, believing that she deserves the punishment, and hopes that her god will forgive her and take away her humiliation of being born with golden blood. When she is reminded of being an alaki she thinks: "White Hands doesn't have to remind me of what I am. I know I'm a demon, foul and unclean, despised by Oyomo. No matter how much I beg, no matter how absolutely I submit, He never listens, never even hears me."¹⁸⁵ These passages show how deeply rooted the patriarchal system, under the name of the holy, is within the girls. In his article about faith manipulation, Edwin Bii asserts that in some African cultures "the first thing they do is use fear and guilt. They make you really scared to stand up for yourself or challenge them or if you don't obey them. They instill fears in you, like saying you'll go to hell or be cursed."¹⁸⁶ Namina Forna is a Sierra Leonean-American writer who used her childhood in West Africa as an inspiration for *The Gilded Ones*, where she portrays cultures in which individuals who disobey their superiors are punished by being portrayed as cursed, which extends to their entire family line. Such practices refer back to 'blind obedience' which is particularly highlighted in the Deathless trilogy. What is more, Forna focuses on one of the paths to escaping religious abuse and blind obedience which is coming to contact with other cultures.

Deka of Irfut finds freedom for the first time when she leaves her home village. Even though religious patriarchal oppression is in every corner of Otera, Irfut enforces Oyomo's practices flawlessly. When Deka moves to Hemaira "'I've never felt this happy before. Never felt this free."¹⁸⁷ As the main character meets alaki from different parts of Otera, who either worship other gods or are non-believers, she is disoriented. In the first few weeks at Warthu Bera, the reader sights not only Deka's first doubts but also how deep her teachings are rooted inside her:

¹⁸⁵ Forna, *Gilded Ones*, 45.

¹⁸⁶ Bii, "Spiritual Manipulation."

¹⁸⁷ Forna, *Gilded Ones*, 140.

Elder Durkas always told us that's because they're trying to show us how to live happy, righteous lives. "What if they were meant to cage us instead?" I force the thought back, guilt flooding through me. The way of the faithful is trust and submission—how many times has Elder Durkas told us that? I may not understand it now, but Oyomo has a greater plan for me. All I have to do is submit and have faith. Even though I'm here, doing things that go against the teachings, I have to believe that Oyomo understands my heart, that he sees I'm trying my best to be faithful. I will submit. I will be faithful. I won't think any more dangerous thoughts.¹⁸⁸

As this passage suggests the main character experiences exponential character development later in the book. Deka slowly learns to love herself, which leads her to see the priests' faults and abandon Oyomo's Infinite Wisdoms. She shifts her loyalty to the Gilded Ones, whom she frees at the end of the book, and spreads the word about the real goddesses of the land. Uncovering the truth about the existence of the Gilded Ones leaves Deka feeling furious and betrayed. Such violation of trust was one of the main steps towards abandoning her past beliefs. In *Beyond the Black Door*, it was the priest who manipulated the king and overpowered him, in *The Gilded Ones*, however, they work together, representing the marriage between politics and religion. What is more, the emperor is considered to be closer to Oyomo than the high priests, seizing the utmost control as a jatu.

While Oyomo is presented as a man, the Gilded Ones as women, and Heshara and Tain as a woman and a man, Anyme is neither and both, introducing the first gender-less character. In *The Final Strife*, religion is portrayed positively and does not play a significant role. However, it is still used in the name of atrocious acts by the leaders, such as unjustly trials where they proclaim themselves as an extension of God: "'In the name of the four wardens, blessed by Anyme, our God in the Sky, we bring forth the accused.' [...] 'May Anyme be our guide. May Anyme absolve you of your sins.'"¹⁸⁹ These rippings are slightly similar to the Death Mandate as the person is killed for being a threat to the leadership; however, it is not based on any magical ability. Nonetheless, characters do not associate their God with oppression; after all, "May Anyme protect you"¹⁹⁰ is used as a blessing, not a threat.

However, not everyone sees Anyme the same way. The character mentions that even though the entire empire prayed to them, Ghostings, the native inhabitants, worshipped them differently: "Anyme wasn't the all-seeing God the Embers preached and the Dusters repeated, but an energy

¹⁸⁸ Forna, *Gilded Ones*, 141.

¹⁸⁹ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 10–11.

