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BRAVE, BRIGHT AND BEGUILING

Representations of the Witch in Young Adult
Fantasy Fiction (1990s – 2010s)



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PhD Thesis in English Studies

UAB

**Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona**

**BRAVE, BRIGHT AND BEGUILING
Representations of the Witch in Young Adult
Fantasy Fiction (1990s – 2010s)**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to demonstrate that the character of the witch has undergone a positive transformation within young adult fantasy fiction. After second-wave feminists reclaimed the term 'witch' in the 1960s, more positive representations of the character in different media have appeared. Mostly depicted as a villain and a maleficent woman until the recent past, the witch has now become an anti-patriarchal symbol in many cultural expressions. The four series of novels analysed in this dissertation, namely Terry Pratchett's *Tiffany Aching* series (2003-2015), J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), Rin Chupeco's *The Bone Witch* trilogy (2017-2019) and Kelley Armstrong's *Women of the Otherworld* series (2001-2012), portray the witch under a positive light and dismantle the notion of the witch as a wicked character.

Although the witch has been thoroughly researched within historical and cultural studies, there is a dearth regarding her current representation in young adult fantasy fiction. Thus, through a close reading of the selected texts and an understanding of how the witch has been previously depicted in fiction, as well as considering how the fantasy and young adult genres operate, this thesis explores how the witches present in young adult fantasy fiction are no longer monstrous hags but brave, bright and beguiling characters. By analysing how fantasy is used in each of the texts analysed, together with the conventions of young adult fiction I shall provide evidence of the character's transformations.

Keywords: witch, YA fiction, fantasy, feminism, female hero, Rin Chupeco, *The Bone Witch* trilogy, J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter* series, Terry Pratchett, *Tiffany Aching* series, Kelley Armstrong, *Women of the Otherworld*

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INTRODUCTION: YOUNG ADULT FANTASY AND THE WITCH

A stereotype becomes a stereotype when a significant percentage of the population appears to conform to it.
Kelley Armstrong, *Dime Store Magic*

This dissertation aims to explore how the depiction of the witch in young adult fantasy fiction produced between the 1990s and the early 2010s challenges previous sexist conceptions of this character within this genre. While the witch and fantasy fiction have been thoroughly and widely studied independently, young adult fiction is a relatively new and underdeveloped field. Besides, the conflation of the three (character, genre, subgenre or witch, fantasy, young adult fiction) has been overlooked and it has only recently begun to attract scholarly attention. These three elements which compose my dissertation, once marginalized and considered devoid of interest, are now mainstream and worth of academic attention. Although these three aspects are often considered independently, it is my belief that they share a connection; thus my choice of texts for this dissertation consists of novels which contain the three elements.

As John Stewig noted, “One of the most interesting, recurring figures in recent fantasy for young readers is the witch woman. (...) either at the plot’s center or at least as an important operative to get the plot going” (1993: 48). In the ensuing chapters, I shall therefore examine four popular English-language young adult fantasy series published between the 1990s and the early 2010s which incorporate images of the witch that differ from stereotypical portrayals of the character in previous literature: Terry Pratchett’s *Tiffany Aching* series (2003-2015), J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), Rin Chupeco’s *The Bone Witch* trilogy (2017-2019) and Kelley Armstrong’s *Women of the Otherworld* (2004-2012). I selected these works not only because they share progressive

representations of the witch, but also, because they address a young adult readership and contain different fantasy elements which attests to the adaptability of the witch. While Pratchett's and Rowling's series are aimed at younger readers,¹ Chupeco's and Armstrong's books require a more mature audience.² Additionally, all these novels feature adolescent or young adult protagonists (or secondary characters) whose maturation process parallels their development as witches. Nonetheless, the four works chosen for my study differ from each other in the manner they use the fantasy genre conventions and how they present the character of the witch, which allows me to explore the different uses of fantasy elements in young adult fiction and how the witch can be portrayed positively in different contexts.

Even though my dissertation will focus on these four texts, I am aware that there are plenty of other young adult fantasy series and novels which include a young witch as their protagonist, published before and after the texts selected for this study, and I refer occasionally to them throughout my discussion. Novels such as L.J. Smith's *The Secret Circle* (1992), Gregory Maguire's *Wicked* (1995), Rachel Hawkins's *Hex Hall* trilogy (2010-2012), Armstrong's *Darkest Powers* (2008-2010) and *Darkness Rising* (2011-2013) trilogies and the anthology of short stories *Toil and Trouble: 15 Tales of Women and Witchcraft* (Spotswood and Sharpe, 2018), amongst others, might be discussed in relation to the primary texts. Similarly, earlier representations of the witch in young adult fantasy fiction such as Andre Norton's *Witch World* novels (1963-1996) might be considered precedents of the works I analyse. I have, however, dismissed others on the

¹ Pratchett's website classifies the *Tiffany Aching Series* under the label "younger readers" (<https://www.terrypratchettbooks.com/book-series/younger-readers/>) and the *Harry Potter* books are usually classified under the twelve and up category.

² Chupeco's trilogy was marketed as young adult from the beginning but Armstrong's series is not aimed at young adults. As I shall explore in its chapter, however, the trilogy inside the series featuring Savannah Levine might be labelled new adult, a category that shares similar characteristics to young adult fiction. I will explore this category further in Chapter 4.



grounds that they were still incomplete when I started my dissertation, for example Nnedi Okorafor's series *The Nsibi Scripts* (2011-2022). I decided to focus on young adult fiction because it was one of the most popular genres during the period when the novels I analyse were written and published:

With another baby boom coming along in 1992, the Second Golden Age of YA literature bloomed in the 2000s. The teenage population—between twelve and nineteen years of age—grew by 17 percent, outpacing the growth of the rest of the population. The definition of 'young adult' grew to include readers as young as ten and as old as twenty-five (as of the late 1990s). YA fiction today is a force in the book industry, with children's and YA books gaining 22.4 percent of sales in 2014. (August, 2022: online)

Therefore, young adult books which included a progressive image of the witch helped to evolve and promote the character. Besides, the intended readership of young adult novels, adolescents, might benefit from being exposed to an image of the witch that differs from that found in fairy tales and children's literature: whereas the witch in novels aimed at a younger audience tend to be the villains, representations of the witch in young adult novels position her in the place of the hero. What is more, young adult fiction, through the character of the witch, helps readers to think critically and question the roles and attributes assigned to certain characters, which leads me to the reasons why I decided to focus on the witch.

The witch is both a literary and a real-life figure. While there are many characters which represent women within fiction, such as the fairy-tale princess or the damsel in distress, they distinctively belong to fiction whereas the witch is a complex and multifaceted character. As I shall demonstrate throughout this dissertation, the witch can fulfil a myriad of roles. The witch resonates with many because she transitioned from mistreated victim to empowered hero, both in fiction and in real life, and her malleability and capacity to adapt differs from other characters within fiction. Finally, the choice to focus on fantasy fiction is due to the genre's own ability to change and adapt. Fantasy is



not bound to strict genre conventions and patterns which allows characters such as the witch to demonstrate their own versatility.

Lastly, it is also important to note that I will not consider other representations of the witch outside fantasy fiction. Although enormously interesting, images of the witch in historical fiction and other literary and artistic expressions such as theatre and poetry are not part of my study. Historical fiction,³ for example, is rich in representation of witches yet a close reading of a historical fiction novel is inevitably connected to the historical events portrayed in the text and how accurate the events described might be. Historical fiction is a vast genre and undergoing the task to analyse how the witch has been characterised within this genre would require a separate thesis. The analysis of plays, although some feature quintessential witches, such as William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1623) or Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), requires a different approach than the one I am undertaking in my dissertation, which also applies to the study of poetry. Young adult fantasy fiction allows me to consider the witch from a different perspective: how a witch grows up within a community which might (not) accept her and how her development as a witch is tied to her maturation process to finally emerge as the hero. While some reference to such representations will be essential, they are not the focus of my dissertation. There might be references, however, to how the witch has also been portrayed in film and TV, as the witch has also become a popular figure in those media.⁴

³ Some historical fiction novels including images of the witch are Katherine Howe's *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* (2009), *The Witch's Daughter* series (*The Witch's Daughter*, 2011; *The Winter Witch*, 2013; and *The Midnight Witch*, 2014) by Paula Brackstone and Amy McKay's *Witches of New York* (2016).

⁴ Some examples of TV witches are Nell Scovell's *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2000), based on the Archie comics series of the same name (1971-2009), FX's *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013-2014) and Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020), also based on the Archie comics series. Popular movies featuring witches are *Hocus Pocus* (1993) directed by Kenny Ortega, *The Craft* (1996) by Andrew Fleming, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) by Eduardo Sánchez and Daniel Myrick, and *The Witch* (2016) by Robert Eggers.



0.1 Research Questions and Thesis Statement

My interest in the character of the witch stems from my MA thesis in which I analysed Anne Rice's trilogy *The Lives of the Mayfair Witches* (1990-1994). My MA thesis explores the figure of the witch as a disempowered character who offers a negative portrayal of witches within a Gothic narrative and it aims to bring attention to the fact that even though some representations of the witch might seem progressive, they in fact carry misogynistic connotations and dangerous representations of sexual violence as accepted and even desired behaviour. In contrast, the aim of this dissertation is to offer a comprehensive analysis of the figure of the witch as a progressive character presented, as noted, in four young adult fantasy texts published between the 1990s and 2010s. There are many portrayals of the witch within fantasy fiction which characterize her as the villain in the story, a trend which originated from Biblical texts such as the *First Book of Samuel* (630-540 BCE) and which has continued until today. Since I considered the representation of the witch from a darker perspective in my MA thesis, I sought to investigate how the witch can also be a source of inspiration and a role model for young adults. Thus, my choice to focus on young adult fantasy novels that vindicate the witch stems from the belief that the witch's popularity in this genre is explained by readers seeking new readings of the character. Therefore, it is essential to investigate how the witch is being portrayed. Consequently, my research questions are the following: how do these portrayals of witches relate to the gender issues of the period in which the novels are written/set? Do they reinforce or undermine patriarchal ideology? Are they ideologically conflicted? Considering previous negative representations of the witch, how does the fantasy genre deal with representing the witch as an anti-patriarchal character? How are these works gendered? How do they define femininity? Do the characters



conform to their assigned gender roles? And, finally, what role(s) do these works play in terms of women's literary history and tradition?

Ultimately, the witch has become an anti-patriarchal symbol used to represent women's experience fairly and it is necessary to assess her development within fiction as well as the effect(s) this evolution has had on the young adult and fantasy genres. One of the objectives in this study is to demonstrate that the character of the witch has evolved from maleficent woman to anti-patriarchal hero and the works I have selected provide evidence to support my thesis.

Through an exhaustive analysis of my research questions, I intend to establish a correlation between the reclamation of the term 'witch' by Second Wave feminists and the rise and increasingly favourable portrayal of witches in fiction, especially in fantasy for young adults. The re-appropriation of the term has benefited women in terms of representation: the witch we find in fantasy texts is not only and no longer the hag, the madwoman or the villain. In young adult fantasy fiction the witch is not only the protagonist of her story; she is also portrayed as a hero, a position which she was previously denied. The new readings of the witch as an anti-patriarchal hero and the different femininities she can embody allow readers to question and challenge patriarchal assumptions, which in turn benefits women's representation within young adult fantasy fiction. Before I proceed to outline the structure of my dissertation, I shall briefly consider the three aspects which frame my discussion: fantasy, young adult fiction and the character of the witch.

0.2 The Challenge of Defining Fantasy: An Overview of the Genre

Fantasy has proven to be an elusive genre: to provide an exact definition of what fantasy is seems to be unfeasible and yet the genre is distinctively different from other

literary expressions. While this dissertation does not seek to provide a literary review of the different definitions of fantasy and how the genre has evolved and been understood through time, it is essential to assess how some scholars have considered the topic.

There are several key critical works which theorize the genre and try to offer, if not a strict definition, a close understanding of how it operates. Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (originally *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique*, 1970) is no doubt a foundational analysis of fantasy. In his study, Todorov sets to define the fantastic, a notion that to him, stands between the marvellous and the uncanny. According to Todorov, the fantastic is “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (1973: 25); the concept of the fantastic is “therefore to be defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary” (1973: 25). As I mentioned, Todorov places fantasy between the “uncanny” and the “marvellous”. Clute and Grant observe that “In Todorov’s scheme ‘the fantastic’ occupies an intermediate, and privileged, position between ‘the uncanny’—stories where unusual events are clearly assigned a natural explanation—and ‘the marvellous’—stories where unusual events are clearly assigned a supernatural explanation” (1997: 335). Nevertheless, “The genre Todorov examines in this book is not what most English speakers call fantasy; rather it is a rather specialized brand of eerie fiction in which the reader never knows for sure whether events are natural or supernatural” (Attebery, 2012: 89). Therefore, even though Todorov’s work is often cited as one of the essential works concerning the fantasy genre, his theory, as Attebery warns, is focused on the fantastic than fantasy itself.

Another notable fantasy theorist, Rosemary Jackson, expands Todorov’s theory in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) to include aspects of psychoanalytical theory. “Fantasy in literature”, she argues, “deals so blatantly and repeatedly with

unconscious material that it seems rather absurd to try to understand its significance without some reference to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic readings of texts” (1981: 3). T.E. Apter’s *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* (1982) also tackles fantasy from a psychoanalytical perspective: “Psychoanalytic theory, so adept at defying absurdity, is a plausible aid to the interpretation of this difficult and dubious genre” (1982: 5). From a psychoanalytical perspective, fantasy can be used to explore the unconscious: what is normally controlled and hidden is exposed within fantasy “Any fantasy, from folk and fairy tales to science fiction and children’s tales, is valued as an introduction to unconscious material” (Apter, 1982: 6). Thus, I agree with Apter’s claim that “fantasy can explore and test reality in much the same manner as psychoanalysis” (1982: 7). The witches selected to be part of this study test and defy the reality they are part of and thus demonstrate that fantasy is the ideal setting to do so.

In *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) Brian Attebery argues that fantasy can be a mode, a genre, and a formula. In his opinion, “genres may be approached as ‘fuzzy sets’, meaning that they are defined not by boundaries but by a center” (1992: 12). Drawing from Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of the fuzzy sets,⁵ Attebery argues that the “centre” is a category surrounded by “prototypical examples” which are at a more or lesser distance from it. Therefore, we might be able to identify fantasy works according to whether they resemble or deviate from the prototype that is in the centre. For instance, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) by J.R.R Tolkien is usually described as a model of the type of fantasy text that would be right in the centre. Therefore, other works which might be considered fantasy should be compared to the central text and their status as a fantasy text determined by how much they resembled the prototypical example. Attebery’s theory seems to have

⁵ The theory of the fuzzy sets originally derives from mathematics, in which fuzzy sets are groups whose elements have different degrees of membership. Lakoff and Johnson applied this theory to linguistics. In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) they suggest that metaphors are a tool which people use to understand abstract concepts such as feelings and time. For more insight into fuzzy sets check Belohlavek et al (2009).



become one of the most accepted definitions of fantasy by other literary theorists and from which others develop further theories.

John Clute and John Grant's previously quoted volume *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997) is a quintessential reference work concerning fantasy. Clute and Grant define fantasy as "a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms" (1997: 338). Clute and Grant's work is helpful when considering works published during and after the 20th century: "There is no easy division between realism and the fantastical in writers before 1600 or so, and no genre of written literature, before about the early 19th century, seems to have been constituted so as deliberately to confront or contradict the 'real'" (338). However, this does not mean that fantasy, as we know it today, was not present in literature before the 20th century. There were stories "understood by their authors (and readers) as being impossible" yet "it is quite something else to suggest that the perceived impossibility of these stories *was their point*—that they stood as a counter-statement to a dominant world-view" (338, original italics). Therefore, what is understood nowadays as fantasy literature has its origin "in these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discussions of fancy vs. imagination, history vs. romance, the mirror vs. the lamp" (Wolfe, 2012: 11). Still, the historical origins of fantasy are not clearly defined, and as Moran observes:

Many commentators believe in a deep history of fantasy and include in the genre any and all mythical, folkloric or legendary narratives, whatever their place or time of origin. Others (...) view fantasy as an inherently modern genre that emerged around the Victorian era, either before or in the wake of the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic and the Arts and Crafts movement, around authors like William Morris and George MacDonald. (2019: 13)

While the aim of this dissertation is not to trace the birth and development of fantasy, it is necessary to acknowledge that although fantasy was not conceived as a genre until a relatively recent period, its features and characteristics were present in the works



of authors who might not have been considered within the fantasy genre at one point, but which contained fantastical elements, nonetheless. Some of these works which might be considered fantasy through modern conceptions of the genre also include the presence of witches and might have shaped how witches have been represented in fantasy in later works.

Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) deals with how fantasy's language and rhetoric shape the genre, establishing a taxonomy. Mendlesohn's and Edward James's *A Short History of Fantasy* (2012) covers a myriad authors and texts and traces the genre from its earliest years to the 2010s, while seeking to explain its continuing and growing popularity. Andrew Rayment's *Fantasy, Politics, Postmodernity: Pratchett, Pullman, Miéville and Stories of the Eye* (2014) begins by criticizing most of the previously mentioned scholars for being too pretentious and diachronic in their definitions of fantasy and proceeds to define fantasy as a genre "characterised by its providing of meticulously constructed technologically backward worlds that are full of unfamiliar (magical) things and people" (2014: 17). Lucie Armitt's *Fantasy* (2020) considers the kind of writing we find in fantasy and how it is different from other sub-genres of the literary fantastic. In fairy tales, for example, the reader enters the fantastic when they read the customarily 'once upon a time' but "In other narratives, a journey needs to be undertaken, away from the world of realism and into the unfathomable" (2005: 9). Generally, however, fantasy is understood as a genre in which the presence of the inexplicable and impossible conflate, thus creating a world of wonder that is different from our own reality. For the purposes of my dissertation, I shall primarily rely on Attebery's, Clute's and Grant's and Mendlesohn's definitions and classifications of fantasy.



Rhetorics of Fantasy (2008) is especially helpful in its taxonomy of different types of fantasy. Mendlesohn provides a categorization of five different types: The Portal Quest Fantasy, Immersive Fantasy, Intrusion Fantasy, Liminal Fantasy and “The Irregulars”. Broadly, in portal quest fantasies, which have their origin in ancient Greek myths, “a character leaves her familiar surroundings and passes through a portal into an unknown place” (2008: 30) where they go on a heroic journey. Immersive fantasy is entirely set in an imaginary world where characters do not question their surroundings since they are part of them. Mendlesohn argues that immersive fantasy can be sustained because the reader is familiar with the framework of the story: “an author can use the knowing of the reader to imprison the reader within her immersion, to use the sense of expectation to seal off the fantastic world and make it real” (2008: 146). Therefore, it might be argued that immersive fantasy texts imitate the structure of earlier works which have previously been identified as fantasy to be considered as such: “authors use the legacy texts of fantasy to create endoskeletons around which both the story and the world are draped. Even if one knows the shape of the skeleton one does not know the story per se, but one might know how the story works” (146). This explanation is reminiscent of Attebery’s definition of fantasy: the readers can identify a text as fantasy depending on how close the text is to the centre of the “fuzzy set”. Thirdly, Mendlesohn describes intrusion fantasy as the one which disrupts an already existing comfortable world (which is often but not necessarily contemporary Earth) and in which this trouble “disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled” (165). Finally, liminal fantasy “is a fantasy set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world” and “it must assume that the reader is as much a part of the world as are those being read about” as well as being “both the mirror of mimetic literature and its inner soul” (2008: 99). Although considered separately, one must be aware that texts



might incorporate and mix different types of fantasy, which is what Mendlesohn defines as “The Irregulars”.

Kari Maund also provides insight into the fantasy genre in her essay “Reading the Fantasy Series”, which is especially useful considering that all the texts I deal with in my dissertation are series. Maund divides series into three different types: classic, scripted and thematic or series of place. According to Maund, classic series

may take place over a long period of time, occur in a number of settings and present the protagonists with a variety of problems and challenges. As a form it is open-ended. Each of the exploits and adventures is largely self-contained: although there may also be an overarching plot, this is not usually the focus of any one adventure or episode. (2012: 148)

Pratchett’s *Discworld* and Armstrong’s *Women of the Otherworld* might be considered, as a whole, classic series. The second type Maund identifies is the plot-driven scripted series:

(...) perhaps the most common form within fantasy: in the first volume the author presents a situation, a problem, a conflict and a cast of characters whose task it to resolve it. The middle volumes provide obstacles and short-term successes often followed by further obstacles. The final volume contains resolution and character reward. (2012: 148)

Rowling’s *Harry Potter* and Chupeco’s *The Bone Witch* series belong to this second category. In the thematic series novels are “bound less by plot arc or continuity of character than by a common theme or setting” (2012: 149). An example of such a series might be *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C.S. Lewis. However, none of these categories are mutually exclusive and one series can display elements of more than one category.

In light of the above, fantasy texts might be approached from different stances and the same text can be evaluated from different perspectives. Fantasy texts can also be further divided into different subcategories: Epic, Sword and Sorcery, Dark Fantasy, Urban Fantasy and so on. Since the different texts I explore in this dissertation belong to different subgenres of fantasy, I shall discuss their particular characteristics in their own chapters without providing a single overall definition for the genre. However, a key plot device in fantasy novels is the presence of magic. Fantasy novels might or might not



include a detailed magic system within their narrative, yet its presence is essential: “Magic is the coin of the realm, the force that replaces the natural laws of science fiction. Transformations happen by magic” (Martin, 2002: 26). I shall discuss the different magical elements of each of the series in their own chapters. Therefore, I will now turn to examine the second key concept in my thesis: young adult fiction.

0.3 Between Children’s Literature and Adulthood: What is Young Adult Fiction?

Young Adult (YA) literature, Garcia writes, “has a rich history, but the genre has too often been marginalized and even demonized” (2013: ix). As Garcia points out, despite its popularity and demand, Young Adult Fiction⁶ is still seen as genre fiction: texts which are not considered worthy of critical attention because they are dismissed as being superficial forms of entertainment. The fact that YA fiction is still disregarded as low literature might be tied to its commercial origin in the USA market, “for while the implication of the label suggests more challenging issues, in some areas of the market what often emerged was fiction that primarily concerned control of the body, and this was particularly true of the paranormal romance” (Levy and Mendlesohn, 2016: 198). In *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, Michael Cart also discusses the origins and evolution of Young Adult fiction as a genre:

Because adolescents, teenagers, or young adults were—at least until the late 1930s—still widely regarded as children, (...) there was no separate category of literature specifically targeted at them. However, as—over the course of the first four decades of the twentieth century (1900–1940)—opinions began coalescing around the viability of recognizing a new category of human being with its own distinct life needs, books aimed at these “new” humans began to emerge. (Cart, 2010: e-book)

⁶ Both Young Adult Literature and Young Adult Fiction are terms used interchangeably when they refer to texts considered to be written for a young adult readership. I shall also use its abbreviated form ‘YA fiction’.



The history and development of YA fiction is tied to how childhood and adolescence have been perceived through time. According to Bossche:

It was during the Victorian era that the years from age 13 to 24 came to be regarded as a distinct epoch in individual development: adolescence. The word ‘adolescence’ came into vogue in the late nineteenth century, and the first major sociological study of it, G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence*, appeared in 1905. While adolescents came to be regarded as distinctly different from children or adults, the concept of adolescence (the word is derived from the Latin *adolescere*, ‘to grow up’) was implicitly tied to Victorian notions of what it meant to be an adult. (1999: 82)

During the Victorian era the transition from child to adult was different depending on one’s social standing. The upper classes employed different rituals to signal a child’s entry into adulthood, such as the ‘coming out’ ceremony, whereas children born into working classes were sent to work as soon as they reached puberty. There are many Victorian novels that portray the coming of age of its hero or heroine and that reflect the values and concerns of this time. Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (1849) and George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) are just two examples of coming-of-age novels written during the Victorian period.

The modern notion of teenagers as a separate population group emerged in the mid-20th century: “During 1944, Americans began to use the word ‘teenager’ to describe the category of young people from fourteen to eighteen. From the very start, it was a marketing term used by advertisers and manufacturers that reflected the newly visible spending power of adolescents” (Savage, 2007: e-book). Coinciding with the emergence of youth culture in the 1950s, publishers began to distribute books aimed at adolescents⁷ which resonated with their feelings and experiences. As Karen Coats argues in the *Handbook of Research on Children’s and Young Adult 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

⁷ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “the earliest known use of the word adolescent is in the Middle English period (1150 – 1500). OED’s earliest evidence for adolescent is from around 1440, in Palladius’ *De Re Rustica*.”



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most importantly, between an impulsive individualism and a generative ethics of interconnectedness. (Coats, 2011: 316)

It seems, therefore, that YA fiction targets a specific group of readers between the ages of 12 and 25: “Literature for twelve to eighteen-year-olds (or thirteen to nineteen-year-olds) could officially be described as ‘teen’; and books for eighteen (or even sixteen) to twenty-five-year-olds could be categorized as ‘young adult’” (Cart, 2010: e-book). However, “according to YALSA, the Young Adult Library Services Association, young adult literature is aimed at people aged 12 to 18, and in most cases the protagonists of the novels fall within those age ranges, and the story is told through teenage eyes” (Peterson, 2018). Nevertheless, YA fiction is also popular amongst adults: “approximately 55 percent of today’s YA readers are adults” (Kitchener, 2017); what is more, many of the novels considered to be the first young adult novels published in the 1970s were not specifically targeted to a young adult audience (Cart, 2010). Hence, there is no consensus on the age range of young adult readership, which is, as Coats reflects, “a persistent obstacle to the serious study of YA literature” (2011: 322). As I see it, YA fiction is written and marketed for young people between the ages of 12 and 25. However, the texts under the category of YA explore universal themes and topics, such as love and death, which can resonate to different age groups. Besides, as Levy and Mendlesohn suggest:

It can even be argued that the Young Adult form, which replaced the Juveniles of the 1950s, is precisely not about growing up in that it is not about entering the adult world, but rather about occupying a class of people that, at any time prior to the 1960s, would have overwhelmingly been in the workplace. (2016: 209)

Critical work focused on juvenile fiction appeared by the mid-1950s (Cart, 2010: e-book). “The Novel for the Adolescent” by Dwight L Burton (1951), is often cited as the first piece of YA criticism, yet the YA label still did not exist. In this article, Burton discusses four different novels aimed at young adults and he concludes that:

Because of the nature of adolescence itself, the good novel for the adolescent should be full in true invention and imagination. It must free itself of Pollyannism or the Tarkington-Henry Aldrich-Corliss Archer tradition and maintain a clear vision of the



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adolescent as a person of complexity, individuality, and dignity. The novel for the adolescent presents a ready field for the mature artist. (1951: 369)

Since the intended reader are teenagers, most of the critical work on this type of writing focuses on its educational purposes and how texts can be used in the classroom (see Herz and Gallo, 1996; Coats, 2011; Gruner, 2019). I will not focus on the education value of the novels I analyse since this is beyond the scope of my dissertation. However, the influence the texts I analyse can have on young adult readers will be considered.

During the late 20th and early 21st century, YA fiction experienced a boost thanks to best-sellers such as the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) and *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010) so that by the mid-1990s YA fiction “had made a miraculous recovery to become one of the most vital and innovative areas of publishing” (Cart, 2016: e-book). The popularity YA fiction is enjoying today makes it a significant research topic within literary and cultural studies since its themes resonate not only with teenagers but also with the adult population. I agree with Daniels’ opinion that “there is absolutely no reason to avoid the serious scholarly study of YA literature. These are works that have significance to all of us, regardless of which age category we fall into, because they speak to the human condition” (2006: 79). Nonetheless, as she also points out, criticism is still scant because scholars “mistakenly believe that works labelled as YA should only be analysed in terms of the connection—whether that be historical or psychological—to the supposed ‘intended’ reader” (2006: 78).

Before 2021, books under the label YA did not have an established canon. As Coats observes, this is important as having a canon is “part of the process of legitimizing a marginalized literature in the field of literary studies” (2011: 317). In 2021 Victor Malo-Juvera and Crag Hill published *Critical Explorations of Young Adult Literature: Identifying and Critiquing the Canon*. Juvera and Hill considered three aspects a text should have to be included in the canon: “it [a text] has been widely and continuously



read over many years, that it is taught with greater frequency when compared to other YA texts, and that it may have been groundbreaking at the time of its release and/or had lasting impacts on subsequent writers in the field” (2021: e-book). By providing YA with a canon, the genre becomes legitimized. Currently, only the *Harry Potter* series is included in the canon of YA texts out of the four texts I analyse in my dissertation.

Theorizing YA fiction and providing a taxonomy of the genre has proven to be challenging. In *Essentials of Young Adult Literature* (2015), Short, Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown offer, however, helpful insights. Fundamentally, YA texts present an adolescent protagonist, and the plot revolves around their actions, decisions, and behaviour. Similarly, the speech, events, and problems in the plot are related to adolescents and the point of view imitates the adolescent’s mind and not that of an adult reflecting back on adolescence. Besides, as many critics have pointed out, the novels are specifically written for young adults and marketed to their age segment (Short, Tomlinson and Lynch-Brow, 2014: 3). Accordingly, in YA fiction one of the main challenges, or tasks, the protagonists face is to how grow up, as the narrative reflects: “no matter what events are going on in the book, accomplishing that task is really what the book is about, and in the climactic moment the resolution of the external conflict is linked to a realization for the protagonist that moves toward shaping an adult identity” (Campbell, 2010: 70).

The four characters I have chosen to analyse in my dissertation are on the verge of becoming adolescents at the beginning of their story. Tiffany Aching and Tea Pahlavi are 11, whereas Hermione Granger and Savannah Levine are 12. These different witches undergo a double process of maturation: they begin their journey as children but by the end of the narrative, they are perceived as young adult women. Besides, their maturation process parallels their development as proficient witches. In addition, “growth in this genre is inevitably represented as being linked to what the adolescent has learned about



power. Without experiencing gradations between power and powerlessness, the adolescent cannot grow. Thus, power is even more fundamental to adolescent literature than growth” (Trites, 2000: x). In YA texts, the teen protagonists learn to negotiate their place within an adult community that is reluctant to see them as individuals with distinct opinions. Adolescents might be viewed as hormonal and/or irrational by the adults in their lives and therefore their feelings and thoughts are dismissed as silly or immature. Thus, acquiring power or authority to be perceived as fully formed members of society with valid opinions and feelings becomes one of the central aspects of YA fiction. The characters I analyse go through the process of negotiating their place and their power within their society and the novels reflect the tensions between the adult authorities and the developing witches. However, the power relations in YA fiction are analysed differently according to the subgenre of the text.

Evidently, YA literature is present in a myriad genres: from realistic fiction to horror, passing through mystery and poetry. The focus of my dissertation is fantasy and within that genre YA texts are thriving. As Cart points out: “The international success of the [*Harry Potter*] series helped turn young adult literature into an increasingly global phenomenon and sparked a new interest in fantasy as a genre not only for children but also—and perhaps more important—for young adults” (Cart, 2010: e-book). Therefore, the next section is devoted to briefly examine how YA fiction and fantasy conflate.

0.4 A Thriving Genre: Young Adult Fantasy Fiction

Authors of YA fiction blend styles and experiment with different genres and as a result, boundaries become gradually blurred. YA fantasy fiction includes different subgenres: high fantasy, historical fantasy, magical realism, paranormal romance, and others. Therefore, providing a static definition for YA fantasy fiction becomes a



conundrum, mixing the twin conundrums of what is fantasy and what is YA. In my view, YA fantasy fiction consists in general terms of those texts which include fantasy elements, especially magic, and an adolescent protagonist. Most academic studies of YA fantasy fiction focus on specific books and trends and the genre's educational value in the classroom, as I have noted. Specific studies about YA fantasy fiction as a narrative genre are scarce but growing in number.

Alison Waller's *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism* (2006) offers insights into what adolescents read, exploring what Waller calls "fantastic realism" and how these novels offer the adolescent reader tools to become themselves. Waller contends that "the process of distinguishing young adult fantastic realism from young adult realism is not only necessary for constructing a more finely shaded taxonomy of texts available to teenagers, but is also a useful tool for noting significant trends in the field" (2006: 11). YA fantastic realism, however, is distinctively different from YA fantasy fiction, which "merges teen realism (and its sub-genre the problem novel) with elements of fantastic literature, including fantasy, horror, supernatural tales, fairy tales and—to a certain degree—science fiction or speculative fantasy" (2006: 17). As Waller argues, fantastic realism remains usually located within a realist worldbuilding and it does not feature secondary worlds or other aspects of fantasy literature (2006: 21). Besides, in YA fiction "fantasy provides private meanings for adolescence, acting as an intrinsic facet of identity rather than merely providing the epic scope for individual heroic actions" (2006: 63).

Two other critics who have tackled YA fantasy fiction are Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn. In *Children's Fantasy Literature: An Introduction* (2016), Levy and Mendlesohn offer the chapter "Romancing the Teen" in which they explore different issues pertaining YA fantasy fiction alongside different authors and genres. These critics argue that the YA fantasy boom began in the 2000s (2016: 196) and that the predominant



subgenre was paranormal romance (2016: 201). Additionally, although this is not normative, most YA fantasy fiction, and especially paranormal romance, features a female protagonist. Levy and Mendlesohn also allude to “the paranormal family narrative” (2016: 204), which is especially relevant in narratives in which witchcraft is linked to family relationships and the status quo. In their view,

Whether we examine the paranormal romances or the paranormal familial tales, these are all essentially consolatory fantasies, and fantasies of status acquisition. They all deploy a trajectory towards incorporation of the teen into the adult body politic, with an emphasis on family, whether heteronormative (the paranormal romance) or matriarchal (the witchcraft families). (2016: 205)

Levy and Mendlesohn go one step further and they argue that the adult inflection in YA fiction might be misleading since the texts in this category are for “Over Aged Children”. Their section on YA fantasy fiction is included in a study mostly devoted to children’s fantasy literature, as part of the tendency other reviewers have noted: YA texts are still considered as part of children’s literature and not a genre on their own.

In *Young Adult Fantasy Fiction: Conventions, Originality, Reproducibility* (2019), Wilkins explores how YA fantasy fiction raises questions concerning the marketing, circulation and consumption of the texts, as well as their construction. Wilkins argues that YA fantasy texts tend to be set in past or archaic worlds: “Historical settings allow young adult characters to drive the narrative with more agency, and to do so from a less safe social position, because they are not cocooned by family” (2019: 16). Another common characteristic in YA fantasy fiction is the trope of the Chosen One: “This chosen-for-greatness fantasy narrative has an intensified function when coupled with YA” (Wilkins 2019: 20). The trope of the Chosen One is, of course, linked to Joseph Campbell’s theory of the monomyth (1949) and the premise that the protagonist must undergo a series of trials to finally be acknowledged as a hero. Wilkins comments that “the genre’s interest in a succession of trials lends fantasy novels their distinctive narrative shape (...) In many cases, this proliferation of trials carries over into subsequent books, lending the genre to



seriality” (2019: 23). Overcoming the trials means overcoming the physical challenges of adolescence (2019: 24). Besides, I would add that the protagonists not only mature physically but also undergo a journey of self-discovery. The characters I analyse in this dissertation face a series of challenges and strive to succeed in their journey towards adulthood.

In the next section I examine the figure of the witch both within fantasy and history. As a literary and historical character, as well as popular icon, the witch is a shifting figure which provides room for discussing the different meanings and connotations that have been attached to women. It is essential, therefore, to consider how the witch has been interpreted both socially and in fantasy fiction.

0.5 A Brief History Lesson: The Witch Figure in Real Life

The belief in magic and the fascination for the supernatural have been alive for centuries and are not exclusive to the Western world. Many cultures and societies believe in magic and witches, and many women—and men—have been persecuted because they were believed to be magic practitioners. The witch stereotype emerged in the ancient world under a variety of different names such as *saga*, *pharmakeutria*, *striga*, *mekhashefa* (Stratton, 2014: 3) and ancient texts, such as the *Code of Hammurabi* 1755-1750 BCE and *The Book of Dead* (1550 BCE-50 BCE), discuss the practice of magic. Although the witch trials of the early Modern Period (start of the 15th century until late 18th century) are a popular area of research due to the different approaches that can be taken for their analysis (socio-economic, political, anthropological), there are earlier occurrences of women being persecuted and accused of witchcraft. In the 4th century BCE, a woman named Theoris of Lemnos in Greece was tried and executed for being considered a witch



and Livy's *History of Rome* (331 BCE) contains a chapter detailing how 170 women were executed as witches in the context of an epidemic illness. However,

Although the notion that certain people could perform harmful sorcery was extremely ancient, the full stereotype of European witchcraft—that is, the idea of a diabolically organized and conspiratorial cult of maleficent sorcerers bent on harming faithful Christians and subverting the order of the Christian world—actually developed quite late in the medieval period, appearing only in the early fifteenth century. (Bailey, 2003: 2)

Thus, many researchers have focused on the infamous witch trials of the early Modern Period to investigate the causes that led to the killing of thousands of mostly women:

Scholars of religious history, social history, and economic history, of law, gender, and culture have all contributed to our understanding of an issue that manifested itself in so many areas of European life. Even when we limit our focus to the origins of this phenomenon in the late Middle Ages, the situation becomes scarcely less complex. (Bailey, 2003:139)

To better understand why some women were accused of practicing witchcraft it is first necessary to provide a definition for what was understood to be a witch. The term 'witch' originated in early modern Europe: "The word 'witchcraft' undoubtedly derives from the Anglo-Saxon *wiccecraft*, just as 'witch' derives from the related nouns *wicce*, signifying a female worker of that 'craft' (plural *wiccen*) and *wicca*, meaning a male one (plural *wiccan*). What exactly the 'craft' concerned was, however, is a difficult matter" (Hutton, 2018: 103, original italics). Hutton notes that the term *wiccecraft* changed overtime alongside other terms associated with it. In the later Middle Ages, "*wiccecraft* mutated into 'witchcraft' and *wicce* and *wicca* into the (ungendered) 'witch', a process made easier by the fact that the Anglo-Saxon 'cc' was pronounced as a 'ch'" (2018: 106). However, the texts were produced by clerics who may have used the words differently from lay persons (107).

In later periods, the term 'witch' was further connected to Christian terminology and used to describe mostly women who had an association to Satan. There was also a different linguistic approach to those who practiced magic depending on their sex: while



women were referred to as witches, men were ‘conjurers’ or ‘magicians’ (Hutton, 2017: 112). Hutton concludes that the use of ‘witch’ and ‘witchcraft’ as derogatory terms occurred in early modern times: “Deployed against others, therefore, they represented not neutral terms to be qualified by additives such as ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ ‘white’ or ‘black,’ but a serious and dangerous insult or accusation” (2017: 119). Nowadays there are four accepted definitions for the term witch. The most extended definition by Rodney Needham in 1978, is that a witch is “someone who causes harm to others by mystical means.” Other meanings define

the witch figure as any person who uses magic (although those who employ it for beneficial purposes are often popularly distinguished as ‘good’ or ‘white’ witches); or as the practitioner of a particular kind of nature-based Pagan religion; or as a symbol of independent female authority and resistance to male domination. (Hutton, 2017: 10)

While my dissertation focuses on fictional representations of the witch, it is nonetheless essential to understand how real-life women were demonized for being considered witches. As noted, a key episode are the infamous witch trials that occurred between the 15th and 17th centuries in Europe. The publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), a treatise on witchcraft which encourages the persecution and torture to obtain confessions of those who are believed to be practitioners of magic by Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger propelled and promoted the persecution of witches: “Although the extent of actual witch-hunting has often been exaggerated, belief in witchcraft quickly became nearly universal in late medieval and early modern Europe, and the image of the witch that first appeared in the early 1400s endured as a figure of fear and persecution for many centuries” (Bailey, 2003: 2). It is estimated that until the 18th century, more than 50.000 women and men were accused of being witches and sentenced to death. There is a manifest link between witchcraft and Christianity which emerged during this period: “Ultimately witches were accused of worshipping demons, renouncing their faith, and surrendering themselves completely to the service of the devil”



(Bailey, 2003: 4) yet, as Bailey adds the “witch stereotype” also gathered “common conceptions of magic and popular folklore widely held by the laity” (2003: 4). Diane Purkiss has analysed how the figure of the witch has been (mis)interpreted and manipulated not only by patriarchal men but also by feminist historians and feminist critics. In *The Witch in History. Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representations* (1998) she argues that “feminist histories are no more ‘biased’ than those male historians who have taken up the figure of the witch and reformulated it according to their needs and fantasies” (1998: 10). Purkiss has labelled this phenomenon the myth of the “Burning Times”, a myth “invented at the point when the women’s movement began to turn away from rights-centered public-sphere issues towards crime-centered, private-sphere issues. Domestic and sexual violence against women were foregrounded as the representative crimes of patriarchy, to the exclusion of other issues” (Purkiss, 1998: 15). In her conclusion, Purkiss emphasizes that the character of the witch is most present, even in contemporary literature, in children’s fiction and fairy tales: “She is the bogey of Western society’s infancy, a feature of our early years as a culture. She exemplifies the dark ages, the primitive, the superstitious, the unenlightened” (1996: 278).

Another essential historical moment related to the history of witches are the Salem witch trials of 1692. “During the course of the trials, 141 people were arrested as suspects, 19 were hanged and one was pressed to death. Those afflicted by the witches were mostly young girls, yet their ‘child’s play’ led not only to the deaths of innocent people but also to total upheaval in the colonial Puritan Church” (Guiley, 2008: 297). Many scholars have investigated this case of mass hysteria and Guiley explains in detail what might have happened:

Before becoming a minister, Parris had worked as a merchant in Barbados; when he returned to Massachusetts, he brought back a slave couple, John and Tituba Indian (Indian was probably not the couple’s surname but a description of their race). Tituba cared for Parris’ nine-year-old daughter Elizabeth, called Betty, and his 11-year-old niece, Abigail Williams. (2008: 298)



Abigail Williams was one of the first to accuse her neighbours of witchcraft and she propelled what would become the mass hysteria. Although enormously interesting, the causes that led to the persecution of women as witches in Salem and the different stories of those involved cannot be fully explored in this section as they would deserve their own dissertation.⁸

The persecution of people accused of witchcraft seems to have ended after 1736 when the English Witchcraft Act⁹ was repealed, formally ending witch hunts and trials. However, the last known official witch trial in Europe occurred in 1782 with the arrest and execution of Anna Göldi. It must not be forgotten, however, that there are still women persecuted as witches nowadays (see Federici, 2018). In 2020, “Akua Denteh was beaten to death in Ghana’s East Gonja District—after being accused of being a witch. The murder of the 90-year-old has once more highlighted the deep-seated prejudices against women accused of practicing witchcraft in Ghana, many of whom are elderly” (Müller, 2020: online). Accusing women of witchcraft nowadays is still based on the same prejudices and injustices perpetrated on women centuries before. However, many women identify as witches nowadays thanks to the reclamation of the term by second wave feminists.¹⁰

⁸ For more insight into the Salem witch trials, see Hill’s *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (2002), DeRosa’s *The Making of Salem. The Witch Trials in History, Fiction and Tourism* (2009) and Schiff’s *The Witches: Salem 1692* (2015), among others.

⁹ The English Witchcraft Act was passed in 1542 and it defined witchcraft as an act punishable by death.

¹⁰ Within the modern neopagan religion Wicca there are many women who call themselves witches. Wicca was founded in 1954 by Gerald Garner, a British civil servant. Wicca is duotheistic and its practitioners worship the Triple Goddess and the Horned God: “Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca are based on autonomous covens (groups of witches, traditionally thirteen in number) run by a High Priestess and/or a High Priest, and centre on the worship of the Goddess and her consort, the Horned God. Polarity in all things is stressed — female/male, dark/light, negative/positive — and the cycle of birth, death and rebirth is celebrated, along with fertility, through the eight seasonal festivals. Nature is honoured and all things, including oneself, are regarded as part of nature” (Pearson, 2002: 35). Hanegraaff argues that many accepted to be called witches within Wicca because “she [the witch] is controversial and threatens the status quo: arguably, there is hardly a better way to express one’s rejection of the values informing mainstream society than claiming the name of its traditional enemies. Given the fact that these perceived ‘enemies’ were, in fact, victimized brutally and on a massive scale, it was easy to sympathize with them” (2002: 305). For more insight into Wicca see *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and The New Age*,



According to Mona Chollet, “the first feminist to unearth the history of witches and to claim that title for herself was the American Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826-1898), who defended women’s right to vote, but also the rights of Native Americans and the abolition of slavery” (2019: e-book). Almost a century later, during the second feminist wave (1960s-1980s), many feminist scholars researched the causes and roots of the witch hunts and especially relevant to this dissertation is the movement that emerged from the Women’s Liberation movement. The radical feminist movement W.I.T.C.H was founded in 1969 in New York by Robin Morgan and Florika. This movement chose the witch as a symbol “identifying themselves with everything women were taught not to be: ugly, aggressive, independent, and malicious. Feminists took this symbol and molded it—not into the fairy tale ‘good witch’, but into a symbol of female power, knowledge, independence, and martyrdom” (Eller 1993: 55). Consequently, the witch became an image of the antipatriarchal woman who defies patriarchy’s assumptions that women must be subservient to men. By reversing patriarchal notions of the witch, feminists offered a new vision of the character which could be employed to suggest new representations of empowered womanhood with which many women could feel identified.

Luce Irigaray (*Speculum of the Other Woman*, 1974), Hélène Cixous (*The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1975), Mary Daly (*Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, 1978), the *First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*, 1987), Barbara Creed (*The Monstrous Feminine*, 1993) and Justyna Sempruch (*Fantasies of Gender: The Witch in Feminism and Literature*, 2008) are some of the scholars who have focused on the image of the witch. Relevant to this study is Sempruch’s approach to how witches might be understood by different scholars:

by Joanne Pearson (Ed.), 2002.



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1) as a radical feminist (political) figure representing the culturally subjugated and victimized woman (Daly, Dworkin), and her subsequent herstorical reconfiguration into a sovereign, mythic and powerful “superwoman” (Cixous, Wittig, Gearhart, Walker); 2) as a problematic dialogical figure collapsing into the archaic forms of the pre-symbolic mother and the phallic monstrous feminine (Kristeva, Creed); and 3) as a borderline phenomenon suspending logocentric discourse and opening thus heterogeneous spaces beyond the accumulation of stigmas, but also beyond the mythic origin, maternal *jouissance* or femininity (Irigaray, Butler, Braidotti). (2008: 5)

As it can be appreciated, the witch offers a myriad of (re)interpretations. Chollet proposes four approaches to examine the causes that led to the persecution and execution of women accused of witchcraft and how women still face these prejudices nowadays. According to Chollet, the first approach is considering the persecution and punishment of female independence. Chollet argues that women who were single or widowed presented a challenge to patriarchy’s order and therefore had to be chastised. Chollet also contends that women who decide not to marry nowadays are also susceptible to being misjudged and dogmatized, although to a lesser degree. The second cause which she examines is the criminalization of abortion and contraceptive methods. The scholar argues that those women who did not want to procreate were considered witches and that women who reject motherhood still face prejudice nowadays: they are believed “to hate children, just as witches who greedily devoured the little roasted bodies in the covens, or cast curses on the neighbor’s children” (Chollet, 2019: e-book). The third reason why a woman might have been considered a witch is old age. Old, unmarried, childless women were derogatorily referred to as crones; their independence from men caused their persecution. Chollet also explores the different challenges women face today when they reach old age and how ageist society is. The fourth and last aspect Chollet considers is what patriarchy has labelled as women’s irrational side. While men have always been considered rational, women were treated as unreasonable, foolish, and naïve and that was reason enough to exclude them from what were considered to be men’s spheres, such as medicine and politics.



In *Witches, Sluts, Feminists* (2017) Kirsten Sollée also explores the character of the witch and how she might be approached. Sollée argues that there are four ways¹¹ in which we can define the witch today:

(First) the witch is an evil, malicious sorceress (or sorcerer) who is driven by the Devil to do harm. The second definition follows this line of thinking into vivid aesthetic expressions. The witch embodies the horror of the aging woman: the hag. (...) The third definition brings us into the twentieth century with the Wiccan religious movement. (2017: 16-18)

As demonstrated, the witch as an historical figure has undergone an evolution from persecuted woman to feminist icon. Many feminist scholars have considered and investigated how women accused of being witches were treated and victimized and how the history of witchcraft is intrinsically linked to the history of women's oppression. Nevertheless, the image of the witch emerged as a powerful symbol of female independence and freedom during the second feminist wave, and it has continued to be so until today.

0.6 The Literary Witch and Young Adult Fiction

The representations of the witch within literary texts are unavoidably connected to historical and cultural meanings from which it is difficult to separate them. Although depictions of the witch are typically connected to the connotations conferred to her during the Middle Ages by Christianity, negative portrayals of the witch within fictional texts predate the witch hunts of that period. It seems that the first examples of fictional witches are to be found in religious texts (the Witch of Endor, in the *First Book of Samuel* 630-540 BCE) and in classical Greek works (Hecate and Medea in Hesiod's *Theogony*). Certainly, Greek mythology is full of women who might fit the description of witches and

¹¹ "The fourth and final definition of 'witch' refers to mathematics. For the curious, the 'witch of Agnesi' is a mathematical curve supposedly named after a mistranslation of a 1748 treatise by Italian mathematician Maria Gaetana Agnesi. The term 'versiera,' meaning 'turning,' was mistakenly read as 'avversiera,' a nickname for the Devil's wife, and translated as 'witch'" (2017: 16-18).



who might have set the core features of the character. Kimberly Stratton and Dayna Kalleres comment in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* that “This image of female sorcery passed into Christian discourse where, in moralizing homilies, it served to denigrate women, justifying their subjugation to male control” (2014: ix).

One of the first examples of fictional witches in literature written in English is William of Malmesbury’s *The Witch of Berkeley* (1120s), a legend which describes how a woman sold her soul to the devil in exchange for wealth and how the devil came back after her death to retrieve her soul. As it might be expected, the legend portrays the witch unfavourably and that is the discourse that would prevail in subsequent writings. Another notable example is Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Morgana Le Fay, who in *Vita Merlini* (1150s) appears as a healer but later appears in the role of enchantress and sorceress. In later works, such as Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (1485), Morgana surfaces as more vindictive and sexually active than in previous representations.

One of the best-known witches in English literature is Sycorax, from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1610-1611) yet she does not explicitly appear in the play and she is not given a voice. Sycorax, Caliban’s mother, is described as having been a malevolent witch by Prospero, the hero of the play. Shakespeare also incorporated witches in another of his most famous plays: *Macbeth* (1623). The weird sisters in *Macbeth* lead the title character to his death with their prophecies and resemble the Moirai, the three Fates of classical mythology. *Macbeth* and its witches are especially relevant as Pratchett ironically recreates the play in his novel *Wyrd Sisters* (1988). However, Pratchett’s witches differ from the negative portrayal given by Shakespeare.¹²

¹² For more insight into Pratchett’s use of Shakespeare in his novels see “Shakespeare in Discworld: Witches, Fantasy, and Desire” (Noone, 2010).



The Witch of Edmonton (William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, 1621) is another play which contains the image of the witch as an old woman who sells her soul to the devil and gets revenge on her neighbours for previously having shunned her. The negative portrayal of witches in fiction continued in the 18th and 19th centuries with the proliferation of Romantic poems and fairy tales. The image of the malevolent witch is present in poems such as “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”, John Keats (1819) and “The Witch of Atlas”, by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1820) being perhaps the most known. Many of the Grimm brother’s tales (1812) include images of wicked witches (“Hansel and Gretel”, “Snow White”, “Rapunzel”) as well as many of Christian Andersen’s fairy tales, published between 1837-1844 (“The Little Mermaid”, “The Nightingale”, “The Snow Queen”). I will further explore the image of the witch within fairy tales in Pratchett’s chapter, as the author follows a fairy-tale like narrative.

One of the most infamous witches in children’s literature is L. Frank Baum’s Wicked Witch of the West, who appears in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900); her story would later be rewritten by Gregory Maguire in *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1995). In the original, Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion are sent by the Wizard to kill the Wicked Witch of the West. However, the witch manages to imprison them and acquire more power by taking one of Dorothy’s silver shoes. Finally, Dorothy throws a bucket of water onto the witch which causes her to melt and die. The trend of portraying witches negatively in children’s literature continued with Jadis, the White Witch and Lady of the Green Kirtle from C.S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956) and subsequent works of different authors, such as Roald Dahl’s *The Witches* (1983). As regards modern theatre, a quintessential work regarding the presence of witches in the literature written in English is Arthur Miller’s already mentioned *The Crucible* (1953), a fictionalized retelling of what happened in the



Salem witch trials of 1692, used here as an allegory for the anti-Communist witch hunts of the McCarthy era.

Nevertheless, there have also been positive depictions of witches in literary texts. When Second-Wave feminists reclaimed the term in the 1960s, there seemed to be a shift in how women and witches were perceived from different perspectives: culturally, socially, and historically, yet images of the witch as a virtuous character are not exclusively a product of second-wave feminists. In her article “Retelling Salem Stories: Gender Politics and Witches in American Culture”, Marion Gibson traces how the witch has been represented in American culture and changed her status from a demonic character to benevolent woman. Discussing two authors, Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826-1898) and Charles Godfrey Leland (1824-1903), Gibson argues that “Almost certainly, Gage’s work influenced her son-in-law Lyman Frank Baum, when he wrote his satirical fantasy *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900” (2006: 89). According to Gibson, with Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, the perception of the witch as a malicious woman changed:

The good sense and kindness of witches and the witch-like heroine is celebrated, whilst the book’s male characters are the brainless (Scarecrow), heartless (Tin Woodman) and cowardly (Lion). Unlike the potent and emancipated witches, they are held in thrall by a fraud and induced to believe many things that are ‘a great mistake’. (2006: 90)

By 1900, Gibson notes, witches had become “liberal metaphors for political dissent and female self-empowerment, pointing the way to a future where traditional delusions were comical and obsolete” (90).

Despite this new understanding of the witch during the twentieth century, women could only be portrayed as benevolent witch characters if they conformed to societal expectations. During the period 1930s-1960s the witch was domesticized to fit what was expected of women: their magic was rooted in domesticity and they use it because it does not pose a threat to societal conventions: “*The Passionate Witch* [novel, 1949] and *I*



Married A Witch [film, 1942] are paradigmatic of the portrayal of witches in twentieth-century popular culture—as a transparent metaphor for debate over the role of women” (Gibson 2006: 92). During the 1940s and 1950s, “Socially-speaking, times were good for women at home and at work, and so they were better for witches too. But it was still clear that the best place for a woman was at home” (Gibson 2006: 92). *Bewitched* (Saks, 1964-1972) is a popular sitcom which reflects this tendency of portraying the witch in a domesticized environment. The witch protagonist of *Bewitched*, Samantha, promises his husband to lead a typical housewife life yet accidents involving magic occur and the plot is driven by Samantha trying to hide their supernatural origins. Only after the 1960s, the landmark for the birth of the feminist witch, did witches leave domesticity behind.

Many literary works which include witches are based on real life figures—such as *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, by Maryse Conde (1986) or *Voodoo Dreams: A Novel of Marie Laveau*, by Jewell Parker Rhodes (1993)—are mainly focused on portraying different versions of the witch hunting and witch trials that occurred during between the 15th and the 18th centuries. Other examples are Kathleen Kent’s *The Heretic’s Daughter* (2008), and Katherine Howe’s *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* (2009), which include depictions of the Salem witch trials.

Within young adult fiction, Elizabeth George Speare’s *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (1951) seems to be the first text to include a compassionate image of the witch. The story is set in 17th century New England and it revolves around Katherine Tyler (Kit), a 16-year-old girl from Barbados who relocates to Wethersfield, Connecticut. Kit begins teaching some children who are preparing for traditional school and one day reenact a passage from the Bible. However, when the head of the school sees what has happened, she shuts down the school and Kit runs to the woods and befriends a woman (Hannah) who had been outcasted and was considered a witch. The bond between the two increases



even after Kit's uncle forbids her to continue visiting Hannah. Despite the school being closed, Kit continues teaching one of the girls, Prudence, who was thought to be 'stupid'. After some incidents, Kit is also accused of being a witch but she is finally found innocent when Prudence demonstrates she can read the Bible, as a witch would not teach anyone how to do so. Finally, Kit returns to Barbados with her lover Nat.

Within fantasy fiction, one of the earliest examples of progressive witches is to be found in Andre Norton's *Witch World* series (1963-2005). The first novel in the series *Witch World* introduces Estcarp, a land governed by witches. Ursula K Le Guin's *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971), which is part of the *The Earthsea Cycle—A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan*, (1970), *The Farthest Shore* (1972), *Tales from Earthsea* and *The Other Wind* (both 2001)—, might be considered one of the first young adult fantasy texts to include a progressive image of the witch. *The Tombs of Atuan* follows Tenar's Bildungsroman. Tenar (renamed Arha) is believed to be the reincarnation of the high priestess and she is taken from her family when she is 5 years old. *The Tombs of Atuan* explores Tenar's growth and how she rebels against the social role that has been imposed to her. Another young adult fantasy novel advancing the image of the witch is *The Changeover: A Supernatural Romance* (1984) by Margaret Mahy. The novel focuses on 14-year-old Laura who decides to become a witch to save her younger brother Jacko from the Braque, an ancient being who consumes others to keep himself alive.

As it can be appreciated, there are a few novels featuring progressive images of the witch, but it seems that it was not until the 1990s when the character of the witch became one of the most popular within young adult fantasy fiction. L.J. Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* series (1991-1992) is one of the first series to include a witch co-protagonist, Bonnie McCullough. However, it was after the publication of the *Harry*



Potter series (1997-2017) that the witch gained even more prominence and popularity, a trend that continued in the early 2000s and until the 2010s.¹³

As mentioned previously, we find witches in all types of literary genres: from classical mythology, to drama, poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. My four chosen texts belong to the genre of fiction, and more specifically, they are YA fantasy novels. In contemporary YA fantasy texts, witches are mostly young, intelligent, and attractive women and current representations of the character offer a vision of the witch as a wise and friendly character. Within YA fantasy fiction, the witch has emerged as one of the most popular and prominent characters:

Witchcraft forms a recurring theme in teenage fantastic realism and a number of texts relate episodes where apparently 'ordinary' teenage protagonists emerge as a witch of some kind. Like haunting novels, witchcraft narratives tend to focus on the affirmative qualities of the fantasy rather than any fearful properties of black magic (unless they are part-horror). Most protagonists in witchcraft novels are female and it seems that authors are eager to explore issues of matrilineal power and contemporary female identity through mythological and historical frames. (Waller, 2006: 23)

The rise in popularity of the witch can be accounted for her versatility. Witches are given a set of characteristics which make her identifiable by the reader. Although the image of the witch has changed, the characteristics of traditional representations of the witch are still very present.

Even though witches have always been present in literature, they achieved a tremendous success and acceptance as representative female characters after the second feminist wave. Therefore, this change of status begs the question whether these new literary witches are a product of historical changes or if, on the contrary, the witch is a character which has always been adaptable. It seems that the image of the witch that is represented in a text is intrinsically linked to the historical moment she is written in, and

¹³ See the Appendixes section for a list of novels featuring witches published before and after the 2000s.



therefore one wonders whether this also applies to women's representation in popular culture.

0.7 Young Adult Witches: Justification of Primary Sources

Undeniably, all the texts I have chosen are part of a large tradition, but they add new perspectives to how women are represented in YA fantasy fiction. Belonging to the late 20th, early 21st century, they have not received much scholarly attention despite being popular texts, except for the *Harry Potter* series and the *Discworld* novels. Regarding this corpus, there are different factors which need to be considered. The four sets of novels have been published between the 1990s and the 2010s, meaning that they were written and published when the witch had already been reclaimed as a feminist character.

The representations of the witch from the late 20th century and the early years of the 21st century have yet to be explored. The lack of critical bibliography on some of the texts I intend to analyse is compensated by a thorough understanding of how witches have been characterized in past fantasy literary representations and how witches in contemporary texts differ from those characteristics. At the same time, cultural studies surrounding the witch will be essential for more comprehensive research. Since I focus on YA fiction, I will also need to consider genre studies.

Finally, what is meant by femininity and womanhood needs to be clarified since the works I analyse in this dissertation approach femininity in different ways. The novels that are examined in the present dissertation were written and produced between the 1990s and the 2010s. Consequently, they are set after the third feminist wave and in the centre of the fourth wave. Femininity is defined as “the fact or quality of having characteristics that are traditionally thought to be typical of or suitable for a woman” (*Cambridge*



Dictionary, 2022). However, there is not a universal femininity that suits every woman or person who identifies as female. As Butler argues:

That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (1990: 180)

If gender is performative, so are femininity and masculinity. The traditional qualities attributed to the female sex and labelled as “feminine”, such as being caring, passive and emotional, amongst others, may be endorsed or rejected. Quoting Merja Makinen: “woman identified (as) woman has the potential to put forward alternative models of femininity untainted by the phallogentric and thereby open up another concept of femininity to all women, heterosexual as well as lesbian” (Makinen, 2001: 43).

Traditionally, the character of the witch has been linked to monstrous femininity:

The witch is defined as an abject figure in that she is represented within patriarchal discourses as an implacable enemy of the symbolic order. She is thought to be dangerous and wily, capable of drawing on her evil powers to wreak destruction on the community. The witch sets out to unsettle boundaries between the rational and irrational, symbolic and imaginary. Her evil powers are seen as part of her ‘feminine’ nature; she is closer to nature than man and can control forces in nature such as tempests, hurricanes and storms. (...) Irrational, scheming, evil—these are the words used to define the witch. The witch is also associated with a range of abject things: filth, decay, spiders, bats, cobwebs, brews, potions and even cannibalism. (Creed, 1993: e-book)

Nevertheless, the works I have selected for my study do not offer this image of the witch and they express femininity in different ways.

To make my point, in the subsequent chapters I provide close readings of the four sets of novels that support my theory, focusing on how fantasy conventions and YA characteristics intertwine to represent the figure of the antipatriarchal witch. Since the use of different fantasy conventions shapes how the witches are portrayed in these texts, all four chapters will open with an overview of the fantasy elements used by the author that surround the character. I believe that we cannot study how the witch is represented within



YA fantasy fiction without considering how the different fantastic elements shape the witch's setting. Besides, this section will also focus on the different themes, motifs and conventions which conform Young Adult fiction and how they are presented in the texts. As Waller argues: "Fantastic spaces, magical powers and enchanted identities all allow teenage protagonists possibilities for resolving the problems of adolescence and actively seeking agency" (2009: 142) yet "although witchcraft novels allow their heroines a sense of empowerment that might signify celebration in the shifting of gender roles in the late twentieth century, these narratives also indicate a certain fear or anxiety surrounding female power" (2009: 142). Therefore, the second section in each chapter evaluates how the texts present the characters' journey from childhood to adulthood and what shapes their identity as witches. A third section is devoted to examining how the characters selected for my study become witches and the education or training they receive to succeed in becoming powerful and influential witches within their community. Section four is concerned with gender issues presented in the text that affect not only the protagonists but also other characters. Finally, a fifth section will provide the conclusions I draw from my analysis.

After justifying the chapter's structure, I would also like to mention the order in which they appear. My first and second chapters, devoted to the *Tiffany Aching* series and *Harry Potter* series respectively, might be considered for readers from the ages 9 and up whereas the last two chapters, Chupeco's *The Bone Witch* trilogy and Armstrong's *Women of the Otherworld* series are meant for older readers. This order will allow me to see how the character of the witch is represented differently according to the intended readership of the texts. While all the witches in my dissertation fight the established order, Chupeco's and Armstrong's witches offer a darker image of the witch although not a negative one, than Pratchett and Rowling. Nevertheless, each author succeeds in



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representing young adult witches with agency and power who overcome several obstacles and find their position in their world.



CHAPTER 1. SHIFTING ROLES: REDIFINING THE WITCH AS A HERO IN TERRY PRATCHETT'S *TIFFANY ACHING* SERIES

People think that stories are shaped by people.
In fact, it's the other way around.
Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad*

1.1 Imaginary Realms: Terry Pratchett and Fantasy

1.1.1 Introducing Sir Terry Pratchett

Sir Terence David John Pratchett OBE (1948-2015), professionally known as Terry Pratchett, is widely considered an extremely successful fantasy author. Pratchett was born in Beaconsfield, England, and he grew up in a typical British family (Burrows, 2020: e-book). Pratchett “began his three-year apprenticeship in journalism in the September of 1965 (...) Alongside on-the-job training, he worked in his spare time to achieve his National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) qualification and an A-Level in English” (Burrows, 2020: e-book). After several jobs in journalism, Pratchett became Press officer at the Central Electricity Generating Board in 1979, which he left after his breakthrough came apparently after the BBC show *Woman's Hour* broadcast a radio adaptation of *Equal Rites* (1987), his third novel, in 1987. Pratchett could then leave his job and become a full-time author. Pratchett married Lyn Purves in 1968 and their daughter Rhianna was born in 1976. In 2007 Pratchett announced that he had been diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's disease and he worked on several documentaries sharing his experience: *Terry Pratchett Living With Alzheimer's* (Charlie Russell, 2009), *Terry Pratchett Choosing to Die* (Charlie Russell, 2011), and *Terry Pratchett Facing Extinction* (Charlie Russell, 2013).

Pratchett's major series, the *Discworld* novels (1983-2015), has amassed tremendous commercial success: more than 80 million copies have been sold worldwide and they have been translated to more than 37 languages (Burrows, 2020: e-book). Apart from the *Discworld* novels, Pratchett has authored and co-authored many books, such as *Good Omens* (1990) with Neil Gaiman and *The Long Earth* series (2012-2016) with Stephen Baxter. Pratchett also wrote many books for children: *The Carpet People* (1971), *The Abominable Snowman* (2014) and different short story collections, such as *A Blink of the Screen* (2012), and non-fiction, *A Slip of the Keyboard* (2014). Even though Pratchett's works are considered popular literature, they have received positive critical appraisal.¹⁴ Pratchett's oeuvre is vast, and although he also wrote science fiction (*The Dark Side of the Sun*, 1976) and horror (*Strata*, 1981), fantasy ultimately became his focus and preferred genre.

Pratchett's legacy goes beyond his literary production: four of Pratchett's *Discworld* novels have been adapted into graphic novels—*The Colour of Magic* (2008), *The Light Fantastic* (2008), *Guards! Guards!* (2000) and *Small Gods* (2016)—, there are two video games based on the *Discworld* universe (*Discworld*, 1995 and *Discworld II: Missing Presumed...!?*, 1996); and twenty-eight of his works have been adapted to the theatre by Stephen Briggs, amongst them *Wyrd Sisters*, *Carpe Jugulum* and *Lords and Ladies*, which feature some of the *Discworld*'s witches. There have also been a total of ten TV adaptations of his novels, including *Hogfather* (Vadim Jean, 2006), *Good Omens* (Douglas Mackinnon, 2019) and *Going Postal* (Jon Jones, 2010).

¹⁴ Pratchett received countless awards and distinctions. As stated before, he was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire for his services to literature in 1998 and received a knighthood in 2009. Related to the series analyzed in this chapter, he won the Locus Award for Best Young Adult Book in 2004 for *The Wee Free Men*, in 2005 for *A Hat Full of Sky*, in 2007 for *Wintersmith* and in 2016 for *The Shepherd's Crown*. *I Shall Wear Midnight* won the 2010 Andre Norton Award, among many others. (See <https://www.terrypratchettbooks.com/about-sir-terry/>)



Chapter 1. Shifting Roles: The Witch as Hero in the *Tiffany Aching* Series

In fact, Pratchett's influence in popular culture is so extensive that a convention was created to honour the author of Discworld, the International Discworld Convention (Dwon),¹⁵ in 1996. Furthermore, several academic books dealing with Discworld topics have been published, such as *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature* by Andrew M. Butler, Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (2000), *Discworld and the Disciplines: Critical Approaches to the Terry Pratchett Works* by Anne Hiebert Alton and William C. Spruiell (2014), *Discworld and Philosophy: Reality is not What it Seems* (2016) by Nicholas Michaud, and *Terry Pratchett's Ethical Worlds: Essays on Identity and Narrative in Discworld and Beyond* by Kristin Noone and Emily Lavin Leverett (2020).

Pratchett also co-authored books dealing with subjects present in the Discworld to help expand the reader's notions about the fantasy universe he created: *The Science Of Discworld I, II, III, IV* (1999-2013), with Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen, and *The Folklore of Discworld* (2008), with Jacqueline Simpson. Pratchett also co-authored *Nanny Ogg's Cookbook* (1992) with Stephen Briggs and Tina Hannan, and there are several map books of the Discworld, such as *The Complete Discworld Atlas* (2015).

The enormous success of Pratchett and the *Discworld* demonstrates that fantasy has become a fully established genre in readers' preferences, and it is only befitting that this dissertation starts by discussing his series. The presence of positively depicted witches in the *Discworld* alongside Pratchett's outstanding popularity have contributed, undoubtedly, to offer a renewed image of the witch, as well as making it acceptable and even desirable to find feminist witches within literature. Although this chapter will focus on the *Tiffany Aching* series, a sub-series of the *Discworld* novels, the other witches present in the *Discworld* will be certainly acknowledged.

¹⁵ More information on the convention can be found at <https://2020.dwcon.org/>



1.1.2 On the Back of Great A'Tuin: Fantasy in Pratchett's Discworld

The *Discworld*¹⁶ series is comprised of a total of 41 books, published between 1983 and 2015. The Discworld is the fictional setting of Pratchett's fantasy novels, and it consists, as its name suggests, of a disc with an edge-of-the-world drop-off and waterfall which rests on the backs of four elephants, which are in turn standing on the back of a gigantic turtle called Great A'Tuin.¹⁷ The Discworld emulates fantasy lands such as those from J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis; it is inhabited by different creatures and species, and it follows its own parameters and rules. Nevertheless, the Discworld differs from the typical conventions of high fantasy since one of Pratchett's intentions was to satirize previous fantasy works. Haberkorn argues in his essay "Seriously Relevant: Parody, Pastiche and Satire in Terry Pratchett's Discworld Novels" (2008) that through these elements Pratchett references previous works of fantasy to mock them, so in Pratchett's novels intertextuality is abundant: "Pratchett's Discworld novels engage with fantasy literature by targeting some of its characters, events and conventions. These are playfully imitated, criticised and ridiculed, and ultimately adapted, and changed into something new. (...) Readers who do not see these interconnections will miss significant layers of humour and meaning" (2018: 146). Indeed, Pratchett's use of satire and irony in the *Discworld* novels is a key aspect to consider when analysing the witches' novels and their depiction: by parodying previous representations of the witch in fantasy, Pratchett is both deconstructing the character and offering a new perspective, as I argue here.

Pratchett partly owes his success to how he used satire, parody and irony and although he often scorns specific fantasy conventions, Pratchett's oeuvre is never just a caricature of fantasy. Even though fantasy as a genre has been tackled in the introduction,

¹⁶ Discworld will be italicized when I refer to the novels. When it is not, I am referring to the world created by Pratchett.

¹⁷ The concept of the World Turtle is a mytheme in Hindu mythology, Chinese mythology, and the mythologies of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. It states that a giant turtle supports the world.



this section is dedicated to analysing how Pratchett uses fantasy to deconstruct the genre itself in his books, and how that in turn helps to deconstruct patriarchal assumptions that are embedded within the fantasy genre. As Clemons suggests, “through the use of satire, Pratchett’s narrator asks their audience to enjoy the construction of the diegesis and their relationship to it” (2020: 120). In most of the witches’ novels, Pratchett intentionally draws from traditional fantasy and fairy tale stereotypes familiar to the readers such as the wicked witch or the cute princess, to encourage readers to reconsider previously acquired notions of these genres. Clemons further argues that through the *Discworld* novels “we might be able to construct a Pratchettian rhetorical theory: a declaration of how language works on audiences to construct reality and how rhetors should use such magical tools” (2020: 120). Therefore, we should consider “not just the message of the stories but how they are told and what actions or attitudes those messages suggest in the telling” (2020: 136). Hence, understanding how Pratchett uses fantasy and fairy-tale conventions will help us comprehend the message the *Discworld* novels convey:

Pratchett and his narrator’s end goal is not to immerse us uncritically, but to engage us. This positioning of the speaker to his created world allows readers just enough critical distance to accept or reject the terms the stories provide, creating a different kind of magic: cooperation between author and audience to create meaning both for the storyworld and extradiegetically in the readers’ own context. (140)

For Gideon Haberkorn, since humour is one of the main aspects of the *Discworld* novels and the tool which Pratchett uses to subvert its fantasy elements it is therefore necessary to discuss *Discworld*’s rhetoric of humour. In “Debugging the Mind: The Rhetoric of Humour and the Poetics of Fantasy” (2014) Haberkorn argues that these “are central aspects of the *Discworld* novels” (2014: 60). Haberkorn begins by discussing various theories of humour, from Plato and Aristotle to Raskin’s Semantic-Script Theory



of Humor¹⁸ to frame his argument. According to Haberkorn, Pratchett mostly uses puns, irony and understatement to create “a playful atmosphere” (2014: 171); “the puns and the plays on words have a central role in this. The use of understatement, humorous footnotes and comparisons—as well as several types of irony—creates a safe environment in which to practice questioning our mental patterns and assumptions” (2014: 171). Incidentally, this is what Tiffany, the protagonist of the texts to be analysed in this chapter, does in the novels. Although *The Good Childe’s Booke of Faerie Tales*, the book that Tiffany reads in *The Wee Free Men* (2003), the first novel in the series, is not a humorous read, she is capable to discern its most harmful aspects and that is the ultimate reason why she wants to become a witch, to fight women’s stereotyping in similar books, since “the stories didn’t want you to think, they just wanted you to believe what you were told...” (*The Wee Free Men*, 29, original ellipsis). Consequently, Pratchett’s readers discover, along with Tiffany, how stories have been shaped to fit certain stereotypes and conventions. As Haberkorn argues “Tiffany questions the pattern of a traditional fairy tale story” (268) and she also actively tries to change it throughout her narrative. Pratchett draws attention to how things normally happen within stories and “If we recognize and understand these patterns, if we understand that they are merely creations of our minds, then we can use them, we can reinterpret them, we can change them” (Haberkorn: 270).

I shall proceed to briefly summarize the plot of each novel featuring Tiffany for better understanding. In the first novel in the series, *The Wee Free Men*, Tiffany lives with her parents and siblings in The Chalk, a region near Lancre, a small kingdom in the

¹⁸ This theory, put forward by Victor Raskin in *Semantic Mechanisms of Humour* (1985) was the first one to approach humour linguistically, therefore it only considers words used narratively, such as riddles or puns.



Ramtops.¹⁹ Tiffany's grandmother, Sara Aching the hag o' the hills,²⁰ has passed away and The Chalk is now defenceless against the threat of the Elves. In the Discworld, a witch is the defender of the land, amongst other tasks they must also fulfil, such as assisting births and accompanying those who are dying. After her grandmother's passing, Tiffany decides to assume the role of witch, aided by a group of small Nac Mac Feegle who call themselves The Wee Free Men.²¹ *The Wee Free Men* thus focuses on Tiffany's decision to become a witch and her mission to rescue her brother Wentworth, a toddler, and Roland (13), the King's son, who have been kidnapped by the Queen of the Elves. In the second novel, *A Hat Full of Sky* (2004), Tiffany leaves her home to begin her training as a witch with Miss Level, a research witch²² and former circus performer. In this novel, Tiffany is possessed by a hiver, a parasitic entity which takes over the mind and body of other creatures. After wreaking havoc under the influence of the hiver, Tiffany manages to get her body back and fight it. Finally, she goes back to The Chalk to take her place as the hag o' the hills. *Wintersmith* (2006), the third novel, focuses on Tiffany's first 'romance' and the arrival of her first menses. Tiffany is now being trained by Miss Treason, who takes her to see a Morris dance. Despite being warned not to do so, Tiffany joins the dance and the Wintersmith (the personification of Winter) mistakes her for Lady Summer and falls in love with her. In this novel, Tiffany must stop the Wintersmith from freezing the Discworld over and refuse his sexual advancements. In the fourth novel, *I Shall Wear Midnight* (2010), the plot focuses on Tiffany's fight against a resurrected witch

¹⁹ The Ramtops are the central mountain range in the Discworld.

²⁰ She was considered to be the hag o' the hills by the Feegles but not by the villagers, who saw her as a shepherd and a wise woman. Readers only learn things about Granny Aching through Tiffany's memories of her. Granny Aching did not call herself a witch, although the witches from Lancre knew she was one.

²¹ The Nac Mac Feegle are a fictional type of fairies: "They have shaggy red hair and are covered all over with blue tattoos and blue paint, in patterns which indicate their clan. They wear kilts or leather loincloths, use feathers, bones or teeth as decorations, and carry swords almost as large as themselves—though they go in for kicking and head-butting too. They are about six inches tall" (Pratchett and Simpson, 2008). The Feegles' place of origin is Scotland and that explains their choice of clothing. For more details about the Nac Mac Feegle, check Pratchett's and Simpson's *The Folklore of Discworld*.

²² A research witch studies old spells and magic to see how they can work.



hunter. Tiffany is already working as a witch in *The Chalk* and when the local Baron dies, she is accused of murder, as she had been taking her care of his health. Finally, *The Shepherd's Crown* (2015), chronicles Tiffany's last adventure: facing Granny Weatherwax's death and protecting her world from an Elvish invasion.

Since the *Tiffany Aching* books focus their plots on stories which question and redefine fairy-tale conventions, Haberkorn labels them as metafiction or theoretical fiction and so "Such works can be read as commentaries on narrative worldmaking, and thus can be used by readers to better understand the way in which their worlds and their selves are narrative constructions" (270).

Although Pratchett challenges traditional fantasy conventions in all Discworld novels, I will focus and pinpoint how the author dismantles these narrative conventions in the *Tiffany Aching* series and how by doing so he contributes to the erasure of the conception of the witch as a wicked character. However, before I proceed to analyse the breaking of genre conventions in the *Tiffany Aching* series, I shall first consider what type of fantasy Pratchett uses in the series.

Taking Mendlesohn's theory of fantasy, Pratchett's 'witches' novels can be classified under the category of 'intrusive fantasy'. Intrusive fantasy presents a primary or a secondary world which is invaded by a fantastical element so that "the world is ruptured by the intrusion, which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled" (Mendlesohn, 2008: e-book). In the *Tiffany Aching* series, the enemies who challenge the stability of the Discworld are the Elves, "extradimensional inhuman monsters" (Pratchett and Simpson, 2008: e-book) who are not native to the Discworld but come from a "parasite universe" (Pratchett and Simpson: e-book). Pratchett's elves are "a predatory, cruel, parasitic race, who will use other living beings, and hurt them, because this is fun. They break into a world through



those strange places where the barrier between dimensions is just a bit too thin for safety” (Pratchett and Simpson, 2008: e-book). If not defeated, the Elves might overcome and conquer the Discworld and subjugate its people, thus it is Tiffany’s job to defeat the Elves in the last instalment of the series, *The Shepherd’s Crown*. Therefore, the image Pratchett portrays of the elves differs from the notion of “tall, shining figures dancing in rings in the moonlight to the loveliest music one could hope to hear; or tiny dainty creatures with butterfly wings, fluttering round flowers” (Pratchett and Simpson, 2008: e-book) that can sometimes be found in fairy tales.

Another important aspect of Pratchett’s use of fantasy conventions is his description of how the Discworld functions. In *Turtle Recall: The Discworld Companion... So Far* (2014) Pratchett and Briggs provide several explanations for the Discworld’s rules and parameters. Three main factors constitute the world’s “physics”: “Life force, The Power of Metaphor and Belief and Narrative Causality” (2014: e-book). Narrative Causality is perhaps one of the most important characteristics:

It plays a role similar to that substance known as phlogiston, once believed to be that principle or substance within inflammable things that enabled them to burn. In the Discworld universe, then, there is narrativium. It is part of the spin of every atom, the drift of every cloud. It is what causes them to be what they are and continue to exist and take part in the ongoing story of the world. (Pratchett and Cohen, 2014: e-book)

The emphasis on the power of stories is essential since “narrativium” is “the anchor for the stories that unfold on Pratchett’s secondary world, revealing another meta fictional level and ensuring that stories follow certain patterns” (Lüthi, 2014: 136). In Pratchett’s stories, the stereotypical elements of fantasy and fairy tales are the foundation of the Discworld yet at the same time Pratchett uses these conventions to subvert and question them: “While revealing the lighter side of tropes he makes fun of, Pratchett simultaneously uncovers the mechanisms which are at work behind stories” (138). Hence, in Pratchett’s Discworld we find unusual protagonists, villains, and stereotypical places



and storylines which are reversed. As Lüthi concludes, “Discworld is a mirror of pop culture and, more importantly, a critical reflection of fantasy and storytelling itself” (140).

In the *Tiffany Aching* series, as noted, Pratchett reverses and challenges traditional fairy tale elements. The author himself, together with Jacqueline Simpson, published a book about the folklore we can find in the Discworld, which is also a useful guide to notice its borrowings: *The Folklore of Discworld: Legends, Myths, and Customs from the Discworld with Helpful Hints from Planet Earth* (2008). Pratchett’s and Simpson’s book is essential to understand how Pratchett draws from different English, Scottish and Irish traditions to develop the Discworld’s own history and folklore. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, folklore expresses “the traditional stories, beliefs, and customs of a group of people” (online) and fairy tales are one of the artistic expressions of these, amongst legends, songs, art and many others. Therefore, the difference between folktales and fairy tales need to be considered. An essential work on folktales is Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). In this seminal work, Propp considers the structural elements which occur in typical Russian fairy tales. According to the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*,

The fairy tale is a written story that relies upon the FANTASTIC, although it need not involve fairies or FAERIE. It is usually set somewhere distant in place or time or both - in “once upon a time” or, as J.R.R. TOLKIEN called it, the “Perilous Realm.” It almost always involves a TRANSFORMATION, either physically or through self-discovery, so that by its end people or circumstances have changed, generally allowing a “happy ever after” conclusion. (1997: 332-333, original capitalized text)

The folktale, in contrast, is a “narrative derived from oral tradition which relates a well understood and recognizable story. Usually dependent upon a nation’s FOLKLORE, the folktale will reflect a cultural identity and be part of that nation’s heritage. (...) Not all folktales involve the supernatural or fantastic but many rely upon a feeling of WRONGNESS drawn from SUPERSTITION” (1997: 359, original capitalized text). Additionally, as Jack Zipes argues in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*: “From



the beginning, fairy tales were symbolic commentaries on the mores and customs of a particular society and the classes and groups within these societies and how their actions and relations could lead to success and happiness” (2000: xxi). Zipes’ definition is particularly helpful to the *Tiffany Aching series* since Pratchett is undoubtedly making a commentary on society’s customs by reversing some traditional fairy tale patterns.

Another important author which considered fairy tales is J.R.R. Tolkien. In his essay “On Fairy-Stories” (1939) Tolkien discusses what constitutes a fairy-story and analyses various examples. According to the scholar,

A ‘fairy-story’ is one which touches on or uses Faërie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy. Faërie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic—but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician. There is one proviso: if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away. (1983: 114)

In the *Tiffany Aching* books a sense of tradition can be appreciated through the structure the plot follows yet the reader realizes that this is not a traditional fairy tale. As Zipes argues:

Beyond the comic turns and surface humour, Pratchett’s refashioning of familiar fairy tales addresses large themes: the responsibility of authors in shaping stories, the role of readers in challenging the grand cultural narratives which inhere in fairy tales, and finally the central importance of creativity and imagination to the humanity of human beings. (2000: 400)

Zipes considers *Witches Abroad* (1991) and *Hogfather* (1996) the two novels in which Pratchett uses fairy tale conventions most openly, and I would argue that the *Tiffany Aching* series follows their path. Furthermore, as Nikolajeva points out: “Most fantasy novels have many similarities to fairy tales. They have inherited the fairy-tale system of characters, set up by Vladimir Propp and his followers: hero/subject, princess/object, helper, giver, antagonist” (2003: 140). Thus, my aim is to explain how Pratchett deviates from both traditional writing and stylistic patterns as well as content in the *Tiffany Aching*



series and how by doing so proposes a reshaped fairy tale model embedded in a series of novels.

The fantasy genre contains many items found in fairy tales: wizards, witches, dragons, talking animals and princes and princesses yet “the writers’ imagination allows them to transform and modernize these” while keeping their function; fantasy has also “inherited the basic plot of fairy tales: the hero leaves home, meets helpers and opponents, goes through trials, performs a task, and returns home having gained some form of wealth” (Nikolajeva, 2003: 140). Tiffany’s plot, hence, follows the basic plot of fairy tales with some twists and turns.

Tiffany’s fairy tale does not start as most traditional fairy tales do. The typical “once upon a time” or “there was once a girl...” are not used at the beginning of any of the five books comprising the *Tiffany Aching* series and yet Tiffany’s story resembles that of a fairy tale, portraying a young girl who sets off on a transformative adventure to become who she is destined to be. Tiffany begins her journey in *The Wee Free Men* when she is 9 years old, and she finds her place in the world when she is in her late teens in *The Shepherd’s Crown*.

In the *Wee Free Men* readers are introduced to the Aching family, who live in The Chalk, an area of land named after the chalky stone which sits under the grassland. The Chalk is ruled by the Baron de Chumsfanleigh (pronounced Chuffley) and Tiffany’s father is the tenant of Home Farm, where they live. The books are set in a rural environment, as most fairy tales are, and they resemble a medieval type of society with a ruling class and its subjects. The story line opens when Tiffany, aged nine, fights Jenny Greenteeth (a figure of English folklore who pulls children into the water to drown them) to save her younger brother Wentworth from being drowned. Miss Tick, a witch who travels to find young girls with magical abilities, notices this feat and becomes interested in the young



girl. The reader already knows that Tiffany wants to become a witch “she’d decided only last week that she wanted to be a witch when she grew up” (*The Wee Free Men*, 3).²³ In this passage we find two subversions of the traditional fairy tale. First, becoming a witch is presented as a suitable career path instead of a curse; secondly, most 9-year-olds in fairy tales would not decide to become witches but would rather be princesses. From that moment onwards Tiffany’s story is shaped by her will to become a witch and the challenges she faces to fulfil her aim.

Tiffany’s path, however, is not an easy one since witches are not accepted in The Chalk. While the witches in Lancre are respected and tolerated as “It is to them that the village turns when a child or a cow falls desperately sick, when a woman is having a difficult labour, when those who are dying cannot actually die” (Simpson and Pratchett, 2008: 155), the people thought to possess magical abilities are feared and persecuted in The Chalk since the baron outlawed witchcraft. Thus, Tiffany’s story centres on her will to become the witch of The Chalk and earn the villagers’ respect while stopping women from being persecuted for being witches. In the ensuing novels, the reader joins Tiffany in her path to become a witch and overcome the many obstacles that stand in her way: from having to struggle against the spirit of Winter to fighting a malevolent ghost of a witch hunter to finally save the Discworld from the threat of the Elves’ invasion.

Many authors have explored the conventions of traditional fairy tales and nowadays, the study of fairy tales as a genre is wide-ranging and there are many critics who have focused their research on fairy tale literature. Jack Zipes is perhaps one of the most influential researchers in fairy-tale literature (*Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, 1979 and *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, 2000). Other scholars in the field are Stephen Benson (*Cycles of Influence: Fiction, Folktale,*

²³ Hereafter referenced to as *TWFM*.



Theory, 2003) and Cristina Bacchilega (*Fairy Tales Transformed: 21st-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder*, 2013). The research on fairy tale literature is growing both in acceptance and popularity, therefore demonstrating that works once considered devoid of interest have now gained literary merit. Many authors have rewritten classic fairy tales from a feminist perspective, such as the *A Fairy Tale Revolution* series (Blacman, Solnit, Shamsie and Winterson) which includes four books (*Blueblood*, *Cinderella Liberator*, *Duckling* and *Hansel and Greta*) all published in 2020. These books are retellings of classical fairy tales such as “Cinderella” or “The Ugly Duckling”. Other critics have devoted their efforts to include women writers in the history of the fairy tale tradition, such as the *conteuses*.²⁴

The previously mentioned Vladimir Propp is often quoted in relation to his key text *Morphology of the Tale*, published in 1928, in which he analysed the structure of different Russian folktales trying to pinpoint characteristics which were present in all of them. According to Zipes, Propp believed that “in order to establish what constitutes a genre, one has to demonstrate that there is a constant repetition of functions in a large body of tales” (2012: xi). Propp argued that there are thirty-one functions of the dramatis personae in folk tales, occurring in a specific consecutive order.

Even though Propp developed his theory from wonder and folk tales, his theory might be applied to fairy tales. In relation to the *Tiffany Aching* series, Propp’s functions might be considered when analysing the structure of the series as a fairy tale, both regarding the form and the motifs, themes and local folklore. The *Tiffany Aching* series might be considered a single, long fairy tale beginning in *The Wee Free Men* and

²⁴ The *conteuses* (Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, Louise d'Auneuil, Cathrine Bernard, Catherine Durand, Charlotte-Rose de La Force, Marie-Jeanne Lheritier de Villandon, and Henriette-Julie de Murat) were French aristocratic women who wrote fairy tales with female protagonists during the 17th century. (See Lewis Seifert, 2004) Charles Perrault (1628-1703) was also part of the same tradition who in 1697 published *Stories or Tales from Past Times* (*Histoires ou contes du temps passé* in its original French).



concluding in *The Shepherd's Crown*, or each novel might also be considered a complete fairy tale in itself since each proposes an initial situation that is resolved by the end.

In my view, the *Tiffany Aching* novels, as well as the other novels featuring witches, are complex fairy tales: while they might not have been written with the intention of being fairy tales, many of the traditional elements of the genre are included. Pratchett revisits and mentions some popular fairy tales to criticize them, especially in one of his previous books: *Witches Abroad*. In this novel Pratchett plays with the concept I have already mentioned, narrative causality, which “means that a story, once started, takes a shape. It picks up all the vibrations of all the other workings of that story that have ever been” (*Witches Abroad*, 1991: 13). Pratchett counts on the reader’s familiarity with fairy tales to twist their conventions and the plotlines, as he “capitalises on the incompatibility of neatly drawn story with how the world actually works” (Taylor, 2015: 2). The allusions to fairy tales that Pratchett includes in his books help the reader to create a mental framework of how the story might develop yet they find a plot and characters that do not fulfil their typical roles in fairy tales.

Fairy tales are plot driven: a task is set to the main character, and they must overcome different obstacles to reach their goal, usually with the help of magical creatures (what Propp called “Magical Agent”) while learning a valuable lesson in the process. Also, fairy tales include good/bad characters, magic and magical creatures and they are set in a past rural environment. All these elements (magic, magical creatures, a medieval type of social structure) are present in the *Tiffany Aching* series, yet they are not used in traditional fairy tale fashion. In traditional fairy tales, the characters are clearly defined as either heroes or villains but in the series we find more complex and multifaceted characters. Another element that is twisted in the *Tiffany Aching* books is the pre-established notion that by the end of the fairy tale, the heroine marries the handsome



prince. Although Tiffany has a partner by the end of the series, she is conflicted and not convinced that marriage is her goal (a point I expand on in section 1.4). Besides, the length of the series cannot compare to the shorter structure of the fairy tale, usually equivalent to a short story. Also, the focus on a witch hero is a feature that must be taken into consideration as a challenge to patriarchal elements usually found in fairy tales since witches are opposed to the hero in traditional fairy tales and are never the protagonist. This shall be examined in an ensuing section when I consider Pratchett's breaking of traditional fairy-tale conventions in relation to content and motifs in relation to the character of the witch.

1.1.3 For Discworld's Younger Readers: The *Tiffany Aching* series as Young Adult Fiction

Pratchett's *Discworld* series are in turn divided into subseries, in principle for adults, with some exceptions. In Terry Pratchett's official website, the *Tiffany Aching* series is placed under the young adult category, along with *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents* (2001), *Nation* (2008), *Dodger* (2012), and *Dodger's Guide to London* (2014). *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents*²⁵ was the first *Discworld* novel marketed at young adults since all other *Discworld* novels are for older readers yet "The main audience for Pratchett's 48 books, all busily in print, is teenagers, who are drawn by his irrepressible invention and sense of mischief" (Ezard, 2002: online).

A stylistic difference between Pratchett's books aimed at a younger readership that started with *The Amazing Maurice* is the division of the novel into chapters, a characteristic which also presents the *Tiffany Aching* series. Pratchett's novels were not divided into chapters because, the author explained,

²⁵ Hereafter referred to as *The Amazing Maurice*.