¹⁹⁰ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 22.

fueled by their ancestors' spirits. It was a guiding force of the path unseen."¹⁹¹ Dismissing the idea of a human-like figure that establishes the world's order through the chosen ones but absorbing it as a divine force makes this book, compared to the other three, unique. However, the colonizers, Embers and Dusters, do not present Anyme the same way. While in the other books, priests played a separate role from the government, in *The Final Strife*, the legal and religious system is governed by one person: "As Warden of Truth, he was believed to be the divine force of justice in the land. He was the head of the Abosom, a devout sect of Anyme's followers. He also governed the legal system and the religious rites of the empire, as they were one and the same."¹⁹² El-Arifi uses epigraphs at the beginning of every chapter to introduce some elements of world-building. Legal and religious systems both seem at the same level of providing justice and sentencing rebels to their death in the name of Truth. Although this could be the perfect example of the combination of politics and religion, this book never mentions corruption by religious beliefs as it mainly focuses on the Wardens of Strength and Crime.

In conclusion, these four novels focused on women's resilience in the face of torture, oppression, disrespect, and danger. Each of the main characters reacted in a different way, validating many women's experiences, understanding that conditions and person's personality play a large role in one's reaction and they should not be compared. This chapter discussed the many faces of oppression and the difficulties in identifying the source and appropriate response. Nevertheless, the main focus of these stories is the women's self-discovery journey as they learn to love and trust themselves, ensuring confidence and understanding that emotions and fails do not make you weak. All of these goals are best achieved with the support of someone in the same place, experiencing the same struggles. Friendships and unity are the conditions under which empowerment flourishes.

¹⁹¹ El-Arifi, *Strife*, 54.

¹⁹² El-Arifi, *Strife*, 66.

Conclusion

All stories have the potential to be empowering, no matter the genre. This paper's primary focus were young adult high fantasy novels with women as main characters. The aim of this thesis was the analysis of empowering nature of these stories reflected in secondary worlds, political subplots, friendships, power, heroines' personalities, and character growth. Readers whose representation is censored are given the impression that they are alone and abnormal, instilling inner conflicts and ostracizing them from social circles. *Beyond the Black Door*, *Throne of Glass*, *The Gilded Ones*, and *The Final Strife* each offer a variety of characters in a relatable way, aiming to normalize taboo topics and representation.

One of the instruments for creating empowering young adult high fantasy novel is the creation of secondary worlds. High fantasy worlds do not only offer new places the characters can visit, but also unique political, social, and moral values. The authors have the possibility to create a world with characters of only one race sexuality, gender, or a mixture of multiple to create an idealized version of the society. Nevertheless, young adult fantasy authors tend to choose the opposite option, highlighting the underlying issues they feel need to be addressed. For example, Namina Forna's *The Gilded Ones* portrays a world consumed by patriarchy and religious oppression. Even though there are societies where these practices are common—which is the message of the story—for Western readers it may feel foreign and impossible. From this point of view, it can be analyzed that Forna is using these extremities to highlight the inequality and injustice against women. Similar practice is seen in *The Final Strife*. Just like Deka, Sylah is also a person of color, however, in contrast to Deka, she does not experience any racist remarks and discrimination since all citizens of the empire are either black or imirs. Instead, the prejudice is based on the color of their blood, which is also similar to *The Gilded Ones*, and, therefore, social standing. These authors chose to comment on an aspect and used the possibilities of otherworlds to emphasize it.

Well-executed world-building is crucial for young adult fantasy novels as it should be consistent, not overwhelm the reader, compliment the plot, and be unique. Worlds should not be complex only to impress the reader, as it does not necessarily equal a successful story. Vastness of the world is based on the length of the book or series, book's setting, and overall plot-line. *Beyond the Black Door* was chosen as an example of a simple world-building that works in favor of the author and their readers. Contrastively, *The Final Strife* is exhausting with the amount of details

and characters introduced at once. Nonetheless, the world-building in these books was used effectively to empower and represent. The stories focus on three aspects to give their characters power: combat skills, confidence, and kind-heartedness.

Since all of the chosen secondary worlds are either in war or under the threat of it, the knowledge of combat is a priority. Kamai is the only character who fails at physical fighting skills, instead, the author focused on her already existing extraordinary qualities and supported them by giving the main character superpowers that boost them. Even though the book contains violence, Kamai's true weapons were her supernatural capabilities and intelligence. Although all heroines can be considered smart, the other three more rely on physical strength as they have all been trained to become soldiers and assassins. This analysis showed that authors ensured that the heroines preserved their femininity and did not succumb to the stereotype that connects strength with masculinity. It was achieved by comparing combat to dancing, describing women's gentle appearance, and prioritizing qualities other than strength by comparing them to men's roughness. However, the heroines still faced stereotyping from other characters. In some cases they used it to their advantage, for example, Celaena appearing unthreatening, but some characters faced it as an obstacle, for example Kamai, who was pressured to marry.