Chapter 1. Shifting Roles: The Witch as Hero in the *Tiffany Aching* Series

“Life doesn't happen in chapters—at least, not regular ones. Nor do movies. Homer didn't write in chapters. I can see what their purpose is in children's books (“I'll read to the end of the chapter, and then you must go to sleep”) but I'm blessed if I know what function they serve in books for adults.” (in Grant, 2008: online)

Pratchett's decision to include chapters in his young adult texts might have come from his editor's insistence (in Grant, 2008: online). However, I will not focus on the stylistic differences in Pratchett's young adult novels from the ones intended to an older readership, but on their content and the characteristics that place them under the term young adult fiction.

An aspect which differentiates the *Tiffany Aching* series from other *Discworld* novels in which the protagonist is a witch is, evidently, age. The other main witches in the *Discworld*, Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, Magrat Garlick and Agnes Nitt²⁶ are adults and therefore the narrative does not follow a coming-of-age pattern. The plots of the novels in which they appear *Wyrd Sisters* (1988), *Witches Abroad* (1991), *Lords and Ladies* (1992), *Maskerade* (1995), and *Carpe Jugulum* (1998) do not revolve around the witches' struggle to earn their place in society. On the contrary, Granny Weatherwax's reputation and standing within the witch community is firmly established from the beginning; she is “the most highly regarded of the leaders they [the witches] didn't have” (*Wyrd Sisters*, 13). While Tiffany's books focus on her journey to become a witch and earn the respect and admiration of other witches and the people from her village, the plot of the other witches' novels revolves around different conflicts. In *Witches Abroad*, for example, the Lancre coven (Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg and Magrat Garlick) try to liberate the city of Genua from the curse that has been cast upon them by Lily Weatherwax, Granny Weatherwax's sister. *Wyrd sisters* is a parody of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*: King Verence I of Lancre is murdered by his cousin persuaded by his wife and the king's child is given to the three witches, who hand him to a troupe of travelling actors.

²⁶ I am excluding Eskarina Smith (*Equal Rites*, 1987) as she trained to become a wizard and not a witch.



Finally, the witches help the child, Tomjon, take his rightful place as king. *Lords and Ladies* centres on Magrat's wedding to King Verence II and the fight against the Elves that are trying to invade the Discworld. *Maskerade* follows Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg trying to collect the money obtained from Nanny Ogg publishing her cookbook as well as trying to recruit Agnes Nitt for the Lancre Coven after Magrat married King Verence. Finally, *Carpe Jugulum* centres on the naming of Magrat and King Verence II's daughter and the threat of a family of vampires taking over the kingdom.

As mentioned, young adult fiction focuses on the challenges of youth and on the protagonist's journey into adulthood. Young adult novels are coming of age stories and growing up is the central theme. According to Campbell, "the narration moves swiftly to a point where the protagonist has an epiphany that matures him or her in some vital way and, as a manifestation of that inner change, solves a problem that has been central to the plot" (2010: 75). Although YA novels may present different styles, themes, and motifs, this moment of epiphany is essential. Besides, YA novels must

be told in the YA voice from the limited adolescent viewpoint. In addition, it must be relevant to the lives of young readers in some way. Disqualifiers, it seems to me, would be settings or subjects outside the scope or interest of contemporary teens and long passages in the voice of an adult or a child character. (Campbell, 2010: 76)

Tiffany is presented as a 9-year-old at the beginning of the series (*The Wee Free Men*) and that is the moment her journey into young adulthood begins, still in childhood. Tiffany's moment of epiphany comes in the last novel in the series, *The Shepherd's Crown*, when she realizes that she must occupy the position left by Granny Weatherwax at her death and become the head witch.²⁷ According to Köhler, "Young adults consistently identify two markers of adulthood as the highest-ranking ones (...): Willingness to take responsibility for the consequences of one's actions and developing personal beliefs and

²⁷ Although it is established in the novels that there is no such thing as a "head witch" it is nonetheless understood that Granny Weatherwax would have had that position if it was officially stated.



values independently of one's parents or other influences" (2021: 103). In their journey towards adulthood, "personal responsibility and independent thinking" are an essential part of a YA protagonist. By accepting the responsibility of becoming the go-to witch when a problem arises, Tiffany is beginning her journey into adulthood.

To my knowledge, only Köhler's article "Responsibility and Critical Thinking As Markers of Adulthood in Two Coming-Of-Age Fantasy Series: Terry Pratchett's *Tiffany Aching* Novels And Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus* Trilogy" (2021) has tackled the YA characteristics present in the *Tiffany Aching* series. Köhler argues that responsibility and critical thinking are two essential requisites in the Discworld to become a successful and competent witch (104). Being responsible for the well-being of the community and fixing not only her own mistakes but those of others is an intrinsic part of being a witch. However,

Tiffany struggles with this throughout the series because her everyday work is thankless, but as she grows up she comes to accept this as the necessary reality of witchcraft—most days, the job in front of you is not one of fighting off supernatural threats through spectacular displays of magic, but one that needs to be done nevertheless. (Köhler 2021: 107)

As the series progresses, Tiffany takes on more responsibilities and that demonstrates her path towards maturity. Köhler also contends that "As with responsibility, Tiffany has a natural inclination towards critical thinking that motivates her decision to become a witch" (2021:115), a marker as noted of YA fiction. Tiffany demonstrates from an early age that she is capable of questioning everything and come to her own conclusions and this is exemplified in all the novels that conform the series. Questioning one's society and its roles is also an inherent characteristic of YA fiction. Therefore, analysing Tiffany's coming of age within the series is essential to understand how the witch is portrayed in YA fantasy fiction. Thus, the next section focuses on Tiffany's heroic journey into adulthood and how her coming of age is portrayed within the series, which can be thus described as a Bildungsroman.



1.2 “Sometimes, Tiffany thought, I am so fed up with being young”: Tiffany’s Journey from Childhood to Young Adulthood

The *Tiffany Aching* series is, as noted, a coming-of-age story, or Bildungsroman, in which Tiffany grows from being a 9-year-old witch in *The Wee Free Men* to being in her late teens in *The Shepherd’s Crown*. The series falls into different and overlapping genres; the books are considered young adult literature since the intended readers are teenagers comprised between the ages of 12 to 18 yet their readership might cover younger and older people: although Tiffany is presented as a child, her journey into becoming a witch is interesting to different age groups. Intended for a young audience, the books are important because by featuring a favourable portrayal of the witch, they help reframe the previously negative vision of witches that children and young adults might have perceived from other stories, such as *The Witches* (1983), by Roald Dahl or the White Witch from *The Chronicles of Narnia (The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and *The Magician’s Nephew* (1955)) by C.S. Lewis.²⁸ Therefore, it is crucial to analyse how Tiffany’s two journeys, from childhood to young adulthood and her development as a witch, correlate. The *Tiffany Aching* series, then, proposes a twofold coming of age: her journey to become a young woman and the one to become a proficient witch. Hence, my intention in this section is to examine how Pratchett positively contributes to the literary tradition of fictional witches by presenting a feminist heroine journey. In order to do so, I shall first briefly examine the concept of the Bildungsroman and then analyse Tiffany’s coming of age through a close-reading of the series.

²⁸ Roald Dahl’s *The Witches* has been adapted to the screen twice: one in 1990 directed by Nicolas Roeg and the latest in 2020, directed by Robert Zemeckis. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was first adapted for television in 1967. Consisting of 10 episodes, the series was directed by Helen Standage. The novel was adapted again in 1979 as an animated series directed by Bill Melendez. The film was directed by Andrew Adamson and released in 2005.



Chapter 1. Shifting Roles: The Witch as Hero in the *Tiffany Aching* Series

A Bildungsroman is a novel, or series, which deals with the maturation process, from childhood to adulthood, of a character and the challenges they face during this process. The journey, naturally, “is a symbolic manifestation of the child’s Bildung or process of maturation, encouraging them to shift beyond their comfort zone and step into the unfamiliar or hitherto unknown” (McCulloch, 2019: 174). It is befitting, then, that the *Tiffany Aching* series is a Bildungsroman featuring a young witch-child because not only it represents the girl’s maturation process, but it also serves as an example of how the vision of the witch has changed and developed. Incidentally, it is no coincidence that the series is intended towards a young adult audience who might also be going through the same process of growing up and finding their place in the world and therefore might identify with Tiffany’s experience. Thus, young readers empathize with Tiffany and her training process as it might mirror their own experiences.

The Bildungsroman as a genre has been thoroughly examined and although the consensus amongst critics is that it originated in Germany, there are dissenting voices as to which text is the original. According to Graham:

Several critics assert that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s multi-volume novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, 1795-6), is the urtext, while others make that claim for *Geschichte des Agathon* (*The Story of Agathon*, 1766-7) by Christoph Martin Wieland. Either way, the genre’s birth seems deeply implicated with the German Enlightenment. (2019: 2)

Thus, it is generally assumed that the Bildungsroman originated in 18th-century Germany. Nevertheless, like most genres, the Bildungsroman has evolved, and now it has broadened to include wide-ranging representations of different backgrounds and stories, such as LGBTQ+ characters and BIPOC persons. According to McCulloch, “It is not an obsolete, static genre, then, but a format that can be revisited time and again, and injected with political and theoretical impetus from feminism, postmodernism and so on” (2019: 176).

Inevitably, when exploring a series of novels which feature a young character who becomes a hero, Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) must be



acknowledged. Campbell put forward the theory of the monomyth, which in narratology is commonly known as the hero's journey. According to Campbell, the basic pattern is the following: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (1949: 28). Nevertheless, Campbell's theory of the monomyth has been heavily criticized by feminist scholars who have rightly labelled it too male oriented. As Maroula Joannou argues, "A woman's quest for her identity may be explorative rather than goal-orientated, epistemological rather than teleological, relational rather than linear, circuitous or circular rather than direct, or shifting rather than fixed" (2019: 203). Maureen Murdock, one of Campbell's students, published in response a self-help book called *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness* (1990). Murdock sees the heroine's journey as a therapeutic act in which women go on a "quest to fully embrace their feminine nature, learning how to value themselves as women and to heal the deep wound of the feminine. It is a very important inner journey toward being a fully integrated, balanced, and whole human being" (1990: 3). Murdock's book deals with the female hero's journey from a psycho-spiritual perspective, and she protested that in Campbell's view "Women don't need to make the journey, they are the place that everyone is trying to get to" (in Davis, 2005: 5). Campbell's journey, therefore, proves to be a flawed, patriarchal narrative in need of revision.

Many authors have explored the female hero's journey before and after Murdock's publication, both from psychological and literary perspectives. Victoria Lynn Schmidt's *45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters* (2001) explores the different archetypal characters we can find in literature; she also provides versions of both the hero and heroine's journey. According to Schmidt,



Chapter 1. Shifting Roles: The Witch as Hero in the *Tiffany Aching* Series

the feminine journey is a journey where a hero must go deep inside herself and change throughout the story. This hero awakens in Act I and moves toward rebirth. Movies of the week and character-driven stories tend to fall into this category as well as *The Wizard of Oz*, *Titanic*, *American Beauty*, *Mother*, *The Awakening*, and *Alien*. (2001: 213)

In her analysis, Schmidt proposes nine stages “mirroring classic story structure” (220) which the heroine must go through to become “a complete being in charge of her own life” (2001: 220); she argues that the journey starts “by questioning authority, then gaining the courage to stand up for herself and finally embodying the willingness to go it alone and face her own symbolic death” (220). Even though Tiffany’s journey does not seem to completely fit within the parameters created by Schmidt, she does indeed go on a journey in which she matures both as a witch and as a woman. The heroine’s journey is mostly portrayed through the experiences of a young heroine, yet it can occur at any stage of life and the heroine does not always need to be a child or a teenager. In that view, a novel which features a heroine is not quintessentially a Bildungsroman though in the *Tiffany Aching* series we do find a heroine’s journey intertwined with a Bildungsroman.

In Tiffany’s case, becoming a witch not only implies a maturation process but also a challenge to her land’s traditions since witches have never been accepted in The Chalk, her place of birth. As noted, Tiffany’s coming of age begins in *The Wee Free Men* when she is 9 years old. There is a two-year gap between each book, so Tiffany is 11 in *A Hat Full of Sky*, 13 in *Wintersmith*, almost 16 in *I Shall Wear Midnight* and 18 or 19 in *The Shepherd’s Crown*. In the series, Pratchett portrays a different aspect of growing up in each of the novels.

From the very beginning Tiffany is presented as a child with a bold personality who is eager to learn. To exemplify this, when a group of teachers visit Tiffany’s village, she wants to know more about Jenny Green-Teeth, a monster she has just fought off, so she queries the teacher who had taught her previously about hedgehogs:

‘I would like a question answered today,’ said Tiffany.



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‘Provided it’s not the one about how you get baby hedgehogs,’ said the man.
‘No,’ said Tiffany patiently. ‘It’s about zoology.’
‘Zoology, eh? That’s a big word, isn’t it.’
‘No, actually it isn’t,’ said Tiffany. ‘Patronizing is a big word. Zoology is really quite short.’
The teacher’s eyes narrowed further. Children like Tiffany were bad news.

(*TWFM*, 21)

Tiffany’s deadpan response demonstrates that she is no ordinary 9-year-old and that her maturity is above average. This is further exemplified when she meets Miss Tick, a witch who scouts villages seeking young witches to train. Tiffany’s decision to become a witch determines her growth as a woman since a witch is viewed differently in society, and in the fiction she reads: “She couldn’t be the prince, and she’d never be a princess, and she didn’t want to be a woodcutter, so she’d be the witch and *know* things, just like Granny Aching” (*TWFM*, 30, original italics). However, just by deciding that she wants to be a witch Tiffany does not become one immediately; Miss Tick tells her that she must train in a “magical school”, a trope shared by many fantasy novels, including the ones I have chosen for my dissertation. In the Discworld, wizards and witches receive an education yet the type of magic they learn is different (a point I further discuss in section 1.4.). Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that Tiffany’s witch training by practice helps her mature: “‘The thing about witchcraft,’ said Mistress Weatherwax, ‘is that it’s not like school at all. *First* you get the test, and then afterwards you spend years findin’ out how you passed it. It’s a bit like life in that respect’” (*TWFM*, 298, original italics). *The Wee Free Men* concludes with Tiffany realizing that she needs to become a good witch to help and protect her people, which in turn helps her to change the view that the people of The Chalk have of witches. The path that Tiffany chooses at nine is not an easy one, yet she is determined to accept the challenges and worries that come with it. Tiffany proves, then, that she is a great example of a resilient young woman.

As mentioned, In *A Hat Full of Sky*, Tiffany leaves her home to become an apprentice with the old witch Miss Level, thus continuing her journey to become a witch,



a woman, and a hero. The fact that she must leave home keeps in line with the heroine's journey as well, since she has to abandon the sense of security that she feels around her family to become a self-sufficient person. Since witches are not trusted in *The Chalk*, Tiffany's only possibility to learn is to leave. Her prejudiced neighbours think that witches

danced around on moonlit nights without their drawers on. (Tiffany had made enquiries about this, and had been slightly relieved to find out that you didn't have to do this to be a witch. You could if you wanted to, but only if you were certain where all the nettles, thistles and hedgehogs were). (*A Hat Full of Sky*, 15)

Miss Level oversees Tiffany's training and provides her with the knowledge she needs to become a professional witch. The role of the witch in the Discworld is to take care of the community as a healer and general problem solver and Tiffany must learn to do that to her best capacity. In *A Hat Full of Sky*, Tiffany also meets other witches her age and socializes with them, another key aspect in any person's development. Tiffany attends a sabbat²⁹ where she meets Annagramma, who plays the role of 'mean girl' as Tiffany's antagonist. Annagramma is Miss Earwig's apprentice and they believe that witches "must distinguish the higher MagiK from the everyday sort."³⁰ (*AHFOS*, 129). Annagramma mocks Tiffany which undermines her confidence:

Perhaps she wasn't a witch at all. Oh, she'd defeated the Queen, with the help of the little men and the memory of Granny Aching, but she hadn't used magic. She wasn't sure, now, what she had used. (...) Perhaps Tiffany should go home and make Soft Nellies³¹ for the rest of her life. (*AHFOS*, 135-37)

Tiffany's insecurity is a common feeling amongst 11-year-olds, but it is an emotion she needs to overcome. By the end of the novel, however, Tiffany has learnt to face her emotions and grows from her experiences. In *A Hat Full of Sky*, Tiffany understands that

²⁹ A sabbat is a gathering of witches where several rituals are performed. For more insight see Hendrix, 2011. In Pratchett's novels, however, the sabbat does not involve performing any rituals and it is just portrayed as a meeting where witches discuss different matters.

³⁰ Magik consists of "proper sacred circles, spells written down. A proper hierarchy, not everyone running around doing whatever they feel like. Real wands, not bits of grubby stick. Professionalism, with respect. Absolutely no wards. That's the only way forward" (*AHFOS*, 130). In other words, magik is performative whereas magic is being of service to others.

³¹ Soft Nellies is a type of hard cheese.



being a witch means not only taking care of the community but facing obstacles and fighting her own fears. Tiffany's antagonist in this novel is the hiver, an entity which can 'possess' someone's mind and body. Eventually, the hiver takes over Tiffany and induces her to cause chaos around her. Pratchett appears to use the 'hiver' as a metaphor for what it is popularly called teenage angst. Tiffany's erratic behaviour (such as stealing a neighbour's money) caused by the hiver could be extrapolated to traits of the behaviour that teenagers display when they are faced with the anxiety of growing up and not knowing how to deal with their emotions. As Donaldson argues, the hiver might act as a doppelganger that expresses a darker side of Tiffany, but once Tiffany faces it she can "acknowledge her fears, release them and come away with a greater understanding of her power/agency" (2017: 8). Tiffany faces the 'hiver' by helping him die, so she is confronted by DEATH³² (original capitalization). As part of her training as a witch, Tiffany learns that she will have to help people die and guide them through 'the other side' if necessary. Only 11 years old, Tiffany accepts that watching people die is part of life, a critical life moment in everyone's maturation process. Granny Weatherwax congratulates Tiffany on her achievement: "'Do you know what part of being a witch is? It's making the choices that have to be made. The hard choices. But you did... quite well.'" (*AHFOS*, 297, original ellipsis). By the end of the novel, Tiffany understands that she must continue her training to become a more skilled witch, which will in turn help her grow up as a woman respected by her peers. As Granny Weatherwax tells Tiffany: "If you don't know when to be a human being, you don't know when to be a witch" (*AHFOS*, 324). *A Hat Full of Sky*, then, deals with Tiffany's process of finding her place in the world, while still a child or pre-teen.

³² DEATH is a character in the Discworld and a parody of other personifications of death. He is a skeleton wearing black robes who usually carries a scythe. DEATH appears as a leading character in *Mort* (1987), *Reaper Man* (1991), *Soul Music* (1994), *Hogfather* (1996) and *Thief of Time* (2001).



The third novel, *Wintersmith*, explores Tiffany's concerns about puberty and facing the death of one of her mentors, Miss Treason, which signifies her entrance into the adult world. *Wintersmith* covers a turning point in Tiffany's journey since the novel explores her passage from girlhood to adulthood through the arrival of the girl's menstruation. While it is still considered taboo in some countries to openly discuss girls' menstruation, Pratchett beautifully creates a metaphor by linking Tiffany's menses to her sharing some of the Lady Summer's powers: plants grow where she walks barefoot and the Cornucopia³³ appears. The comic scene in which Tiffany is diagnosed with "Ped Fecundis" allows Nanny Ogg,³⁴ Granny Weatherwax and Miss Tick to explain to Tiffany what is happening to her. Since Tiffany has acquired some of the features of the Summer Lady when her menses appears, the Wintersmith believes that Tiffany is the Lady herself and becomes infatuated, since she is, Miss Tick says, "...exciting his romantic propensities" (*Wintersmith*, 201, original ellipsis). Therefore, Tiffany must play the role of the Summer Lady or confront the Wintersmith and reject his romantic advances. As Donaldson argues:

Tiffany clearly experiences her maturing body as uncanny, possessed by a force of nature over which she has no control, but this is not a force that either can or should be expelled: Summer is fertility, ripening life and heat, and symbolises Tiffany's sexual maturation. Tiffany's interaction with and acceptance of Summer into her growing complex of personal doubles is thus essential. What she resents is the fact that with maturation comes the imposition of social expectations and responsibilities. (2017: 8)

Thus, by not tolerating and refusing the Wintersmith's flirtation, she positions herself against any unwelcomed sexual behaviour, demonstrating agency and control over her own body.

³³ A Cornucopia (also known as Horn of Plenty) crash-lands in Tiffany's garden. This is a curly shell-like object, of magically variable size, containing every kind of fruit, vegetable and grain—in fact, it turns out, anything and everything one can eat or drink (Pratchett and Simpson, 2008: 219).

³⁴ Nanny Ogg is understood as the Mother stereotype of the Triple Goddess myth; she has had three husbands and fifteen children who in turn have given her plenty of grandchildren. Nanny Ogg is usually liked in the Discworld and people often go to her for advice.



In *Wintersmith*, Tiffany experiences the uncertainties, fears, and contradictory feelings of maturing but it is essential that she goes through them to become a woman and a witch. Furthermore, she also realizes some of the impositions and expectations that will be placed on her, such as finding a husband and having children: “Yes, her mother had been married when she was still fourteen, but that was the sort of thing that happened in the olden days. There were a lot of things to be done before Tiffany ever got married, she was very clear about that” (*Wintersmith*, 183). Pratchett masterfully portrays this emotional change in a girl’s life through humour which in turn might help any readers going through the same process. By the end of the novel, Tiffany accepts who she is becoming and successfully rejects the Wintersmith, thus restoring the natural order. Tiffany needed to go through this change and accept that she would gradually become a sexually mature woman who will have to defy impositions thrown at her not only because of her status a woman but also because she is a witch. As Donaldson puts it “To save the Chalk, she must grow up” (2017: 8).

I Shall Wear Midnight explores Tiffany’s growing into a society that might not accept who she wants to become. In this novel, Tiffany is not quite yet 16 and the villain she needs to fight is the Cunning Man,³⁵ a witch hunter who intends to turn society against witches and kill Tiffany. However, “The Cunning Man isn’t a man, although he was once, and now he’s not even a ghost. He is an idea. Unfortunately he is an idea whose time has come” (*Midnight*, 197). Evidently, *I Shall Wear Midnight* delves into the history of the witch hunts and the prejudices and vexations many women who were accused of witchcraft endured. In this new instalment of Tiffany’s adventures, Pratchett is making a

³⁵ The Cunning Man was an Omnian witchfinder, book-burner, and a torturer who fell in love with a witch. The witch, however, did not reciprocate him as she knew who he was and as she was being burnt to death she grabbed him and both of them died. The Cunning Man then became a demonic spirit that corrupted minds and instilled hatred and suspicion in villages where witches were not previously seen as evil.



social commentary on how women who do not conform to their social expectations are treated:

There were really only four types of people in the world: men and women and wizards and witches. (...) But witches were not only very busy, they were also *apart*; Tiffany had learned that early on. You were among people, but not the *same* as them. There was always a kind of distance or separation. (...) This wasn't just because of respect, but because of a kind of fear as well. (*I Shall Wear Midnight*, 9, original italics)³⁶

In this novel, Tiffany is already acting as the witch of the Chalk and her responsibilities have grown: she takes care of the elderly and assists births and deaths on her own. In other words, at just 16, Tiffany is already considered an adult within the witch community since her training has finished.³⁷ However, although Tiffany's 'formal' training might be finalized, she still needs to find her place within a society who rejects her: "Every few hundred years or so, suddenly everyone thinks witches are bad. No one knows why it is. It just seems to happen" (*Midnight*, 163). As previously noted, in this novel Pratchett clearly draws from the history of the witch hunts between the 15th and 17th centuries when women who were thought to be witches were persecuted:

all the witches put together can remember the really hard times. When wearing a pointy hat got a stone thrown at you, if not something worse. (...) And there's always an excuse, isn't there, to throw a stone at the old lady who looks funny. It's always easier to blame somebody. And once you've called someone a witch, then you'd be amazed how many things you can blame her for. (*Midnight*, 164-165)

In this passage, Pratchett is criticising how appearances are intrinsically related to how a woman might be perceived and treated within society, especially if she does not conform to patriarchy's demands. Tiffany, who is not described as 'feminine' or ladylike, and who, moreover, refuses to be labelled as nothing else but a witch, does not belong to the

³⁶ The passage suggests that there might be some genetic predisposition to become a witch or a wizard. In *Equal Rites*, for example, it is stated that the eighth son of an eighth son will become a wizard. The concept of the eighth son of an eighth son comes from the folklore concept of the seventh son of a seventh son which established that special powers are given to that son. We can infer that witches might also be genetically predisposed to magic, and thus this differentiation between men, women, witches, and wizards.

³⁷ The roles and duties of witches will be further commented on in point 1.4 in relation to gender expectations.



community and so is susceptible of being persecuted. The Cunning Man, who represents the most harmful misogynistic aspects of patriarchal society, acts as a catalyst to provoke Tiffany into rejecting what is expected of her and fight not only to keep her right to be who she is but also to protect every witch who might be wronged. As Sinclair points out: “Tiffany’s challenge then is to not only break free of the gendered narratives confronting a young woman, but to inspire the same kind of freedom in others” (2015: 15). Tiffany must fight to become a respectable member of society even though all the odds are against her since witches, although considered essential in the Discworld, where science-based Medicine does not exist, were not welcome in most places: “That was the problem with witchcraft: it was as if everybody needed witches, but hated the fact that they did, and somehow the hatred of the fact could become the hatred of the person” (*Midnight*, 260).

Another parallel which might be drawn between *I Shall Wear Midnight* and the witch hunts is the mention of a book, *The Bonfire of the Witches*, which can be easily interpreted to be the equivalent of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Kramer and Sprenger, 1846). It is worth mentioning this parallelism since Tiffany concludes that books have power and can be used for the better or the worse, thus displaying her own critical skills; she realizes that “a book can’t hurt, can it? Except that books contain ideas, and ideas can be dangerous” (*Midnight*, 301). By the end of the novel, Tiffany manages to fight off the Cunning Man by luring him into a burning field, thus burning him again. Finally, Tiffany decides to build a school for the children of The Chalk. Tiffany’s project to build a school so children can learn to think critically positions her as the mentor and role-model of the community, leading her to become a respectable witch and reconciling the fact that witches are educators as well and sources of knowledge. As it is expected, Tiffany’s reasoning matures as she grows older, and she becomes more and more sure of herself and her position in society. The fact that she wants other children to learn how to manage



their thoughts and develop critical thinking skills indicates she will become an excellent mentor.

One of the major characteristics that show Tiffany's maturation process throughout the five novels are her thoughts. Tiffany has what Pratchett described as First, Second and Third thoughts, which show her different levels of reasoning. As Webb notes, "What Miss Tick identifies as her 'First Sight' is, however, most importantly manifested in her ability to see what is really there, not someone else's ideas" (2006: 157). Briefly:

First Thoughts are the everyday thoughts. Everyone has those. Second Thoughts are the thoughts you think about the *way* you think. People who enjoy thinking have those. Third Thoughts are thoughts that watch the world and think all by themselves. They're rare, and often troublesome. Listening to them is part of witchcraft. (*AHFOS*, 61, original italics)

As Tiffany grows, so does her ability to interpret her different thoughts which in turn allows her to become a better witch. The last novel in the series, published posthumously, *The Shepherd's Crown*, focuses on Tiffany's adult life, although she is only in her late teens. In the *Shepherd's Crown* readers can really appreciate Tiffany's development as a witch and as a young woman. Unfortunately, Granny Weatherwax passes away and Tiffany must face another of her mentor's death as well as the impending invasion of the Elves. Granny's death complicates Tiffany's duties: she must take care of the people of The Chalk as well as covering Granny's duties in Lancre taking care of the sick and the dying. Even though Tiffany feels overwhelmed at first, she understands that she has become the leader that the witches need (even though it is stressed throughout the novels that witches do not have a hierarchical structure): "I am the acknowledged successor of Granny Weatherwax, who was brought up as a witch by Nanny Gripes, who learned from witches going all the way back to Black Aliss, and that doesn't change" (*The Shepherd's Crown*, 117). By the end of the series, Tiffany has fully matured into womanhood and witchcraft and her development has led her to become an intelligent, capable, self-confident woman and witch, since both, the witch and the woman, are now completely



intertwined: “She was Tiffany Aching. Not Granny Weatherwax, but a witch in her own right. A witch who knew exactly who she was and how she wanted to do things. Her way. And she had not failed, because she had barely begun...” (*The Shepherd’s Crown*, 302, original ellipsis). Tiffany has gained full agency to become a perfect example of an antipatriarchal witch. Schmidt contends that:

Whereas the masculine hero ‘gets the girl’ or an external reward in the end, the feminine hero gets something internal, a reward of spirit that continues on. Just because she has attained her goal and changed her life doesn’t mean society has changed right along with her. There will still be tyrants, ogres, racists, and sexists in the world; she’s just more equipped to deal with those obstacles now. (Schmidt, 2001: 260)

Even though society might not have changed along with Tiffany, it is undoubtedly made better by having witches like her who fight against patriarchal values. Tiffany’s development is beautifully and respectfully depicted by Pratchett. As Tiffany herself maintains, books are powerful, and they have the capacity to change how readers view the world. Many young readers might feel identified with Tiffany and see her as a role model in ‘real’ life, therefore striving to become as independent and with as much agency as Tiffany displays. Overall, Pratchett’s depiction of a young adult witch’s growing process should be praised as it is portrayed through integrity and anti-misogynistic commitment.

Having outlined Tiffany’s coming of age, I shall now examine how Pratchett uses fairy-tale conventions to dismantle the traditional concept of the witch within fairy tales. Pratchett does not portray the witch as the traditional villain of the fairy tale in his novels and thus, his witches are a prime example of how the character is multifaceted and has evolved from wicked woman to virtuous hero.



1.3. Wicked Witches and Perfect Princesses: Breaking Fairy-Tale Conventions in the *Tiffany Aching* Series

1.3.1. Witches in Fairy Tales: A Feminist Approach

Tracing a history of how the witch has been depicted in fairy tales is beyond the scope of this dissertation yet we must consider how she has become a feminist figure within (some) fairy tales and how Tiffany fits this tradition. As many characters, the witch has been attributed a set of physical and psychological attributes that make her easily identifiable. Typically, the witch has been represented in fairy tales as an agent of evil and wicked femininity. Furthermore, the witch is also an archetypal character common to worldwide representations of female wickedness not only in fairy tales but in fantasy fiction in general and in real life. Fantasy literature has incorporated the character of the witch for centuries yet her portrayal as a positive female character is relatively recent. The typical image of a fairy-tale witch is that of an ugly old woman, full of warts and scruffy clothes. To this day, this image of the witch prevails, and it is deeply rooted in the Western patriarchal imaginary, so it is difficult to imagine a witch different from the one that fairy tales and fantasy fiction have portrayed and perpetuated. In other words, the witches which readers are used to finding in fantasy literature are a representation of the monstrous woman. Even though the figure of the witch as an evil woman prevails, since the 1960s, when second-wave feminists reclaimed the term, more positive portrayals of witches have emerged, and the *Tiffany Aching* series is an example of such a change.

Carolyn G. Heilbrun stated in *Reinventing Womanhood* that “myth, tale, and tragedy must be transformed by bold acts of reinterpretation in order to enter the experience of the emerging female self” (1979: 150). From the 1970s onwards, many revisionist versions of fairy tales have been published: Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), Robin McKinley’s *Rose Daughter* (1997) and Naomi Novik’s *Uprooted*



(2009) are just some examples. Therefore, much Third-Wave feminist criticism of the witch focuses on those reinterpretations or retellings of fairy tales. As it can be appreciated, much of the early feminist fairy tale scholarship focused on how women were represented in fairy tales and how stories perpetrated a patriarchal view of women. Later research, however, focused on the analysis of the revisionist writings of fairy tales by many female authors and moved to show how these rewritings could be adopted by women to help them form their identities. The already mentioned Jack Zipes has analysed revisionist writings in *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (1979), *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (1982), *Literature and Literary Theory: Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (1983), *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (1987), and *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter* (2000). Although Zipes does not solely focus on retellings of fairy tales his work is helpful to understand how fairy tales are being re-constructed. On her side, Christina Bacchilega's study *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (1997) examines how narrative construction in contemporary revisions of classical fairy tales challenges the notion of gender in traditional stories. As Haase argues "Bacchilega's study denaturalized the concepts of both gender and narrative and articulated a much more complex view of postmodern revisions, one that acknowledges the multivocality of both the traditional texts and the revisions that entered into dialogue with them" (2000:34).

Within this framework, the witch is a character that has undergone different reinterpretations. "During her literary evolution," Ferreira explains, "the witch underwent a process of 'demonization', going from an image without negative connotations, as a wise woman, healer, botanist with knowledge of alchemy, kabbalah and astrology, to a



schematized image of an ugly and old woman, with magic broom and peaked hat, which employs rituals, formulas and ceremonies” (217: 47). The image of the witch as a wise woman predates the medieval conceptions of what constituted a witch and it can be found in texts such as The Hebrew Bible (8th/7th centuries BCE-2nd/1st centuries BCE) with the wise woman of Abel, who prevents a bloodshed.

Thanks to feminist reinterpretations, the witch has returned to the image of a wise woman albeit not completely, since there are still texts which depict her as the malevolent woman. Pratchett’s books, however, do portray witches in a benevolent light and use the view of the witch as a wicked woman as a laughable stereotype.

1.3.2 Becoming a Witch: Subverting Fairy-Tale Stereotypes

In Pratchett’s Discworld, unlike in *Harry Potter*’s universe or in Chupeco’s high fantasy world, magic is not necessarily inherent. While Tiffany and the other witches display magical abilities, much of what they do is not related to magic. In the “old witches” books, the reader grasps an idea of how witches are regarded in the Discworld and what their tasks entail. According to Santaulària, Pratchett exploits the fairy-tale genre in the ‘witches’ novels because “By playfully reproducing the archetypal presentation of this traditional female monster but eliminating evil from the equation, Pratchett’s ‘witches’ novels encourage readers to reassess their preconceptions about the figure and to view elderly witches as wise and useful for their communities” (2018: 62). Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg and Magrat Garlick represent the neopagan wiccan concept of the Maiden, Mother and Crone. Even though she would not admit it herself, Granny fulfils the role of the Crone, someone who is wise and deals with death. Nanny Ogg is the Mother, a figure representing fertility and the witch who participates in births. Finally, Magrat is, in *Wyrd Sisters* and *Witches Abroad*, the Maiden, a character that



symbolises fertility and youth. However, after marrying King Verence II in *Lords and Ladies*, the role of the maiden is transferred to Agnes Nitt, a young girl who reluctantly accepts becoming a witch.

Pratchett's representation of witches is based on the archetypal roles of the witches we find in fairy tales: they mostly dress in black, wear pointy hats and they are intended to look as hideous as possible. In fairy tales, ugliness has been traditionally linked to wickedness and malice, yet the image of the fairy-tale evil witch is reversed in the *Discworld*. Granny Weatherwax even regrets having perfect teeth at her old age: "It was one of the few sorrows of Granny Weatherwax's life that, despite all her efforts, she'd arrived at the peak of her career with a complexion like a rosy apple and all her teeth" (*Wyrd Sisters*, 41). In the *Discworld*, having "crone" credibility is a crucial element to which all witches aspire since it means they have earned the respect and validity from their peers, and this is defined by age as well as (bad) looks. As Lymbou argues: "A witch's skills and magic are thought to be effective if the witch in question conforms to the narrative directives imprinted within the imagination or the unconscious" (2015: 51). In other words, the more hideous a witch looks, the more skills and prowess she is believed to possess.

By using the old and wicked witch archetype ironically, Pratchett takes away the patriarchal assumptions that have been placed on the character. Additionally, since witchcraft is viewed as a career choice and not a curse, and witches are not evil, there are no grounds to persecute them. Most witches in the *Discworld* are respected: "They stand out because of the nature of their job" and what makes Tiffany "even more special" is that Pratchett "relies on the old witch of traditional fairy tales and capacitates her for a heroic role" (Santaulària, 2018: 64).



In the earlier ‘witches’ novels dealing with the adult women, the reader gradually learns how witchcraft works and is perceived in the Discworld, and the roles and obligations witches have. However, as noted, Tiffany’s career path begins from a different position in society. When Tiffany decides to become a witch, she is aware that women who are believed to be witches in her land do not enjoy the social status that witches in other domains do. Tiffany’s grandmother lived alone with two dogs and took care of the sheep of The Chalk and acted as a judge when problems raised in her community. Nevertheless, since she did not display any characteristics of a traditional fairy-tale witch, she was left alone and unbothered. On the other hand, Tiffany witnessed how an old woman (Mrs. Snapperly) who lived in the woods by herself was accused of kidnapping the Baron’s son. The Baron, believing that a witch had taken his son, decreed that “any witches found in the country would be tied up and thrown in the pond” (*TWFM*, 39, original italics). Mrs. Snapperly was forced out of her house in the woods, which the villagers burnt down, and she died mercilessly one cold winter night because the villagers refused to aid her. After the tragedy, Tiffany realized that what the villagers had done was criminal, and discussing the events with Miss Tick she argues that “‘I think she was just a sick old lady who was no use to anyone and smelled a bit and looked old because she had not teeth (...) She just looked like a witch in a story. Anyone with half a mind could see that’” (*TWFM*, 40). Yet, Tiffany is not deterred, as Miss Tick finds:

‘Can’t you teach me what I need to know to be a witch?’ said Tiffany.
‘Tell me why you still want to be a witch, bearing in mind what happened to Mrs Snapperly?’
‘So that sort of thing doesn’t happen again’, said Tiffany.
(*TWFM*, 40)

Tiffany’s choice to become the witch of a land that rejects this figure is an act of bravery, immediately giving her the status of a hero. By presenting a young but powerful girl who has agency and chooses to become a witch, Pratchett is deconstructing the character and



giving the readers a new anti-patriarchal image of the witch within a fairy-tale like narrative.

The ostracizing and injustice of punishing an old woman just because she is believed to be a witch infuriates Tiffany and by becoming one herself, Tiffany will be able to defend marginalized women from being treated terribly just because they fit patriarchy's conceptions of wicked women. As Webb states: "For Pratchett, it is this ethic that defines the witch: rather than being simply a social reject or a cursing crone, the witch takes responsibility for the well-being of the community" (2006: 157). The agency Tiffany shows from the very beginning in the series is essential to determine what kind of witch, and woman, she will become: "*The Wee Free Men* validates not just the outsider, but the witch as witch. In aspiring to be a witch, Tiffany is taking on both power and responsibility" (Webb: 159).

In *The Wee Free Men*, Tiffany re-evaluates what her book of fairy tales claims and she is capable of discerning what information is prejudicial for her: "She'd never really liked the book. It seemed to her that it tried to tell her what to do and what to think. Don't stray from the path, don't open that door, but hate the wicked witch because she is *wicked*. Oh, and believe that shoe size is a good way of choosing a wife" (*TWFM*, 55), a sly reference to Cinderella. Contrarily to the fairy tale and the fable tradition, in which we tend to find a moral at the end of the story with didactic and often patriarchal connotations, Pratchett does not try to convince his readers to believe what he writes but rather encourages them to think critically through the character of Tiffany and her deep dislike of a story we can recognize, such as, here, "Hansel and Gretel":

A lot of stories were highly suspicious, in her opinion. There was the one that ended when the two good children pushed the wicked witch into her own oven. (...) Stories like this stopped people thinking properly, she was sure. She'd read that one and thought, Excuse me? No one has an oven big enough to get a whole person in, and what made the children think they could just walk around eating people's houses in any case? (*TWFM*, 55)



By diminishing the teachings of the fairy tale tradition, the *Tiffany Aching* series inspires a young and not so young audience not only to challenge and defy the validity of traditional and patriarchal conceptions of the witch but also to defend the importance of developing critical thinking.

Nevertheless, not only in her questioning the legitimacy of what she has been taught do we find proof of Tiffany's antipatriarchal position. When Tiffany goes on a quest with the Wee Free Men to rescue her brother from the Queen of the Elves, she shows skills and traits which have been traditionally reserved for male heroes, thus reverting gendered behaviours. Nuttall argues that "From her introduction, Tiffany is characterised as a selfish girl. She feels guilt throughout *The Wee Free Men* as a result of her apparent lack of love for her brother, Wentworth, something she associates with selfishness" (2018: 26). Yet this trait, commonly considered unfeminine, helps her to save her brother, offering further proof of the gender role reversal in the series. As Nuttall concludes,

The stereotype of the selfless, emotionally labouring woman as an example of good womanhood would seem to suggest that Tiffany is, by contrast, a bad girl (and, later, woman) as a result of her selfish nature. However, Tiffany's triumph over the Queen hinges on her realisation that her selfishness is, in fact, a strength. (2018: 26)

To further exemplify how Tiffany defies gender expectations and shows complete agency, I turn to a passage just before she defeats the Queen and rescues her brother in which the reader can grasp what kind of girl Tiffany is:

You're going to turn into somebody like Miss Tick, said her Second Thoughts. Do you really want that?

'Yes', said a voice, and Tiffany realized that it was hers again. The anger rose up joyfully. 'Yes! I'm me! I am careful and logical and I look up things I don't understand! When I hear people use the wrong words I get edgy! I am good with cheese. I read books fast! I *think*! And I always have a piece of string! That's the kind of person I am!' (*TWFM*, 256, original italics)

By defining herself, Tiffany shows that she does not care what expectations patriarchy imposes on her and she is set to be who she wants to be: a witch.



There are many examples in the text which prove Tiffany's agency, independence and critical thinking. The popularity which the novels in her series have achieved show that young readers are eager to find female characters who differ from the typical roles associated with women. Furthermore, young adult literature which incorporates strong and antipatriarchal female characters needs to be appreciated and praised for the role these characters play into showing younger generations to re-evaluate and re-assess what patriarchal conventions have made them believe. The *Tiffany Aching* series offers a much-needed positive female role model and redefines gender expectations for women.

1.4. Fighting Patriarchy: Gender Issues Raised in *The Tiffany Aching* Series

1.4.1. Gendered Magic in the Discworld: Witches' and Wizards' Education

Many critics have tackled the gender issues raised in Pratchett's novels, especially focusing on the witches sub-series. This section is aimed at analysing in which ways the differences between female and male magic are portrayed in the *Tiffany Aching* series and how fantasy provides the ideal setting to either further or dismantle sexist gender assumptions.

The segregated magic and education of witches and wizards is a recurrent topic in the *Discworld* novels. Magic in the Discworld universe is gendered, that is, witches and wizards' use of magic is different, and they receive a different type of education based on their gender. The *Tiffany Aching* books focus on the process of a girl becoming a witch and learning the craft, but they do not dwell into why her only option is to become a witch and not a wizard. However, there are many instances in the series in which wizards are mentioned and the difference between witches and wizards is brought up.

In *The New Companion to the Discworld*, Pratchett and Briggs divide the magic of the Discworld into three subcategories: intrinsic, induced and residual (2004: e-book).



There is no inherent division into female and male magic; in other words, all who possess magical abilities can use magic as they see fit, yet there is a strong division between female and male practitioners of magic in the Discworld: “The magic practiced by witches and wizards although not different in nature as they can all access the various forms of magic (...) is distinct in what concerns methodology, organisation and source of power, a topic that is especially dealt with in *Equal Rites*” (Martins, 2016: 122), to which I will return later. Therefore, the distinction between female and male practitioners of magic is imposed by Pratchett’s decision to maintain the traditional representations of wizards and witches within fantasy as part of separate groups.

To understand why magic is gendered in the Discworld it might be useful to refer to a talk given by Pratchett at Novacon³⁸ in 1985 titled “Why Gandalf ever Married”. In this talk Pratchett particularly insists on the division between female and male magic. According to Pratchett, such a division is just a “cliché” but

the fact is that the consensus fantasy universe has picked up the idea and maintains it. I incline to a different view, if only to keep the argument going, that the whole thing is a lot more metaphorical than that. The sex of the magic practitioner doesn’t really enter into it. The classical wizard, I suggest, represents the ideal of magic—everything that we hope we would be, if we had the power. The classical witch, on the other hand, with her often malevolent interest in the small beer of human affairs, is everything we fear only too well that we would in fact become. (online)

Pratchett’s division of magic in the Discworld needs to be understood as an ironic portrayal of pre-established sexist categories in the fantasy genre: “Given the canon from which it is created, the consensus fantasy universe is undoubtedly a patriarchal one—a consensus however which Pratchett challenges” (Sinclair, 2015: 6). Pratchett, whose portrayal of wizards in the *Discworld* differs from the “ideal of magic” since wizards tend to be clumsy and inept in most cases, subverts these notions of gendered magic that have prevailed in the fantasy genre. Moreover, witches’ magic in the *Discworld* is not presented

³⁸ Novacon is a science-fiction convention run by the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, founded in 1961. The first Novacon was held in 1971.



as ‘malevolent’ and ‘occult’ and Pratchett demonstrates in his novels that even though classical conventions of fantasy can be perpetuated, they can also be bent and rewritten to fit society’s changes.

In the Discworld, wizards are organized in formal orders whereas witches tend to work individually. Besides, wizards attach much importance to books and the written word and are trained academically whereas witches, although literate, are not at all interested in scholarship. Tiffany, however, shows plenty of interest in books as it can be seen in *The Wee Free Men*, and she knows how stories can have an impact on readers and shape their opinions. What sets Tiffany apart from other witches in the series is her ambition to learn, become educated and educate other people.