Main characters' extraordinary skillsets might evoke feelings of unachievable goals, therefore, authors used other methods to make their women characters relatable. All of the heroines are multi-dimensional and have numerous weaknesses, nonetheless, each has one that hinders her the most. Pride, rage, depression, lack of self-esteem, distrust, and fear are feelings that young adult readers, coming out of the turbulent teenagehood, relate to. These vulnerabilities are present to prove that one does not need to be 'perfect' and courageous to have power and that weaknesses do not stop women from being empowered.

Why give them superpowers in the first place, then? This question can be answered in numerous ways. Firstly, supernatural abilities are an easy way to give characters power, meaning that authors can focus on other aspects of building their characters, such as their personality, relationships, and backstory. Secondly, since they are involved in wars and defeating supernatural beings, they need the strength that comes with magic. Lastly, the magic in young adult high fantasy genre evokes escapist elements. Although these characters are powerful in many different ways thanks to magic, their empowerment comes from their personalities, actions, and hard-work; after all, they all needed to learn to use their magic.

Magic systems are inseparable from secondary worlds, nevertheless, it needs to be accompanied by other elements to create a well-rounded otherworld. Closely related to such magic systems is mythology and theology. Although these beliefs can be compared to religions that are part of the 'real' world, fantasy authors create new titles and stories which are unique to their world and influence the characters living in them. In Sylah's and Celaena's stories, religion does not play a dominant role or is not mentioned at all. Dekka's and Kamai's is the opposite as it provides a large negative function in their story. Both of these stories comment on the corruption and abuse of power that happens in higher social standings and the atrocities done in the names of gods. These actions were usually motivated by greed, jealousy, or thirst for fame. In these books, gods were not simply symbols but appeared as side characters, giving them human-like qualities. At first it may seem that it is the gods who are the source of these crimes since they are 'evil'; however, it is revealed that it was greedy men who unleashed them in the first place. Therefore, the story points at men as the source of hatred and injustice in this world, not gods or religion itself. This message is supported by positive characters who are either priestesses or descendants of these gods themselves.

As previously mentioned, these young adult high fantasy novels heavily focus on political subplots. And although these four books chose to approach the topic in a different light, they all include the question of colonization. The analysis has shown that political subplots are a powerful tool for writing empowering stories as it portrays women in dominant roles, standing up and fighting for themselves. In these stories, they do not wait in the sidelines for the powerholders, other than a few chosen side characters, to aid them but exercise the power they hold as people to overcome their obstacles. Oppression of women is a sensitive topic and evokes different reactions. These books portray women on the offensive. Female rage plays a large part in these books and, once again, represents women in roles that tend to be discouraged and suppressed.

It cannot be denied that women's friendships and mutual support are prominent in young adult fantasy books and encourage women to rely on each other instead of seeing each other as a competition. Women have a unique power to empower other women and these books offer instances that were analyzed to show how empowerment may be applied in friendships. All the main characters' victories would not be achieved without another woman or women that they have met during their journeys. Representation does not only involve the type of characters the stories consist of, but also their relationships and treatment of others. As previously mentioned, although

powerful and ruthless, the heroines are kind-hearted and supportive, showing their gentle feminine side without shame. The chosen books mention characters who are people of color, queer, and of various beliefs and body shapes. Although each one focuses on different group of people, the authors insisted on representing at least one character from each of these categories.

Overall, these books show the power women have when they are given the opportunity to use it. The female main characters' empowerment is relatable, even though the fantasy genre can feel out of reach. Young adult high fantasy novels are meant to educate, entertain, empower, and represent young and adult alike. It prepares young minds for the world they are exploring and offers understanding to those who have experienced these moments firsthand. These novels can be used as a tool for escapism, as it transports the reader into a different world; however, they also offer a deeper message. Such taboo topics, rebellion, and empowerment are threatening to those who make profit off of the oppressed and might feel threatened by the empowered masses. Censorship cuts unrepresented people from their true selves and gives the impression that they are alone. This is the importance of literature, no matter the genre. This paper's primary focus were queer women fighting for themselves and those they love; nevertheless, such sentiment could be tied to hundreds of other topics that young adult high fantasy offer as well.