To further understand this difference between witches and wizards, it is necessary to first focus on *Equal Rites* (1987), which narrates a girl’s journey to becoming a wizard. Eskarina Smith is the first female wizard and a character who also appears in *I Shall Wear Midnight* to aid Tiffany in her fight against the hiver. Another beloved character in the series, Granny Weatherwax, also a witch, makes her first appearance in *Equal Rites* as well. At the beginning she adamantly rejects that a girl can become a wizard. In a conversation with Eskarina’s father, Granny Weatherwax makes her position clear by stating that “Female wizards aren’t right either! It’s the wrong kind of magic for women, is wizard magic, it’s all books and stars and jommetry. She’d never grasp it. Whoever heard of a female wizard?” (*Equal Rites*, 21). Here Granny Weatherwax seems to hold a rather simplistic and sexist view of male and female magic. Although both witches and wizards believe that their kind of magic is the superior one, wizards, who are portrayed as patriarchal, sexist men for the most part, believe that women are incapable of performing male magic. In a conversation with Eskarina, the Vice-Chancellor of Unseen



University, the school of wizardry located in the city of Ankh-Morpork, the capital of the Discworld, comments the following:

‘High magic requires great clarity of thought, you see, and women’s talents do not lie in that direction. Their brains tend to overheat. I am sorry to say there is only one door into wizardry and that is the main gate at Unseen University and no woman has ever passed through it.’ (*Equal Rites*, 152, original italics)

Throughout *Equal Rites*, Eskarina is determined to become a practising wizard and she demands an explanation from her elders to understand why women cannot become wizards. Apparently, the only answer they can provide is that it is customary that only men can be wizards and that for a woman to become one is “against the lore” (*Equal Rites*, 183). This sexist argument is dismantled by the end of the book, when Eskarina finally becomes the first female wizard. After being rejected, she manages (with the help of Granny Weatherwax) to enter Unseen University as a servant. Eskarina observes how another student, Simon, creates a hole which opens the Dungeon Dimensions.³⁹ Eskarina’s staff⁴⁰ manages to close the hole but in doing so, Simon’s mind is trapped. She “borrows” then the mind of the university and successfully battles the “Things” from the Dungeon Dimensions. After this incident the Vice-Chancellor suppresses the rule of male-only students, and Eskarina and Simon go on to develop a new kind of magic.

Eskarina’s case sets a precedent further explored in *A Shepherd’s Crown* when another exception is made for Geoffrey, a young boy who wants to become a witch and not a wizard. Although the differences between the female and male displays of magic are maintained, the last novel written by Pratchett hints towards a renegotiation of gender constructions and gendered education in the Discworld. Geoffrey Swivel is the third son of Lord Swivel and thus his father, who already has an heir and a spare, does not ‘need’

³⁹ “The Dungeon Dimensions are the great dark dimensions less than a shadow’s width away. There is endless, dry, silver sand, and it is said to be as cold as the space between the stars, and it’s populated by Things that exist just enough to hate everything that has actual substance” (*Discworld Wiki*, n.d.: online).

⁴⁰ The staff is a tool which wizards use to aid them when performing magic. Eskarina inherited a staff when a wizard appeared in her village, Bad Ass, and signaled her as his successor.



him. Geoffrey is a vegetarian and a pacifist and he prefers books to fights and sports. Geoffrey leaves his home and goes to Lancre, where he asks Tiffany to become her apprentice so he can become a witch: “Mr Wiggall—my tutor—told me of one witch who became a wizard, so surely, mistress, the concept must go both ways?” (*The Shepherd’s Crown*, 143). His request is an interesting point since it shows that gendered magic is not intrinsic but rather a social construct both in the Discworld and the fantasy genre; magic is genderless until it is identified as male or female by its users. Applying Butler’s gender performativity theory to witches and wizards in the Discworld, it could be argued that the repetition of certain characteristics and acts is what defines magic either as male or female. However, it must also be acknowledged that the status granted to witches and wizards is different in the Discworld. While wizard magic is highly regarded by the general population, witches are regarded to perform low magic. Pratchett, thus, is critically portraying the sexist, traditional views of male and female magic. Fantasy genre conventions regarding magic performativity have also maintained the division between male and female magic and perpetuate stereotypes and clichés, as Pratchett points out. However, Geoffrey’s decision to be a witch does not make him female, it simply makes him a male witch in the same way Eskarina is a female wizard. When Tiffany accepts Geoffrey as an apprentice, she is changing traditional views on witchcraft in the Discworld and moving towards a more inclusive, feminist society:

Then she wondered, not for the first time, about the differences between wizards and witches. The main difference, she thought, was that wizards used books and staffs to create spells, big spells about big stuff, and they were men. While witches—always women—dealt with everyday stuff. Big stuff too, she reminded herself firmly. What could be bigger than births and deaths? But why shouldn’t this boy want to be a witch? She had chosen to be a witch, so why couldn’t he make the same choice? (...) She didn’t have to ask any other witches. It could be her decision. Perhaps a first step towards doing things differently? (*The Shepherd’s Crown*, 145)

This passage illustrates the main difference between witches and wizards in the Discworld seen from the point of view of a witch. Broadly, witches’ magic is portrayed as the



traditional, applied or pragmatic type of magic always associated with women, whereas wizard magic is regarded as a scholarly pursuit. In *The Folklore of the Discworld*, witch magic is explained as “innate gifts, carefully honed by practice and observation” (2008: e-book) and in *A Hat Full of Sky*, Tiffany realizes that witch magic involves “wandering round the local villages and the isolated farms and, mostly, doing medicine. There were always bandages to change or expectant mothers to talk to. Witches did a lot of midwifery” (95). In other words, witch magic in the Discworld mirrors the work done by healers and midwives between the 15th and 18th centuries and wizard magic leans towards the scientific experimental. Nonetheless, not all witches use their magic in the same fashion. In *A Hat Full of Sky*, Tiffany learns that there are “research witches”, as Miss Tick explains: ““Oh, it’s a very ancient craft. She [Miss Treason] tries to find new spells by learning how old ones were really done” (*A Hat Full of Sky*, 28). As it can be inferred, research witches are similar to wizards in that they want to find answers to the questions posed by the different enchantments and potions they use, and how to make them more effective. Another type of magic that is mentioned in the *Tiffany Aching* series is “magik”, which I have already explored in this chapter. The use of “magik” amongst witches is promoted by Mrs. Earwing, a witch who lives near Lancre and who is married to a retired wizard, Dr. Earwing. Mrs Earwing is portrayed as a snobbish and arrogant witch who believes in the use of crystals and uses “Boffo,” a kind of headology⁴¹ which uses paraphernalia to convince others that one is a witch and has magical powers. Mrs. Earwig has written several books on “magik” and she is Annagramma’s mentor in *A Hat Full of Sky*. Evidently, the magic Mrs. Earwig wants to promote is similar to the magic used by New Age practitioners, a type of magic Pratchett mocks throughout the series. As Granny Weatherwax points out:

⁴¹ “The practice of headology relies on the principle that what people believe is what is real. This is used by witches to earn respect or at least fear, and also to cure patients” (*Discworld Wiki*, n.d.: online).



Chapter 1. Shifting Roles: The Witch as Hero in the *Tiffany Aching* Series

‘*Mrs Eearwig* tells her girls it’s about cosmic balances and stars and circles and colours and wands and... and *toys*, nothing but toys!’ She sniffed. ‘Oh, I daresay they’re all very well as *decoration*, somethin’ nice to look at while you’re workin’, somethin’ for show, but the start and finish, *the start and finish*, is helpin’ people when life is on the edge. Even people you don’t like. Starts is easy, people is hard.’ (*A Hat Full of Sky*, 236, original ellipsis and italics)

Even so, this derided type of magic might be intricately connected to the induced type that Pratchett and Briggs describe: “an often neglected but very powerful form, and available for use even by non-practitioners. It is the magic potential created in an object, or even a living creature, by usage and belief” (2004: 272). Headology, in which Granny Weatherwax is extremely accomplished since her strong personality aids her in making people follow her instructions, is similar. One of the essential aspects of headology, if not the most important one, is that it requires wearing a black hat. This “was like being a policeman. People saw the uniform, not you. (...) You were there, you had the hat, you did the job. That was a basic rule of witchery: *It’s up to you*” (*AHFOS*, 188, original italics). As Martins points out, “appearances matter to magic users on the Disc since the narrative imperative gives them power, enabling them to perform some kinds of magic, a fact that serves to explain why both witches and wizards strive to look as people expect them to” (2016: 109). While for witches wearing a black hat is essential to be identified as such, wizards need their staff to be identified as wizards, further proving that magic is in part gendered by its practitioners rather than being itself gendered.

In conclusion, the fact that magical abilities are gendered is, according to Pratchett, a clichéd view of magic that the fantasy genre has maintained through time. What Pratchett successfully argues in the *Tiffany Aching* series is that worn out clichés about witches and wizards are just that, clichés. The series is full of instances in which Tiffany questions and reassesses what she has been taught to believe (and so does the reader through her) to finally acknowledge that it is not someone’s gender who determines how powerful or capable they are to perform magic but their inner strength. By including a



boy who wants to be a witch, we can appreciate how Pratchett intended to demonstrate that gender is an arbitrary issue regarding magical skills: “Esk’s and Geoffrey’s plots, underdeveloped as they are (mainly due to Pratchett’s early death), seem to indicate that the lines separating witches and wizards are slowly disappearing from the Disc, which underscores yet again that people’s lives ought not be constricted by stories” (Martins, 2016: 124). Nevertheless, that this gendering has persisted through time indicates that sexist perceptions of both men and women are deeply integrated in fantasy and it is commendable that authors like Pratchett bend and break them to deliver a more inclusive and comprehensive portrayal of witches and wizards. Since Pratchett masterfully manages to dismantle these assumptions about magic, he is giving readers the opportunity to question and reassess gender constructions both in fantasy texts and in real life.

1.4.2. Matters of the Heart: Love and Marriage in the *Tiffany Aching* Series

Traditionally, fairy tales conclude with the promise of marriage between the hero and the princess while the witch is cast away and punished without experiencing love. In the *Tiffany Aching* series, in contrast, Pratchett offers an unusual portrayal of a young witch’s love life. Although Tiffany does not get married in the end, the books offer a different view regarding witches’ love expectations. In most narratives, and especially in conventional fairy tales, witches are depicted as incapable of love and undeserving of affection. Since, as Creed proposes, “a central reason for the persecution of witches was morbid interest in the witch as ‘other’ and a fear of the witch/woman as an agent of castration” (1993: 74), it is not unexpected that most witches have been represented as evil and unlovable hags.

Even though Tiffany is not ‘rewarded’ with marriage by the end of the story, she proves to be deserving of love and affection, therefore dismantling the notion of the witch



as an agent of castration that Creed suggests. However, Tiffany is not the only one who challenges the vision of the witch as an unloving and an unlovable character since other witches in the Discworld marry and have children, such as Nanny Ogg, who has been married three times and had many children. It is interesting, then, to assess Tiffany's doubts and questions regarding marriage and love, not only from a gender perspective but also considering the novels are addressed to a young adult audience. This section is devoted to exploring the issues raised in the novels related to marriage and love and how their depiction undermines and reassesses sexist conceptions placed on the character of the witch.

Historically, marriage has been linked to women's social and economic status and the marriage plot has been central to many works of literature since the 19th century. Oversimplifying, the marriage plot centres on the process of two people (generally heteronormative) falling in love and overcoming different obstacles to finally get married. As I have previously mentioned, the promise of marriage is intrinsically connected to the fairy tale tradition, as Zipes observes: "In the end the 'goodness' of the hero or heroine shines through, and there is a happy end that generally culminates in marriage" (2000: xxx). Tiffany's status, however, is not dependent on whether she marries or not and therefore, the depiction of marriage in the series does not centre on the protagonist's quest for love nor does the series fulfil the characteristics of the conventional marriage plot.

Tiffany first faces the question of marriage in *The Wee Free Men*, when she is only nine years old and becomes aware that in her world "The girls were expected to grow up to be somebody's wife. They were also expected to be able to read and write, those being considered soft indoor jobs that were too fiddly for the boys" (*TWFM*, 17). However, when the Feegles' Kelda⁴² dies and Tiffany is appointed her successor, she is asked to

⁴² The Kelda is the queen of a tribe of Feegles, whose job is to marry one of the Feegles and have as many babies as possible.



choose a husband among the male Feegles, a request that overwhelms her. Nonetheless, she manages to keep the Feegles content while at the same time avoiding marriage at such an early age by choosing an impossibly distant wedding day. The question of Tiffany's marriage to Rob Anybody is resolved when a female Feegle from another clan is elected Kelda and marries him, to "spend most of the rest of her life in the mound, having babies like a queen bee" (*AHFOS*, 21). Thanks to her wit, Tiffany avoids the trap of becoming a wife and a mother at an untimely period in her life.

In *The Folklore of Discworld*, Pratchett himself offers an explanation for the myth of the triple Goddess and how it applies to the witches of the Discworld. Inevitably, when discussing Tiffany's romantic life, this myth needs to be considered. The triple goddess is a deity revered in many neopagan religions that merges three aspects of femininity into one, often described as the Maiden, Mother and Crone; each aspect of the triple goddess symbolizes a stage of the female life cycle. In many of the novels featuring witches in the *Discworld*, the myth of the triple goddess can be easily identified. The stages are not mutually exclusive, and the same witch can be the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone at different stages of her life. Tiffany, Nuttall maintains, "falls into the category of 'Maiden' throughout her narrative arc, which begins when she is a child and continues until she is a young adult" (Nuttall, 2018: 29). Narratively, her journey implies "that the Maiden role contains a natural progression towards the Mother role, signaled by a growing competence in dealing with sexual and romantic matters" (2018: 29). Yet Tiffany blends in her arc the Maiden with the Crone, skipping the Mother: "I am the maiden—and I am also the hag" (*The Shepherd's Crown*, 239). By the end of the story, it is unclear whether Tiffany will ever become the Mother though the fact that she has the option to become one is a step towards a different vision of the witch in fairy tales.



In the series Tiffany has got two love interests. Roland, the Baron's son in *The Wee Free Men* and Preston, a former guard of the Baron. Initially, the reader is led to believe that Roland and Tiffany will become a couple: Tiffany rescues him from the Queen of the Elves, and they develop a relationship which, as it is hinted, appears to be romantic. At the beginning of her apprenticeship, Roland and Tiffany exchange letters, which prompt a direct question from her tutor:

One day Miss Treason had said, 'This young man who writes to you... is he your beau?' and Tiffany had changed the subject until she had time to look up the word in the dictionary and then more time to stop blushing.

Roland was... well, the thing about Roland was... the main thing about... well, the point was... he was there.

(*Wintersmith*, 82, original ellipses)

Considering Tiffany's reflection, she thinks of Roland as a friend and a connection to her land rather than a genuine romantic interest. Both Tiffany and Roland feel as outsiders in their own community and they find solace and understanding in each other:

The thing was... the fact was... well, who else had they got? Roland couldn't, just couldn't have friends among the village kids, what with him being the son of the Baron and everything. But Tiffany had the pointy hat now, and that counted for something. (*Wintersmith*, 83, original ellipses)

Even though Tiffany might have considered her feelings for Roland to be romantic—to the point she is a bit jealous when Roland meets and finally marries Letitia⁴³ in the end she realizes that they were never a good match and finally they become good friends. Roland is indeed Tiffany's first love experience, yet their relationship is marked by confusing feelings and not knowing if what they felt for each other was really love or just deep affection.

⁴³ Letitia appears in *I Shall Wear Midnight*. She is the daughter of a duchess, and she is to be married to Roland. However, Letitia also wants to be a witch but she does not know how to become one. While practicing some incantations, she accidentally summons The Cunning Man and Tiffany and her have to work together to defeat him. Donaldson expresses that "Sexist stereotypes cast Tiffany and Laetitia as alter-egos, each envying the other: Tiffany envies Letitia's attractiveness, whereas Letitia envies Tiffany's agency" (2017: 9).



Chapter 1. Shifting Roles: The Witch as Hero in the *Tiffany Aching* Series

On the other hand, the portrayal of Tiffany's feelings towards Preston shows that he is probably the first person she falls in love with. Tiffany and Preston meet in *I Shall Wear Midnight*, when she is 16 and he a year older. Preston works for Roland, now a Baron after his father's death, as a Lance Private for the castle guard and he is described as a clever man, usually playing dumb not to upset his truly dumb superiors. Preston helps Tiffany in her quest to defeat the Cunning Man and she, grateful for his help and realizing that he might be wasting his time, asks Roland to sponsor Preston's training as a doctor. At the very end of *I Shall Wear Midnight*, the reader realizes that Tiffany and Preston have fallen in love:

He said, 'Miss Tiffany, the witch... would you be so good as to tell me: what is the sound of love?'

Tiffany looked at his face. The noise from the tug-of-war was silenced. The birds stopped singing. In the grass, the grasshoppers stopped rubbing their legs together and looked up. The earth moved slightly as even the chalk giant (perhaps) strained to hear, and the silence flowed over the world until all there was Preston, who was always there.

And Tiffany said, 'Listen.'

(*ISWM*, 414, original ellipsis)

Tiffany's 'listen' means that to her the sound of love is silence, but the kind of silence that only Preston can provide. Preston makes Tiffany forget about all that surrounds her, so that whenever her attention is focused on him, Tiffany is at peace and can forget her worries related to her duties as a witch. When Preston moves to the city to study 'doctoring' the couple's relationship continues through letters and Tiffany's sporadic visits. Nonetheless, Tiffany and Preston's relationship is not free from troubles. On the one hand, once it is known that Tiffany and Preston are more than friends, they are expected to marry and settle down. Her father, though, has a different opinion:

'Tiffany's mother would like her to settle down, o'course, on the Chalk with her young man—you know, young Preston, who's gone off to learn to be a proper doctor in the big city. But I reckon she won't, not for a while anyway. As I see it, there's lots of Achings around here but our Tiff is following in the footsteps of her granny, only more modern thinking, if you get me? I reckon she's out to change the world, and if not the world, then this little bit called the Chalk!'

(*The Shepherd's Crown*, 132)



As Mr. Aching maintains, a “more modern thinking” has been introduced in the Discworld and there are hints in the novel towards a modernization of the customs and the land. Neither Preston nor Tiffany want to give up their careers and this poses a challenge to their relationship, which in turn is something many readers might sympathise with: “‘I think we are married to our jobs.’ She swallowed, a lump suddenly appearing in her throat. ‘It’s not that we don’t want to be together... I mean, I... but...’ The words trailed off and Tiffany just looked miserable now” (*The Shepherd’s Crown*, 178, original ellipses). Although she is only in her late teens, Tiffany is already considered an adult by her community, and she finds herself having to decide between her love and her career, a dilemma many young adults experience nowadays:

Tiffany could feel the tears beginning. She said, ‘But why do I feel like this? I know a part of me does want to be with Preston—and it would make my family so happy!—but I also want to be a witch. And I’m *good* at it—I know it’s a terrible thing to say, but I measure myself against the other witches and I know I’m better than most of them when it comes to witchcraft. I can’t *not* do it.’ A tear threatened to trickle down her cheek. ‘Just like Preston can’t not be a doctor,’ she finished sadly. (*The Shepherd’s Crown*, 178-179)

Still, it has been proven in the Discworld that a witch can have both, a family life, and a career as a witch, as Nany Ogg has demonstrated. One of Tiffany’s challenges, then, is to find the proper balance in her life between being a witch and the desire to be with Preston. As Sinclair argues, “Specifically, the major theme of the Witches stories is the protagonists’ quest to balance performing the roles expected of them while still pursuing their own desires” (2015: 5). The reader does not find out how Preston’s and Tiffany’s relationship develops but it is hinted that they are content with what they have and there is hope that one day they might be able to spend their days together without having to forsake either their love or their careers. Whereas Tiffany and Roland’s relationship was just a childish infatuation, her relationship with Preston indicates a more mature and deeper love. This open ending also follows the narrative premise of many young adult texts of presenting a “happy for now” ending than a “happily ever after”.



The representation of Tiffany and Preston's love might resonate with older young adult readers in the 21st century trying to reconcile their careers and their personal lives. Tiffany's love life is not portrayed as a cliché or a trope that a fairy-tale like narrative needs to include. Besides, with Tiffany's father being supportive of her daughter's career and by avoiding the pressure Tiffany endures to marry and have children, young adults are offered a narrative in which the protagonist does not necessarily end her story with a marriage: "Tiffany's challenge then is to not only break free of the gendered narratives confronting a young woman, but to inspire the same kind of freedom in others" (Sinclair, 2015: 15), thus offering a modern twist to young romantic love portrayed in fairy tales.

1.4.3. A Witch's Job: Fighting Patriarchal Abuse

The *Tiffany Aching* books portray a society which is still rooted in the 'old ways'. The background setting of the books resembles the late 18th century, just before the Industrial Revolution; in *The Shepherd's Crown*, the construction of the railway is mentioned as a sign of progress. Nevertheless, while it seems that by the end of the series the Discworld is entering a new era, patriarchy's most horrible traits are still part of society, and it is a witch's job to fight them. From the onset of the *Tiffany Aching* books, the reader gets a glimpse of The Chalk's patriarchal society: as noted, the murder of a woman who looks like a witch but who in fact is not one sparks Tiffany's interest in becoming a witch herself to avoid this kind of situation in her land. From that moment onwards, one of Tiffany's aims in becoming a witch entails preventing certain barbaric behaviours and customs from being perpetuated.

I Shall Wear Midnight, the fourth book within the *Tiffany Aching* series, is arguably the darkest novel in the tetralogy. The villain Tiffany must defeat in this novel is the Cunning Man, a witch hunter. As I have noted, the Cunning Man is the personification of



patriarchy and once he is woken his influence corrodes socially sanctioned behaviour. The Cunning Man is portrayed as a spirit, a floating mind without eyes who takes a humanoid shape to be seen. The Cunning Man, a character based on the many witch-hunters and prosecutors of the early modern period, embodies society's misogynistic conduct towards women accused of being witches. The Cunning Man influences others with his hate and Tiffany's fight in this novel consists of defeating him to re-establish a peaceful society in which witches, if not loved, are at least respected.

In *Midnight*, the young adult reader witnesses an uncomfortable initial scene: the physical abuse of a teenage girl by his father. Although it is a minor scene in the series, this portrayal of patriarchal abuse deserves to be explored since it depicts a dark aspect of a witch's duties towards her community. Even though Tiffany's responsibilities mostly involve dealing with the sick and performing practical and domestic work for her community, she is also expected to handle awkward situations and provide a resolution. In a sense, Tiffany acts as a judge when confrontation arises, as her grandmother, Granny Aching, did before her. "As 'mediators' the witches are often presented as 'liminal' beings (...) Their liminality is not synonymous with marginalization that often accompanied historical figures thought to be witches; on the contrary, their unique status places them above the lands' nominal rulers" (Tykhomyrova, 2018: 258). Although the scene is not explicitly represented, apparently Mister Petty's daughter, a 13-year-old teenager, had premarital sex and became pregnant. Her outraged father batters his daughter to the point that she miscarries. Since Tiffany is now the witch of The Chalk, it has become her job to deal with a situation like this for "The terrified Mrs Petty, a mouse of a woman, had run screaming along the lanes to the village pub as soon as the beating had begun, and Tiffany's father had sent a lad to wake Tiffany up" (*Midnight*, 26). Although Tiffany is a teenager herself this is not a handicap for her to deal with this type of affairs. As the witch



of The Chalk Tiffany is not viewed as a teen anymore. Likewise, her gender does not deter her father from seeking her help in a case of abuse towards another young woman.

In a patriarchal society the men punish the assailant but Tiffany warns Mr. Petty about what awaits him:

She had to hope that they [the men] did not go into the barn first, because they would hang him there and then. If he was lucky, they would just hang him. When she had looked into the barn and seen that murder had been done, she knew that, without her, it would be done again. (*Midnight*, 26-27)

Yet Tiffany's job as a witch is, precisely, preventing patriarchy's nastiest habits from prevailing. As Nuttall argues: "Witches are allowed a different relationship with men to other women in society, because they are viewed by that society as different to other women" (2018: 31). Tiffany, then, is not regarded as a woman dealing with a case of abuse but rather as a witch doing her job.

The Chalk, Tiffany's land, is not presented as an overtly patriarchal society yet Pratchett manages to convey that patriarchy lurks everywhere: "Every man was king in his little castle. Everyone knew about that—well, at least every man—and so you minded your own business when it came to another man's castle until the castle began to stink, and then you had to do something about it lest all castles should fall" (*Midnight*, 28). Yet within patriarchy there seem to be certain rules that ought not to be trespassed, not because they are deemed necessary for the wellbeing of the community, but for the ultimate preservation of the system itself. Mr. Petty breaks one of these rules by beating up his daughter and therefore he deserves punishment from other (patriarchal) men because he took his patriarchal power too far. Tiffany, then, becomes the person standing between the abuser and other men who want to punish him: "Personally, I could not care less what happens to your miserable frame but I do not wish to see good people get turned into bad people by doing murder" (*Midnight*, 28). Tiffany's job as a witch is to avoid more pain being inflicted on her community which, while flawed, does not tolerate abuse in



any form. Tiffany tries to reason with Mr. Petty but his brute nature prevents him from listening and he just keeps spitting hate towards her to the point he even attempts to punch her, which, as Tiffany reminds him, is an awfully bad idea: ““Do you have any idea what would happen to you if you hit a witch?”” (*Midnight*, 29) Although a witch might not be a much-loved character within the Chalk, she is indeed *respected* and anyone who dared to threaten or insult a witch would find themselves in an uncomfortable position: not only would he face the other witches’ punishment but also that of his own community.

Once Tiffany manages to scare Mr. Petty away, she has one more job to do: bury the baby. In a conversation with her father, who is worried about his daughter’s responsibilities, Tiffany assures him that this is the path she has chosen. The reader also discovers, through Tiffany’s dad, that Seth Petty had not always been an abuser:

‘Seth Petty was a decent enough lad when we were young. Not the brightest piggy in the litter, I’ll grant you that, but decent enough in his way. It was his dad who was a madman; I mean, things were a bit rough and ready in those days and you could expect a clip around the head if you disobeyed, but Seth’s dad had a thick leather belt with two buckles on it, and he would lay into Seth just for looking at him in a funny way.’ (*Midnight*, 35-36)

Even though this passage might not be written with the intention to make the reader empathize with Mr. Petty, it shows that domestic violence is not part of a person’s character but rather something that is learned through poor child-rearing practices that are passed down through generations and which are fuelled by a patriarchal society. Evidently, there is no justification for Mr. Petty’s actions, yet it might be argued that if his upbringing had been different, he might not have reacted so violently. By preventing the other villagers from battering Mr. Petty, what Tiffany successfully manages is to stop the cycle of violence from repeating itself and tarnishing an otherwise benevolent community.

Mr. Petty’s act of violence is not the only example of patriarchal behaviour in The Chalk to which Tiffany is exposed to in *Midnight*. Later in the plot, the same villagers



that wanted to discipline Mr. Petty and who would have protected Tiffany if he had beaten her, turn against her, and imprison her for being a witch. Under the influence of the Cunning Man, the people of The Chalk start despising witches more flagrantly:

That was the problem with witchcraft: it was as if everybody needed witches, but hated the fact that they did, and somehow the hatred of the fact could become the hatred of the person. People then started thinking: Who are you to have these skills? Who are you to know these things? (*Midnight*, 260)

This passage sharply exemplifies patriarchy's way of thinking: witches (women) should not be allowed to have a certain kind of knowledge least it made them too powerful or too knowledgeable and realize they live within a system that is against them. The fact that witches possess certain qualities that other people lack or that they can perform specific functions that other people ignore, in a patriarchal society's view, makes them dangerous and leads the community towards their ostracizing. The witches' 'otherness' also inspires fear and, what is more important, respect. In the Discworld, "Despite these 'punishments', the witches are portrayed as overwhelmingly respected, successful, and happy characters, as opposed to the foes whom they overcame who are hated, failures, and ultimately dissatisfied" (Sinclair, 2015: 16). Certainly, being considered the 'other' might affect one's position in society yet witches in the Discworld have benefited from being the 'other' since it is this 'oddness' that brings them respect.

Nevertheless, under the influence of the Cunning man, respect for witches is lost and it becomes Tiffany's job to restore it. It is often stated in the *Discworld* novels featuring witches that they are respected not just because of the work they do for the community but also because they fulfil the stereotype of the old crone: "there is an underlying conviction that ugliness lends credibility to the figure of the witch" (Lymbou, 2015: 51). As I have argued, respect for the witches seems intrinsically related to whether a witch looks the part or not. Tiffany, however, earns respect not through her appearance (she refuses to wear the typical black robe a witch normally wears) but thanks to her skills



and prowess. Although the Cunning Man tries to push Tiffany further to the edges, she ultimately succeeds in defeating him because witches are a pillar of the community: without them people would not know who to depend on. The threat of the Cunning Man, then, is twofold: he threatens not only Tiffany's life but also the wellbeing of her community. By successfully defeating the Cunning Man and earning the respect of her community, Tiffany demonstrates that it is possible to change patriarchal societies' view on witches and, by extension, women. Although witches in the Discworld face uncomfortable situations and decisions, they have the skills and courage to challenge patriarchal conventions and overturn them, as Tiffany has demonstrated throughout her short but promising career as a witch.

1.5 Conclusions: Not a Girl, but a Witch

'Not a girl,' Tiffany said. 'I'm a witch.' And she looked down to the little cat beside her and said,
'That's so, isn't it, You?'

(The Shepherd's Crown, 320)

These lines quoted above close the *Tiffany Aching* series, showing readers that Tiffany's maturation into a witch has been completed and she has the support of Granny Weatherwax who, despite being dead, gives her approval through her familiar, the cat simply named You. *The Shepherd's Crown* was the last book Pratchett wrote and it was published posthumously, so although there might have been more adventures for Tiffany, her process of maturing is completed by the end of the Bildungsroman, as it should be expected. Tiffany's evolution into a powerful witch is intrinsically linked to her own development as a girl—both witch and woman must mature simultaneously to be whole—and the Bildungsroman genre is essential to symbolize the growth of a character as multifaceted as the witch. Tiffany Aching is one of the most beloved characters in the Discworld fandom—"everyone really loves Tiffany as she is such an aspirational female



character” (Greengrass, 2017)—and the main factor which makes the *Tiffany Aching* novels so special is that they portray a witch who possesses agency and has the capacity to choose who she wants to be in life. As this chapter has demonstrated, Pratchett’s portrayal of a young girl who decides to become a witch, a class of vilified and ostracized women, helps erase these outdated and patriarchal conceptions placed on witches. Furthermore, the fact that Tiffany’s story is framed within a fantasy context which also considers the witch an evil creature, helps demonstrate that fantasy conventions can be bent and broken, and such is the case in Pratchett’s work. Consequently, this further reveals that fantasy is not a static genre but one which provides much room to eagerly reformulate its own characteristics.

Given that the reader is already familiar with the concepts and the structure of fairy tales, Pratchett’s deconstruction of its tropes is effective since he offers an alternative story that the reader might have not considered before. As I have argued, fantasy proves to be the ideal setting for exploring gender issues related to the character of the witch. The fact that the heroine of the series is a witch is unexpected because witches have always been the villains in the story, the aids, or advisors, but never the protagonists. As Webb argues, “Tiffany’s explicit interrogation of such assumptions produces a re-valuation of what the most reviled figure of fairy tale, the witch, may mean” (2006: 160). By breaking boundaries, Pratchett is contributing to the erosion of patriarchal elements rooted in the fantasy genre.

It seems that during the last 20 years, books portraying a witch as their main character have enjoyed an enormous popularity yet not all of them offer a feminist stance, which leads me to return to my original research questions. Having explored the *Tiffany Aching* series, I can certainly argue that they undermine patriarchal ideology by showing a female character who possesses agency and who fights to be her own person within her



society, free of boundaries and restrictions. Furthermore, the books explore Tiffany's coming of age and her sexual awakening, and Tiffany's femininity is depicted respectfully and without clichés. Although Tiffany does not question her womanhood, she questions and fights the impositions that have been placed upon her and others. It is interesting, then, that the intended readership of the books is a young adult audience, and one is left to wonder what Pratchett's intention was when creating such a powerful young woman. While the books do not have a didactic purpose, they undoubtedly help readers question their own values and reassess what they have been taught to believe. The huge success of the series seems to suggest that young adult readers (and by extension, young adult fiction) seem to be more accepting of traditional characters being portrayed in a new light. Although the next chapters examine how other portrayals of witches have positively contributed to the reversal of the character from malevolent hag to feminist heroine, it is safe to say that Pratchett did a wonderful work by creating Tiffany. Pratchett declared in an interview with Cory Doctorow (2013: online) that he would most like to be remembered for the *Tiffany Aching* series and, indeed, he will be.



CHAPTER 2. SAVING THE WIZARDING WORLD: HERMIONE GRANGER IN J.K. ROWLING'S *HARRY POTTER* SERIES

I'm hoping to do some good in the world!
J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

2.1 The Wizarding World: An Overview

2.1.1 From Rags to Riches: Presenting J.K. Rowling

English novelist Joanne Kathleen Rowling CH, OBE, HonFRSE, FRCPE, FRSL (b. 1965) is the enormously successful author of the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007). Rowling is considered one of the most popular and influential living writers of children's literature, for which she has received numerous awards and distinctions.⁴⁴ Rowling's story is well-known, even for those who might have not read her novels: on the verge of poverty, she became one of the richest women in the world thanks to the *Harry Potter* series, which has sold more than 500 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 80 languages.⁴⁵

Rowling's success story began with the publication of *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone* (known as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the United States) in 1997. The following novels, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005) and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007)⁴⁶ catapulted her

⁴⁴ A complete list of what awards each book has received might be found here: www.bloomsbury.com/uk/discover/harry-potter/j-k-rowling/awards-and-prizes/

⁴⁵ For more insight, check www.wizardingworld.com/news/500-million-harry-potter-books-have-now-been-sold-worldwide

⁴⁶ I will use abbreviated forms from now on: *Philosopher's Stone*, *Chamber of Secrets*, *Prisoner of Azkaban* and so on.

to fame and sparked a worldwide phenomenon. The words uttered by Minerva McGonagall, a Hogwarts teacher, in *Philosopher's Stone* have turned out to be premonitory both in the world of Harry Potter and in real life: ““He’ll be famous—a legend—I wouldn’t be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter Day⁴⁷ in future—there will be books written about Harry—every child in our world will know his name!”” (*Philosopher's Stone*, 14). The success of the *Harry Potter* novels allowed Rowling to stop living off government welfare (Adney and Hassel, 9: 2011) to become a full-time author.

Apart from the core seven novels that conform the series, Rowling has also written different books related to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter: *Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them* (2001), *Quidditch Through the Ages* (2001), *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* (2008); she also co-wrote the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016) with John Tiffany and Jack Thorne (based on her own storyline), as well as the screenplays for the *Fantastic Beasts* movies: *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them: The Original Script* (2017), *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* (2018) and *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* (2022). Also related to the *Harry Potter* world, Rowling published a series of e-books in the Pottermore⁴⁸ website: *Short Stories from Hogwarts of Power, Politics and Pesky Poltergeists* (2016), *Short Stories from Hogwarts of Heroism, Hardship and Dangerous Hobbies* (2016), *Hogwarts: An Incomplete and Unreliable Guide* (2016) and an 800-word short story set three years before the birth of Harry Potter featuring Sirius Black and James Potter, Harry’s godfather and father respectively. Rowling’s first publication after the *Harry Potter* series was a tragicomedy named *A Casual Vacancy* in 2012. Rowling has also written a series of detective novels

⁴⁷ There is, in fact, a Harry Potter Day. UK Prime Minister James Cameron declared 2nd May Harry Potter Day to honor Rowling’s literary work: nationaltoday.com/international-harry-potter-day/

⁴⁸ Pottermore, now called Wizarding World (www.wizardingworld.com/), is a website dedicated to the Harry Potter Universe. Founded by Rowling, the website intends to maintain the popularity of the books and the movies by publishing news and articles written by Rowling.



under the penname Robert Galbraith: *The Cuckoo's Calling* (2013), *The Silkworm* (2014), *Career of Evil* (2015), *Lethal White* (2018), and *Troubled Blood* (2020). The seven *Harry Potter* novels were adapted into blockbuster movies, which greatly enhanced their popularity and success.⁴⁹ For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I shall only discuss the core seven novels although I will occasionally refer to her other works.

There is already plenty of academic work discussing *Harry Potter*. The literary merit of the series, as well as its tremendous popularity, have been largely studied, apart from a series of key topics: “Rowling’s aesthetic choices and the merits of her work; historical, cultural, and literary contexts; and analysis through lenses as diverse as religious, philosophical, and mythological” (Adney and Hassel, 2011: 281). Undoubtedly, Rowling has had a major impact into attracting readers and scholars to the fantasy genre.

This second chapter focuses on the character of Hermione Granger who, despite not being the series’ protagonist, is an indispensable character without whom the novels would lack depth and complexity, particularly considering that “the series does not present itself as the chronicle of an individual’s journey so much as that of a triumvirate: Harry, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger” (Kniesler, 2012: 129). Hermione Granger is the only witch in this dissertation who is not the main character of the story, yet her influence and impact on young readers and how they perceive the image of the witch cannot go unnoticed. Hermione’s important role as well as her agency in the *Harry Potter* series are essential in any discussion of the contemporary witch in young adult fantasy fiction. I proceed next to discuss the series’ fantastic elements as well as the complexities of labelling the novels either children’s or young adult’s fiction.

⁴⁹ The success of the *Harry Potter* novels led not only to the making of eight extremely successful movies produced by Warner Bros. but also to the development of a theme park named The Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Universal Studios Orlando, which opened its doors in 2010. Besides, fans of the series can visit the studio tour in London where parts of the filming for the films took place.



2.1.2 Fantastic Elements and Where to Find Them: The Magic World of *Harry Potter*

The seven novels that encompass the *Harry Potter* series focus on Harry's development and his quest to defeat the evil Lord Voldemort (originally Tom Riddle), a villain who terrorized the wizarding world. The plot covers a period of seven years, beginning when Harry turns 11 and ending when he is 17, the majority age in the wizarding world. Mostly regarded as children's literature, the *Harry Potter* books conflate a diversity of genres. Structurally, the books follow the calendar of the school year except *Deathly Hallows*, in which Harry decides not to return to school to find and fight his archnemesis. Elements of fantasy, gothic, mystery, drama and the Bildungsroman are present, yet for the purposes of my dissertation, and as I did on Chapter 1, I focus here on the fantasy elements in relation to the character of the witch and her coming of age.

The prototypical fantasy elements present in the *Harry Potter* are the depiction of the eternal struggle between good and evil, the use of magic as a plot device and the creation of a secondary world populated by magical and non-human creatures: "Fantasy is based on the most traditional and oldest of stories, from dragon slaying onwards, which are then given a new context. So too are the central plot lines of the Harry Potter stories" (Eccleshare, 2002: 44). In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, Clute and Grant coined the term "wainscot fantasy" (1997: 991), a type which depicts a concealed society in which its inhabitants have magical power and knowledge. In wainscot fantasy "a particular relationship exists between two cultures which share the same physical space. The dominant culture—the culture the text's readers are presumed to share—is mundane, large, and presumed to hold power over its environment, but is largely unaware of the existence of the wainscot culture" (Le Lievere, 2003: 26). Le Lievere argues that in the



Harry Potter series, the magical world is positioned as a wainscot culture from the beginning although

The difference between the wainscot wizarding world and the dominant culture (Muggles) in the series, however, is not a physical difference such as size (as in the Borrowers tetralogy), conformity (the horrors [or *Horrible Histories*] books), or socioeconomic status (Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*) as is usual in this sub-genre. It is magic: that is, imagination. (2003: 27)

The *Harry Potter* books clearly differentiate between the wizarding world and the Muggle⁵⁰ world, the term used to refer to non-magical people. Obviously, the wizarding world is given more priority and space in the narration while the reader only gets a glimpse of the Muggle world at the beginning and ending of each novel. The image offered to the reader of the Muggle world is filtered through Harry's perspective when he stays at the home of his only living relatives, as he is an orphan because his parents were murdered by Lord Voldemort—his aunt Petunia (his mother's sister), Vernon Dursley (Petunia's husband) and his cousin Dudley—during the summer holidays and with various snippets from short intrusions of witches and wizards into the Muggle world throughout the series. In the Potterverse there are witches and wizards all around the world, however, the setting of the story is the United Kingdom and therefore the traditions and culture which are mostly represented in the books are from that nation.

As I have pointed out, Le Lievere considers the *Harry Potter* books to be a “wainscot” fantasy whereas others argue that the *Harry Potter* books are portal fantasies since students need to cross Platform 9 ¾ at King's Cross railway station to board the train bound for Hogwarts: “they [the novels] begin as intrusion fantasies—the abrupt arrival of the owls [which bring the Hogwarts' acceptance letter to prospective students]

⁵⁰ Etymologically, muggle means “c. 1200, “a fish-tail,” also, apparently, “a person with a fish-tail” (only as a surname), a word of uncertain origin, perhaps from Latin *mugil* “mullet.” ([www.etymonline.com/word/muggle#:~:text=muggle%20\(n.,1\)&text=c.,from%20Latin%20mugil%20%202mullet.%22](http://www.etymonline.com/word/muggle#:~:text=muggle%20(n.,1)&text=c.,from%20Latin%20mugil%20%202mullet.%22)) It can also be used as a slang word to describe someone who uses cannabis (BBC News, 24 March 2003); it was included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2003 following Rowling's usage.



in Privet Drive in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*⁵¹ (1998), causing chaos and disturbance—but very rapidly transmute into almost archetypal portal fantasies, reliant on elaborate description and continual new imaginings” (Mendlesohn, 2008: 2). *The Chronicles of Narnia* are a prime case of portal fantasy: the four children enter a different world when they enter a wardrobe and thus reach Narnia. In *Harry Potter*, however, the wizarding world is not in another dimension. Although there are portals which wizards and witches use to cross to specific areas of their world, such as Platform 9 ¾ or the public toilets to access the Ministry of Magic, these places do not transport magical people to another world; actually, the wizarding world is embedded within the Muggle world yet Muggles cannot see it due to the spells and incantations used to keep it from them. Gupta correctly argues that in the novels “The Magic and Muggle worlds are overtly presented in the books; our world is implied through both those worlds” (2009: 85). As he argues, in the Muggle world “*magic can be manifested and causal explanations cannot always apply; magic is apparent as magic because it defeats the desires and sharpens the explanatory failures of Muggles; the Muggle world and the Magic world are mutually definitive*” (2009: 87, original italics). In other words, magic in the Muggle world might be disdained and feared (by the Dursleys) or accepted and celebrated (the Evans and the Grangers) but its existence is not denied, only concealed. In the reader’s world, on the other hand, magic does not exist, so that the reader participates in the story from a completely external point of view. Therefore, the *Harry Potter* series is an immersive fantasy, “set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world” (Mendlesohn, 2008: e-book). Neither in the magical world nor in the Muggle world the fantastic elements are questioned and the reader experiences these two worlds from the viewpoint of the characters native to the setting: “In effect, we must sit in the heads of the

⁵¹ Mendlesohn might have misreferred here to *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*.



protagonists, accepting what they know as the world, interpreting it through what they notice, and through what they do not” (Mendlesohn, 2008: e-book).

The type of fantasy used by Rowling in this series is essential to determine how the figure of the witch is viewed. Although magical people are hidden from the Muggle world, suggesting they were once feared and persecuted, their existence has never been denied. While within *Harry Potter* most Muggles are oblivious to the existence of magic, there are others who know it exists, such as the Muggles which have a family member with magical abilities. In *The Half-Blood Prince*, for example, the reader learns that the newly elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is aware of the wizarding world, though he is still scared when he receives the visit of his wizarding world equivalent:

He had remained speechless throughout Fudge’s kindly explanation that there were witches and wizards still living in secret all over the world and his reassurances that he was not to bother his head about them as the Ministry of Magic took responsibility for the whole Wizarding community and prevented the non-magical population from getting wind of them. (*Half-Blood Prince*, 4)

The scene confirms Gupta’s and Lievre’s thesis that there are two worlds overtly presented in the *Harry Potter* books (the wizarding world and the Muggle world) and that the reader’s world is only implied. Consequently, the fantasy elements present in *Harry Potter* occur at two levels: within the magical world, magic is the norm but in the Muggle world magic is the exception and thus it is inexplicable yet not denied. Gupta also contends that

what Muggles understand to be normal and explicable, and the norms and explanations in accordance with which Muggles conduct their lives, are to a very large extent the creation of the Magic world—it is not Muggles who determine the condition of their world but Magic people who do so in a benign and Muggle-friendly fashion, by making the Magic world invisible. (2009: 89 original italics).

The need to maintain the wizarding world hidden from the Muggle world, hence, is to protect Muggles from those wizards and witches who believe in magical supremacy. Although the novels suggest that witches and wizards were once harassed, especially during the late Middle Ages, Rowling somewhat flippantly suggests they were not



harmed. In the ensuing passage, Rowling is downplaying the real consequences that people accused of practising witchcraft faced in real life at the expense of a humorous anecdote. Muggles

were particularly afraid of magic in medieval times, but not very good at recognizing it. On the rare occasion that they did catch a real witch or wizard, burning had no effect whatsoever. The witch or wizard would perform a basic Flame-Freezing Charm and then pretend to shriek with pain while enjoying a gentle, tickling sensation. (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 2)

Gupta comments that Rowling presents “such acts of witch-burning as being laughably absurd” (2009: 88). He adds that “Witch-burning (unless the victim was mistakenly not a witch) would be an understandable and quite possibly harmless exercise” (2009: 88). Therefore, the separation between the two worlds is seen to be more beneficial towards Muggles than magical people since magic is dangerous to them. However, it is also to the benefit of witches and wizards to maintain their anonymity. As Hagrid, Hogwarts’ groundskeeper, explains to Harry when they first meet:

‘But what does a Ministry of Magic *do*?’
‘Well, their main job is to keep it from the Muggles that there’s still witches an’ wizards up an’ down the country.’
‘Why?’
‘*Why?* Blimey, Harry, everyone’d be wantin’ magic solutions to their problems. Nah, we’re best left alone.’

(*Philosopher’s Stone*, 70, original italics)

Hiding the wizarding world from the Muggles is, thus, mutually beneficial. Nevertheless, towards the end of the series the unsuspecting Muggle world is at risk because of Voldemort’s intention of subjugating the Muggles to his force and erasing those wizards and witches believed to be of mixed Muggle origin.

Another key aspect to consider when analysing the fantastic elements in *Harry Potter* is the source of magic. This is not explored in the books yet when approaching the character of Hermione Granger and her position within the wizarding world it is essential to consider her Muggle origins. In *Harry Potter*, magic is genetic and innate, that is, it is not a trait acquired through a process of learning, though it requires training. What young



witches and wizards learn at Hogwarts, thus, is how to control and use their powers through spells, enchantments, and potions. There are four types of magical people: pure bloods, half-bloods, Muggle-borns and squibs. Purebloods are wizards or witches who claim to have no Muggles or Muggle-borns in their family tree. Half-bloods are those wizards or witches who have Muggle or Muggle-born parents or grandparents. Muggle-borns are the children of two non-magical parents. Finally, Squibs are born to two magical persons but cannot perform magic, yet they are integrated in the wizarding world.

To my knowledge, there is only one article examining the genetic origins of magic within *Harry Potter*: “Origins of Magic: Review of Genetic and Epigenetic Effects” (Ramagopalan et al., 2007). This article argues that “Although shared environmental influences can also lead to familial clustering of a trait, the presence of magical abilities in seven generations of the Black family and at least three generations in others strongly suggests the influence of genetic factors in determining magical ability” (2007: 1299). Hermione Granger is a witch born of two Muggle parents and although she is not the only witch with this genetic background, the books offer no explanation as to how Muggles can produce magical offspring. Therefore, although the books offer no insight into Hermione’s lineage, the possible explanation as to why Hermione is a witch might be found in the supposition that someone in her family might have been a Squib: “muggles with magical abilities are those descended from squibs in previous generations who have integrated into muggle society” (Ramagopalan et al., 2007: 1300). Most importantly, Hermione’s status as a Muggle-born witch is the reason why she is bullied by fellow schoolmate Draco Malfoy and persecuted by Voldemort’s followers, the Death Eaters, in *The Deathly Hallows* (an issue I further explore in section 2.4).

Having established the fantasy elements which frame the *Harry Potter* novels, in the next section I focus now on the elements which define the *Harry Potter* books as



either children's or young adult fiction. Although the first two books might have been aimed at younger readers, the themes and motifs present in the later books characterize the series as young adult.

2.1.2 Children's or Young Adult Fiction: The *Harry Potter* Conundrum

Since its publication, the *Harry Potter* series has been mostly regarded as children's literature of a rather typical kind in English fiction. The *Harry Potter* books present a boarding-school thematic structure, following as noted the academic year, which moves from children's literature to young adults' fiction, further complicating their genre definition. Within this tradition, there are notable authors such as Enyd Blyton (*Malory Towers*, 1946-1951), and within children's fantasy fiction involving witches, Jill Murphy's *The Worst Witch* series (1974-2018) and Diana Wynne Jones' *Witch Week* (1982). Within my dissertation, the *Harry Potter* series is the only set of books that might be considered children's literature yet strictly speaking only *Philosopher's Stone* and *Chamber of Secrets* belong to this genre. The inclusion of darker themes and motifs in *Prisoner of Azkaban* and in the subsequent novels, along with the characters' growth, indicates that the texts progressively become young adult novels.

Trites contends that "growth in adolescent literature is inevitably depicted as a function of what the adolescent has learned about how society curtails the individual's power" (2001: 473). It is precisely in *Prisoner of Azkaban* when Harry, his best friend Ron, and their friend Hermione learn how society and its constrictions work. The trio face the impossibility to demonstrate the innocence of Harry's godfather, Sirius Black, because none of the adults, except Albus Dumbledore, believe what had really happened to him when he was unfairly accused of a terrorist act and imprisoned for life (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 413-414); the three teens are therefore forced to act behind the Minister of



Magic's back: "as the series progresses, so does the depiction of the moral complexity of power, and some characters' powers are portrayed ambiguously" (Trites, 2001: 474).

In *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature*, Nikolajeva asserts that

The typical plot in children's literature, which we may call a basic plot or a master plot, follows the pattern: home-departure from home-adventure-homecoming. Home provides safety, but the character must depart from home, since nothing exciting ever happens there. Being away is exciting but also dangerous, so the characters must return home, often after they have found a treasure or gained knowledge and maturity. (2003: 159-160)

Although each of the *Harry Potter* books present this structure, Harry's homecoming is always tainted by the strained relationship he has with his relatives, as they reluctantly took him in. Harry was put under the care of the Dursleys, his only living relatives, when he was one year old after his parent's demise at the hands of Voldemort. Harry's parents (James and Lily) were killed because they opposed and fought against Voldemort's reign of terror. Nevertheless, Voldemort's goal was to kill Harry, as there was a prophecy which stated that a child born on the seventh month would have the power to relinquish the Dark Lord (*Order of the Phoenix*, 744). Voldemort, however, failed to murder Harry as Lily stood before him to protect him from the killing curse *Avada Kedavra*. Lily's sacrificial act of love conferred Harry a special magical protection and as long as Harry considered the Dursley's his home as he had a blood relative there, Voldemort could not harm him (*Order of the Phoenix*, 770), which is why special importance is given to Harry's return to the Dursley's after the school year ends.

By the end of the series Harry leaves the Dursley's house, where he has endured much abuse as an unwanted foster child, to never return and he breaks the bond to what he painfully had to consider home. Yet, although the *Harry Potter* books follow the pattern Nikolajeva describes, the protagonists are not young children. The three are 11 years old when the story begins and although they might still be considered children,



Harry and his friends are about to enter adolescence, a process through which many readers accompany them.

The *Harry Potter* books also present another unusual characteristic: the implied reader of the first *Harry Potter* books is younger from the implied reader for the later books. This difference might be explained by the fact that not only the characters in the series mature but also its the readership. An unusual characteristic of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon is that many of its readers grew up alongside Harry, Ron, and Hermione to the extent that they are labelled “The *Harry Potter* generation”. Therefore, I am inclined to believe that the *Harry Potter* books fall into the category of young adult fiction rather than children’s fiction because not only do the characters gain maturity, but they also grow physically and the novels explore themes and motifs which are rarely present in children’s literature.

Nikolajeva contends that children’s literature is mostly plot-oriented since “It is commonly believed that young readers are more interested in plot than in characters, as compared with adult readers” (2003: 12); in her view this seems to be the case of the *Harry Potter* books. Nevertheless, the characters are not static and we can trace their evolution through their narrative arc. Nikolajeva adds that “beginning in the 1960s” Western children’s fiction presented “a more profound interest in character “and more “psychological, character-oriented children’s novels” (Nikolajeva, 2003: 13). Still, Nikolajeva maintains that this was not generalized and remarks that “we are not given Harry’s thoughts or feelings if he is at all bestowed with the ability to think and feel. He is not a character encumbered by complex inner life” but “a character deliberately constructed as a romantic hero” (2009: 236). I do not share Nikolajeva’s viewpoint. Harry does develop as a character, and so do Hermione and Ron, especially towards the end of the narrative. Throughout the seven novels the readers experience Harry’s maturation



process and how he develops from being an inexperienced and incredulous 11-year-old to accepting and facing the challenge of sacrificing himself for the greater good. As Damour defends, “As coming-of-age tales go, *Harry Potter*’s is hard to beat. Harry not only saves the world but also does so while acting in developmentally appropriate ways from ages eleven to seventeen” (2009: 8).

Another argument presented by Nikolajeva to consider the *Harry Potter* books as children’s literature and not a young adult text is Harry’s inexperience in sexual matters: “As compared to some sexually advanced teenagers in contemporary young adult fiction, Harry is ridiculously uninformed. Yet this is also a children’s literature convention” (2009: 237). Nikolajeva’s argument is inaccurate. Although there are no explicit sexual encounters in the series, there are many instances in which kissing and “snogging” are mentioned, suggesting the sexual awakening of the characters and their development as sexual beings. Harry’s progressive infatuation with Ravenclaw’s fellow student Cho Chang and later on Ginny Weasley (Ron’s sister) proves that point, as well as Ron and Hermione’s tumultuous relationship (and her own crush on Viktor Krum). The key difference between children’s and young adult’s fiction is, no doubt then, the sexual awakening of the characters and its representation, as well as the character’s progressive maturation. Therefore, the *Harry Potter* novels should be considered young adult texts, especially the novels published after *Chamber of Secrets*, once the main characters become teens, since they feature key elements in the protagonists’ lives which propel their maturation process.

Having outlined the elements which indicate the *Harry Potter* series as young adult fiction, I shall continue with an analysis of Hermione’s coming of age within the series. Although Hermione is considered a secondary character, she still undergoes a process of maturation and development in the books which shall be explored. To do so, I will first



consider her role as a secondary character within the series and then I will move on to consider and evaluate her own Bildungsroman.

2.2 Growing Up: Hermione's Journey from Childhood to Adulthood

2.2.1 The Importance of Secondary Characters: Hermione's Role as Hero

In the *Harry Potter* series, Harry is regarded as the protagonist since he plays the role of the hero and is portrayed as 'the chosen one', following in the tradition of many other fantasy works, from *The Lord of the Rings* to the *Matrix* trilogy. Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, although extremely important, are often relegated to the position of secondary characters. Hermione and Ron, however, are essential characters without whom the downfall of Lord Voldemort would not occur. Although the hero is the one who embarks on a quest, Hermione and Ron accompany him and provide indispensable assistance to achieve the main goal; they actively participate in the success of the quest. Consequently, this section of Chapter 2 is devoted to demonstrating that Hermione Granger, mostly considered a secondary character whose main job is to assist Harry in his quest, is not merely a Campbellian helper or a subordinate character but a hero in her own right who grows and develops throughout the story. Thus, her position in the series as a powerful witch with agency grants her a place in any discussion of young adult witches in fantasy fiction.

Secondary characters remain undertheorized. Some studies which focus on or discuss secondary characters are E.M Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927); W.J. Harvey's *Character and the Novel* (1965); Alex Woloch's *The One Vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (2003); Jeremy Rosen's *Minor Characters Have Their Day: Genre and the Contemporary Literary Marketplace* (2016) and Stephen M. Zimmerly's *The Sidekick Comes of Age: How Young Adult Literature is*



Shifting the Sidekick Paradigm (2019). Although there are articles devoted to specific secondary characters (e.g. Watson from the *Sherlock Holmes* stories) it seems that a complete taxonomy is still yet to be developed.

Forster's study provided the original standpoint to consider two different types of characters, flat and round: "In their purest form", flat characters are "constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round" (Forster, 1927: 48). In contrast, "The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way" (Forster: 55). Although questionable, since secondary characters are not all essentially flat, Forster's classification provided an awareness about how the different characters could be approached. In short, flat characters are those which do not change throughout the narrative while round characters are more complex and undergo a process of development. Forster's assessment, although helpful, reduces characters to only two types of classification and it risks being too simplistic. Woloch's study, on the other hand, provides a better insight into the secondary characters by providing readings of the minor characters from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), and Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* (1835) in relation to the main protagonists. Woloch illustrates in his analysis of these three major 19th century novels how the character system is constructed and how the development of the protagonists is tied to that of the secondary characters. He provides two new narratological categories:

the character-space (that particular and charged encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole) and the character-system (the arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces—differentiated configurations and manipulations of the human figure—into a unified narrative structure). (2003: 14)

According to Woloch, a character's importance is tied to the narrative space which they occupy within a text and the relationship they develop with the main character.



Especially relevant to my dissertation is Zimmerly's *The Sidekick Comes of Age: How Young Adult Literature Is Shifting the Sidekick Paradigm* (2019). In his work, Zimmerly argues that there are four classic sidekick roles, namely a "narrative gateway" through which the reader can better understand an enigmatic protagonist; a 'devil's advocate' to provide conflicting views; as 'comic relief' to an otherwise serious hero; or as a 'foil' to contrast with the protagonist" (2019: 2). In this classification, Hermione Granger would occupy the role of 'devil's advocate', as in Zimmerly's words: "the role shows (in part) how a sidekick can challenge, hone, and improve a hero's decision-making" and "'devil's advocate' could be alternatively titled 'the voice of reason'" (2019: 21). In Chapter 3, Zimmerly explores the case of Neville Longbottom, an important secondary character in the *Harry Potter* series, describing how a sidekick is fully capable of becoming a secondary hero: "a peripheral figure of comic relief, (who) became one of the hero's most trusted sidekicks, and then (in that hero's absence) was elevated to take the role of secondary hero" (2016: 81). However, the fact that, according to Zimmerly, the hero needs to be absent for a secondary character to become a secondary hero is problematic. Hermione Granger does not need Harry's absence to become a hero by herself: she participates in many heroic acts alongside Harry and Ron and on her own. In *Philosopher's Stone*, for example, Hermione accompanies Harry in the pursuit of the stone and although she does not join Harry to face Professor Quirrell (in whose pliant skull Lord Voldemort's conscience has taken residence), the fact that she decides to assume the risk and put her life in danger already grants her the status of hero, thus proving that the main hero does not need to be absent for her to become a hero.

Another study which is helpful to understand how different characters operate within a text is Nikolajeva's *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature* (2003). She classifies characters into two types which are further subdivided. The first category



consists of what she calls central characters, which include main characters (protagonists) and supporting characters. The second category, peripheral characters, is formed by satellite and backdrop characters: “Satellite characters are not essential for the plot, but they may serve to illuminate some aspects of the plot, or for contrastive characterization or simply for variation. In books where the depiction of society plays an important role, satellite characters represent a variety of human types” (2003: 113). In contrast, backdrop characters can be simply removed. Within this framework, supporting characters, satellite characters and backdrop characters are all considered secondary characters (Nikolajeva, 2003: 112). Nevertheless, “Supporting characters are all secondary characters essential for the plot. Together, main and supporting characters constitute central, or integral, characters. The plot cannot develop if we remove any of them” (2003: 112). If Hermione, or Ron, were removed from the *Harry Potter* narrative, the plot would collapse since they are an integral part for the advancement of the story. While other characters might be disposed of without any major consequences for the plot, the elimination of Hermione Granger and her input into Harry’s quest would prevent him from finally destroying Voldemort. Therefore, as Bell argues in *Hermione Granger Saves the World: Essays on the Feminist Heroine of Hogwarts* (2012), “Hermione can be seen as supplemental only if one accepts the premise that, simply because his name happens to appear in the title, Harry Potter is the protagonist of this epic”. For Bell, “the Trio as a whole—Harry, Ron and Hermione together—is the protagonist of the tale, and each member of the Trio is essential, required even, to ultimately succeed” (2012: 16). Bell divides their roles into body, mind and soul with each member fulfilling their function to work as a unanimous entity: if one of the parts is removed, the others cannot properly function (2012: 17). I maintain, therefore, that Hermione is a co-protagonist of the series since without her the plot would collapse.



Still, the reader only gets a glimpse of what she does and how she acts when she is with Harry: “There are limits on how well Harry can see Hermione occupy certain roles” (Cordova, 2015: 21). The limitations to see how Hermione behaves when alone is one of the major flaws against her also being a hero. While Harry’s thoughts and emotions are presented to the reader, Hermione’s psyche remains largely unexplored. However, the fact that the reader ‘sees’ Hermione through Harry may well be an asset and not a hindrance when assessing her character. As Berndt argues, “since Harry does not feel attracted to Hermione in a romantic way, his perception of her—and, henceforth, the image of Hermione in general—is not informed by the so-called ‘male gaze’. Consequently, Hermione is never described in terms of a sexual object” (2016: 162).

That Hermione is a hero is, anyway, obvious. There are many instances when she saves the day; without her Lord Voldemort’s defeat would not have been possible. Indeed, Hermione’s persistence and perseverance to fight the Dark Lord should be understood as heroic. In *Deathly Hallows*, for example, Hermione is tortured by Death Eater Bellatrix Lestrange and she endures the agonizing pain of the *Cruciatus*⁵² curse without revealing essential information from their plan (379-380). Therefore, it is perfectly relevant to analyse Hermione’s coming of age, and how she develops as a witch, as the narrative arc of a hero.

2.2.2 A Witch’s Coming of Age: Hermione’s *Bildungsroman* in *Harry Potter*

The *Harry Potter* series is considered, amongst other genres, a *Bildungsroman*. Besides, since the novels mainly focalize on Harry, he is the one to whom Campbell’s theory of the monomyth is usually applied. As Boll argues, Harry “grows from chosen

⁵² The Cruciatus Curse is one of the three Unforgivable Courses within the wizarding world. This curse inflicts intense, excruciating physical pain on the victim, which might result in insanity if the victim is subjected to it for a prolonged time.



child to the hero of his own story” (2011: 85). My main concern in this section is that even though Hermione is not the protagonist of the story, her position as indispensable secondary character offers the opportunity to explore how a secondary character may also undergo a heroic journey. Although Hermione’s development cannot be fully traced from childhood to adulthood, a close reading of the series offers the necessary data to analyse her path to become a hero. Quoting Dresang, although she is not “the hero in an archetypical hero tale (...) the multi-layered, multi-focused nature of what is happening in this novel gives some license to look at Hermione as a second hero, for the hints are clear in book four that she has her own quest to follow” (2002: 224). According to Bakhtin, “The hero should not be portrayed as an already completed and unchanging person but as one who is evolving and developing, a person who learns from life” (1981: 10). Throughout the *Harry Potter* heptalogy, Hermione evolves into a hero while learning about a world which is foreign to her. While Harry’s status as hero is predetermined by fate, Hermione earns her position as a hero, and she changes and develops her understanding of the world.

J.K. Rowling has established that Hermione Jane Granger was born on 19th September 1979⁵³ and thus was nearly 12 years old when she received her Hogwarts’ invitation letter. Very little is known about Hermione’s childhood, except that her parents are both dentists and that she is an only child. Until Harry and Ron rescue her from the troll in *Philosopher’s Stone*, she is mostly portrayed negatively, presented as a bossy know-it-all with buck teeth and unwieldy hair. However, from the very beginning Hermione’s interest in learning is well established: upon meeting Harry and Ron on the Hogwarts Express, she tells them that she has already learnt all the coursebooks by heart

⁵³ Rowling, J.K. Section: Extra Stuff — Hermione Granger . J.K. Rowling Official Site. Archived from the original on 16 September 2008.
[/web.archive.org/web/20080916201222/http://www.jkrowling.com/textonly/en/extrastuff_view.cfm?id=8](http://www.jkrowling.com/textonly/en/extrastuff_view.cfm?id=8)
(Last Accessed 9/05/2022)



and even “tried a few simple spells just for practice” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 112). It is also in *Philosopher’s Stone* that we discover Hermione’s origin: ““Nobody in my family’s magic at all, it was ever such a surprise when I got my letter, but I was ever so pleased, of course, I mean, it’s the very best school of witchcraft there is, I’ve heard”” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 113). This short passage suggests two ideas. First, that although no one in Hermione’s family has magical abilities the fact that she is a witch, while surprising, did not seem to cause a stir in her family. Quite the opposite, she was “ever so pleased.” Besides, her parents do not seem concerned about the fact that their daughter is a witch since they are portrayed accompanying her to Diagon Alley⁵⁴ to get her supplies for the school year (*Chamber of Secrets*, 60). Second, the words “it’s the very best school of witchcraft there is, I’ve heard” (my emphasis) suggests that upon learning about her nature as a witch someone described to her and her family what Hogwarts was. Although it is not explicitly stated in the books, it seems that Muggle-borns’ letter of acceptance is delivered in person by a member of Hogwarts’ faculty or staff. We can infer this information from the fact that Harry was visited by Hagrid and told he was a wizard (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 55) after the Dursleys tried to prevent Harry from attending Hogwarts, and Tom Riddle (Lord Voldemort) received his letter from Albus Dumbledore himself (*Half-Blood Prince*, 225). Therefore, it is highly likely that Hermione also received her letter in a similar fashion. It is upon receiving the letter that Hermione’s journey begins. Unlike Harry, Hermione prepares herself for what is to come: she reads as much as possible about Hogwarts and the wizarding world and invests her energy and efforts on understanding her new environment. This trait accompanies Hermione for the rest of her journey, and helps the trio overcome the Dark Lord. Besides, it defines

⁵⁴ Diagon Alley is a magical shopping area concealed in London behind a wall in the Leaky Cauldron, a wizarding pub.



Hermione as a hero: she works to understand the task she is given and aspires to succeed thanks to her efforts. In short, Hermione actively participates in the story instead of passively waiting for something to happen, thus demonstrating her agency.

However, Hermione's first months at Hogwarts are not easy: she is mocked for being too uptight and a smarty-pants and she seems to have no friends to comfort her. After a Charms class in which Hermione and Ron are paired together, he, who is angry at Hermione, tells Harry:

'It's no wonder no one can stand her,' he said to Harry as they pushed their way into the crowded corridor. 'She's a nightmare, honestly.'
Someone knocked into Harry as they hurried past him. It was Hermione. Harry caught a glimpse of her face—and was startled to see that she was in tears.
'I think she heard you.'
'So?' said Ron, but he looked a bit uncomfortable. 'She must've noticed she's got no friends.'

(Philosopher's Stone, 184)

Her lack of female friends has been pointed out by some critics as an indication in presenting Hermione's presentation as a supposedly feminist character (Dresang, 2002: 231) yet Hermione develops a close relationship with Ron's sister Ginny and is in friendly terms with other Gryffindor girls. Nevertheless, Hermione's beginning at Hogwarts is socially challenging and until she becomes friends with Harry and Ron, she appears to spend most of her time on her own. After successfully defeating the troll that threatens her in the first novel, however, there is a shift in Hermione's personality which makes her more likeable to the boys. Lin suggests that the troll scene is central because "it exhibits the humiliation required of many female heroines in fairy tales" (2010: 88). Although Hermione is not really punished for being intelligent, Lin contends that she is reprimanded for bragging and being too conceited:

Saved by Harry and Ron, Hermione surprisingly defends them by lying to Professor McGonagall, saying that it was her arrogance that caused the trouble. Hermione's lie is ironic and persuasive because it is based on her well-known conceitedness. Yet, by inventing a convincing lie, she also acknowledges and repents her vanity. (2010: 89)



The moment Hermione acknowledges her pride and becomes less pretentious, she gains the respect and friendship of Harry and Ron. This is a key moment both for the development of the story and for Hermione's arc: she understands that if she is to spend seven years at Hogwarts, she needs friends and although she remains an unapologetically focused student, her demeanour changes. Another key moment in *Philosopher's Stone* which reflects Hermione's growth is a scene close to the end. Once the trio has overcome the different obstacles placed to protect the Philosopher's stone, which guarantees immortality and is thus pursued by Voldemort, Hermione acknowledges that apart from intelligence, friendship and bravery are also important as she has learnt throughout her first year at Hogwarts (*Philosopher's Stone*, 308). Readers infer that Hermione's heroic journey is twofold: on the one hand, she undergoes an internal journey to discover herself and what kind of witch she wants to be and, on the other hand, she participates in the quest to defeat Lord Voldemort.

In the second novel, *Chamber of Secrets*, Hermione is hardly present and therefore it is more challenging to assess how she develops as an adolescent and a witch in it. However, although Hermione's presence is limited, *Chamber of Secrets* presents a crucial point in her growth: she discovers that her condition as Muggle-born is a defining trait that threatens her own existence. Hermione is bullied by Draco Malfoy, who uses against her the worst possible slur:

'No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood,' he spat.
Harry knew at once that Malfoy had said something really bad because there was an instant uproar at his words. (*Chamber of Secrets*, 118)

Although Harry and Hermione cannot understand the meaning of 'Mudblood', and therefore are not really distressed by his insult, pure-blood Ron, who has grown up within the wizarding world becomes infuriated and attacks Malfoy with a curse, which backfires. Later, Ron explains what the word means:



‘It’s about the most insulting thing he could think of,’ gasped Ron, coming back up. ‘Mudblood’s a really foul name for someone who is Muggle-born—you know, non-magic parents. There are some wizards—like Malfoy’s family—who think they’re better than everyone else because they’re what people call pure-blood.’
(*Chamber of Secrets*, 121)

After this incident, Hermione understands that her status, even her life, as a Muggle-born witch is threatened by some members of her new community, intent on exterminating all ‘Mudbloods’. Therefore, Hermione realizes she will need to demonstrate that she belongs to the wizarding world and that her prowess as a witch is not only based on her genetic make-up but on her magical skills.

In *Chamber of Secrets*, the enemy is, once again, Lord Voldemort, here still a shadow that emerges from one of his Horcruxes,⁵⁵ the diary of his former self Tom Riddle. The Chamber of Secrets is a hidden basement room in Hogwarts; it is the lair of a monster (a basilisk) which can only be controlled by Slytherin’s heir. When the monster is unleashed, it attacks Mrs Norris, caretaker Argus Filch’s cat, and she is petrified. Next to the animal, the writing on the wall reads: “The Chamber of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the Heir, beware” (*Chamber of Secrets*, 146). Malfoy takes this occasion to insult and threaten Hermione again:

‘Enemies of the Heir, beware! You’ll be next, Mudbloods!’
It was Draco Malfoy. He had pushed to the front of the crowd, his cold eyes alive, his usually bloodless face flushed, as he grinned at the sight of the hanging, immobile cat. (*Chamber of Secrets*, 147)

Understandably, Hermione is distressed: “The attack had also had an effect on Hermione. It was quite usual for Hermione to spend a lot of time reading, but she was now doing almost nothing else” (*Chamber of Secrets*, 155). Feeling that her life is in danger, Hermione tries to learn all she can about the Chamber of Secrets and what kind of monster it harbours. Besides, she is involved in formulating the plan which discloses who is behind

⁵⁵ Horcruxes are powerful magical objects which contain a piece of somebody’s soul with the purpose of making the creator immortal. Horcruxes are created with dark magic as one needs to kill to fragment one’s soul and place it in the horcrux. To become immortal, Lord Voldemort created a total of seven horcruxes so in the event of his death, he could come back to life through the performance of a ritual.



the attacks. In *Chamber of Secrets*, thus, Hermione becomes the instigator for the trio to break the rules and discover the culprit, hence reversing the roles in the previous novel:

‘I don’t want to break rules, you know. I think threatening Muggle-borns is far worse than brewing up a difficult potion. But if you don’t want to find out if it’s Malfoy, I’ll go straight to Madam Pince now and hand the book back in...’

‘I never thought I’d see the day when you’d be persuading us to break rules,’ said Ron.

(*Chamber of Secrets*, 175, original italics)

This change in Hermione’s character foreshadows her future campaign to liberate the domestic elves and her fight for an egalitarian community within the wizarding world. It also suggests that her sense of injustice and self-preservation are more acute than her disposition to follow rules. Inopportunistly, Hermione is also attacked and petrified, and she cannot participate in facing Tom Riddle. However, her research skills and her determination to discover the culprit and protect herself should be seen as a clear progression in her characterization and in her role within the plot. Hermione understands that her Muggle-born status conditions her existence within the wizarding world. Thus, the more magic she learns the better she will be able to defend herself against those who believe that Muggle-borns should be annihilated.

Another key point in Hermione’s development happens in the third novel of the series, when she obtains a ‘familiar’, traditionally an animal that serves a witch. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione purchases Crookshanks, a half-Kneazle cat.⁵⁶ To my knowledge, there are only two scholars who have examined the connection between familiars and witches in *Harry Potter*. William Thompson’s “From Teenage Witch to Social Activist: Hermione Granger as Female Locus” (2012) briefly mentions that the purchase of Crookshanks is a key developmental moment in Hermione’s life and Elizabeth Ezra’s “Becoming Familiar: Witches and Companion Animals in *Harry Potter*

⁵⁶ “A small catlike creature with flecked, speckled, or spotted fur, outsize ears, and a tail like a lion’s, the Kneazle is intelligent, independent, and occasionally aggressive, though if it takes a liking to a witch or wizard, it makes an excellent pet” (Rowling, 2001: 90)



and *His Dark Materials*” (2019) offers an insight into how three of the major witches in *Harry Potter* have an association with cats.

Rowling established that “Familiars, in the strictest sense, do not exist within the world of Harry Potter. Although Hogwarts students are permitted to bring animals to school with them, the cats and rats we see there are, broadly speaking, pets” (Rowling, 2015). Yet, Ezra dismantles the author’s description of familiars by demonstrating that Crookshanks is more than a pet: he “performs the roles of the servant and the spy that Rowling identifies as functions of familiars (evoking the word’s more distant origin, prior to its association with family, in the *famulus*, or servant)” (2019: 176). In his essay, Thompson contends that

Having a familiar, even though Hermione treats Crookshanks as a pet, positions her more fully as a witch in the series and operates as a rather oblique manifestation of her developing sexuality. (...) the magical nature of Crookshanks reinforces at this point Hermione’s position as the savvy girl witch who is no longer a child. (2012: e-book)

Thompson’s point is interesting, yet he does not clarify what he means by stating that a familiar “operates as a rather oblique manifestation of her developing sexuality.” He might refer here to the association between cats and femininity that has perdured through time. In different pagan religions, cats embody the archetype of the feminine since they are connected to female deities (e.g. Artemis and Hecate in Greek mythology). Therefore, Hermione choosing a cat as a familiar could be perceived as her embracing her femininity and her condition as a witch. I believe that Hermione’s decision to have a cat as a pet—and not an owl or a toad, or any other animal—metaphorically represents her embracing her condition as a witch, thus unconsciously reproducing the archetypal image of the witch accompanied by her cat.

One of the points most intensively analysed in Hermione’s development is her ‘transformation’ in *Goblet of Fire*. Some critics have suggested that Hermione’s improved looks for the Yule Ball are an attempt to beautify her and therefore present her as a suitable



candidate for heterosexual romance. She is “only presented as the attractive date of Viktor Krum after she has a form of plastic surgery”; her teeth are modified through a “corrective spell”, and she is transformed “like Cinderella and, like many tomboys in teen novels, into a ‘princess’. She becomes physically acceptable” (Heilman and Donaldson, 2009: 151). Calling her transformation “plastic surgery” seems a bit unfair. Heilman and Donaldson forget to comment, besides, that Hermione’s parents are dentists and they wanted her to continue wearing braces to fix her teeth, with no magic. Hermione lets Madame Pomfrey—the school nurse—shrink her teeth just to stop wearing braces and accelerate the process. I believe that Hermione’s transformation for the Yule Ball intends to demonstrate that physical appearance should not be a main concern. Presumably, Hermione is 15 years old, and many teenage girls are worried about their looks at this age. Hermione, however, prefers to put her efforts into her studies and self-realization than in how she looks, as she tells Harry that doing what she did for the Yule Ball is “way too much bother to do every day” (*Goblet of Fire*, 366). I agree with Lin, who contends that “unlike Cinderella—in a possible move from stereotype to archetype—Hermione has no wish to continue the fantasy she experienced at the ball. (...) On the one hand, her matter-of-fact tone may indicate that she finally is able to observe rationally the princess fantasy; and on the other, it can be construed as a powerless acceptance of her failed attempt to realize that dream” (2010: 90). In my view, Hermione is aware that beauty does not guarantee happiness, but this does not concern her because her aspirations go beyond becoming someone’s princess and being adored by her looks. As Berndt contends, “Hermione appears to make the transition from childhood through adolescence to maturity without losing confidence in herself; she in fact gains further belief in her own abilities” (2012: 168).



However, the fact that Hermione becomes an object of desire marks a developmental stage in her life. In *Goblet of Fire* Hermione experiences her first romantic relationship with Viktor Krum, one of the participants in the Triwizard Tournament⁵⁷ held at Hogwarts and her date at the Yule Ball. Hermione's relationship with Krum is not fully described but we get glimpses throughout the rest of the series. Hermione's connection with manly Krum is mostly used in contrast to her relationship with bumbling Ron and how it affects their dynamics: while Krum acknowledges Hermione and asks her to attend the Ball with him, Ron remains clueless about how to act on his feelings for Hermione, a pattern repeated in *Order of the Phoenix*. Incidentally, *Goblet of Fire* also presents Hermione's awakening to the unfair treatment of the domestic elves in the wizarding world and her fight against Rita Skeeter, the journalist who is at Hogwarts to report on the Triwizard Tournament. These points, however, will be explored in section 2.4.

In *Order of the Phoenix*, Hermione's major character development is associated to her fight against Dolores Umbridge, the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, sent by the Ministry of Magic to replace Headmaster Dumbledore himself after he goes on the run. After Umbridge's first speech at Hogwarts, Hermione understands that their enemy is institutional power, which has infiltrated Hogwarts through this villainous woman (*Order of the Phoenix*, 198). One of the characteristics of YA fiction is the portrayal of young adults rebelling against power structures and this is what Hermione does in *Order of the Phoenix* by refusing to accept Umbridge. Hermione, who had always demonstrated a strong inclination to follow rules and orders, modifies her conduct when she believes that the power structure is corrupted and thus it is acceptable for her to rebel against it. Throughout *Order of the Phoenix* the Ministry of Magic is intent on denying the fact that

⁵⁷ The Triwizard Tournament is a magical contest held between three wizarding schools in Europe: Hogwarts School of Magic and Wizardry, Beauxbatons Academy of Magic and Durmstrang Institute. Its participants must complete three dangerous tasks which test magical ability, intelligence and courage.



Lord Voldemort has returned and to do so they start a campaign to defame Harry and Dumbledore. Ultimately, they infiltrate Hogwarts to control the education of the young witches and wizards to fit the Ministry's policies. *Order of the Phoenix*, then, narrates how Hermione resists and combats a repressive teacher and, by extension, an oppressive institution. Bealer observes that

Professor Umbridge also politicizes her Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom to promote the Ministry's version of the current wizarding sociopolitical atmosphere. Because, according to the Ministry, the world outside Hogwarts is utterly benign, there is no reason to teach the students practical defenses against the Dark Arts. (2009: 179)

Although Hermione is herself part of the power structure within Hogwarts (she is appointed Prefect at the beginning of the school year) she believes that questioning power is a legitimate course of action. As Trites argues, "growth in this genre [YA fiction] is inevitably represented as being linked to what the adolescent has learned about power. Without experiencing gradations between power and powerlessness, the adolescent cannot grow" (2000: x). Hermione's awareness of how the power structure operates in the magical world and her rejection of its oppressiveness is the character's major developmental phase in *Order of the Phoenix*. Her fight against an unjust system (which she begins in *Goblet of Fire*) defines her life because she devotes her career to the democratic betterment of society. Hermione's resistance to an oppressive system and her awareness that a change is necessary ultimately contributes to her being eventually appointed Minister for Magic, as we learn in the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2019).

Hermione's maturation process and her development as a hero culminate in *Deathly Hallows*, when she is already an adult by wizarding-world standards and decides to accompany Harry, together with Ron, in the quest to find the Horcruxes and destroy Lord Voldemort. Aware of what their mission entails, Hermione demonstrates that she has been preparing herself to face Lord Voldemort. As Boll has noted, "in the last volume she



remains for a long time the only character who seems to be capable of grasping the complexity of the situation, possibly best illustrated by her meticulously packed handbag which holds objects for almost all the eventualities they might encounter while on the run” (Boll, 2012: 92). Even though both Harry and Ron know they must go after the Horcruxes to destroy Voldemort, only Hermione has been preparing for the task by doing research on these evil objects (*Deathly Hallows*, 76, 81). Hermione proves to be more aware of the situation they find themselves in than Harry and she focuses on the task of learning as much as possible about Horcruxes to succeed. Although Harry has faced Voldemort numerous times, Hermione embarks on the quest to defeat their enemy as ready as she can be and with all the knowledge she has been able to master, demonstrating “a level of agency that is equal to and often exceeds that of Harry or the other male characters in the series” (Thompson, 2012: e-book). Hermione’s agency and understanding of the situation is especially relevant when we learn that she has bewitched her parents to protect them, convincing them that they are Wendell and Monica Wilkins, new migrants in Australia:

‘Assuming I survive our hunt for the Horcruxes, I’ll find Mum and Dad and lift the enchantment. If I don’t—well, I think I’ve cast a good enough charm to keep them safe and happy. Wendell and Monica Wilkins don’t know that they’ve got a daughter, you see.’ Hermione’s eyes were swimming with tears again. (*Deathly Hallows*, 77)

This is one of Hermione’s greatest sacrifices as a hero: she accepts that she might die in their pursuit to find and destroy the Horcruxes. Accepting one’s death is a crucial point in any hero’s journey and Hermione’s courage and willingness to embark on a potentially mortal quest proves her bravery and her heroic status. In *Deathly Hallows* Hermione has already abandoned her status as mere helper or assistant to Harry: she actively participates in the destruction of the Horcruxes and maintains the focus on the task, preventing Harry



from deviating from his duty to locate them as well as the Deathly Hallows.⁵⁸ Regrettably, Hermione's destruction of one of the Horcruxes is not narrated in the book. Yet, in *Deathly Hallows* we see the culmination of Hermione's journey, which differs from the prototypical hero's journey proposed by Campbell. In *The Feminization of Quest-Romance* Dana A. Heller argues that the feminine quest consists of

Rebellion against an oppressive feminine standard that obstructs their journeys toward self-knowledge [which] occurs frequently in the form of internalized combat against an enemy that lives within the female psyche. The demands of patriarchal culture, which female protagonists internalize through "successful" socialization, inevitably must be won over if the female hero is to succeed in her quest. Fighting patriarchal standards, female protagonists may thus engage in a kind of internalized self-combat. (1990: 12)

From *Philosopher's Stone* to *Deathly Hallows* Hermione undergoes her own Bildungsroman and she grows from being a know-it-all little witch to one of the most caring, brave and brilliant adult witches of the wizarding world. The books portray a time of transition from childhood to adulthood and for Hermione this transition is twofold: not only she is becoming a young woman, but she is also becoming a witch. Hermione's Bildungsroman, therefore, exemplifies how she manages to correct her flaws and become a mature young witch who knows her worth and fights for her principles as well as her intention of learning as much as she can from the wizarding world to become an accomplished witch. Besides, the fact that she transitioned from the Muggle world to the wizarding world and that in the latter she is considered a second-class citizen due to her 'Mudblood' status awakens and propels Hermione's strong sense of justice. By the end of *Deathly Hallows* Hermione has realized what type of witch she is and what place she wants to occupy within the wizarding world. She has also freed herself from the

⁵⁸ The original story of the Deathly Hallows was told by Beedle the Bard and passed from generation to generation. The Deathly Hallows are three powerful magical objects supposedly created by Death that would make their owner invincible and convert him or her to Master of Death. These objects are the elder wand, the resurrection stone and the cloak of invisibility.



oppression of being labelled a ‘Mudblood’ and she intends to continue fighting for justice not only for Muggle-borns but for all magical species.

2.3 A Misplaced Ravenclaw: Hermione’s Thirst for Knowledge

2.3.1 Learning to Be a Witch: Hogwarts’ Education System

Hogwarts’ School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was supposedly established around the 10th century in the Scottish Highlands. Hogwarts’ school system is of interest in connection to Hermione’s role, as it is thanks to her knowledge and her academic abilities that the story reaches its conclusion. Besides, examining Hermione’s education is essential when considering how she learns to become a witch and use her abilities to her maximum potential. Additionally,

The schools in school stories often represent microcosms of the larger world. In this isolated environment children act in different ways than they would if they were living under the constraints of their parents’ rules and regulations, and they also construct their own social order and culture. Certainly, this is true for the world at Hogwarts, particularly in terms of its society. (Alton, 2009: 212)

Therefore, Hermione not only learns how to be a witch in Hogwarts but also what kind of witch she can be in the wizarding world.

Trainee witches and wizards are accepted at Hogwarts when they turn 11 years old and normally attend the school until the age of majority in the wizarding world, which is 17. There is apparently no higher education, as there is in the Discworld with Unseen University. The primary education that witches and wizards receive previous to joining Hogwarts is not described, yet Rowling claimed in an interview that “they can either go to a Muggle primary school or they are educated at home” (in Mugglenet 2004, online), depending on their background. Hermione must have attended either a public or private primary school before she discovered she was a witch.



Upon arriving at Hogwarts, students are divided into four houses, named after the four Hogwarts founders: Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. This division “is significant, as it affects students’ experiences in and out of classrooms, and it affects the social order and learning at the school” (Birch, 2009: 114). In Hermione’s case, it is consequential that she was placed in Gryffindor, home of the brave, and not Ravenclaw, home of the scholarly inclined, a point I discuss in the next segment. This section focuses on what kind of education Hogwarts offers and how it helps Hermione develop as a witch.

Throughout the whole series, several compulsory Hogwarts subjects are mentioned: Transfiguration, Charms, Potions, History of Magic, Defence Against the Dark Arts, Astronomy and Herbology. Additionally, students many choose in the third year between “Arithmancy, Muggle Studies, Divination, Study of Ancient Runes and Care of Magical Creatures” (Rowling, 2015, online). Students must take two official exams: O.W.L (Ordinary Wizarding Level) at the end of their fifth year and N.E.W.T (Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Test) at the end of their seventh year. The tests “mark time and accomplishment” and “The curriculum is the preparation for the test” (Birch, 2009: 115). The results obtained help students to determine what kind of career they will pursue in the wizarding world.

Hogwarts is a co-educational school with, seemingly no gender, class or race differentiation (there is no mention of fees, by the way). However, Hogwarts’ curriculum has been criticized as traditional and conservative (Eccleshare, 2002: 89). Galway comments that “the inherently gendered and elitist traditions of (school stories) are perpetuated”; although “on its surface” the series “appears to champion equality and diversity” the novels “propagate elitist notions of class, gender, and masculine heroism that are integral to the school story tradition” (2012: 67). The traditional environment in



which Hermione is trained and educated as a witch affects the perception others have of her and how she manages to overcome prejudices about her Muggle-born origins.

While in the wizarding world both wizards and witches have access to the same type of education, in Pratchett's novels, as noted, the magic wizards and witches use is differentiated by gender and so is their education, as I have argued in Chapter 1. Similarly, in Chupeco's trilogy those capable of wielding magic are educated in different skills according to their gender. In Armstrong's series learning magic is not institutionalized so the knowledge is transmitted through grimoires and by other witches, though there is also a difference between witch and sorcerer's magic. Besides, the use of magic is also different in the diverse texts. In the wizarding world there is an endless supply of magic; its application does not affect the user physically, mentally, or morally. Even though there is dark magic in the wizarding world, its use does not transform witches and wizards into immoral persons; it is assumed that they were already unscrupulous. In the Discworld, magic is subjected to specific rules because "relying too much on magic can scour away one's ethical sense" (Croft, 2009: 130). Similarly, in the *Bone Witch* trilogy, "drawing from the Dark" can also cause corruption and 'darkrot', which can turn a witch into a malicious and untrustworthy person. In Armstrong's *Women of the Otherworld* the use magic is also restricted (its users need to 'recharge' before they can use it again) but it is not tied to being morally corrupted. However, at Hogwarts "There seems to be no difference in which subjects boys and girls are expected to excel, no difference in teaching methods, no difference in expectations of students' academic or athletic achievement" (Croft, 2009: 137) and no restrictions to how much magic one can use.

However, as I have noted, only a selected group of children are accepted at Hogwarts, which evidently excludes Muggles but also squibs. Galway contends that this is why the series conforms to the elitism present in school stories: "Taken as a whole, the



series suggests that Rowling is writing firmly within the school story tradition, rather than resisting or critiquing it. (...) While most children will not have such educational experiences, there is something alluring about the privileged world represented in these texts” (2012: 77). Arguably, Hermione is privileged because she has a right to attend Hogwarts which Muggles and other species in the wizarding world, such as goblins, do not have, yet she is bullied there. The strategy she follows to deflect that bullying, determined by her Muggle origins, is achieving academic excellence. As Kniesler argues, “She has identified that studying and academic success is the path to this goal, presumably due to a history of scholastic achievements in her early education” (2012: e-book). The better Hermione performs academically the harder it is for others to judge her aptitude of being a witch and the more she learns the better witch she becomes.

Hermione excels at all subjects offered at Hogwarts except Divination, which she quits at the end of her third year. Hermione’s disdain for this course is rooted in her lack of a natural ability to see into the future. Hermione’s scepticism for subjects such as Divination reveals her pragmatic approach. In that sense, Gutiérrez contends that

the more Hogwarts teaches students about magic—which to us is supernatural and unreal—the more it’s actually providing a grounding in the real: the skill sets, pragmatic routines and formulae needed to succeed. For this reason, Hogwarts is actually a vocational/technical school masquerading as a grand, old-style British public school. (2009: 30)

Similarly, Scholz argues that Hogwarts trains students “to use spells safely and effectively in order to function in the world” (2018: 126) as competent witches and wizards. However, the way students are educated at Hogwarts has been criticized for not allowing students to think critically, in the absence of higher education:

At Hogwarts, Harry and his friends are taught how to perform spells and brew potions. They are not taught to love reading or ideas, to think scientifically, to appreciate art and literature, or to reflect in an informed and disciplined way about the problems of society and the human condition. (Bassham, 2010: e-book)



Scholz also comments that “there is no expectation for critically thinking about the causes of the individual links” (2018: 141) in the magical lore they learn. However, others argue that “One of the main skills children learn at Hogwarts is critical thinking as they constantly examine their apparent environment for underlying problems” (Black and Eisenwine, 2001: 32).

Hermione does think critically and questions the education she receives, especially in the fifth novel in the series, *Order of the Phoenix*. As I have mentioned, the Defence Against the Dark Arts subject is taught by Professor Dolores Umbridge, who has been appointed by the Ministry of Magic. Umbridge’s method of teaching is completely theoretical as she refuses to let students practice what they learn in class. After the introductory speech Umbridge gives at the first dinner at Hogwarts, Hermione realizes that the Ministry is interfering at Hogwarts (*Order of the Phoenix*, 198) and her suspicions are confirmed once she realizes what type of teaching Umbridge will use in class. Hermione questions Umbridge’s method and the course aims the first day of class, demanding she teaches defensive spells:

(...) ‘Surely the whole point of Defence Against the Dark Arts is to practice defensive spells?’

‘Are you a Ministry-trained educational expert, Miss Granger?’ asked Professor Umbridge in her falsely sweet voice.

‘No, but—’

‘Well then, I’m afraid you are not qualified to decide what the “whole point” of any class is. Wizards much older and cleverer than you have devised our new program of study. You will be learning about defensive spells in a secure, risk-free way—’

(*Order of the Phoenix*, 224-225)

The dialogue provides context and evidence of Hermione’s awareness of her educational needs. Umbridge’s disqualification encourages Hermione to persuade Harry to establish Dumbledore’s Army, a secret organization through which Harry teaches students proper Defence Against the Dark Arts. Hermione demonstrates again that she is proactive when it comes to her education and, therefore, that she is not afraid of breaking rules and going



against the system, actually becoming “despite her inherent respect for authority, (...) one of the most rebellious students in the school when the freedom of knowledge is challenged” (Flaherty, 2004: 96).