Resumé

Young adult je žánr, který v posledních letech podlehl velkým změnám, a proto nemá jednotnou definici. Přestože je to tento žánr často marketingován pro mládež, věková hranice čtenářů i postav se zvyšuje. Kritéria pro témata tohoto žánru, která byla zvolena pro tuto práci jsou: dobrodružství, elementy bildungsrománů, politické konflikty mezi dobrem a zlem—nehledě na to na jaké straně postavy stojí—a záhada. Co se týče hlavních postav, byly vybrány ženy ve věku 15–21 let, které jsou, a nebo se v příběhu stanou sebevědomé, odhodlané bojovat za sebe i za své blízké, jsou ochotné tvrdě pracovat, aby těchto cílů dosáhly, mají vnitřní konflikt, který se v knize popisuje a vyvíjí a pracují na sobě fyzicky, psychicky i spirituálně. Světy, ve kterých se příběhy odehrávají jsou plné magie, komentují nerovná práva, která vyvolávají konflikty a mají elementy vysoké fantazie, jako je fantastická kultura a společnost.

Kapitola "Women's World" se zaměřuje nejen na ženy a jejich roli ve společnosti, ale též na nespravedlnost a nerovnost. Popisuje různé nástroje, které lidi ve vysokých pozicích mají a zneužívají je pro vlastní benefit na úkor ostatních. Za účelem analýzy vybraných knih se soustředí převážně na náboženství, stereotypy a cenzuru menšin a taboo témat. Jelikož hrdinky reagují na tyto skutečnosti, tato teoretická část popisuje *female rage*, neboli ženský hněv. Hněv v rukou žen je často potlačován a podceňován, což slouží jako nástroj pro ovládání a utlačování žen. Tato teoretická kapitola cituje autory, kteří vysvětlují důležitost hněvu a vypráví své osobní zkušenosti s naštváním a nenávistí. Nenávist je mocná emoce, která vede ke konfliktům, které mohou vypuknout v revoluce či války. Role žen ve světě by neměla být podceňována a tato kapitola poskytuje teorii, která toto tvrzení podporuje.

Tato práce analyzuje jak různé aspekty těchto knih prezentují hlavní hrdinky jako silné ženy, které bojují pro kontrolu nad svým životem (*empowerment*). Třetí kapitola vysvětluje jakou roli v tomto boji má prostředí, ve kterém se příběh odehrává. Soustředí se hlavně na představování a vytváření fantastických světů a shrnuje, že tato místa nemusí být rozsáhlá ani komplikovaná, pokud jsou užita efektivně. Přestože byly nalezeny spojitosti, každé z vybraných děl použilo představování světa (*world-building*) s jiným cílem, ať už to bylo klamání čtenáře, aby se snížila předvídatelnost knihy a nebo skrývání detailů za účelem velkého rozuzlení na konci knihy. Velká část této kapitoly se věnuje mapám jako ilustracím na začátku knih, jejich využití a jak se můžou promítnout jako fyzický předmět v dílech. "World-building" též poskytuje krátká shrnutí děl, aby byla následná analýza spojena se základními myšlenkami knih. Jedno z témat řešených v této

kapitole jsou politické konflikty, převážně okupace, válka a revolucionáři. Soustředí se na reakci hlavních i vedlejších postav na tyto situace a jejich následný dopad.

Poslední část této práce je pojmenovaná "Women's Empowerment" a zaměřuje se na ženské postavy v těchto knihách. I když se převážně soustředí na hlavní postavy, zmiňuje i vedlejší postavy a vysvětluje jejich roli v příběhu z pohledu reprezentace a vztahů. Přátelství mezi ženami je podrobně popsáno se zaměřením na vzájemné podporování se a laskavost, která jim dodává sílu a rozšiřuje možnosti jak v boji proti nepříteli, tak v jejich seberozvoji. Stereotypické hrdinové jsou fyzicky silní, nebojácní, mužský a většinu boje jsou sami. Hrdinky v nových young adult vysokých fantaziích se od těchto popisů odchyľují. Již od začátku knihy je čtenář seznámen s jejich nedokonalostmi a tragickou minulostí či přítomností. Díky těmto rozhodnutím jsou hlavní postavy více lidské a čtenáři se v nich můžou najít, což znamená, že jejich činy mají na ně větší vliv. Přestože má každá hrdinka moc, aby roli ve své knize mohly naplnit, nejsou neporazitelné a některým z nich, jako například Sylah a Celaena, neskončí příběh šťastně. Ovšem i finální neúspěch nezmenšuje jejich sílu, jelikož jejich osobní růst je znatelný a nikdy neodchází zcela poražené a stejně slabé jako byly v první kapitole. Hlavní postavy nepodléhají stereotypickým pravidlům mužnosti a i přes jejich sílu, moc a trénink, si ponechají svoji ženskou něžnost, ukazujíc, že je nedělá slabšími. Jedním z poselství těchto knih je ukázat, že mít pocity a být sám sebou je normální a neznamená, že člověk nemůže dosáhnout vysokých cílů.