One of the key themes in *Order of the Phoenix* is thus how to resist a useless education. This novel

stands out as a critique of both institutional constraints that schools face today, such as increased accountability, standardization, and high-stake testing, as well as a critique of common curriculum practices. When the Ministry of Magic interferes with the Hogwarts curriculum, the instruction becomes even more divorced from student needs and desires, positioning the lives of students against the curriculum, and the practical against theoretical. (Birch, 2009: 115)

If Hogwarts is a vocational/ technical school, as Gutiérrez argues (2009), the fact that one of the most important subjects is taught theoretically without real practice is untenable. However, Birch also contends that “as evil forces that disrupt and stand to ruin the school and endanger the students” Hogwarts itself “does not provide a substantial alternative vision of how school can be”; in fact “real learning occurs outside the classroom and with little influence from a teacher’s instructional style and ability or their knowledge” (Birch, 2009: 116). Although it is true that key learning and skills development occur outside the classroom (such as Hermione learning how to brew a Polyjuice Potion on her own), the teachers’ input should not be underestimated, though Birch asserts that they have an effect “privately and outside of the class and formal curriculum” (2009: 117). Nonetheless, the knowledge received in class is also helpful. For instance, if Hermione had not been taught how to translate runes in her Study of Ancient Runes class, the trio would not have become aware of the Deathly Hallows and the fact that Lord Voldemort was after the all-powerful Elder Wand.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The Elder wand was said to be the most powerful wand in existence, allowing its user to perform magic that would normally be impossible with other wands.



In short, the education Hermione receives both in and out of the classroom is essential for both her development as a witch and for her quest to defeat Lord Voldemort. Besides, the fact that she challenges the education she receives when she feels it is not adequate or valuable demonstrates that she is invested and involved in her education. Hermione's academic excellence leads her to become the most accomplished witch she can be without losing sight of what is really important. The fact that she abandons her education after her sixth year to accompany Harry and hunt the Horcruxes together to destroy Voldemort shows that Hermione understands that there are more significant and pressing issues that need to be solved before she can finalize her education: "Her moral reasoning tells her that her own advancement must come after ensuring the survival of her world" (Foster, 2012: e-book). The next section, thus, discusses how the knowledge Hermione obtains at Hogwarts contributes to the defeat of Lord Voldemort.

2.3.2 'Books! And cleverness! There are more important things': How Hermione's Knowledge Saves the Wizarding World

Hermione's intelligence and her inclination and appreciation of learning have led many *Harry Potter* fans and scholars to question the Sorting Hat's decision to place her in Gryffindor instead of Ravenclaw. The founder of this house, Rowena Ravenclaw, valued students for their intelligence, learning, wisdom, and wit and these are characteristics that Hermione possesses. However, many have pointed out that even though Hermione is intelligent, and that she definitely has a talent for studying, she lacks the open-mindedness of thought that Ravenclaw requires (exemplified by Luna Lovegood), which seems unfair. Perhaps it is the other way round and Ravenclaw students lack what Gryffindor possess: courage. This section aims to demonstrate how although "her intelligence and book-learning play a critical role in setting the magical world to



rights” (Foster, 2012: e-book), her courage to embark on a dangerous journey without the reassurance that they would overcome their enemy should not be underestimated.

Foster compares Hermione to Percy Weasley⁶⁰ and Lord Voldemort, both also great academic achievers. As she argues, there is a clear difference between them:

Percy, former Prefect, former Head Boy, and outstanding student with excellent exam results, uses his achievements to serve a corrupt system, blinded by his ambition. Tom Riddle, former Prefect, former Head Boy, and brilliant student with top exam results, uses his achievements to serve his own ends, dehumanized by his ambition. Hermione, current Prefect, most likely candidate for Head Girl, and brilliant student with top exam results, uses her achievements to serve her friends, (...) true to her ethic of care. (Foster, 2012: e-book)

Even though Hermione’s interest in learning everything and becoming the most accomplished witch initially arises from her need to demonstrate to the wizarding world that she is the best witch of her generation, her perspective changes once she faces Lord Voldemort for the first time in *Philosopher’s Stone* and after being in mortal risk during *Chamber of Secrets*. When Hermione tells Harry, just before he is about to face Lord Voldemort to recover the Philosopher’s Stone, that there are more important things than books and cleverness, she has realized that without bravery and teamwork the task of defeating the Dark Lord would be unfeasible. Although Hermione’s strongest ability is the capacity to learn, her sense of justice, loyalty, and courage have rightly placed her in Gryffindor. Quoting Kniesler, “If the Hat could not readily see the ‘daring, nerve, and chivalry’ in Hermione at age eleven, her desire to achieve these qualities outweighed her propensity for ‘wit and learning’ (2012: e-book). Although it is not specified in the book, it is nonetheless implied that when students sit beneath the Sorting Hat they have some input into deciding what house they would like to be assigned to (*Deathly Hallows*, 619). In *Order of the Phoenix* Hermione states that the Sorting Hat “did seriously consider

⁶⁰ Percy Weasley is one of Ron’s older brothers. Percy is characterized in the books as being academically focused and a strict follower of rules. Percy was also Prefect and Head Boy and after he finished his education at Hogwarts he started working in the Department of International Cooperation in the Ministry of Magic and later on became Junior Assistant to the Minister for Magic.



putting me in Ravenclaw (...) but it decided on Gryffindor in the end” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 369). Hermione does not confirm whether she asked to be placed in Gryffindor, but in *Philosopher’s Stone* she had expressed the hope that she would be placed there because “it sounds by far the best, I hear Dumbledore himself was one, but I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn’t be too bad...” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 113, original ellipsis). Given the Hat’s hesitation it is not unlikely that she indicated her preference for Gryffindor and thus chose “to be placed in a situation that will test her character” (Kniesler, 2012: e-book).

Foster comments that “Hermione’s thirst for knowledge and penchant for thorough research” are fundamental in Voldemort’s defeat (2012: e-book). In *Chamber of Secrets* (306) for example, Hermione discovers what is inside the chamber and how to face it; in both *Goblet of Fire* and *Half-Blood Prince* she demonstrates excellent detective skills when she discovers that Rita Skeeter is an animagus⁶¹ and that the surname Prince belonged to Severus Snape’s mother, quite an important clue in the quest. Finally, Hermione’s knowledge and abilities are proven in the last novel of the series, *Deathly Hallows*. In this novel readers can clearly appreciate that without Hermione, Harry would not have defeated Lord Voldemort on his own.

After Dumbledore’s death in *Half-Blood Prince*, Harry decides not to return to Hogwarts the next academic year but instead seek and destroy the Horcruxes that contain the fragments of Voldemort’s soul. When Hermione and Ron offer to accompany him and he rejects their help, she replies “quietly”: ““You said to us once before (...) that there was time to turn back if we wanted to. We’ve had time, haven’t we?”” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 542). Not only is Hermione acknowledging that both she and Ron had promised Harry to

⁶¹ An animagus is a wizard or a witch who can transform themselves into an animal and back again at their own will. Rita Skeeter transformed herself into a beetle and that is how she could overhear and spy different conversations and then write and publish articles with confidential information.



accompany him in his quest to defeat Voldemort; she is also stressing that after everything they have been through since *Philosopher's Stone*, her choice is clear. By choosing to continue the fight against Lord Voldemort and not return to Hogwarts to finish her studies, Hermione is both honouring the promise made to Harry and acknowledging that saving the wizarding world is a priority, as well as demonstrating true Gryffindor bravery: “she acknowledges that the practical application of her studies, saving the world from Voldemort’s return, takes precedence over her personal desire for knowledge” (Foster, 2012: e-book).

Even though Dumbledore had explained to Harry what the Horcruxes are, they could only be destroyed in *Deathly Hallows* because Hermione had the foresight to procure Dumbledore’s books on the subject and learn about them. The books were hidden in the Headmaster’s office but she used a Summoning Charm to get hold of them, right after his funeral. Without her action, the trio would have been unable to destroy the Horcruxes. Hermione had also prepared for their journey, packing in a magic handbag everything that might be useful to them (*Deathly Hallows*, 130). Hermione’s protective spells (*Deathly Hallows*, 221) are also extremely useful or her jinxing Harry’s face so that Death Eaters do not recognize him when they are captured by their bounty-hunting Snatchers. She also realizes the negative effects of the Horcruxes on those who hold them (*Deathly Hallows*, 233) and keeps the trio focused on the task of finding and destroying the Horcruxes. Without her determination, all their efforts “would have been for nothing” (Waters, 2012: e-book).

Hermione’s intelligence and wit play a critical role in the denouement of the story and, according to Friedman, this is a characteristic of the literate female heroes of young adult fantasy fiction since the 1980s: “the young adult fantasy heroines who manage to help, ‘save the day’ are those girls who read, write, interpret and practice other forms of



literacy in a dialogic manner, not only with the texts but with other people and the world around them” (Friedman, 2006: 13). Hermione ‘saves the day’ not because she has accumulated much knowledge, but because she can interpret and apply it when it is necessary: “It is not merely Hermione’s ability to translate runes or relate disparate bits of information that defeats Voldemort: it is her ability to collect, organize, and access information, as well as her ability to recognize what constitutes a legitimate answer to a question” (Freier, 2014: 8). Hermione shows enormous mental strength when she is capable of focusing on the last task they need to complete to eliminate Voldemort. Indeed, “The inclusion of an intellectually capable and compassionate active female hero in the team shows the value of mental and emotional strength over the physical strength of a hero” (Garcia, 2010: 240). When Fred Weasley (one of Ron’s older twin brothers) is killed by a Death Eater, both Ron and Harry are filled with anger and hatred yet although Hermione is also affected, she stays focused. Restraining the extremely angry Ron, she convinces her companions to go after Voldemort’s dangerous snake, the final Horcrux: “‘We *will* fight! (...) We’ll have to, to reach the snake! But let’s not lose sight, now, of what we’re supposed to be d—doing! We’re the only ones who can end it!’” (*Deathly Hallows*, 523, original emphasis). Without Hermione’s composure and self-possession, Harry and Ron might have abandoned the search for the last Horcrux and joined the battle without hesitation. Hermione, however, is aware that without destroying the snake the efforts made to battle their enemies are futile since Lord Voldemort still lives. As Garcia points out, “While the classic hero Harry may use his heart and his courage to fight Voldemort (...) Hermione demonstrates a strength and leadership that is based on cleverness” (2010: 228).

For this reason, I reject Birch’s argument that “A strong theme in the series is that book learning is very much less important than who one knows, how brave one is, how



strong one is, and what one's moral directives are" (2009: 117). Even though Birch is right to argue that bravery and one's ethics play a very important role in the quest to defeat Lord Voldemort, without Hermione's capacity for book learning and applying the knowledge obtained it would have been impossible to know how to destroy the Horcruxes. It is also important to acknowledge that Hermione had the same knowledge as Lord Voldemort on how to create Horcruxes yet she never considers using it for her own advantage. At the end of *Deathly Hallows*, Hermione's knowledge of magic is as proficient as other great witches and wizards yet she uses that knowledge to the betterment of society. Having outlined how Hermione's thirst for knowledge plays an essential role in the defeat of Lord Voldemort, I shall now turn to examine other struggles involving Hermione: her battle against the oppression of other magical species, especially elves, and how gender issues are represented and handled in the series.

2.4 Hermione's Fight for Equality: Species and Gender Issues in *Harry Potter*

2.4.1 'I'm hoping to do some good in the world!': Hermione's Struggle Against Social Injustice

Apart from fighting for her own survival as a Muggle-born, Hermione actively engages in the defence of the rights of other magical creatures, especially house-elves. The wizarding world is not only inhabited by witches and wizards; there are plenty of beings who possess magical abilities but who are still regarded as inferior creatures. After discovering that house-elves are treated as slaves by the wizarding community in *Goblet of Fire*, Hermione embarks on a quest of her own to bring social justice to the magical beings that do not have the same rights as human magical people.

The animosity that pureblood wizards and witches profess towards Muggles and Muggle-borns has been defined as racism. However, racism is discrimination and



prejudice against someone's race or ethnicity, and in the *Harry Potter* series there are witches and wizards of different ethnical backgrounds who are pure-blood and thus face no discrimination, such as Kingsley Shacklebolt. Therefore, the term ableism might be more accurate when describing the discrimination that Muggle-borns face in the wizarding world. As ableism is discrimination and social prejudice against someone with a disability, both Muggles and Muggle-borns might be considered disabled by elitist pure-bloods on the grounds that the absence of magical ability constitutes an impairment. As I briefly explained in section 2.1 of this chapter, apparently the ability to use magic is genetic and, so, no outward difference between pure blood magical people and Muggle-born wizards and witches is noticeable. According to Rowling, although there had previously been magical people who were not accepting of Muggle-borns, such as Salazar Slytherin, the animosity towards Muggle-born magical people gained importance after the International Statute of Secrecy became effective in 1692, the date of the Salem trials:

This was a traumatic time for witches and wizards, and marriages with Muggles dropped to their lowest level ever known, mainly because of fears that intermarriage would lead inevitably to discovery, and, consequently, to a serious infraction of wizarding law. Under such conditions of uncertainty, fear and resentment, the pure-blood doctrine began to gain followers. As a general rule, those who adopted it were also those who had most strenuously opposed the International Statute of Secrecy, advocating instead outright war on the Muggles. (Rowling, 2015: online)

If we assume that magical people just carry a genetic mutation occurred long ago, this means that magical people are not a different species (Ramagopalan et al., 2007: 335). There is no scientific basis for the pure-blood claims that witches and wizards are superior to Muggles and Muggle-born magical people. Hence, the animosity some magical people feel towards Muggle-born witches and wizards stems from fear of losing their power in society, as Oakes explains: "They hate them because they believe that these nonwizards and 'tainted' wizards threaten the control of magic from outside the wizarding world" (2009: 144). The Death Eaters (Voldemort's inner circle) and other supporters of blood purity, like Umbridge, believe that their ability to use magic makes them superior to



others. The fact that Muggle-borns can use magic threatens their privileged position in society as rulers and leaders of the wizarding world.

I believe that the hate towards other magical beings requires another label: speciesism. The term speciesism was introduced by Richard Ryder, an English writer, psychologist and animals' rights activist who was a member of the Oxford Group, an organization that spoke out against animals' abuse, in the 1970s. Generalizing, it is used to define the belief that only one species (human beings) is morally superior to the rest. What differentiates one species from another is the in/ability to procreate. In that sense, giants, werewolves and veelas (veelas are human-like creatures who appear as young, beautiful women who cause people to behave foolishly because of their power of attraction) should be considered (half)human, as there is evidence in the series that they can mate with witches and wizards and produce offspring. Rubeus Hagrid, for example, is the son of a giantess and a wizard (*Goblet of Fire*, 383-384). Nevertheless, although giants, werewolves and veelas present human characteristics and can successfully mate with plain humans, they still suffer from prejudice. There is no evidence that centaurs, goblins or house-elves have mated with witches and wizards.

Undoubtedly, the wizarding community is guilty of speciesism in their treatment of other magical creatures and Hermione realizes that a fair community is only possible if all those capable of using magic have access to the same rights and resources. This section of my dissertation, therefore, focuses on Hermione's struggle to have her voice heard on matters of social justice and how her Muggle background aids her to have an external point of view of the flaws of the wizarding community as she suffers from prejudice herself. The fact that Hermione is a witch integrated in the wizarding community gives her a voice that other creatures, such as elves, do not have.



The bias of the wizarding society towards non-human magical beings is implied through the existence of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. This department was established in 1750 yet efforts to regularize other magical beings date back to earlier times: “Burdock Muldoon, Chief of the Wizards’ Council in the fourteenth century, decreed that any member of the magical community that walked on two legs would henceforth be granted the status of ‘being’, all others to remain ‘beasts’” (Rowling, 2001: x). However, as it is explained in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001), the impossibility to reach an agreement on what constituted a magical being led to the creation of three divisions within the Department: “the Beast Division, the Being Division and the Spirit Division” (Rowling, 2001: xi). Understandably, there were magical creatures who did not agree with the measures taken by the Ministry to classify them and they “declared that they would manage their own affairs separately from wizards” (Rowling: xiii).

The prejudice against non-human magical beings integrated in the wizarding society can further be appreciated through the image of the Fountain of Magical Brethren in the Ministry:

Halfway down the hall was a fountain. A group of golden statues, larger than life-size, stood in the middle of a circular pool. Tallest of them all was a noble-looking wizard with his wand pointing straight up in the air. Grouped around him were a beautiful witch, a centaur, a goblin, and a house-elf. The last three were all looking adoringly up at the witch and wizard. (*Order of the Phoenix*, 116)

Even though this fountain is supposed to represent the harmony between all magical beings and creatures in the wizarding world, as its name suggests, the fact that it depicts a centaur, a goblin and a house-elf “looking adoringly up at the witch and wizard” reinforces the idea that magical humans are superior to other magical beings. Besides, the tallest of the statues is that of a noble-looking wizard, thus indicating patriarchal values embedded in the wizarding society as well.



To understand the elves' position in the wizarding world and why Hermione decides to fight for their rights we need to look at how other beings are treated and regarded by the wizarding community. As I have mentioned, there are some beings in the wizarding world that prefer to manage their own affairs separately from witches and wizards. Such is the case of the centaurs, whose liaison office in the beast division of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures has never been used (*Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, xiii). Centaurs do not participate actively in wizarding affairs and do not answer to the Ministry, as they tell Harry and Hermione:

'We are a race apart and proud to be so... We will not permit you to walk from here, boasting that we did your bidding! (...) We are an ancient people who will not stand wizard invasions and insults! We do not recognize your laws, we do not acknowledge your superiority,—'

(*Order of the Phoenix*, 696, original ellipsis)

By choosing to be labelled as “beasts” centaurs avoid any direct contact with the wizarding world since, as Trosclair comments, “they knew that by doing this, they would be in complete control of their lifestyles” (2018: 45). However, although the Ministry of Magic does not interfere with centaurs' concerns, they still regulate some aspects of their lives, such as where they may live: “This is a similar ideological process that the Victorians established with Kipling's ‘White Man's Burden’ except through the lens of *Harry Potter*, it is the Wizard's Burden to be responsible for the magical creatures and keep them under control” (Trosclair, 2018: 46). There are still witches and wizards who view centaurs as inferior creatures that benefit from the ‘benevolence’ of the Ministry of Magic. Dolores Umbridge, for example, makes a terrible mistake by calling them “half-breeds” and telling them that their habitat belongs to the Ministry: ““Your forest? (...) I would remind you that you live here only because the Ministry of Magic permits you certain areas of land—”” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 694). Umbridge's arrogance and insolence mirrors the conviction of many supremacist witches and wizards that they are above others in the magical world.



Goblins, on the other hand, are an active part of the wizarding society and a great example to contrast how different species are treated within the wizarding community. Goblins manage the wizarding bank, Gringotts, and they also have a Goblin liaison office, which they use (*Goblet of Fire*, 73) thus demonstrating that they participate in wizarding affairs. According to Horne, Goblins “clearly have more power than any of the other nonhuman species depicted in Rowling’s novels” (2010: 87). Still, readers learn throughout the books that the relationship between wizards and witches and goblins has not always been amiable. There are examples in the novels which refer to many goblin revolts and rebellions (*Goblet of Fire*, 197; *Order of the Phoenix*, 669), usually related to the right to carry a wand. In the wizarding world, only witches and wizards are allowed to use wands, and this is a right denied to other magical beings. Indeed, there is a law which states that “No non-human creature is permitted to carry or use a wand” (*Goblet of Fire*, 113). The fact that wands have been denied to other magical beings poses a problem especially when Lord Voldemort returns to power. In *Order of the Phoenix* some members of the order are discussing whether goblins will join the Dark Lord and Lupin comments the following: “I think it depends what they’re offered (...) And I’m not talking about gold. If they’re offered freedoms we’ve been denying them for centuries they’re going to be tempted” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 79). Lupin recognizes in this passage that the wizarding community has denied this right to goblins for centuries and later on, in *Deathly Hallows*, the issue is introduced again when Ron and the Goblin Griphook quarrel:

‘It doesn’t matter,’ said Harry, noting Griphook’s rising colour. ‘This isn’t about wizards versus goblins or any other sort of magical creature –’
Griphook gave a nasty laugh.

‘But it is, it is precisely that! As the Dark Lord becomes ever more powerful, your race is set still more firmly above mine! Gringotts falls under Wizarding rule, house-elves are slaughtered, and who amongst the wand-carriers protests?’
(*Deathly Hallows*, 397)

This passage illustrates how some witches and wizards (in this case, Harry and Ron) fail to understand that some beings part of the wizarding community are still denied their



rights. Besides, as Horne contends “the oppression goblins experience at the hands of the wizards is not just personal, stemming from the actions of a few bad wizards, but institutional” (2010: 92). That goblins are denied the right to carry a wand shows that they are not seen as equals within the wizarding world and this is what Griphook is arguing. Hermione, who feels she is in the same position as Griphook, defends the goblin. Nevertheless, although goblins are clearly denied rights that witches and wizards enjoy, they have demonstrated to be capable of fighting on their own, unlike the elves, as Hermione states:

‘Worrying about poor ’ickle goblins, now, are you?’ Ron asked Hermione. ‘Thinking of starting up S.P.U.G. or something? Society for the Protection of Ugly Goblins?’

‘Ha, ha, ha,’ said Hermione sarcastically. ‘Goblins don’t need protection. Haven’t you been listening to what Professor Binns has been telling us about goblin rebellions?’

‘No,’ said Harry and Ron together.

‘Well, they’re quite capable of dealing with wizards (...) ‘They’re very clever. They’re not like house-elves, who never stick up for themselves.’

(Goblet of Fire, 379)

Hermione’s choice to fight for the rights of house-elves rather than other creatures such as centaurs or goblins stems from her perception that the most undervalued and abused magical beings within the wizarding world are, in fact, the house-elves. Besides, Hermione believes that house-elves do not have the courage to fight for themselves and therefore they need someone to stand up for them.

Withing the wizarding community, house-elves are classified as beings; the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures includes an Office of House-Elf Relocation. As its name suggests, however, this office is dedicated to relocating house-elves rather than offering elves representation within the wizarding government. House-elves belong to a particular family and are inherited, like slaves. However, if the last member of the family dies without designating an heir for their house-elves, they are “relocated”. House-elves can perform magic yet, like the goblins, they are



also denied the right to carry a wand. However, unlike the goblins who have rebelled against witches and wizards, house-elves serve magical people willingly, apparently accepting their role as enslaved creatures.

Hermione's fight against the enslavement of house-elves has been often explored, and while there are critics who commend Rowling's efforts to portray Hermione as an activist others argue that Rowling's handling of the topic is flawed. Those critics who praise Rowling for including the topic of racism in a narrative for young adults argue that the text offers its readers the opportunity to question and condemn the racism present in the wizarding world but also in their own society (Carey, 2003; Thompson, 2012); others contend that "Rowling's world of fantasy is one of hierarchy and prejudice" (Mendlesohn, 2002: 177). According to Horne a third group "argue that the texts' attitudes toward race are contradictory, simultaneously embracing both radical critique and conservative traditionalism (Ostry, Anatol)" (2010: 77). Horne also identifies two approaches that Rowling takes in the *Harry Potter* texts to tackle the question of racism:

While a multicultural approach to antiracism work focuses on individuals learning about others and about their own biases, social justice pedagogies focus on teaching students to examine the social, political, and economic structures in which they live (...) In other words, social justice antiracism assumes that racism lies not only in individuals, but also in the institutions that grant privileges and power to certain racial groups in a society, and restrict other racial groups from the same. (2010: 79)

Horne concludes that even though both approaches are present in Rowling's series, the multicultural approach, based on individual antiracist acts, prevails. Nonetheless, a witch's fight against the oppression of other magical beings deserves to be commented as it mirrors her own struggle to become accepted within a society which often demeans her. Besides, as Carey comments, J.K. Rowling uses the "plight" of the enslaved house-elves "both as a commentary on the society and economy of the magical world she creates and as a way of demonstrating the opportunities for political activism available to young people in the real world" (2009: 103).



Hermione's awareness of the unfair treatment of house-elves begins in *Goblet of Fire* when she and her friends meet Winky, the house-elf of bureaucrat Barty Crouch,⁶² at the Quidditch World Cup (she is hiding after witnessing an episode of torture):

'You know, house-elves get a *very* raw deal!' said Hermione indignantly. 'It's slavery, that's what it is! That Mr. Crouch made her go up to the top of the stadium, and she was terrified, and he's got her bewitched so she can't even run when they start trampling tents! Why doesn't anyone do something about it?'

'Well, the elves are happy, aren't they?' Ron said. 'You heard old Winky back at the match... "House-elves is not supposed to have fun" ... that's what she likes, being bossed around...'

'It's people like you, Ron,' Hermione began hotly, 'who prop up rotten and unjust systems, just because they're too lazy to —'

(*Goblet of Fire*, 106, original ellipses)

Up until that moment, Hermione had never met a house-elf in person although she knew about Dobby, the house-elf that warns Harry about the opening of the Chamber of Secrets in *Chamber of Secrets*. Hermione's indignation at Ron's remark shows her awareness of how unfair systems are maintained not just by those who are in power but also by an oblivious and indifferent society. Quoting Carey, "Hermione sees the problem as a public one, requiring political engagement to reach public solutions" (2009: 105).

Once at Hogwarts, Hermione researches the history of the house-elves and she is horrified to discover that their enslavement, which goes back centuries (*Goblet of Fire*, 189), has been neglected by the history books (*Goblet of Fire*, 200). After realizing that house-elf labour keeps Hogwarts running, Hermione starts S.P.E.W (Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare)⁶³ and declares that "'Our short-term aims (...) are to secure house-elves fair wages and working conditions. Our long-term aims include changing the law about non-wand use, and trying to get an elf into the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, because they're shockingly underrepresented'"

⁶² Barty Crouch is introduced in *Goblet of Fire*. He is in charge of the Department of International Magical Co-operation and he used to be Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement during the First Wizarding War. Crouch was known for his ruthlessness and brutality against Death Eaters.

⁶³ The acronym S.P.E.W is ridiculous as it means "vomit". Hermione's use of this acronym invites mockery and skepticism for the cause behind it, and the books show how other students do not take her seriously.



(*Goblet of Fire*, 189). Hermione's choice to create this pressure group and fight for the elves' liberation on their behalf has been criticized as just "a satirical look at the numerous left-wing fringe movements more prominent in British than American culture and at the nineteenth-century tradition of well-to-do liberals speaking for the lower classes whom they have never met" (Westman, 2002: 325). However, Westman herself argues that "The subplot on house-elf rights coincides with the series' more explicit critique of residual prejudice against Muggles, Mudbloods, werewolves, and giants, offering further evidence for Rowling's investigation of how cultural beliefs are naturalized as truth" (2002: 325). Hermione's passionate defence of the house-elves mirrors, as noted, her own struggle to be considered an equal in the wizarding world. Rivka Kellner has even linked the house-elves oppression to that of women, arguing that the reason Hermione is so passionate about the cause is precisely her own oppression as a woman: "House elves, small emotional beings with high-pitched voices, are treated very much like women used to be treated, and in some places are treated to this day" (2010: 369).

As I have mentioned, Hermione's (crypto-feminist) fight for the rights of the house-elves is mostly concentrated in the fourth novel, *Goblet of Fire*. Although in the subsequent novels the issue is mentioned several times, *Goblet of Fire* is crucial in portraying Hermione's awakening to social and political matters. Quoting Carey, "Although she has much to learn about her task, and although her campaign is initially ridiculed by her friends, it in fact provides a clear model for political action with which young people in the real world can identify and emulate" (2009: 107). Hermione's fight for the suppression of the enslavement of house-elves is relentless although she is often mocked and ignored in her endeavour. In *The Politics of Harry Potter* (2012) Bethany Barrat explores Hermione's aims and her strategies to liberate the house-elves and she concludes that "Hermione faces the challenge that acceptance of house-elf slavery is



deeply engrained in wizarding (and elf) culture” (2012: 56). Other scholars have criticized Hermione’s decision to fight for the liberation of the house-elves arguing that she has no right to fight for the rights of other types of beings. “A movement for the advancement of an oppressed class”, James writes, “must be centered on and led by members of the oppressed class” yet as Waters comments, house-elves have been conditioned to think they are under wizarding rule and they do not question their status as slaves (2012, e-book). Hermione herself believes that house-elves have been brainwashed into accepting their subordination to witches and wizards (*Goblet of Fire*, 201) and therefore they need someone to open their eyes.

The crucial point of Hermione’s fight against the oppression of the house-elves is her depiction as someone capable of changing society for good, unlike Lord Voldemort: “Throughout the novels, Hermione continues to evolve as an organizer of a liberation front, and continues to shed light on the negative ramifications of enslavement” (Waters, 2012: e-book). Hermione’s position as a Muggle-born provides her the insight that other wizards and witches lack, and this is what makes her the perfect candidate to advocate for change; the adults see the ableism behind “Voldemort’s anti-Mudblood campaign” but have difficulties “to engage in a discussion that might point out the ways in which their own culture is supported by the oppression of other races, especially that of the elves” (Horne, 2010: 87).

Hermione’s fight against the enslavement of house-elves and her realization of the flaws within the wizarding community influences her decision to pursue a political career to change the status quo. Rowling commented that

“Hermione began her post-Hogwarts career at the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures where she was instrumental in greatly improving life for house-elves and their ilk. She then moved (...) to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement where she was a progressive voice who ensured the eradication of oppressive, pro-pureblood laws.” (in Bloosmbury Live Chat, 2007: online)



Hence, even though Hermione is ridiculed and mocked in her struggle to make her voice heard, she finally manages to secure a position within the Ministry of Magic which allows her to bring real change into the lives of other magical creatures. Although Hermione's campaign to liberate the house-elves is ridiculed and demeaned by criticism, it ultimately provides her with the knowledge that the wizarding society is flawed and it influenced her decision to finally pursue a political career despite having told Rufus Scrimgeour, Minister for Magic that she does not want a career in Magical Law: "I'm hoping to do some good in the world!" (*Deathly Hallows*, 98). Hermione's aim to do good is, however, fulfilled through politics. Hermione's capacity to see and understand the inequalities present in the wizarding world makes her a unique representation of the witch in young adult fiction as she not only fights for eradicating the oppression that others suffer, but she also fights for her right to be seen as an equal in a society which has demonstrated to be unfair and discriminating. However, Hermione's success is extradiegetic: the books do not portray Hermine's accomplishments in the betterment of the house-elves and it is through Rowling's comments that people know of her achievements.

Having discussed Hermione's acute sense of justice, I shall now move on to the next point, and last section within this chapter, where I consider Hermione's and Ron's romantic relationship from a feminist critical point of view.

2.4.2 A Problematic Affair: Hermione and Ron's Relationship

A common theme within YA fiction is the depiction of the protagonists' sexual awakening and their first romantic relationships, which are connected to their overall development. The *Harry Potter* series does not depict explicit sexual scenes which might be found in other young adult books. However, the series represent Harry's and other character's first romantic relationships since it is part of their growing up experience. In



Chapter 1 I analysed how Tiffany's romantic relationship with Preston might affect her intentions to continue working as a witch as she might have to make a choice between her career and her love life. In *Harry Potter* Hermione need not choose between her love life or her career but the romantic relationship she shares with Ron is not as healthy as Tiffany's with Preston. In fact, Hermione's relationship with Ron causes her to assume some unhealthy traits that are not normally associated with a hero.

Hermione meets her future husband, Ron Weasley, on their first ride on the Hogwarts' Express. While Ron is attempting to show Harry a spell to turn his rat Scabbers yellow, Hermione interrupts him:

'Oh, are you doing magic? Let's see it, then.'

She sat down. Ron looked taken aback.

'Er — all right.' (...)

'Are you sure that's a real spell?' said the girl. 'Well, it's not very good, is it?'

(Philosopher's Stone, 112)

Whereas Hermione is already presented as quite sure of herself, Ron is immediately embarrassed by the fact that his spell does not work. From the very beginning, Hermione and Ron's relationship is marked by an imbalance that will be difficult to solve: Hermione, a Muggle-born witch, shows great magical skill while Ron, a pure-blood wizard, is less accomplished. As noted in section 2.2.2 of this chapter, readers do not know much about Hermione's family and her upbringing, yet Ron's is explored within the books. Ron is the sixth son of Arthur and Molly Weasley, both pure-blood wizards, and he lives with his family near the village of Ottery St Catchpole in Devon, in a house called The Burrow. Albeit the Weasleys are one of the few remaining pure-blood families in the wizarding world, they are considered 'blood traitors' because of their association with non-pure-bloods. The Weasleys are also presented as being poor, something Ron is ashamed of (*Chamber of Secrets*, 65), yet the family is sustained thanks to a single salary: that of Arthur's job at the Ministry of Magic in the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office.



Ron is presented as having grown up in a loving and stable environment, yet his confidence is diminished by the fact that his older brothers achieved academic or sports excellence before him. Ron's lack of self-esteem sometimes damages his relationship with Hermione, which will be explored in this section.

Although the previous novels in the series hint towards a romantic connection between Ron and Hermione, it is especially in *Goblet of Fire*, *Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows* when their bond is fully explored as their coming-of-age moment reaches its climax. Before Hermione's 'transformation' for the Yule Ball in *Goblet of Fire*, Harry and Ron never see her as a sexual being. In *Goblet of Fire* both boys are surprised when they learn that Neville has asked Hermione to attend the Ball with him and initially laugh at the situation. However, after being reprimanded by Ginny, Ron tells Hermione clumsily "'Neville's right—you *are* a girl...'" (*Goblet of Fire*, 337 original italics and ellipsis). It seems that until that moment, Hermione had not been perceived as a girl, with all the connotations this label carries.

This passage is problematic since it shows that Ron only sees Hermione as a girl when it suits him, as he needs a dance partner. His asking Hermione to be his date for the Yule Ball for his own advantage shows a complete disregard of Hermione's feelings and suggests that Ron only appreciates Hermione's girlhood because it might benefit him. After Hermione's refusal to accompany either Harry or Ron because she already has a date, Ron becomes infuriated and accuses her of lying. Hermione retorts: "'Just because it's taken *you* three years to notice, Ron, doesn't mean no one *else* has spotted I'm a girl!'" (*Goblet of Fire*, 338, original italics). This is a crucial point in Hermione's and Ron's relationship since he had never considered Hermione a romantic interest for others. Ron becomes then interested in Hermione's love life and their already problematic friendship develops into a love-hate relationship which becomes toxic at some points.



Hermione's relationship with Viktor Krum, a popular Quidditch player and champion in the Triwizard Tournament, begins when he simply asks her out (*Goblet of Fire*, 356). Seeing Hermione with Krum, Ron becomes furious and accuses her of "fraternizing with the enemy" in the Triwizard Tournament; he even argues that Krum's interest in Hermione is "to get closer to Harry—get inside information on him—or get near enough to jinx him" (*Goblet of Fire*, 356 original italics). Hermione is bewildered and offended and after the ball, they have a heated argument:

'Well, if you don't like it, you know what the solution is, don't you?' yelled Hermione; her hair was coming down out of its elegant bun now, and her face was screwed up in anger.

'Oh, yeah?' Ron yelled back. 'What's that?'

'Next time there's a ball, ask me before someone else does, and not as a last resort!' (*Goblet of Fire*. 365)

Harry, a witness to the scene, understands well why Ron is wrong, but Ron's inability to manage his jealousy complicates their relationship. While Hermione is a confident, mature teenager who does not allow others to take her for granted, Ron is still an immature fourteen-year-old who cannot manage his emotions. Ron and Hermione eventually reconcile and become friends again but in *Half-Blood Prince* jealousy surfaces again.

In *Half-Blood Prince* Hermione turns 17 three weeks after the beginning of the school year thus reaching the majority in the wizarding world. She must attend a party organized by the Potions Professor (Horace Slughorn) and Ron is jealous and resentful because he is not invited. However, Hermione tells him that she wanted to bring him as a guest and Ron becomes more polite towards her (236-237). Nevertheless, their relationship becomes complicated once again when Ron discovers in an intense argument with his sister Ginny, that Hermione and Krum kissed during their fourth year and Ron decides to ignore Hermione once again. Ron's reaction demonstrates that he continues to be very immature and unable to govern his feelings; rather than talk to Hermione about how he feels, he chooses to project his insecurities onto her. Not long after this incident



Hermione wrongly concludes that Harry has spiked Ron's drink with Felix Felicis⁶⁴ before a Quidditch match and scolds them for taking unfair advantage over the other team. After the match, however, Harry reveals that Ron is angry at Hermione for not believing in his abilities as a Quidditch player, so he starts ignoring her again. Soon, Hermione finds Ron kissing Lavender Brown, a fellow Gryffindor student, and what follows is perhaps one of Hermione's lowest points, an act which dismantles her perception as a self-composed and mature teenager. Heartbroken and upset, Hermione physically attacks Ron with a flock of birds she has conjured up. Hermione's furious outburst has gone mostly unnoticed, yet I believe it should be considered a key point in understanding her conflicted feelings towards Ron.

Up until that moment, Hermione had not acted incoherently or irrationally towards him but with her attack she becomes the image of the jilted woman. This scene is problematic for Hermione's characterization since it shows that although she is normally a serene, self-possessed person she is also susceptible to becoming unreasonable. Hermione's physical attack on Ron cannot be justified and it shows that she is also a flawed character. After this incident, her relationship with Ron is still damaged and unfortunately, during *Half-Blood Prince* Hermione displays a manipulative behaviour when she dates Cormac McLaggen, another Gryffindor student, just to make Ron jealous. While it might be argued that this behaviour stems from growing up in a patriarchal structure and that it is typical teenage behaviour, it does not excuse her actions. Hermione and Ron reconcile after he is accidentally poisoned with a beverage meant for Dumbledore, yet the readers do not see how this reconciliation happens. It can only be assumed that Hermione apologized to Ron for the attack and Ron admitted that his

⁶⁴ Felix Felicis is a concoction which will make the drinker luckier for a certain period of time and everything they attempted would be successful. It also turns an ordinary day into an extraordinary one. The use of Felix Felicis is forbidden in official competitions.



relationship with Lavender Brown was also to make Hermione jealous. After Hermione and Ron reconcile, Ron's relationship with Lavender weakens until Lavender ends it. It must be noticed that Ron is also immature towards Lavender since he does not dare tell her that he does not want to continue their relationship and he waits for her to break up with him by being cold and ignoring, or ghosting, her. Ron's treatment of his romantic interests is childish, and it shows that he has poor emotional intelligence and irresponsibility and an immaturity to outgrow.

Hermione and Ron's relationship continues to develop in *Deathly Hallows* and in the Epilogue, readers discover that they eventually marry and have two children, Hugo and Rose. However, there are many instances in *Deathly Hallows* which make the readers wonder if Ron and Hermione are suited for each other. In an interview with Emma Watson, who plays Hermione in the film adaptations of the series, Rowling commented that Ron and Hermione's affair "was a young relationship. I think the attraction itself is plausible but the combative side of it... I'm not sure you could have got over that in an adult relationship, there was too much fundamental incompatibility" (in Sims, 2014: online, original ellipsis). Hermione and Ron's incompatibility is portrayed in the series from the moment they meet yet throughout their friendship they seem to accept their differences and work towards maintaining a respectful relationship. At the beginning of *Deathly Hallows* we learn that Ron has read a book gifted by his brothers titled *Twelve Fail-Safe Ways to Charm Witches* which presumably "Explains everything you need to know about girls" (*Deathly Hallows*, 90). After the turmoil in his personal relationships the previous year, Ron seems to have acknowledged that he needs to improve his relationship skills and therefore it appears that he has taken the first steps to become a more mature and emotionally responsible man. However, when the trio are in search of the Horcruxes and they find the first one, Salazar Slytherin's Locket, Ron is more



negatively affected than Harry and Hermione by its presence. After weeks of not progressing with either the hunt for more Horcruxes or finding a manner to destroy the one they already have, Ron becomes infuriated to the point that he abandons Harry and Hermione. Ron's abandonment is a crucial point both for his and Hermione's relationship, as she decides to stay:

'I ...' She looked anguished. 'Yes—yes, I'm staying. Ron, we said we'd go with Harry, we said we'd help—'

'I get it. You choose him.'

'Ron, no—please—come back, come back!'

She was impeded by her own Shield Charm; by the time she had removed it he had already stormed into the night. Harry stood quite still and silent, listening to her sobbing and calling Ron's name amongst the trees. After a few minutes she returned, her sopping hair plastered to her face. (*Deathly Hallows*, 252, original ellipsis)

When Ron abandons them, he fails to understand that Hermione is not choosing Harry as a romantic partner. In fact, Hermione chooses to stay with Harry to continue their search of the Horcruxes and thus end Voldemort's reign of terror. At that moment, Hermione is mature enough to understand that she had promised Harry she would accompany him because she knows that on his own, Harry would not be able to complete the quest. Besides, Hermione is also on her own quest against Voldemort since abandoning the fight would mean accepting her fate as a Muggle-born witch and be either imprisoned or killed. In his feelings of anger, frustration and jealousy, Ron is incapable of seeing the far-reaching consequences that abandoning the fight against Voldemort has.

Ron's abandonment deeply affects Hermione: "sometimes at night when she thought he was sleeping, [Harry] would hear her crying" (*Deathly Hallows*, 254); understandably, when Ron returns, she is furious at him: "Ron gave a weak hopeful smile and half raised his arms. Hermione launched herself forward and started punching every inch of him that she could reach" (*Deathly Hallows*, 310). This is the second time that Hermione physically attacks Ron when she is furious with him and although her feelings of anger towards him are valid, the way she expresses these (punching him) is not right:



She punctuated every word with a blow: Ron backed away, shielding his head as Hermione advanced.

‘You—crawl—back—here—after—weeks—and—weeks—oh, *where’s* my wand?’

She looked as though ready to wrestle it out of Harry’s hands and he reacted instinctively. ‘Protego!’

The invisible shield erupted between Ron and Hermione. The force of it knocked her backward onto the floor. Spitting hair out of her mouth, she leapt up again.

‘Hermione!’ said Harry. ‘Calm—’

‘I will not calm down!’ she screamed. Never before had he seen her lose control like this; she looked quite demented.

(*Deathly Hallows*, 310, original emphasis)

Hermione’s fury, although understandable, is simply too violent. These two instances in which Hermione becomes physically violent towards Ron are often overlooked in her characterization yet they show that Hermione is also a flawed character who, although mature and composed most of the time, can also be immature and unreasonable. However, “It is important for Hermione to be flawed in some ways because she is the character many of the female—and some of the male—audience aspire to be, and it would be unhealthy and unrealistic for her to be perfect” (Hidalgo, 2012: e-book).

The climax in Ron and Hermione’s relationship occurs in the middle of the battle of Hogwarts. After Hermione’s destruction of one of the Horcruxes, Ron shows his concern because the house-elves are unprotected. Hermione is pleased by this comment and kisses Ron. He “responded with such enthusiasm that he lifted Hermione off her feet” (*Deathly Hallows*, 510). After years of being reprimanded for his elitism and speciesism, Ron finally shows empathy for those who are less favoured than him and proves that he has finally matured. Once Ron acknowledges that other magical beings need saving apart from wizards and witches, Hermione welcomes him as her partner. Ron’s understanding of Hermione’s ideals finally shows her that he cares about what is important to her and therefore, she can now imagine herself starting a relationship with him. Although Hermione and Ron’s bond has been tumultuous from the beginning, by the time they reach their late teens they have both matured and accepted each other’s flaws. Hermione



and Ron have also worked to correct their mistakes and thus, as the epilogue shows, they finally get married and have children.

In the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* readers/spectators get a glimpse of how Hermione and Ron's relationship has developed. Hermione is a successful Minister for Magic and Ron works at his brother George's joke shop. They are portrayed as still being in love and, what is more, in the different timelines portrayed in the play they are shown to be caring of each other even if they are not together. Therefore, even though Hermione and Ron's relationship is not that of a fairy tale, Hermione still gets a happy ending which in turn demonstrates that witches are rewarded if they are not the villains of the story.

2.5 Conclusions: The Cleverest Witch of Her Age

Despite not being the protagonist of the *Harry Potter* series, Hermione Granger is one of the most popular witches in young adult fantasy fiction. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Hermione's involvement in the plot moves it forward most of the time. Hermione has got agency and power, sometimes even more than the protagonist, and therefore she should hold the position of co-protagonist. Using Nikolajeva's concept of character building I have established that Hermione is not merely a secondary character but a hero on her own right.

Hermione, a Muggle-born outsider to the wizarding world, works to understand it so that she can become part of it. It can be assumed that her magical powers are innate and genetically inherited, as I have explored. However, Hermione's ability to perform magic increases as she learns and educates herself to become the best witch of her generation and thus prove wrong those who believe that Muggle-borns should not be part of the wizarding community.



I have argued that without Hermione's presence the plot would collapse, and I have demonstrated with textual evidence that this holds true: without Hermione's forethought to retrieve Dumbledore's books on the Horcruxes the trio would have never succeeded in destroying them. By participating in the fight against an oppressive regime, Hermione clearly earns her hero status. Hermione rebels against institutional power in *Order of the Phoenix* and she comes to understand that one of the ways in which she can fight against injustices is from within the system itself, which might explain the reason why she becomes Minister of Magic in the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*.

Although Hermione has always shown an inclination to follow rules and orders, she cannot ignore the fact that it is precisely the system which should help the weak and vulnerable what perpetuates their situation. Hermione's battle against injustice should be considered as a heroic act as her condition of Muggle-born threatens her existence. However, she does not only fight for justice for those who have a Muggle parentage: she embarks on a journey to fight for all the magical species that have been mistreated and abused by those wizards and witches who feel superior and disdain anyone who is unlike them. While Harry's fight is individual, as he is bound by a prophecy which established that either he or Voldemort needed to die for the other to survive, Hermione's fight is part of a collective: she fights for the betterment of society. Thus, Hermione's struggle to liberate the house-elves and Muggle-borns like her mirrors the struggle of witches to rid themselves of the negative connotations that have been commonly applied to them when forced to play the role of villain.

Although the books are narrated from Harry's perspective, readers also see how Hermione develops and matures and what her priorities are. Hermione's development reflects a healthy maturation process, as she demonstrates that worrying about her looks is not her priority. What Hermione is exemplifying is that one's worth is not based on



their physical beauty but on their intelligence, kindness, and energy. Although Hermione is desired (first by Krum and later by Ron) she never bases her self-worth on this aspect. Quite the opposite, Hermione bases her self-esteem on being accomplished and resourceful; the importance she attaches to getting an education proves to be fruitful and is one of the reasons they finally manage to defeat Lord Voldemort. Without Hermione's aim to learn and research, the trio would have not been able to understand how Voldemort tried to be immortal and, in turn, how to prevent him from surviving again. Besides, as I have noted, Hermione possesses the same knowledge as Voldemort on Horcruxes, yet she is never lured to the dark side. Although Harry and Ron make fun of Hermione's thirst for knowledge throughout the series, it is in fact this trait which allows them to overcome many obstacles.

The portrayal of a romantic relationship for Hermione is also an important aspect to consider as it shows how witches can fulfil their emotional needs with others. However, Hermione's relationship is not portrayed as a fairy-tale like romance and it is shown as problematic. Still, the depiction of Hermione being imperfect and learning from her mistakes is valuable as it teaches readers that a hero can also be flawed. Although Hermione and Ron's relationship might not be ideal, they are shown to know and understand each other and accept each other's flaws and weaknesses.

To conclude, the inclusion of a witch such as Hermione Granger in an enormously successful series like *Harry Potter* can only benefit the image of witches in young adult fantasy fiction. By offering an image of a hard-working, resourceful, and injustice-fighting witch, the *Harry Potter* series contributes to the erasure of the traditional qualities ascribed to witches. After *Harry Potter*'s success, the image that most of the public had of witches changed as she became an icon of popular culture. Thus, despite not being the first witch to be portrayed positively, Hermione undoubtedly popularized the image of



the witch while influencing their perception as compassionate and heroic characters. Indeed, Hermione's contribution to the wizarding world and young adult fantasy fiction should be celebrated.



CHAPTER 3. BLURRING THE CHARACTER: THE WITCH AS ANTI-HERO IN RIN CHUPECO'S *THE BONE WITCH* TRILOGY

perhaps we should carve a world one day where the strength lies in who you are, rather than in what they expect you to be.
Rin Chupeco, *The Bone Witch*

3.1 The Eight Kingdoms: Fantasy and World Building in *The Bone Witch* Trilogy

3.1.1 Rin Chupeco: Young Adult Writer

Rin Chupeco is a non-binary Chinese Filipino writer of young adult fiction based in Manila, Philippines. Chupeco is the author of several young adult novels: *The Girl from the Well* duology (2014-2015), *The Bone Witch* trilogy (2017-2019), *The Never Tilting World* duology (2019-2020) and the *A Hundred Names for Magic* duology (2020-2022). They have also published some short stories: “Ho-We” in *Lauriat: A Filipino-Chinese Speculative Fiction Anthology* (Lethe Press, 2012), “Sugar and Spite” in *Hungry Hearts: 13 Tales of Food and Love* (Simon Pulse, 2019), “The Murders in the Rue Apartelle, Boracay” in *His Hideous Heart* (Flatiron, 2019), and “Kapre: A Love Story” in *Black Cranes: Stories of Unquiet Women* (Omnium Gatherum, 2020). Before becoming a full-time writer, Chupeco worked as a technical writer and travel blogger, as well as a graphic designer. Chupeco’s debut was with *The Girl from the Well* in 2014, which received positive feedback from reviewers (Cruz, 2014). Very little is known about Chupeco’s personal life, except for the fact that they are married with two children.

Despite their popularity, Chupeco has been overlooked within academia and even though they have received positive reviews, the themes and topics in their books remain to be explored. This third chapter focuses on Tea Pahlavi, the protagonist of *The Bone*

Witch trilogy, comprised by *The Bone Witch* (2017), *The Heart Forger* (2018) and *The Shadowglass* (2019).

Tea is a complex character who differs from the other witches considered in my dissertation for diverse reasons. On the one hand, even though she is the central character of the story she is not necessarily considered a hero but rather an anti-hero, a notion I will explore in this chapter. However, that she might not be fully a hero does not mean she does not offer a positive representation of the witch in young adult fantasy fiction. Secondly, Tea is not Caucasian like the other witches⁶⁵ in my dissertation are assumed to be: she is described as having brown skin so the world-building that Chupeco provides is not completely Westernized. In the ensuing section, the different fantasy elements present in the series are analysed to provide an overview of the unique fantasy world created by Chupeco to frame Tea's story.

3.1.2 Fantasy Elements in *The Bone Witch* Trilogy: The Eight Kingdoms

In *The Bone Witch* trilogy, Chupeco created what is named the “known world”, a land which contains The Eight Kingdoms: Arshen-Kosho, Daanoris, Drycht, Isteria, Kion, Odalia, Tresea and the Yadosha City States. According to the author, The Eight Kingdoms emulate fictional worlds such as Middle Earth and the Discworld, following their own parameters and rules yet they differ from these other fictional worlds:

The Eight Kingdoms has always been a re-imagining of the real world, but with a twist. Most fantasy worlds based on real ones are very Western-centric, but that's not been my experience, since I was born and raised in the Philippines. So my subversion was setting most of the characters and story in the Asia / Middle Eastern

⁶⁵ In the original production of *Harry Potter And The Cursed Child* in London the role of Hermione Granger was played by Noma Dumezweni, a black South African-British actress. The casting choice caused a stir since many fans believed that Hermione had never been coded as black in the books yet Rowling stated that “there was always the possibility of Hermione being black in the way she was described; skin colour was never mentioned. I had a bunch of racists telling me that because Hermione ‘turned white’—that is, lost colour from her face after a shock—that she must be a white woman, which I have a great deal of difficulty with. But I decided not to get too agitated about it and simply state quite firmly that Hermione can be a black woman with my absolute blessing and enthusiasm” (in Crompton, 2016, online).



Chapter 3. Blurring the Character: The Witch as Anti-Hero in *The Bone Witch*

region, and to give it much more power and influence than the Western counterparts in the story. Odalia in particular is based on the Ayubbid dynasty in the Middle East (ruled by Saladin). Kion is a melting pot of cultures with shared Asian/Middle Eastern touches. (Chupeco, 2019, online)

Chupeco's work might be classified as high fantasy or epic fantasy; or, if we take Mendlesohn's classification of fantasy types, as immersive fantasy. The term high fantasy was coined by Lloyd Alexander in "High Fantasy and Heroic Romance", an essay published in *The Horn Book Magazine* in 1971. In her thesis *High Fantasy: A Definition*, Linda Burns contends that high fantasy

attempts to make myth, a tale told in an effort to make concrete and particular a special perception of man or a cosmic view. In developing this mythical tale, artists use literary archetypes to create a new narrative which tells a timeless story, a story based on the most serious and profound questions man has asked of himself and his world. (1979: 28)

As Chupeco indicates, most high-fantasy literature is Western-centric and draws from Western myths and stories. By setting their story and characters on the Asian/Middle Eastern region, Chupeco breaks away from the Western tradition and draws from other myths and folklore. Nevertheless, typical elements and tropes of Western high or epic fantasy are present in Chupeco's trilogy: the fight of good vs evil, prophecies, the use of magic, or the Campbell's monomyth, present in *The Bone Witch* trilogy though with a few alterations.

As I have noted, following Mendlesohn, *The Bone Witch* could be also classified as immersive fantasy since the narrative is completely set in a secondary world. The world-building Chupeco uses in *The Bone Witch* results in a complete world presented to the readers gradually through the eyes of two narrators: Tea and the Bard. World-building is "a key part of fantasy literature and an original fantasy world is often the most memorable part of a novel or series: from the whimsical worlds of Wonderland and Oz to the culturally complex kingdoms of R. Scott Bakker's *Eärwa* or Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea*" (Barron, 2010: 32). Although they are not fully described from the beginning, as the series



advances readers become aware of the history and traditions of The Eight Kingdoms, as well as the intricate politics and the cultural differences among the inhabitants.

In their secondary world, Chupeco created an intricate legend which provides the background history of The Eight Kingdoms and explains why some people possess different magical abilities. In *The Bone Witch*, she provides the official version of the legend of Blade that Soars and Dancing Wind, written by Vernasha of the Roses, a legendary asha⁶⁶ who founded the city of Kion. This legend describes how Daeva were created, how Heartforgers and Dark asha emerged and why people who draw magic from the dark are considered evil. The Daeva are a group of seven monster-like creatures that roam The Eight Kingdoms and which were created with death magic. They are mostly dormant, but they resurface from time to time, and they are feared by the population. Only Dark asha (also known as bone witches) can control them and put them down, as they cannot be killed. A heartforger is a person capable of distilling memories and forging new ones as well as creating remedies and potions: “They can take memories and break them into bits and pieces, distil them down into potions and spells, and build them back up into new hearts, bright and counterfeit, so that even we can’t tell one heartbeat from the other” (*The Bone Witch*, 51). Later in the series, however, readers discover that the official version of the legend was corrupted to suit Vernasha’s interests when she founded the city of Kion and that there were records of the legend differing from the official one (*The Shadowglass*, 34-36).

The complex world-building that Chupeco provides abounds in locations which the protagonist visits during the quest: “Fantasy is a genre based on travel, quest and exploration: it is no wonder that topography plays such a big role” (Moran, 2019: 44).

⁶⁶ Asha is the name that women with magical abilities receive in The Eight Kingdoms.



The Bone Witch series is rich in the description of the different places Tea visits and encounters, and this helps the reader to envision the world of The Eight Kingdoms:

Kion castles were different in structure from Odalian castles. They were smaller in size but boasted multiple floors, each layer marked by a bowed rooftop—thinner than the ones in the kingdom of Daanoris but less ornate than those of Arhen-Kosho. (...) The houses here were not as small and as square as most of the city but longer and more rectangular in form, the size of two or three average Ankyon houses. (*The Bone Witch*, 59)

As it is habitual in high fantasy, a map of The Eight Kingdoms is included in the novels.

As Patrick Moran notes, Tolkien was the first to use maps as “a multimedia practice”:

The imaginary world is made real by the map, which invites us to follow the heroes’ journey as if it somehow took place beyond the text, in a reality that we could reach through reading. But at the same time, the map invites us to venture into this universe ourselves, regardless of the story being told. (2019: 43)

Another key element in Chupeco’s fiction is the internal consistency and coherence of the secondary world. The myths and legends of The Eight Kingdoms fit seamlessly into the plot and establish the mythological background from which the plot is sustained. Of course, the coherence and consistency of this secondary world is essential for the reader’s suspension of disbelief. As Tolkien argued in “On Fairy Stories”:

What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful ‘sub-creator’. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. (1983:132)

In Chupeco’s trilogy there are two different types of magic and witches: those who have a purple heartsglass (a small vial worn by the people of The Known World which contains the essence of their heart) can perform elemental magic and those with a silver heartsglass can draw runes, the idiom used by Chupeco to refer to the act of tracing the runes in the air so as to cast them. Within the first group we find Forest witches and Water witches, while the second group is formed by the *asha*. Water and Forest witches can tell fortunes, concoct potions and generally perform tasks associated to the figure of the village healer. Here witches Rose and Lilac, Tea’s sisters, are introduced:



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Rose was a Forest witch; she was plump, pickled brown from the hot sun, darker than even the farmers who worked the fields from dawn to dusk. She owned an herb garden and sold poultices and home remedies for gout, lovesickness, and all other common ailments. Lilac was a Water witch; she was tall and stagnant, like a deep pool. She was fond of donning veils, telling merry fortunes, and occasionally finding lost trinkets, often by accident. (*The Bone Witch*, 3)

Asha, however, use a different type of magic which allows them to cast spells (I explore their magic in section 3.3 since it is connected to the protagonist's education). The inclusion of magic is essential in all fantasy narratives and thus, the clear conclusion is that Chupeco's trilogy has all the necessary elements to be considered immersive or high fantasy.

The narrative structure in *The Bone Witch* trilogy is also interesting. Rather than follow a progressive, lineal storyline, Chupeco provides the reader with two different timelines, past and present, narrated by two different speakers: the story about the past is told by Tea to the Bard while the present events are told by the Bard himself. To differentiate the two timelines, the Bard's discourse is always italicized. Following Genette's classification (1983) both Tea and the Bard are homodiegetic narrators, yet Tea could also be considered an autodiegetic narrator since she is telling the Bard her own story. Chupeco's use of the figure of the Bard, a professional storyteller, is also a common characteristic of fantasy fiction and an allusion to Celtic culture: "A prehistoric Old Celtic *bardos produced Scottish and Irish Gaelic bárd and Welsh bardd, which meant 'poet-singer'. It appears to have been the Scottish form which introduced the word into English, in the sense 'strolling minstrel'" (Ayto, 2005: 50). Although the Bard tends to be a passive figure, his presence in the narration is essential to understand Tea's story as without his own unbiased recounting of the events readers might not necessarily understand Tea's motives for revenge. *The Bone Witch* begins with the encounter between Tea and the Bard and by the Bard introducing himself:

'I was born in Drycht but was banished when I came of age for my freethinking ways and for singing against the tyrant kings. Since then, I have made my living on tales



and ballads. I have seen with my own eyes the endless wars of the Yadosha city-states. I have broken bread with the reindeer people and have danced with the Gorvekan tribes on the Isteran steppes. I have seen princes poisoned, have watched a Faceless follower hanged, and have survived in a city that's been swept out to sea. My name is known in many places; my reputation is more than modest (...)' (*The Bone Witch*, xiii)

From the begging the Bard is surrounded by an aura of mystery, which raises expectations about his role. Actually, it is eventually discovered in *The Shadowglass*, the last novel in the trilogy, that the Bard is of noble descent:

'So you know.' I understood then why she had been adamant about sending me away—not to break her promise, but to preserve a bloodline.

'I am not so arrogant as to find a bard solely for him to sing my songs. You are good at tales, but you would make a better ruler for a kingdom mistreated by tyrants for far too long. I am sorry for what happened to Princess Esther, Your Highness. (...) Your father was a tyrant in his own way—but you are not. For the good of Drycht's future, you must be kept out of harm's way.'

(*The Shadowglass*, 384, original italics)

Learning that someone who was seemingly ordinary is in reality an important character within the story is another characteristic of high fantasy.

Having outlined the characteristics which make *The Bone Witch* trilogy a high-fantasy series, I examine in the next section which features of Young Adult Fiction are present in the trilogy. As I have been arguing, YA fiction, together with fantasy, provides the perfect setting for the exploration of themes and topics of interest for young readers which could not be otherwise examined. As Burns contends, “Both myths and high fantasy concentrate on the process of change instead of detailing the happiness to be gained. The pre-adolescent and early adolescent can certainly identify with this situation since their lives are in a constant flux” (1979: 120).

3.1.3 Young Adult Elements in *The Bone Witch* Trilogy

As noted in the Introduction, YA fiction centres on the characters' process of becoming adults and finding out who they are in a society. Therefore, YA fiction revolves around the experiences and anxieties of maturing physically, emotionally, or both.



Nevertheless, relating a character's maturation process is not the only function that YA fiction plays: "Young Adult literature can help teenagers to think about, and hopefully to transcend, the rigid and dysfunctional structures of popular culture, stereotyping, oppression, and injustice" (Hilton and Nikolajeva, 2012: 15). YA fiction, therefore, is a powerful tool which might help its readers to examine and question practically everything.

Since YA fiction also revolves around the anxiety of fitting within the parameters and expectations demanded by society, it is not surprising that many of its protagonists rebel against them. In *The Bone Witch* series, the title character Tea is focused on righting a society which has become too rigid in its demands and expectations, especially for Dark asha like her. As Brugger-Dethmers points out, "When an individual does not live up to these expectations, he or she is branded as abnormal, strange, and potentially socially dangerous" (2012: 78) which is Tea's case. Within The Eight Kingdoms, and more specifically within the asha association, Tea is expected to devote her life to raise and put down Daeva, a task which slowly diminishes her health and ultimately kills her, without questioning or hesitation. Tea refuses to accept what the asha elders from the association expect from her and therefore she becomes a pariah. Ironically, however, the same society that rejects the Dark asha needs them to control and tame the monstrous Daeva. Consequently, Tea has some leverage to negotiate her position within society.

Another characteristic of Young Adult fiction which we find in *The Bone Witch* trilogy is the lack of a clear happy ending for the protagonists. Although a happy ending is not strictly mandatory in children's literature, it is often included to reassure its readers that the normal order of events is restored and closure is provided. The expectation of finding a happy ending at the end of a children's narrative is culturally embedded and, therefore, its presence "is one of the foremost criteria in the conventional definitions of



children's literature, as well as one of the most common prejudices about it" (Nikolajeva, 2002: 170). In young adult fiction, the happy ending is not necessarily expected or included. While the denouement of the narrative needs to provide closure and tie the main plot points, the ending needs not be completely joyful as many readers might find this unlikely and unbelievable.⁶⁷ Contrarily to previous works of YA fantasy, where "fantasy stories for children and adolescents were often domestically oriented romps such as P. L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* (first published in 1934), or amusing but safe adventures such as L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (first published in 1900)" (Green, 2013: 19) in later texts

The child protagonists could no longer rely on well-meaning adults, but had to confront danger themselves and resolve it. (...) One particular motif that returned to the genre in full force after having been long absent was the idea of sacrificial death, or death that pays the price of something that cannot be bought in any other way. (Green, 2013: 19)

The bittersweet ending provided by Chupeco follows this pattern. In order to ensure a fairer society, which is Tea's fight during the trilogy, the asha needs to sacrifice herself so as all magic is suppressed from The Eight Kingdoms as magic had corrupted people: "The loss of the runes [the magic spells] would not stop the tide of politics, but they no longer had the poisonous bite they once did when they came armed with spells" (*The Shadowglass*, 444). By sacrificing herself, Tea guarantees that magic is no longer available as a means to control and extort other people.

Another common characteristic of YA fiction is its use of ambiguity and ambivalence: "Ambivalence refers to the coexistence of conflicting feelings or thoughts toward an action, person, or idea, while ambiguity refers to something that is open to multiple interpretations" (Campbell, 2010: 43). In *The Bone Witch* trilogy ambiguity and

⁶⁷ The Epilogue in *Harry Potter*, titled "Nineteen Years Later", provides readers with a glimpse of Harry, Ron, and Hermione's adult life while they sent their children off to Hogwarts. The passage has been widely criticized as being unbelievable and unrealistic as it is full of clichés.



ambivalence are abundant. While Tea maintains that she only wants to fight and destroy the asha association for abusing their power over asha, her means to do so are questionable: she burns down cities and kills many innocents who then are raised as an army of the dead to help her in her quest. In addition, even though the ending provides answers and closure to the main plot points, it is open to multiple interpretations. The last two paragraphs of *The Shadowglass* present the Bard looking at a sculpture honouring Tea and Kalen, her lover, when a couple approaches him; her words suggest they may have survived:

The woman smiled. 'Well, if there are enough people like you to remember her, then she'll always be alive, won't she?' She looked at the monuments again, a most peculiar expression on her face. 'Sons and daughters,' she echoed, 'sons with my fire, daughters with my eyes. Mayhap one day, they will. A life worth dying for is a life worth living after all.' She laid a hand on her companion's shoulder, squeezing. 'Let's go, my love.'

(*The Shadowglass*, 448-449, original italics)

Whether this couple are indeed Tea and Kalen in disguise, it is open to interpretation. Furthermore, Chupeco's use of both Tea and the Bard as narrators increases this ambiguity, "because each speaker adds his or her own perceptions to make the story, and these may contrast and conflict" (Campbell, 2010: 46) which is indeed the case of *The Bone Witch* trilogy.

Continuing with elements which make *The Bone Witch* series YA fiction, Campbell notes that sexuality, "one of the definitive subjects of YA", is expressed freely. "The same YA permissiveness", he adds, "applies to violence and profanity. There is an edge of anger always just under the surface in most young adult fiction; risky subjects can be explored, and the tone can be very dark" (2010: 71). All these themes are present in *The Bone Witch* trilogy. While sexual encounters are not described explicitly, they are included with a directness unimaginable in the novels by Pratchett or Rowling already analysed:



We came together violently, a tangle of limbs, his hard frame against mine as we stumbled blindly into bed. His hands were eager, his fingers experienced from older memories of us. The robes I wore were promptly discarded, his own following after. We clung like starved folk finding safety in each other and drinking our fill as the blizzard outside increased in intensity, matching our desperation. (*The Shadowglass*, 285)

Therefore, we can conclude that indeed *The Bone Witch* trilogy presents many characteristics common to YA fiction.

Kim Wilkins contends that “Adolescence is generally recognized as a period of identity formation, self-fashioning and self-reflection, which adults may well interpret as self-obsession. In YA fiction, however, these aspects of learning who one is are tied to very high dramatic stakes: they become matters of life and death” (2019: 20). Undeniably, Tea’s coming of age is linked to her coming to terms with the expectations placed on her and her abilities while at the same time realizing that to defy such expectations, she will have to sacrifice plenty. In other words, since in young adult fantasy fiction magic or supernatural elements are a crucial part of the plot, the challenges that the protagonists must face are often more demanding and arduous than in children’s fiction. While growing up is already a challenging task, doing it as you fight mythological monsters and a corrupt system can only put more pressure into the young adult protagonist. Therefore, in the next section I analyse Tea’s coming of age and how (or whether) she follows the traditional Bildungsroman.

3.2 ‘Seventeen did not explain the oldness in her eyes’: Analysing Tea’s Bildungsroman

As noted in the Introduction, the Bildungsroman is a genre with a long tradition which has been widely explored from many perspectives. Following the same pattern as Tiffany Aching and Hermione Granger, Tea Pahlavi also undergoes a double Bildungsroman: she matures into a young woman while developing her magical abilities



and becoming a powerful witch. Tea is about to turn 13 at the beginning of the first novel, *The Bone Witch*, and she is 17 at the end of *The Shadowglass*, the last novel in the trilogy. Throughout the three books the readers witness Tea's struggle to mature and become who she is. As I commented in the Introduction, a Bildungsroman portrays a character's coming of age and this is one of the fundamental characteristics of YA fiction, together with the journey in epic fantasy:

The journey, of course, is a symbolic manifestation of the child's Bildung process of maturation, encouraging them to shift beyond their comfort zone and step into the unfamiliar or hitherto unknown. This culminates in challenging rites of passage, where they overcome some difficulty or barrier or struggle that sets a course through which they navigate along a trajectory that is the ideal route for a Bildungsroman narrative. (McCulloh, 2019: 174)

Like many other coming of age stories, Tea's journey begins at an age when she is no longer considered a child but neither seen as an adult by her community. Tea is from Knightscross, a small village in the region of Odalia, and as in other regions in *The Eight Kingdoms*, the coming-of-age moment is marked by a ceremony called "Heartsrune Day":

On the third day of the third month of their thirteenth summer, children gathered at the village square for the Spring equinox and because it was tradition. Boys and girls wore delicate heartsglass on chains around their necks. A witch (...) traced Heartsrune spells in the air until each empty glass sputtered and flared and filled with red and pink hues. (*The Bone Witch*, 4)

The heartsglass ceremony is of vital importance since the colour of the heart can mark a person's destiny. Generally, heartsglass remain the same colour for people who cannot use magic but its colour changes depending on how a person feels. For instance, a heartsglass might turn green if the wearer is sick or red if they are angered. However, if a heartsglass turns silver in the heartsglass ceremony, the person can wield magic and draw runes. In that case, girls are recruited to become asha (witches) and boys to be Deathseekers (soldiers with magical powers). Some persons can use magic without a silver heartsglass, such as Tea's sisters, but only people with one can become asha or



Deathseekers. Tea, however, could not participate in the heartsrune ceremony since she had raised her brother from the death some days before and had to leave Knightscross before Heartsrune Day. Besides, the fact that Tea is capable of raising her dead brother is sufficient indication to mark her as a Dark asha, as they are the only who can summon dead people. As in many coming-of-age stories, Tea's journey begins with a traumatic event which forces her to depart from home and begin her quest. After involuntarily reanimating her dead brother, Tea is approached by Mykaela of the Hollows, another Dark asha, who becomes Tea's mentor. Tea, however, is reluctant because of the negative connotations attached to being a bone witch, yet Mykaela sees she is actually quite willing:

(...) I did not want the woman's presence in my room, tainting the air with a truth I had no desire to hear. I did not want to think about my brother, torn between the living and the dead by my own hand. But I had wielded the magic, and I had liked its flavor. (*The Bone Witch*, 15)

I explore the prejudice bone witches face within The Eight Kingdoms in section 3.3. Still, I'll mention here that Tea's doubts about becoming a bone witch are justified since she grew up believing that "Bone witches were not a respectable trade" (*The Bone Witch*, 14). Finally, however, Tea accepts to accompany Mykaela and thus she fulfils the first function proposed by Campbell's monomyth: The Departure. Tea receives a call for adventure, which she initially refuses; yet, the agent (Mykaela) appears and finally she crosses the first threshold, which means leaving her hometown and going into "The Belly of the Whale", which metaphorically stands for the hero's willingness to undergo a metamorphosis.

After leaving Knightscross, Tea and Mykaela begin their journey to the region of Kion, and Tea wonders about her fate, comparing herself to other asha:

And I was to be an asha. After everything that had happened, I had little time to appreciate my situation. All my childish play at pretending to be the famous asha of my stories now felt ridiculous. Did Taki of the Silk and Nadine of the Whispers feel this way? I wondered. Were they uprooted from the families they loved and sent to



unfamiliar places because the magic that brought them their fame first gave them no choice? (*The Bone Witch*, 30)

Having doubts about her destiny is part of the process which Tea must undergo during her coming-of-age, and a characteristic of YA fiction. From the moment Tea leaves her hometown, her life is full of trials and adversities which she needs to overcome to be both an asha and an adult. In YA fantasy fiction the presence of trials as rites of passage is almost essential to the narrative as “The physically transformative power of partaking in a succession of trials links metaphorically to the physical transformations of young adulthood” (Wilkins, 2019: 24).

Once in the capital of Kion, Ankyo, Tea must face the first of the trials, which consists of presenting herself in front of the Oracle who will proclaim if she is worthy of becoming an asha: “Many who have failed the first time have gone on to become skilled spellbinders—apprentices must pass only their second tests, when they make their debut—Faceless insurgents have always been a problem, and the first test is simply our way of weeding them out” (*The Bone Witch*, 63). Even though Mykaela tells Tea that it is not necessary to pass the first test to become an asha, if Tea wants to be part of House Valerian, the asha-ka⁶⁸ where Mykaela lives under a Mother’s supervision, she needs to prove that she is fit to become an asha from the beginning: “Mother, unfortunately, is highly superstitious. If the oracle does not approve of a girl at their first meeting, Mother will not accept her into the Valerian” (*The Bone Witch*, 63). Fortunately, Tea passes the Oracle’s first test and thus her training begins.

Tea spends a year working as a maid for the Valerian until she is tricked into attending a party and unknowingly raises a king from the dead, which is the second instance that Tea accidentally brings someone back to life. Tea needs to learn to control

⁶⁸ An asha-ka is a house where different asha live together under the watchful eye of a ‘Mother’ who invests in their education and acts as their legal tutor. In return, when the girls make their debut and can begin working, whatever they earn must be brought to the asha-ka.



her magic and she is finally deemed capable by Mistress Parmina (the ‘Mother’ of her asha-ka) of beginning her training as an asha, aged fourteen:

‘If you think running errands and doing chores was difficult, child, then you are not ready to be an asha. But for all the indignities I heaped on you, you have held your head and done what was expected of you. And after your accident, I no longer see any reason to delay’. (*The Bone Witch*, 134)

During her training and through watching her mentor, Tea realizes that being a Dark asha and fulfilling the duties of one means risking her life for the protection of the Kingdoms. The more Tea learns about asha and the asha-association, the more suspicious she becomes of the system: she cannot accept that while she is asked to risk her life, she is still considered a pariah. Thus, Tea wants to rebel against the institution that has allowed Dark asha to sacrifice themselves:

‘If there is another way to tame these creatures without Dark asha giving up our body and soul, raising and killing daeva for the rest of our lifetimes while the years tick by, then I will do it. Not just for (Mykaela’s) sake but also for mine and for every other Dark asha that will pass through these chambers’. (*The Bone Witch*, 336)

Rebelling against the system is an inherent characteristic of coming-of-age narratives, a genre “of discovery and of coalescence with others that challenges, redefines and resists readings of self-completion and that, ultimately, questions social values” (McCulloh, 2019: 199).

Tea is aware that once she accepts becoming a Dark asha her reputation will only worsen yet the very act of accepting her role and fighting to reverse the situation is what her quest is about. Joannou argues that the male Bildungsroman finalizes with the protagonist accepting and adjusting to societal norms and that

Viewed from a feminist critical perspective, or indeed from any radical perspective with an investment in social change, the classical Bildungsroman appears socially conservative and reintegrative in its ideological project. (...) the female Bildungsroman concentrates on the *difference* between the needs of the protagonist and the expectations that society has of her *as a woman*. (2019: 215, original emphasis)



Therefore, it could be argued that one of the characteristics of the female Bildungsroman is fighting the status quo, which is exactly what Tea does.

The Bone Witch is rich in description of the different tasks that girls must carry to successfully become asha: they must learn how to properly dance, sing, and play different musical instruments as one of their jobs is being entertainers. Apprentices also need to know history and politics and are instructed in combat. Chupeco stated in her blog that the asha were inspired by Japanese Geisha (in Chupeco, 2018: online) and Tea's training certainly resembles that of one (I further explore her training in section 3.3.). Although asha are expected to keep learning until they become masters of a skill or they retire, they are accepted as asha when they make their official debut. Before their debut, however, they go through the *khahar-de*, a ceremony with other asha who have been selected to be the debutant's sisters. The *khahar-de* is vital for Tea's formation as a feminist hero:

the inclusion of a network of friends is another feature that challenges conservative models of male heroism. What is more, it also introduces the feminist concept of sisterhood. (...) Notably, this new power system is non-hierarchical and inclusive and thus echoes systems of power propagated by feminist movements. (Hohenstein, 2019: 24)

The asha selected to be Tea's sisters are Mykaela, Althy, Polaire and Zoya. An asha's sisters are supposed to guide her as her mentors in different areas, and once an asha has gone through the *khahar-de* she can begin having patrons who ask for her presence at parties and gatherings. Tea's debut comes after another incident that happened in the *darashi oyun* (a popular annual dance that different asha perform to mark the Spring equinox), when the azi (a flying, three-headed dragon which is the most feared daeva) interrupted the dance and Tea managed to send it away. To obtain the rank of asha, each novice must present themselves before the elders and take different tests. After passing her test, Tea officially becomes an asha and the second part of her journey begins: finding



the azi to control it and find a way to master the daeva without risking her life. Tea, therefore, is on her way to becoming a hero.

Tea's journey continues in *The Heartforger* and *The Shadowglass* and she experiences loss and treachery on her path to maturity. There are many instances in the books where Tea reflects on her change, here in relation to her family:

(...) I wasn't the girl they remembered. Would they be afraid of me if they knew the runes I wove, if they knew the monsters I'd raised? Would the girl they knew have hidden an azi in her mind and told no one? I knew the answer to that, and it hurt. I was a puzzle piece that no longer conformed to the shape of their lives. (*The Heart Forger*, 131)

In *The Heart Forger*, Tea is already 17 and readers learn more about the path she is following. The personal growth that Tea has experienced is evident by the end of the last novel, *The Shadowglass*. Tea understands that the fairer society she has envisioned can only be possible if she sacrifices herself. Her journey is full of self-doubt, where she struggles between what she considers to be the best resolution and her personal desire to have a peaceful life with Kalen, her lover. As Kokorski observes, "Inner maturation is often made visible for the reader in the characters' increase in magical ability. (...) The protagonists suffer, and, like a phoenix emerging from the ashes, they emerge from the hardship of their journeys as mentally and physically stronger characters" (2012: 216). Throughout *The Heartforger* and *The Shadowglass*, readers see how Tea becomes more powerful at the expense of losing people she loves.

In the traditional Bildungsroman, the protagonist is finally accepted into society and they assimilate its values and ideals, thus reaching a happy ending. Nevertheless, according to Moretti the Bildungsroman demands the protagonist's death if a happy ending is not possible: "His death must first of all isolate the hero: not only from a social order in which he never felt completely at ease, but especially from those collective expectations which he has never wholly betrayed, and to which—within himself—he has



perhaps entrusted the ultimate meaning of his existence” (1987: 119). The classical ending, thus, reinforces the status quo that the protagonist has sought to challenge during their coming-of-age narrative. When the protagonist refuses to assimilate, the only possible ending is death. Tea’s acceptance of her own death as the only possible solution to secure a fairer society demonstrates that she has reached a level of maturity which she did not have at the beginning of her journey. However, while the death of the protagonist in many Bildungsroman is understood as the protagonist’s failure to assimilate into society and therefore the narrative champions the status quo, in *The Bone Witch* series the death of the protagonist marks her success.

Throughout *The Heartforger* and *The Shadowglass* readers see how conflicted Tea is about making the right decision (erasing magic from The Eight Kingdoms by committing suicide and thus securing a fairer society) or keeping her magic and run away with Kalen. Tea’s sacrifice means she will never reach adulthood completely. However, her sacrifice is required so she can achieve the status of hero by the end of the narrative: only someone with Tea’s powers (a Dark asha) can create what is known as shadowglass, a substance that grants immortality to the one who drinks it, or the power to erase magic from The Eight Kingdoms. The sacrificial death has often been understood as necessary to re-establish society’s order yet in *The Bone Witch* trilogy, sacrificial death is essential to destroy that order. Therefore, *The Bone Witch* trilogy presents a reversal of the traditional conventions of sacrificial death. In offering her life to create a fairer society, Tea is fulfilling her role as a hero and therefore her Bildungsroman is complete.

Having explored Tea’s coming of age I turn now to examining Tea’s journey into becoming an asha (Tea’s role as hero is further explored in section 3.3).



3.3 Growing into the Dark: Tea's Training as an Asha

3.3.1 What Is an Asha? Asian Inspired Fantasy

As it happens in many YA series involving a character's discovery of their magical powers, *The Bone Witch* trilogy depicts Tea's journey into becoming an asha and developing her full potential as a witch. In Chupeco's world, however, even though the word 'witch' is used, women with magical powers are named, as noted, asha. *The Bone Witch* trilogy is heavily inspired by Asian folklore and therefore the representation of witches in this trilogy differs from that of the other witches in my dissertation. In Pratchett's and Rowling's chapters I have discussed the image of the witch from a Western perspective and even though Chupeco has inevitably been influenced by the Westernized image of the witch, they have incorporated many Asian elements into their novels. This section, therefore, is devoted to exploring the different Asian features which Chupeco includes in their representation of a young adult witch, mainly the Filipino witch folklore and the Japanese geisha tradition.

Within Filipino folklore, *aswang* is used as an umbrella term for different evil mythological creatures, including the witch:

believed by the folk to be a man or woman—mostly the latter—who is extremely vindictive. By magically intruding various objects—shells, bone, unhusked rice, fish, and insects of various species—through the victim's bodily orifices, the Philippine witch punishes those by whom she has been put out. (Ramos, 1969: 244)

In Filipino folklore, two prominent figures are believed to possess magic, the witch and the shaman, yet they are portrayed entirely different: “The shaman is a human being, man or woman, whom the spirits call (in a manner that cannot be refused without very tragic results) to become their intermediary with the world of human beings” (Demetrio, 1988: 374). The shaman's purpose is to preserve the order established by the world of spirits, for which s/he “serves the divine order on all levels”, promoting “goodness, well-being and life, not only for the individual but also for the community” (Demetrio: 376). Whereas



the shaman wants to maintain order, the witch wants to destabilize it. The witch “is a person who out of selfishness, and utter self-will, has inured himself in evil, isolating himself from the normal run of human interaction with fellowmen, and aims only at doing what is destructive of life and moral and natural goodness” (Demetrio: 380). Chupeco, however, stated that “The asha in the *Bone Witch* were inspired by *mangkukulam*, who are the Filipino version of witch doctors” (Chupeco, 2022, online). The *mangkukulam* are not mythical creatures but real people who practice *Kulam* witchcraft in the Philippines; they come allegedly from the islands of Siquijor and Samar, and the province of Sorsogon, areas known for “their many ‘faith healers’” (Albano, 2022: online). Even though *mangkukulam* face prejudice from their neighbours, many see them

as a kind of village witch, and often go to her for things such as love spells, spells to catch a cheating husband, etc. Sometimes, she will maintain a rivalry with a village *arbularyo* or medicine man. Other times, the *mangkukulam* herself doubles as the village's witch doctor, or faith healer, “curing” sicknesses inflicted upon them by the local versions of dwarves, wood nymphs, and other spirits. (Albano, 2022: online)

Both *mangkukulam* and asha are seen as healers and there are many examples in the trilogy in which the reader is informed that an asha is acting as a doctor, which is reminiscent of Pratchett’s witches. Alluding to Mykaela, Tea comments: “My mentor asked for nothing in return, and my confusion grew with each visit. My books told me that asha could heal the sick, but I had always assumed it was through magic. The reality was very different” (*The Bone Witch*, 26). However, Chupeco does not directly refer to *mangkukulam* in their novels using instead the fictional term asha, which originates from a Zoroastrian concept related to “truth” and “righteousness”:

Asha stands for Ahura Mazda’s righteousness. Ahura Mazda is the father of Asha, says Zarathushtra. He created Asha through his wisdom. Asha is of one will with Ahura Mazda. He is the counsellor of Ahura Mazda, and lives in one abode with Ahura Mazda and Vohu Manah. He is given the attribute Vahishta, ‘best’. (Dhalla, 1938: 44)

Initially, the word carried a neutral meaning, but it later became a word used to describe male divinities: “Asha is the highest word in the Zoroastrian terminology, and its



derivative ashavan forms the epithet of the man who is most saintly and possesses the noblest character” (Dhalla, 1938: 45). In *The Bone Witch* trilogy, Chupeco inverts the concept of asha as a male deity and remodels the character into a female witch. In their novels, asha are respected members of the community who not only entertain the rich but also influence political decisions, and they are considered to be noble, respectable women. However, Dark asha do not benefit from the respect shown to their sisters.

As I argued in section 3.1.2, there are two types of magic within *The Bone Witch* trilogy: elemental magic and rune magic. All asha can draw runes and are considered spellbinders yet a difference exists between the type of runes that asha and Dark asha can use, as well as the type of asha a girl can become, as Mykaela tells Tea:

“Most people know three kinds of asha, Tea. The first are performing asha, known for their dancing and their singing, though their magic may be weaker than others. The second are fighting asha, known for their magic and their prowess, though they may not be the most gracious of hosts. The third are Dark asha like us, the strongest of them all.” (*The Bone Witch*, 28)

Despite the fact that all asha are inspired by the Japanese Geisha, it seems that the first performing asha are the ones who most resemble them. An asha’s appearance is heavily influenced by that of Geisha: the traditional asha clothing, the *hua*, mirrors the Geisha’s kimono. In the trilogy, Chupeco describes in great detail the *hua* and how the embroideries reflect the asha’s personality and rank: “*We can identify a particular asha simply by looking at her dress, for no one would think of wearing the same hua. To put on someone else’s would be an invasion of her privacy, like stealing into her house or secretly assuming her identity*” (*The Bone Witch*, original italics, 81). Like geisha in Japanese culture, young girls in Chupeco’s world must also pass through various stages to become full asha and in both instances they live with their “sisters” in a “house” ruled by a “Mother” while they are being trained and educated. Dalby warns that

The use of kinship terms does not necessarily call into play the sentimental notions about family that we of Western European cultural heritage have come to presume are natural. Instead, the terms older sister and younger sister, mother and daughter,



define the unequal but complementary sets of categories that are the basis of geisha society. (2000: 40)

What Dalby explains about geisha is also applicable to asha:

‘That’s your *mother*?’ I whispered to the asha, aghast, as soon as the two had left the room.

Lady Mykaela chuckled. ‘I call her Mother, but we aren’t related by blood. This is the House Valerian, my asha-ka, and she is Mistress Parmina, who runs it.’

(*The Bone Witch*, 62, original emphasis)

There are many other parallelisms between geisha and asha. For example, in geisha culture the maiko (young geisha apprentices) go through a ceremony called *san-san-kudo* in which they are bound to an older sister who will guide them in their journey to become geisha (Gallagher, 2003). Similarly, in Chupeco’s trilogy, asha go through the *khahar-de*, a ritual in which a novice is given three older sisters who will give her advice on how to be a competent asha. The training both geisha and asha go through is also remarkably similar. Geisha must learn how to dance and play several music instruments, and so do the asha. An asha training includes classes on dancing, singing, general instruction (where they learn about history and politics), meditation, flower arrangement and etiquette, and fighting. Only when her instructors consider that the young asha has achieved an acceptable command of the different disciplines can she make her debut. Before that, as noted, asha must present themselves before their elders and pass a test, unlike maiko.

In the test, the asha are examined on the different aspects of their training, including the use of runes. During her rune test Tea realizes the asha association do not love her as they ask her to perform a task for which she has no power:

I paused, stunned. No one had told me about this part of the test. Had I been any of the other asha, it could have been easily accomplished—a Fire rune to burn through the string, a strong enough gust of Wind to snap at the line...(...)

Faces watched me, knowing. Their heartsglass gleamed silver in the gloom.

They had planned for this. I could not wield any other rune but the Dark, and so they had made painstakingly sure that it would not be easy for me. (*The Bone Witch*, 325)



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At first Tea fails to understand why she is given a task above her abilities but after being told she has passed the test at the “highest level” and the ensuing conversation with Mykaela, Tea realizes that if she had used the powerful dark magic *Compulsion* rune to complete the task, the asha association would have never approved of her being an asha. The asha association wanted a Dark asha who complied with their requests without complaining and who would not use her powers to her own advantage.

After completing the test, Tea is ready to make her debut. The debut of a geisha consists of a ceremony called *erikae* in which they make a round of calls to thank the various patrons which have supported her: “The one-time raw recruit is no longer a girl, and no longer expected to make it on looks alone. From now on, her power of personality and performance skills will earn her living” (Gallagher, 2003: 159). Correspondingly, the asha’s debut includes a procession around the streets of Ankyo until the asha reaches the temple, where she must present herself before the oracle for a second time. Once the asha emerges from the temple, she may begin her career as an established asha. Once asha have made their debut they earn their own money. However, to keep their earnings they first must have to repay what the asha-ka has invested in them during their apprenticeship, as geisha do, along five to seven years, the time of their contract: “During this period, they gradually pay back the money that has been invested in their training and costumers” (Gallagher, 2003: 174).

As I have demonstrated, Chupeco incorporates two main Asian elements in their story: the *mangkukulam* and the geisha. The use of these two Asian elements differentiates Chupeco from the rest of the authors I explore in this dissertation yet the young adult witch that Chupeco portrays still faces prejudice from the other members of her community. Although the *mangkukulam* are tolerated in Filipino society, they are not revered. As the author themselves have commented:



So like bone witches in my book, there's a strange dichotomy that's similar—people fear and even loathe mangkukulam, but still go to them for help, which is obviously a bit hypocritical. I wanted that same push and pull of tension that Tea has to deal with when it comes to interacting with people who don't actually care about her well-being until they need something from her. (in Luque, 2023: 108)

Therefore, one of the main aspects in Chupeco's trilogy is Tea's aim to reveal the rooted hypocrisy in her society when it comes to bone witches. In the next section I examine whether for that reason Tea's journey is depicted as a hero or, contrarily, as an antihero.

3.3.2 Questioning Tea's Quest: Hero or Antihero?

The witches in this dissertation have been considered heroes in their own right and an argument has been made in favour of viewing the witch's transformation from the evil villain in fairy tales to a heroic character as a favourable and desirable improvement. However, the main witch in *The Bone Witch* trilogy, Tea Pahlavi, displays many characteristics which might identify her with the archetype of the antihero. Unlike other witches studied in this dissertation, who are clearly the heroes of their narratives and presented as such, in Chupeco's trilogy the protagonist is not unequivocally portrayed as a hero. In this section, therefore, I explore which characteristics of the antihero archetype might be applicable to Tea and how their use in a narrative which intends to portray witches in a positive light either reinforces or undermines the vision of the witch as an anti-patriarchal character.

In the past few decades, it has become increasingly common to find the antihero archetype in many different cultural expressions, from literary texts to movies and TV shows.⁶⁹ Many ascribe the appeal of antiheroes to their presentation as flawed and

⁶⁹ Lisbeth Salander from Stieg Larsson's *Millenium* series (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, 2005; *The Girl Who Played with Fire*, 2006; *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest*, 2007), Beatrix "the Bride" Kiddo from Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* films (*Kill Bill: Volume 1*, 2003; *Kill Bill: Volume 2*, 2004) and Jackson "Jax" Teller from FX's *Sons of Anarchy* TV series (2008-2014) are some examples.



imperfect characters, which makes it easier for readers/spectators to find them believable and to identify with them. Many literary characters fall under the description of antihero: “outsiders and rebels, alienated and outcasts” (Anderson, 2016: 11) who do not conform to society’s expectations. According to Peters and Stewart: “whereas heroes are celebrated and revered due to their commitment to their honour and pride, the antihero, whilst possibly having their own code of conduct, requires no veneration; in fact, these characters refuse to bow to the expectations of society and rebel against the rules that bind us all” (2015: e-book). The presence of the antihero in literature dates back to classical works of literature and it became a popular figure during the Romantic Period (18th-19th century).

The antihero character seems to gain prominence after challenging periods in history, such as WWI and WWII (Michael, 2013: online). Sara Amato argues that postmodern literature in particular “shifted again to include a protagonist that was not only flawed, but also unreliable” (2016: 17). Unlike hero and villain, whose characteristics and perception are clearly defined, the antihero is still in a grey area. One of the major characteristics which differentiates the antihero from the villain is that the former fights for justice in a villainous manner but without necessarily accruing power, whereas the latter is a character who opposes the hero and who is morally corrupted in his thirst for power. Heroes are usually nearly perfect; antiheroes are flawed and conflicted but their ultimate goal is to achieve justice and redemption. The villain, on the other hand “is the protagonist of a cautionary tale: any man who deliberately abuses the amount of power that patriarchy allows him to enjoy (depending on his social and personal position) will be punished and even eliminated by the hero, whose function is to restore the status quo” (Martín, 2019: 2). Villains have no fear of retribution as they are



not bound by morality, but antiheroes know they will be punished for their actions and accept their fate.

Following tradition, the hero's main concern is to either restore the status quo or create a better one whereas the antihero wants to destroy it. All the witches in my dissertation fight against the status quo to better it yet the means they use to achieve their goals are vastly different: while Tiffany's and Hermione's actions cannot be labelled malicious, Tea takes another path to destroy the status quo. Thus, the key factor to consider Tea an antihero rather than a hero is how she achieves her goal.

In *The Bone Witch* trilogy, Tea is certainly flawed and portrayed as untrustworthy, especially from the Bard's perspective:

The Dark asha watched the chaos her creations caused with a smile on her face.

'Something similar happened in Kion many months ago.'

'I—I remember the reports. An attack on Ankyo, they said, by the Odalian army.'
I could not look away from the horror unfolding before me.

'An eye for an eye, Bard. I do not forget.'