Povahy a vlastnosti postav Kamai, Sylah, Deka, Anoor a Celaena jsou též předmětem poslední části této práce. Přestože není hlavní postavou, Anoor z *The Final Strife* reprezentuje několik citlivých témat, díky kterým je jednou z nejvíc *empowering* postav těchto knih. Anoor je sice dcerou jednoho z vládců země, ale od útlého věku je šikanovaná a nenáviděná její matkou, Uka, protože je jedním z vyměněných dětí během revoluce a není její biologickou dcerou. Uka fyzicky i psychicky týrá svoji falešnou dceru, protože není atleticky zdatná a je tlustší než ona. Z vybraných knih, Anoor je jedinou postavou, která se potýká s fatfobií a dokazuje nejenže vzhled neurčuje lidskou hodnotu a úspěch, ale hlavně absurditu těchto názorů. Jako většina postav v těchto knihách, Anoor reaguje vztekem a odhodláním. *Female rage* je v těchto příbězích ukázaný jako mocný nástroj a zdůrazňuje, že ženy jsou oprávněny za sebe bojovat.

Posledními tématy v této kapitole je reprezentace LGBTQ+ postav a romantické vztahy. Jak již bylo zmíněno, young adult knihy se zaměřují na vývoj postav a objevování sama sebe a otázka sexuality bezpochyby spadá do této kategorie. Některé z ztvárněných postav zmíní, že jsou

queer—a nebo mají sapphic vztah—a nepopisují žádný vnitřní boj, nicméně, jedna z vybraných knih slouží jako příklad pro objevování své identity a jak se s ní lidé můžou smířovat. Tyto čtyři knihy zobrazují velkou škálu míry reprezentace queer postav. Každá kniha v určitém rozsahu zmiňuje lidi, kteří jsou považováni za menšiny, ať už je to otázka genderu a sexuality, a nebo rasy; nicméně, soustředí se pouze na jednu či dvě a ostatní jsou více v pozadí. Reprezentace je velký faktor těchto fantazií a ukazuje ženy jako silné postavy, které berou svoji budoucnost do vlastních rukou.

Knihy *The Final Strife*, *Beyond the Black Door*, *Throne of Glass* a *The Gilded Ones* jsou sice kategorizované jako YA, ale jsou určeny i pro dospělé čtenáře, kteří mohou rezonovat s postavami, jelikož si touto fází života též prošli a takoví byli a nebo si přejí být. Tyto knihy podporují čtenáře všech věků, aby našli svoji sílu, sebevědomí a lidskost a objevili svůj vlastní *empowerment*.

Bibliography

El-Arifi, Saara. *The Final Strife*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2022.

Forna, Namina. *The Gilded Ones*. London: Usborne Publishing Ltd., 2021.

Sarah J. Maas. *Throne of Glass*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012.

Strickland, AdriAnne. *Beyond the Black Door*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Group, 2019.

Bauer, Katherine W., Michaela M Bucchianeri, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer. "Mother-reported parental weight talk and adolescent girls' emotional health, weight control attempts, and disordered eating behaviors." *Journal of Eating Disorders* 1, 45, December, 2013. <http://www.jeatdisord.com/content/1/1/45>.

Bii, Edwin. "Spiritual Manipulation: When They Use Religion and Cultural Beliefs to Manipulate You." *Medium*, January 22, 2024.

Chemaly, Soraya. *Rage Becomes Her*. New York: Atria Books, 2018.

Clute, John, John Grant. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. London: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999.

Diekman Amanda B., Sarah K Murnen. "Learning to Be Little Women and Little Men: The Inequitable Gender Equality of Nonsexist Children's Literature." *Sex Roles* 50, March 2004. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226670406>.

Eccleshare, Julia. "High Fantasy," in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt. London: Routledge, 2004.

Echele, Kathryn. "Weaponization of Religion: The Manipulation of Religion in the Pursuit of Political Power in Yugoslavia and Syria." Senior Theses, Fordham University Fordham University, 2023.

Fitzgerald, Meghan A. "Young Adult Fantasy Fiction in Recent Years." Master's paper, University of North Carolina, 2008.

Garland, Anne Witte. *Women Activists: Challenging the Abuse of Power*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1988.

Gates, Pamela S., Susan B. Steffel, Francis J. Molson. *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults*.

Hoyt, Crystal L., Jim Blascovich. "Leadership Efficacy and Women Leaders' Responses to Stereotype Activation." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 10, October 2007. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1368430207084718>.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen, 1981.

Lee-Chai, Annette Y., John A. Bargh. *The Use and Abuse of Power*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2001.

- Le Guin, Ursula. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1902. https://manifestolibrary.noblogs.org/files/2018/10/Ursula-K.-Le-Guin-The-Language-of-the-Night_-Essays-on-Fantasy-and-Science-Fiction-1993-HarperPerennial.pdf.
- Lewis, C. S. "On Three Ways of Writing for Children." In *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, ed. Sheila Egoff. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Marx, Karl. "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right." In *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* 7 & 10 (February 1844). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.
- Mathews, Richard. *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Muehrcke, Phillip C., and Juliana O. Muehrcke. "Maps in Literature." *Geographical Review* 64, no. 3 (July 1974). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/213556>.
- Pabelonio, Marie. "Can You Be Too Old for YA? Our Expert Opinion: No." *Goodreads*, July 15, 2019. <https://www.goodreads.com/blog/show/1632-can-you-be-too-old-for-ya-our-expert-opinion-no>.
- Pierce, Tamora. "Fantasy: Why Kids Read It, Why Kids Need It." *School Library Journal* vol. 39, October 1993.
- Rabkin, Eric S. *Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales, and Stories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Raymond, Janice G. "Gyn/Affection and Hetero-relations." In *A Passion for Friends*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2001.
- Ryu, Suyeon. "Fear Mongering Religious Manipulation on Children." *The Spectator* issue 7, vol. 112, December 10, 2021. <https://pdf.stuyspec.com/112/7.pdf>.
- Santana, Carmen Martín. "The World of the Fantastic as a Literary Genre. The Trace of a Quest in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*." Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2006. https://accedacris.ulpgc.es/bitstream/10553/3913/1/0234349_00002_0011.pdf.
- Sullivan III, C. W. "High Fantasy," in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Suzuki, Tomohiro. "Mothers' Influence on the Body Dissatisfaction and Weight Loss Behaviors of their Preschool- to Junior-High-School-Level Daughters: The Case of Japan." *Japanese Psychological Research* 65, issue 3, September 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpr.12381>.
- Tacye, "Saara El-Arifi Chats Worldbuilding Behind The Final Strife," Interviews, *United by Pop*, last modified August 9, 2022, <https://www.unitedbypop.com/young-adult-books/interviews-young-adult-books/saara-el-the-final-strife/>.
- Timmerman, John G. *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre*. Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular press, 1983.
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Wolf, Shelby A., Karen Coats, Patricia Enciso, Christine A. Jenkins. *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Yolen, Jane. *Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie and Folklore in the Literature of Childhood*. New York: Philomel Books, 1981.

Zimmerman, Bonnie. *The Safe Sea of Women*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.

Zimmerman, Jess. *Women and Other Monsters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021).

"Author Interview: Saara El-Arifi (The Final Strife, The Battle Drum)," Author Interviews, The Fantasy Review, accessed January 14, 2024, <https://thefantasyreviews.com/2023/05/18/author-interview-saara-el-arifi-the-final-strife-the-battle-drum/>.

"Fantasy Book Sales Statistics," WordsRated, October 2, 2022. <https://wordsrated.com/fantasy-book-sales-statistics>.

"Fiction Books Sales Statistics," WordsRated, January 30, 2023. <https://wordsrated.com/fiction-books-sales/>.

Andi. "Currently Reading This Book." Review of *Beyond the Black Door*, by AdriAnne Strickland. *Goodreads*. December 2019. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2392552942?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1

"Investing in the Health and Well-Being of Young Adults," Books, National Library of Medicine, last modified 2015. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK284791/>.

Pequot Library. "Meet the Author: Namina Forna." Posted February 3, 2022, YouTube video, 59:19. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=762psuhbA5U>.

Tamron Hall Show, "Author Namina Forna Escaped a War as a Child & Later Became a Best-Selling Author," posted May 27, 2022, 5:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=re-AaAhvxvM>.

"Young adult." American Library Association, accessed August 4, 2023. <https://www.ala.org/ala/protocolsbucket/usersvcbucket/youngadultbucket/youngadult.htm>.