(The Heart Forger, 247, original italics)

In her dissertation, Amato studies some of the predecessors of the current female antiheroes, highlighting Hester Prynne from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) as an example. Interestingly, Hester's embroidered 'A', which labels her as an adulteress and separates her from society, connects with the use of the term 'Bone Witch' as a marker of ostracization. While Hester was banished from her community for having committed adultery, Tea's exile is partly self-imposed: once her lover Kalen is killed and she is accused of murdering her sister Daisy, Tea surrenders her heartsglass to the elders of the asha association and travels to the Sea of Skulls, where she plots her revenge: "*I am no longer an asha, Bard; they are beloved by the people, and I am not. My exile here, at the end of the world, is proof of that. They have another name for those like me. Call me a bone witch; it suits me better*" (*The Bone Witch*, xiv, original italics). Amato contends that the character of Hester is a "pre-female anti-hero in the sense that she is a



character who demonstrates ‘bad’ behavior and makes morally questionable decisions” (2016: 25). Yet Hester was constructed to warn other women of what might happen if they did not follow society’s norms: they would be marginalized. Similarly to Hester, Tea also makes morally questionable decisions such as concealing the fact that she has established a link with one of the most powerful and dangerous daeva, which could lead her to madness, or to slaughtering thousands of innocents to achieve her goal. However, “The modern female anti-hero is no longer used solely as a warning or message for readers, but rather a cathartic outlet for such actions against society” (2016: 25). Instead of portraying Tea’s actions as villainous, Chupeco leaves it to the reader to decide whether they are justified.

To better understand how and why Tea becomes an antihero it is necessary to identify what function Dark asha have within Chupeco’s trilogy. As noted, Dark asha have the power to command the dead and use powerful dark magic through the use of runes so they are tasked with the hunting and killing of the daeva to prevent them from terrorizing the people of The Eight Kingdoms. When a girl discovers she has got a silver heartsglass and is to be a Dark asha, however, she is given no choice. If they disobey, they will be pursued by The Faceless. These are a group of spellbinders who seek to control the daeva and to create shadowglass, a material which will allow them to become immortal and govern The Eight Kingdoms. Therefore, all Dark asha are expected to serve The Eight Kingdoms and its people or they face death.

At first, Tea seems to accept her condition as a dark witch and comply with what they ask of her, which is remaining in Kion to be trained. Her sense of responsibility compels Tea to conform to the asha association’s demands to join an asha-ka and undergo specific training to be an entertainer but also a daeva hunter. However, as time passes Tea realizes that every time a Dark asha confronts a daeva, the asha becomes weaker. Tea



becomes aware that her mentor, Mykaela, is dying as a consequence of a life fighting daeva and she is determined to find a solution.

Tea's fight against the association and what is expected from her is driven by her feeling that she feels belittled. The society demands the sacrifice of her sanity and her life to protect the kingdoms yet she must accept that she will be detested and judged by everyone: "Do you know what it's like to have no control over who people think you are? To be feared and hated, even when you protect them, help them? To be deemed unimportant by your friends, the very people you look up to? It isn't fair!" (*The Heart Forger*, 104). Tea is aware of the hypocrisy in her society and she is determined to change how people see Dark asha. Moreover, after confronting one of the Faceless, Aenah, Tea learns that the asha association has not been honest with her and have actually prevented her from exploring her full magic potential. "It's all about control, my dear Tea", Aenah explains. "They only teach you the necessary runes to put down daeva and risk your life for their cause. Why would they teach you the very runes that would allow you to rise above them?" (*The Heart Forger*, 74). While Tea is reluctant to believe Aenah at first, she progressively finds evidence backing her claims. After finding Aenah's book of runes, Tea begins questioning what she has been told about her magic, realizing that the elders of the asha association have kept matters from her, which makes her more wary. Tea discovers that Mistress Hestia, one of the most powerful and influential elder asha, possesses the same book as Aenah. By invading Aneah's memories she discovers the truth:

The asha no longer appeared as adversaries but as collaborators. I saw Mistress Hestia, and my blood ran cold.

'They cannot know.' They were Mistress Clayve, Mistress Joliene, and Mistress Fatima—upstanding members of the association, all. Mistress Hestia held the Faceless's book in her hands.

'Mykaela is too powerful,' Mistress Hestia said. *'She shall be better off without her heartsglass. Best to keep her alive, at least till the next bone witch comes along.'*

The vision faded, but my wrath grew.

(*The Heart Forger*, 479, original italics)



Discovering that the Elders have shortened Mykaela's life span even more finally turns Tea against them. From that moment onwards, Tea's journey is marked by her hatred of the Elder asha and her determination to overthrow their rule over Dark asha. Thus, Tea becomes a fully justified antihero.

In *Antiheroes: Heroes, Villains, and the Fine Line Between* Jennifer Crusie argues that "Although we are not so naïve as to believe that justice is always the primary aim of the antihero, justice, or some form of it often occupies a top spot on the list. This makes the antihero the best type of character to cheer for" (2003: 7). Tea's crusade and her becoming an antihero are connected to her sense of justice but also to her need for vengeance: "*Both asha and the Faceless will pay for taking everything from me—my friends, my love, my identity. (...) "This is my new family. This is my new identity. I will be the bone witch the kingdom fears, and I will make them pay"*" (*The Bone Witch*, 400, original italics). Tea becomes an antihero because she rebels against a society who expects her to abide by their rules and forsake her own life and potential for the greater good. Nevertheless, if Tea had complied with the association's demands, she would still have not been considered a hero: Dark asha who gave their lives to protect the kingdoms from the daeva were still feared and vilified, since the dark magic they are capable of using is not understood nor trusted, as it is the same magic that the insurgent Faceless use to bind the daeva to their will.

However, Tea's role as antihero changes in the last book of the trilogy, *The Shadowglass*. After spending some time in exile, Tea creates shadowglass, a liquid which allows the one who drinks it to become immortal and rule the world. She, however, discovers that shadowglass can also be used to destroy magic. In *The Eight Kingdoms*, magic is used to control people but by drinking the liquid and sacrificing herself, Tea rids the world of magic and levels everyone to the same position.



Therefore, Tea's sacrifice in the last novel automatically converts her from antihero to hero. The means by which Tea achieves her goal are questionable and she is portrayed as an ambiguous character but Tea's self-sacrifice redeems her not only in her society but also in the eyes of the readers.

In the next section I shall explore how Tea should be regarded as a LGBTQ+ ally since she not only fights for her right to be accepted and respected as a Dark asha but also for another character's decision to become an asha even though it is against tradition.

3.4 Confronting Tradition: Gender, Power and Race in *The Bone Witch* Trilogy

3.4.1 Characters of Colour in *The Bone Witch* Trilogy: Tea as a Non-Western Witch

As I have noted, *The Bone Witch* trilogy is different from the other series selected to be part of my study as it features a witch who is not white, but explicitly described as having brown skin (*The Bone Witch*, xi), and "midnight eyes" (*The Bone Witch*, 131). While Tiffany, Hermione and Savannah (see Chapter 4) are presumed to be Caucasian, Tea is portrayed as a witch with Filipino features. Besides, Tea is not the only character in the trilogy who presents non-Western characteristics; the author's effort to include racial diversity can be appreciated in this passage about the variety of women:

There were dark-haired and dark-eyed Kion asha; blond-haired, blue-eyed asha from Tresea; and golden-skinned, angular-eyed asha from Daanoris. There were even asha as far away as the Drycht bluffs, fleeing from that kingdom to avoid persecution and finding refuge in Ankyo. A few still veiled themselves, though many forsook their traditions and embraced the customary Kion hua. (*The Bone Witch*, 76)

In this section, therefore, I explore how race is represented in *The Bone Witch* trilogy and how Chupeco's choice of having a brown-skinned witch as a protagonist helps to reinforce the idea that the witch has become a positive character within young adult fiction regardless of her skin colour and ethnic background.



Although race representation has grown with authors such as Nnedi Okorafor (the *Nsibidi Scripts* series, 2011-2022), white characters still predominate as protagonists in fantasy fiction. What is more, characters of colour are still often cast in the roles of villains or secondary characters. Consequently, as Thomas argues: “the implicit message that readers, hearers, and viewers of colour receive as they read these texts is that *we are the villains. We are the horde. We are the enemies*” (2019: e-book, original italics). Hence, a young adult series which includes a witch of colour as the protagonist helps young readers of colour to feel represented. However, as Thomas also argues, not all representations are favourable: “Stereotyping, caricature, and marginalization of people of color, poor and working-class children and families, gender and sexual minorities, immigrants, and other minoritized groups have been persistent problems in children’s literature” (2019: e-book). Within fantasy, people of colour with magic powers have often been represented as wicked and evil, or used as sidekicks devoid of agency who are present in the story just to aid the main hero. The figure of the “magical negro” is a common trope within speculative fiction, a figure that emerged from “the Noble Savage of 17th century European literature” (Hughey, 2012: 755) and which experienced a series of transformations until it became the white hero’s helper. In general terms, “the Magical Negro is a paranormal or godlike Black character who transforms the life of a lost and broken White character” (Hughey: 756). Although some might view the presence of the magical negro in a narrative a step forward towards inclusiveness in speculative fiction, as Nnedi Okorafor warned in her essay “Stephen King’s Super-Duper Magical Negroes”:

The Magical Negro has great power and wisdom, yet he or she only uses it to help the white main character; he or she is not threatening because he or she only seeks to help, never hurt. The white main character’s well-being comes before the Magical Negro’s because the main character is of more value, more importance. (2014, online)



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The fact that the magical negro is only placed in the narrative to help the main white protagonist reinforces the idea that people of colour cannot be themselves protagonists. Therefore, finding people of colour who display magical powers in the role of protagonists helps to erase the misconception that they can only be cast on the roles of villains or helpers. However, race is not the only determining factor when considering a character as the *other* within fantasy fiction: gender is also a decisive aspect in the marginalization of specific characters. Hence, female witches of colour are doubly othered and ostracized (or *otherized*) within fantasy fiction.

As I argued in point 3.3.1, Chupeco's fantasy world includes themes inspired by Western models of fantasy yet they have included elements of Philippine and Japanese folklore to create The Eight Kingdoms and the legends and culture of its people. As Chupeco commented in her blog, *The Bone Witch* trilogy is "somewhat influenced by the Ayubbid dynasty", established by Saladin in the 12th century:

This was considered by some to be a very liberal period in Middle Eastern history, which has by now been overshadowed by the political turmoil in the region today. Politics will be important in the series, so there'll be variations of culture here and there that will be briefly touched beyond the two main countries *The Bone Witch* revolves around, from dynasty-style mountain nations to Wahhabism-ridden desert kingdoms. (Chupeco, 2016: online)

Following Chupeco's claim that the *The Bone Witch* series setting is a "fantastical version of Middle East/Asia" most of the characters inhabiting The Eight Kingdoms can be assumed to be non-white. Chupeco has also stated that "I am Chinese-Filipino, and the Philippines is a melting pot of different cultures, especially from neighbours like Indonesia and Malaysia, so I tried to portray a fantastical version of my own country through these influences" (in Luque 2023: 110). The Eight Kingdoms exhibit an array of different cultures and ethnicities since the customs and traditions in Odalia are not the same in Kion or Drycht. For instance, in Kneave, the capital of Odalia, it is common to see veiled women, which according to Tea "would be an awkward garment to wear when



working in the fields” back in her hometown in Knighstcross (*The Bone Witch*, 44). In Ankyo, the capital of Kion, veiled women are not as common as in Kneave, “but every now and then, I spotted a covered head among the crowds. Many here chose to wear their hair loose or had elaborately coiffed hairstyles that sported as many as three or four gemstone ornaments” (*The Bone Witch*, 58). By specifically signalling these differences in garments, hairstyle and skin colour amongst the different kingdoms, Chupeco is creating a diverse and multicultural fantasy world.

A character’s physiognomy is markedly important within fantasy, as Diana Wynne Jones satirized in *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*:

Black hair is Evil, particularly if combined with a corpse-white complexion. Red hair *always* entails magical POWERS, even if these are only latent. Brown hair has to be viewed in combination with eyes, whose colours are the real giveaway, but generally implies niceness. Fair hair, especially if it is silver-blonde, *always* means goodness. (1996: 38, original italics and capitalization)

Traditionally, witches were characterized as either having black hair and eyes and pale skin, or being red-haired, thus marking them as evil and wicked with magical powers. Protagonists, on the other hand, used to be mostly described as fair-haired and pale-skinned with blue eyes in the fairy tale tradition from which fantasy borrows many conventions. All the witches selected to be part of my study have got brown or dark hair, but only Tea is also described as having dark skin. This is essential. Since whiteness is considered the default standard in the Western world, and *The Bone With* trilogy was written in English and published in the USA for an international audience, readers might have assumed Tea is white if it were not for her description as a person of colour. Chupeco, however, has stated that

Most of my characters are heavily coded as Filipino as well, though it’s not mentioned outright in the book. There are hints that I tried to convey without being too direct about it (how Tea and Fox interact as siblings, the naming conventions for Kance, Kalen, and Khalad where their names all start with the same letter, etc.) because I do want some distance between depicting real world elements and the fantasy setting that I was creating, so that it becomes more immersive for readers. (in Luque 2023: 110)



Still, even though many of the characters in *The Bone Witch* trilogy are coded as Filipino, an inexperienced reader might have not identified them as such if it had not been explicitly stated in the text. In any case, Chupeco fits race seamlessly within their series and a character's race or ethnic background does not affect the character's life experience. There are many characters in the trilogy described as brown or dark-skinned without this being a cause for concern but rather something to be proud of, as this passage demonstrates:

‘It’s hard to tell who the locals are in Ankyo,’ Isamu protested. ‘Look at Knox here. He’s as black as night, but he comes from Yadosha like the rest of you.’
‘Yadosha is also a melting pot,’ Jolyon observed. ‘Not like you people in Arhen-Kosho. You all look the same.’
‘That is not true!’ One of Isamu’s countrymen extended his arm out, palms facing upward. ‘See? My skin is darker than Isamu’s!’

(*The Bone Witch*, 272)

Similarly, Tea's brown skin does not prevent her from becoming an asha and there are no indications in the trilogy that individuals are discriminated against because of their skin colour. It seems, thus, that there is not a hierarchy of race within the series. As the author has commented:

I was actually pretty adamant that race in my books be something that isn't given the same weight as it has nowadays, particularly because during the heyday of some kingdoms like in Greece and Rome, skin color was actually not a factor. Discriminating because of skin color is a product of more recent periods in history because it's been weaponized by people who claim they're only preserving their own culture which is, honestly, all just in their heads. (in Luque 2023: 110)

Still, it is important that Tea is specifically described as having brown skin because, as noted, this is exceptional: “The vast majority of Fantasy protagonists, whatever the sub-genre in which they appear, are described or shown to have physical characteristics associated with Whiteness” (Young, 2016: 44). Nevertheless, Thomas argues that “even a Dark Other who is transcendently beautiful, beloved, and self-sacrificing—one who has, to borrow a term from the uber-popular *Game of Thrones* TV series, “skin changed” or “warged” a White character—even that Dark Other *must* be sacrificed, and her death



must be positioned as deserved” (2019: e-book, original italics). Tea decides to sacrifice herself at the end of the trilogy and this seems to reinforce Thomas’ argument. Yet, in Chupeco’s trilogy Tea is not the Dark Other because of her skin but because of the magic she can wield: it is her magical powers what differentiates her from the rest.

Chupeco’s trilogy presents a medieval-like society in which there is a ruling class and lay people. Within this society, asha and deathseekers are the only ones who can wield magic and therefore they are granted a special position within the social order, but they do not belong to the ruling class, thus occupying a position in between. Hence, it is not race what divides people but the ability to use magic, as in *Harry Potter*, and the social class into which you are born. Social class is not a determining factor only when you have magical powers: Tea was born in a lower-class family yet her ability to perform magic instantly propelled her upwards. Likewise, the ability to use magic is not tied to one’s skin colour as there are asha and Deathseekers of diverse backgrounds from all around The Eight Kingdoms. Similarly, race and gender are not then determining factors for being part of the ruler class in Chupeco’s trilogy as there are Kings and Empresses from different ethnic backgrounds and each kingdom expresses their own customs and identity differently without this being a major cause of conflict. Chupeco’s narrative seems to adhere to the concept of cosmopolitanism: “Traditionally, cosmopolitanism has been described as a form of universalism that is directly opposed to the idea of nationalism. The term comes from the Greek word *kosmopolitês*, meaning ‘citizen of the world’, and most commentators date it back to Diogenes and the cynics of the fourth century BCE” (Patell, 2015: 4). Perhaps unwillingly, Tea becomes a cosmopolitan herself as she travels around The Eight Kingdoms avoiding persecution. Tea always keeps an open mind about other people’s cultures and customs: she embraces difference since she is different herself. The inclusion of cosmopolitan views in fantasy is not uncommon; as Patell writes, the



genre itself “asks us to come to terms with otherness, to leave the comforts of sameness behind (though in view) in order to explore difference” (2015: 110). Besides, Chupeco’s trilogy demonstrates how “fantasy fiction possesses the unique capacity to imagine new ways of co-existing with radical forms of cultural otherness” (Shaw, 2018: 2). Simultaneously, since fiction reflects the culture from which it springs and therefore the trilogy portrays the diversity of people and customs favourably, readers can appreciate the advantages of a cosmopolitan society.

To conclude, by presenting a dark-skinned witch who fights for justice in a society that prejudices people like her because of the type of magic she can wield and not because of the colour of her skin, Chupeco is reinforcing the idea that race does not determine who you are or what you shall become. As I have argued, race is not a discriminating factor within the books as various people of colour are in positions of power within the trilogy. What is more, by having a protagonist who is a witch of colour, Chupeco is doubly challenging two archaic and primitive concepts: that witches are inherently evil and the villain in the story, and that people of colour with magical abilities should help the protagonist rather than being protagonists themselves. Chupeco dismantles these notions in *The Bone Witch* trilogy and offers a witch protagonist of colour who has agency and who refuses to be at the service of a society that undermines her.

Having discussed the representation of people of colour in the trilogy, I shall turn now to discuss how LGTBQ+ people are represented in the novels through secondary characters and what role Tea plays in ensuring that they are heard and respected within the society of The Eight Kingdoms.



3.4.2 Tea as a LGTBIQ+ Ally: Gender and Sexuality in the *Bone Witch* Trilogy

The representation of LGTBIQ+ people both within fantasy and young adult fiction has increased in recent years and authors and publishers are making efforts to write about and include characters who do not ascribe to the traditional traits of binary gender. *The Bone Witch* trilogy is rich in the representation of queer characters: there is a depiction of a lesbian couple (Lady Shadi and Lady Zoya), one gay character (Khalad) and a transgender woman (Likh) and there are several references to the other characters being tolerant and sympathetic toward them. This section of my dissertation, thus, is devoted to exploring how the witch protagonist becomes an ally for LGTBIQ+ people within the narrative, with a special focus on her support for Likh's choice to become an asha.

To begin with, the label LGTBIQ+ needs to be clarified. The letters in the acronym stand for lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, intersex, queer or questioning and more. Over the years, the acronym has expanded but not all persons who consider themselves queer feel represented under this umbrella. The sign plus, therefore, indicates that much more can be fitted into the acronym and that there is room for expansion. My choice of this acronym for this section stems from the presence, as noted, of a lesbian couple in the series, as well as a gay character and one transgender character. Even though the protagonist of the series is a cisgender, heterosexual witch, the novels portray her as an ally to LGTBIQ+ people and there is enough evidence in the texts to provide a close reading of how LGTBIQ+ characters are represented in *The Bone Witch* series and what contribution they make to the overall representation of queer characters within young adult fantasy fiction.

Since the novels focalize on Tea, the queer characters in the trilogy are secondary characters; readers learn about their experiences through Tea's narration. Although some might consider a setback that the queer characters are secondary and not the main



character, Cart and Jenkins comment that “YA literature is now also including more and more secondary characters who ‘just happen to be’ gay and whose sexuality is no longer presented as being a ‘problem’” (2006: 165) and that “GLBTQ literature needs to be—and is slowly becoming—more than coming-out stories” (2006: 166). Consequently, it is important to consider LGBTIQ+ characters, protagonists or not, beyond the coming-out story.

While there has been an increase of criticism and research on young adult literature featuring LGBTIQ+ characters, especially focusing on its educational purposes (Parsons, 2016; Boyd and Bereiter, 2017; Linville and Harper, 2021) very little attention has been paid to the subgenre of young adult fantasy fiction. Despite the fact that there are many LGBTIQ+ characters in this subgenre (a quick internet search shows that there are plenty of YA fantasy books featuring queer characters) there seems to be a lack of criticism and research on the matter. Therefore, given that YA fantasy fiction is one of the most popular genres not only among young adult people it is also of the utmost interest to consider how LGBTIQ+ characters are characterized in the genre and if their representations indicate a trend towards more inclusive and tolerant narratives.

As I have previously mentioned, this section is mainly focused on the character of Likh, whom Tea meets at the beginning of her journey to become an asha. Likh and Tea first meet when Tea is brought by Mistress Parmina to a *zivar* shop,⁷⁰ where Likh works as an assistant: “He was easily one of the loveliest boys I have ever met, a few years younger than I was. I knew it was a strange thing to say, but ‘lovely’ suited him well” (*The Bone Witch*, 145). In that first encounter, it is revealed that Likh is not too happy

⁷⁰ A *zivar* shop is where asha and other people obtain different ornaments and complements for their hair. *Zivar* is the name given to these ornaments, which are normally charmed with spells to either protect the wearer from certain magic or to give them “glamour” (a better physical appearance).



with her⁷¹ situation; Chupeco discloses that, having been born male, she has got a silver heartsglass, which will oblige her to become a Deathseeker:

‘Likh!; I gaped. ‘You’re a—you’re a—’
‘I can draw runes,’ Likh said bitterly. ‘And you know what that means. Nobody knows because no one really looks at a shop’s assistant, but when my Heartsrune day arrives next year, they’ll find out. I’ll be forced to become a Deathseeker.’
(*The Bone Witch*, 173)

Likh cannot be an asha, as she tearfully explains to Tea because “‘I’m the wrong—well, I’m the wrong everything for it. Just not where it counts most’”. Tea feels “‘terrible for him” knowing “he would not be able to survive Deathseeker training” (*The Bone Witch*, 174). Tea determines to help Likh in her journey to become an asha, thus becoming a LGTBIQ+ ally when she supports Likh in her choice to become who she really is. Even though Likh does not officially change her gender until the last book of the series, the two previous novels offer the buildup to that moment, signalling that Likh is not only a male who wants to defy gender expectations by becoming an asha but a male who does not identify as such.

According to Rockefeller, there are four different types of transgender representations in YA literature:

The first category features characters who are consistently identified as the opposite gender but do not identify as transgender themselves. (...) Books in the second category present and perpetuate negative stereotypes. (...) The third category (by far the most populous) presents the option of passing as a different gender as a quick fix to a problem. (...) Then there’s the fourth category: those few—very few—novels that craft believable, multidimensional characters who embody or face transgender themes in a plausible way. (Rockefeller, 2007: 521)

The Bone Witch trilogy belongs to the fourth category, since Likh is not merely a one-dimensional secondary character who has been placed in the narrative as a stock character. However, Likh was not initially designed as a character of much relevance within the series. As the author stated in an interview: “Likh was initially conceived as a one-scene

⁷¹ I will use the pronouns she/her for Likh since she decides that she wants to be referred to as Lady Likh by the end of the trilogy, and this is how the author refers to her by the end of the trilogy.



character, but she wound up growing on me so much that she ended up being the heart of the series, really. Her name is actually based on the Tagalog word “likha”, which means “to be” (in Jean Book Nerd, 2019: online). Thus, as Chupeco confirms, Likh is one of the indispensable supporting characters in *The Bone Witch* trilogy.

Likh’s desire to become an asha is truncated by the archaic, patriarchal society she lives in, which is in turn a mirror of many societies nowadays. Likh’s story also helps readers to see how Tea positions herself and exemplifies what allies can do, as this conversation between her and the Bard demonstrates. She cannot see why men should not train as asha:

(...) males are not the only people who can rule a realm. If women are encouraged to fight and draw runes and strive to be a man’s equal in those regard, then why can’t a man be encouraged to sing and dance and entertain as we do?’
‘In Drycht,’ I admitted, “men consider such trivialities beneath them. The performing arts are not a show of strength. They are a sign of weakness.’
(The Bone Witch, 178, original italics)

Many books which include trans representation focus on the character’s certainty that they do not belong to the gender they were assigned at birth and therefore the narrative follows their quest to alter what they feel is not their body. Novels such as *Luna* (2004) by Anne Peters and *Almost Perfect* (2009) by Brian Katcher belong to this category. In *The Bone Witch* trilogy Likh finally confesses to Tea how she feels about herself:

‘I’ve always thought that I was born wrong,’ Likh whispered. ‘In the wrong body. I was wondering—I was hoping—that maybe there were other people who thought like me. People who felt different, like me. That maybe there was a rune where we could—where I could—change to be more me than I am right now. To occupy a different body more in keeping with my mind.’
(The Shadowglass, 160)

According to Barker-Plummer, the ‘wrong body discourse’ (WBD) “is an account of gender nonconformity that sees it as the (accidental, biological) result of an individuals’ brain or psyche being misaligned with their anatomy” (2013: 711). By stating that she feels she was born wrong and her desire to find a spell which could change her body to match her mind, Likh seems to position herself within the WBD narrative. While Barker-



Plummer accepts that WBD narratives can be liberating, she also contends that this is a problematic gender discourse “for critical gender theory, including reinforcement, rather than critique, of gender binaries, and, often, a recirculation of some quite essentialist and stereotypical ideas about gender more generally” (2013: 712). Similarly, Putzi argues that “When wrong-body discourse becomes the only option for transgender teens in young adult fiction, however, readers are denied the space in which to think about the complexity of gender, space in which many of them might see themselves” (2017: 445).

Ryan (2009) recognizes four recurrent stereotypes of trans representation in film and media, of which three are negative: the Transgender Deceiver, the Transgender Mammy, Transgender Monster and Transgender Revolutionary. The Transgender Deceiver “utilizes drag and gender transformation to obtain something they want from society”; the Transgender Mammy fits “the stereotype of the fabulous, servile and palatable trans-feminine subject”; the Transgender Monster “describes the use of gender-transgressive killers in horror and slasher films”, and the Transgender Revolutionary is “mostly found in documentaries focused on trans political agency” (2009: iii-iv). Although Likh wears the typical clothes of an asha and she is often considered as such by other characters, she does not aim to gain anything but to feel like herself. Oddly, she apologizes to a male character who mistook her for an asha:

‘(...) I misled you and your friends last night, Sir Knox. You were led to believe that I was...that I was a lady. Likh... in Odalia, Likh is a boy’s name. I joined the Willows out of a genuine sincerity to be an asha... but I shouldn’t have withheld this from any of you. Please forgive me.’ He closed his eyes.

How many times had he confessed this in Kion, I thought, only to be met with derision and disgust? I felt terrible, not having known before. (The Shadowglass, 221 original italics and ellipses)

Because she dresses like an asha, Likh is perceived by others as such and although there are many reasons why someone might want to cross-dress without being transgender, as Stryker argues in her book *Transgender History* (2008):



The practice of cross-dressing can have many meanings and motivations: Besides being a way to resist or move away from an assigned social gender, it could be a theatrical practice (either comic or dramatic), part of fashion or politics (such as the practice of women's wearing pants once was), part of religious ceremonies, or part of celebrating public festivals and holidays (such as Mardi Gras, Carnival, or Halloween). (2008: 18)

Likh decides to cross-dress because she wants to distance herself from her assigned gender and be seen by the community as an asha. However, Likh can only dress as an asha thanks to Tea's support as an ally. In the first novel of the series, Tea asks Rahim, reputed *hua* designer in the Willows, to make a *hua*, the traditional asha gown, for Likh. Rahim reminds Tea that “some asha consider this an affront, a joke made in poor taste” to which Tea replies: “And that's why I was hoping you could make it (...) Everyone knows you would never make a *hua* just for the jest of it. Then perhaps they will take him seriously when he dances” (*The Bone Witch*, 195). By accepting to make the *hua* for Likh Rahim also becomes an ally in Likh's path to become an asha, as he is a queer person himself:

‘The elders would censure lesser-known ateliers for this. Even with my influence, they may still do so. What makes you think I am willing to take such chances?’

‘Because you have taken such risks before,’ Likh said softly. ‘Chesh told me your story, of when you first arrived at Kion. You were a refugee fleeing from a place that punished people like us. (...) You made a living by not compromising who you are. I... I want to do the same—to prove to people that I can and to prove to myself that I can.’

(*The Bone Witch*, 196, original ellipsis)

Later on in the series, Likh is not only supported by Tea in her decision to be an asha but by a vast majority of Tea's asha sisters and even the Prince of Odalia himself, after she performs in the *darashi oyun* dance. However, Likh surprises everyone not only by dancing gracefully but by also drawing runes, which worries Tea because “It was one thing to dance like an asha, but to show them you could draw runes too was inviting trouble. They were going to seek him out afterward, and the boy knew it” (*The Bone Witch*, 297). Therefore, Tea decides to ask the asha association to accept Likh as an apprentice breaking the outdated and patriarchal notion that men cannot become asha:



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‘It is an archaic tradition,’ I argued, more vehement and less apprehensive than I had been at my own test. ‘I don’t see why men who can sing and dance and draw runes should be prevented from becoming asha if they meet all other requirements.’

‘It is an insult to our profession!’ another old lady thundered. ‘It’s nearly as ridiculous as a woman joining the Deathseekers!’

(*The Bone Witch*, 329)

In a society in which men’s and women’s roles and expectations are based on gender and not their strengths and abilities, fighting for a person’s right to choose who they want to be shows Tea (and many of the other asha) in a positive light, demonstrating that even in close-minded societies there are individuals who will stand up for what is right, thus showing readers how important and significant it is to face and challenge patriarchal convictions. This, in turn, helps to view the witch as a positive character.

By the end of the trilogy, Likh chooses to be called Lady Likh and therefore for the rest of the narrative she is referred to as she/her:

‘I don’t want to make other people uncomfortable, but I want to be who I am, and I need to understand my pride in that before anything else. Even if there are no spells to give me that shape, it doesn’t stop me from knowing I *am* a woman, whatever else they may say. Can’t... can’t I at least have that?’

‘And I’ll support you,’ I promised, smiling. ‘Every step of the way, Lady Likh.’

(*The Shadowglass*, 276, original ellipsis)

However, towards the end Likh is poisoned, falling into a sort of coma from which she cannot wake up, which might be read as punishment for her transgression of the gender binary. Nonetheless, when the narrative concludes readers discover that Likh is alive and in a happy relationship with Khalad. Tea becomes an ally once more when she sacrifices herself to rid The Eight Kingdoms of magic, thus lifting the curse upon Likh and erasing any gender expectations regarding magical use since magic disappears. As the Bard says, Tea’s sacrifice helps The Eight Kingdoms to become a more egalitarian society (*The Shadowglass*, 444).

As an ally, Tea does everything in her power to help Likh be seen as an asha by an archaic and patriarchal society who does not accept breaking traditions. Ultimately, Tea sacrifices herself for the greater good which includes revoking the curse placed on



Likh and therefore demonstrates that witches are no longer the ones who jinx people. Finding a witch who stands as an ally to LGBTIQ+ people in a young adult fantasy narrative helps to erase the image of the witch as a mischievous and immoral character. Besides, Tea demonstrates that facing and challenging sexist and obsolete conceptions of gender is how we can help LGBTIQ+ persons. Therefore, *The Bone Witch* trilogy offers a remarkable example of how witches can be allies and not the evil characters they were once depicted to be.

3.4.3 “Sometimes you can’t help who you love or for how long”: The Love Plot in *The Bone Witch* Trilogy

Love and sexual attraction have always been a main topic in YA fiction since it is during adolescence that young adults start to experience and experiment with love and sexual desire. The way these topics are represented in YA literature tends to follow an established pattern. According to Trites:

Generally speaking, two teenagers feel sexually attracted to one another in a standard ya romance. The action is occasionally blocked during a stage in which each character thinks the attraction is unrequited. The characters eventually communicate and express their attraction. Then the action is blocked while they make decisions about consummating their passion. More often than not, they express their passion with some sort of sexual contact. (2000: 85)

The Bone Witch books are not considered a romance trilogy and Tea’s love life is not the main focus of the story, similarly to the other series analysed in this dissertation. However, Tea’s love interests do play an important role and it is necessary to explore how a witch’s love life either maintains patriarchal conceptions of the character or promotes an antipatriarchal image of the witch.

Initially, it is hinted that Tea’s romantic interest is Prince Kance. Tea meets the Prince when they reach Odalia on their way to Kion and are introduced to King Telemaine, Prince Kance’s father. After meeting just once, Tea becomes infatuated:



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Whenever I was at my lowest, I would pretend that I had a better future. I pictured myself as a powerful asha, slaying daeva and slowly earning the people's admiration. I imagined I was as Lilac had predicted, with jewels and gowns and a prince by my side, who resembled Prince Kance more and more with each passing day. (*The Bone Witch*, 86)

Tea seems interested in pursuing a traditional romance story by having a Prince fall in love with her and enjoy the old-style “happily ever after”. Through the flashbacks in which Tea tells her life story to the Bard, Chupeco hints that Prince Kance is Tea's main love interest and that she will strive to attain her desired happy ending: “(...) *Prince Kance started out as a simple infatuation. Back then, I had no inkling how much of my life he would change. But when you are younger and know no better, an infatuation can lead all the world to burn*” (*The Bone Witch*, 98, original italics). This passage suggests that Tea's infatuation with Prince Kance will become stronger and that her love for him will be the cause of her downfall. Tea and Prince Kance's story had all the ingredients to become a powerful love story: a frowned upon relationship between a Prince and a Dark asha who fight against all odds to be together. Besides, the portrayal of Kalen, Prince Kance's cousin and bodyguard as a broody third party set against the match, completed the traditional elements present in many young adult romances. Yet, the romance is not consolidated.

Throughout *The Bone Witch* readers see how Tea goes through various stages in her infatuation with Prince Kance: she experiences jealousy when he focuses his attentions on other asha and when she learns about his plans to marry Princess Inessa from the Kingdom of Kion to form an allegiance. However, Tea realizes that her duty as an asha prevails over any personal feelings she might have for Prince Kance, and when Kalen shows his disapproval she replies: “You're right. I do like Prince Kance, but I've tried my best not to let that get in the way of my duties as an asha, and I never intended to let him know, much less do anything about it” (*The Bone Witch*, 369). The tension



between Tea and Kalen becomes of the utmost importance in the following novels in the trilogy. While in *The Bone Witch* Kalen is presented as an obstacle for Tea and Prince Kance to overcome, in the following novel he becomes Tea's great love, in the typical romance trope of enemies to lovers. The relationship between Prince Kance, Tea and Kalen is not, in any case, a triangle, since Kance never expresses romantic feelings towards Tea.

In the context of YA fantasy fiction it was rare to find love stories featuring a witch as a protagonist. The novelty in YA texts from the 1990s onwards is the inclusion of a romantic subplot for the character of the witch, who had been previously depicted either as the old dried-up hag or the young temptress. By including a romance for the witch, these texts demonstrate that the character has undergone an evolution and she is no longer seen as a monstrous woman/girl. The romantic subplot in *The Bone Witch* trilogy, therefore, enhances the image of the witch as a character deserving of love. Additionally, as Buckley argues the romantic struggle is "further testing" that the hero in a Bildungsroman must undergo "before his initiation is completed" (1974: 22).

The enemies to lovers trope is extremely popular within YA fiction but it is not a novelty: classic romance novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813) had already established a pattern of how this trope should be structured. According to Molly Rockwood, there are a few essential elements: "the characters must be enemies, the characters must be redeemable and the characters must both grow and change to overcome their enmity" (2022, online). While the animosity between the two characters needs to be clearly stated, it should not be so deep that it cannot be overcome. Kalen's hostility towards Tea comes from his prejudices against Dark asha, as one killed his mother (*The Bone Witch*, 54), while Tea loathes Kalen because of his many comments stating that he does not like nor trust her. They seem to briefly become civil to each other



in *The Heart Forger* but they ultimately quarrel again when Tea compels Kalen to leave Odalia and she breaks their budding. Typically, “As the story continues and the characters are wary of each other” they are put “in situations where they can build trust. (...) Eventually, something comes along that challenges this loyalty they’ve started to build” (Bauman, 2021: online). Tea’s and Kalen’s trust is built in the training sessions in which Kalen is forced to teach Tea how to fight and properly use a sword. Once that trust is broken, Tea apologizes to Kalen by casting a rune called “heartshare”:

“It’s used mostly for healing, but it also grants one person control over another willing spellbinder. The only way I can think for you to forgive me is to put myself in the same position I put you in.” I guided the rune toward him; it hovered over his heartsglass. After a moment, he accepted, the rune flaring around him before disappearing. (*The Heart Forger*, 220)

With the heartshare rune, Kalen is now able to control Tea in the same way she previously compelled him to leave Odalia with her, yet he never makes use of it. It may seem problematic, however, that the only way Tea thinks she can earn Kalen’s trust and forgiveness is to give him control over her body and mind. By granting Kalen the possibility of controlling her, she is forsaking her right to consent to any actions perpetrated on her. However, Tea never gave Kalen the choice to consent to leaving Odalia and therefore it seems fair to her to give Kalen the same opportunity to compel her. While Tea’s actions might be read as foolish, it denotes her acknowledgement that controlling someone else without their consent is outrageous, which is what she did to Kalen even if it was to save his life. Still, the fact that she willingly gives Kalen the possibility to control her might be read as giving her consent. Nevertheless, as I mentioned, Kalen refuses to use the rune which portrays him positively. He wants Tea to willingly be with him: “I couldn’t accept your offer. The last thing I wanted was to force you to kiss me” (*The Heart Forger*, 379).



A crucial moment in any novel featuring a romantic relationship is the couple's first kiss. Tea's and Kalen's first kiss occurs at a royal party after Tea kills a soldier to save Kalen's life:

He kissed me. In full view of the nobles, in full view of the emperor and anyone who wanted to see, his mouth hot against mine. He tasted like everything I wanted, and he kissed like I could reach into his heart and take everything I desired from it. I was inexperienced at this (...) But I kissed him back like I wished I could do better, like I could do better if it was always with him. (*The Heart Forger*, 343)

Even though they kiss, it takes Tea some time to acknowledge that she has feelings for Kalen: "My own thoughts rose louder, terrified and elated but still partly, desperately in denial, going *Oh no, oh no, oh no*" (*The Heart Forger*, 360, original italics). The couple finally come together when Kalen confesses he has been in love with Tea for some time and she reassures him that she no longer has feelings for Prince Kance (*The Heart Forger*, 380-381).

Even though *The Bone Witch* series presents a traditional romantic plot of enemies to lovers and it is predictable that Tea and Kalen will become a couple, it is unusual that the witch finds true love. Traditionally, both in literature and real life, witches were considered to be malign creatures who "bewitched" men and committed sexual crimes for which they were persecuted. Before the 1990s, it is rare to find a story in which the witch is romantically involved with another character.⁷² To my knowledge, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, by Elizabeth George Speare (1958) is the first young adult fantasy novel which includes a romantic subplot for the witch but later novels, especially after the 1990s, tend to include a romantic subplot for the witch, such as L.J. Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* (1991-1992). A common trope in fiction which includes a romance for the witch is the use of love spells and potions. As Godwin claims "Whether cast by heroes or villains

⁷² Although it was not common, some fantasy fictions featured a witch with a romantic interest. Such is the case of *Bewitched*, an American TV series which run from 1964 to 1972, and the film *I Married a Witch* (1942), based on the novel *The Passionate Witch* (Thorne Smith and Norman H. Matson, 1941).



to gain romance or control, love spells define witches by their relationship to a male and thus contribute to patriarchal discipline” (2012: 105). The use of love spells and potions shows that witches could not be desirable people on their own and therefore had to rely on their magical powers to obtain love.⁷³ What is more, “Even a seemingly active role such as casting a spell to summon a man is constructed as a passive act” (Godwin, 2012: 116), with the witch waiting for the man to act. Some might argue that the witch casting the love spell is in control of her romantic interests and therefore shows signs of agency, yet I concur with Godwin that in these cases the witch seems desperate, which contributes to the negative image of the witch and to uphold patriarchal assumptions of women: “Media representations of witches underscore the necessity and benefits of female dependence on a more capable male, whether mortal or divine. This rhetorical strategy also connects the use of love spells in media representations with the tendency to attribute witches’ magical power to external sources” (Godwin:117). Nevertheless, such is not the case of *The Bone Witch* trilogy. Even though love potions are mentioned in the novels, Tea never makes use of them to gain Kalen’s affection; he falls in love with Tea because of her character.

To conclude, the love plot in *The Bone Witch* trilogy benefits the portrayal of the witch as an antipatriarchal character who does not need to use love spells and potions to be deserving of love and affection and thus erases patriarchal assumptions about the character. If the witch is presented as capable of loving and being loved without recurring to her using magic to “bewitch” the object of her affection, this contributes to the removal

⁷³ We see this exemplified in Merope Gaunt, Voldemort’s mother in *Harry Potter*. Having fallen in love with Tom Riddle Sr, a Muggle who ignored her, Dumbledore supposed that Merope resorted to a love potion to gain his affections. Believing that Riddle would return her feelings, Merope stopped giving the potion to Riddle. However, Riddle abandoned her, and she died after giving birth to their son, who would go on to become Lord Voldemort.



of the traditional mischievous and malevolent characteristics conferred to the witch and it helps to portray her in a more positive light.

3.5 Conclusions: A Witch's Sacrifice for the Greater Good

A life worth dying for is a life worth living after all.
Rin Chupeco, *The Shadowglass*

The ending of the *Bone Witch* trilogy leaves readers wondering if Tea and Kalen survived after Tea takes the shadowglass potion, as a passage, already quoted, suggests they might have found a way to return to The Eight Kingdoms. Following the aftermath of war and Tea's sacrifice to rid the world of magic, a monument is built to commemorate Tea and Kalen's love and their sacrifice. On the day of Tea's brother Fox wedding to Inessa, Crown Princess of Kion, the Bard is at the foot of the monument paying his respects when a couple approaches him and the woman says something that he had once heard from Tea. Even though this ending is ambiguous and leaves room for speculation, Tea definitely makes a sacrifice for the greater good: by ridding the world of magic, The Eight Kingdoms can become a fairer society as there are no more spells and curses to jinx one's enemies. After being ostracized and regarded as a monster by a hypocritical society, Tea finally becomes a heroine on her own terms, even though many people do not know or understand the sacrifice she made.

Throughout the three books that constitute the *Bone Witch* trilogy, readers see how Tea develops from a scared 13-year-old into a mature girl of 17 and a proficient dark witch. Tea's maturation process is linked to her understanding of her condition as a bone witch and the realization that people like her are only tolerated in The Eight Kingdoms because they are the only ones capable of dealing with the daeva. Tea undergoes an arduous training to become a dark witch, as I have explored in section 3.3. Tea's



preparation to become an asha and the expectations that have been placed on her not only by her asha-ka but also by society and the elders from the asha association affect her understanding of the world. Throughout her training Tea discovers the politics and power games that the asha association is playing and she determines to change her condition and position as a Dark asha. Confronting power structures is one of the inherent characteristics of young adult fiction; as Trites writes:

Power is a force that operates within the subject and upon the subject in adolescent literature; teenagers are repressed as well as liberated by their own power and by the power of the social forces that surround them in these books. Much of the genre is thus dedicated to depicting how potentially out-of-control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures. (2000: 7)

Negotiating one's position within society is a key aspect in young adult literature. The expected outcome is that the young adult adapts to the existing structure and acknowledges that to belong, they must accept their position. Tea, however, never accepts that to be tolerated she must follow the asha association's orders and surrender her life to their service. Since Tea sacrifices herself so young, at the age of 17, it could be argued that she never fully achieves maturity because she prefers to die than submit to the association's rule. However, by surrendering her life Tea demonstrates that she is mature enough to understand that her sacrifice is more valuable than a life under someone's yoke.

As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, Tea is a great example of an antipatriarchal witch because not only does she fight against society's patriarchal establishment but also because she becomes an ally for those who are in a more vulnerable position than her. Additionally, by explicitly stating that Tea has got brown skin, Chupeco is contributing to the inclusion of more people of colour in young adult fantasy, a genre which is mostly filled with white protagonists. The *Bone Witch* trilogy, therefore, is a great example of how fantasy narratives addressing a young adult audience can be inclusive and representative of a myriad of cultures and traditions. Chupeco incorporates



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many themes and topics which resonate with the period the novels were written in, such as the fight of LGTBIQ+ people for being represented in media and the presence of non-western customs.

After having analysed the novels in *The Bone Witch* trilogy I can argue that they portray an antipatriarchal witch with agency who challenges previous misconceptions placed on the character and who positively contributes to the representation of women in young adult fantasy. Even though *The Bone Witch* books were not written with a didactic purpose, they undoubtedly help the readers question the power structures in their own society and what can they do to resist them.



CHAPTER 4. BREAKING THE STEREOTYPE: KELLEY ARMSTRONG'S WITCHES IN THE WOMEN OF THE OTHERWORLD SERIES

Stuffing people into boxes is for those who have issues about their own box.
Kelley Armstrong, *Spell Bound*

4.1 The Otherworld: Fantasy in Kelley Armstrong's Series

4.1.1 Kelley Armstrong: Canadian Fantasy Author

Kelley L. Armstrong (b. 1968) is a popular Canadian author of mainly fantasy fiction. Armstrong graduated with a degree on psychology from the university of Western Ontario but went on to study computer programming at Fanshawe College. While working for a bank, she wrote the first novel in the *Women of the Otherworld* series, *Bitten*, which was sold in 1999 but published in 2001. Apart from the *Women of the Otherworld* series, Armstrong is also the author of many other novels for young adults: *The Darkest Powers* trilogy (2008-2010), *The Darkest Rising* trilogy (2011-2013) and *The Cainsville series* (2013-2017), amongst others. Armstrong has co-authored (with Melissa Marr) the *Blackwell Pages* trilogy (2014-2016), a middle grade narrative centred on Loki's and Thor's descendants and their journey to prevent the end of the world. Armstrong is also the author of the *Nadia Stafford* books (2007-2017), a series of mystery novels for adults. Armstrong received one Aurora Award (given annually to the best Canadian fantasy and science fiction works) for *The Rising*, the third novel in *The Darkest Rising* trilogy (2013).

The *Women of the Otherworld* series, composed by thirteen novels and several short stories, novellas and anthologies, is arguably Armstrong's most popular work, a

popularity to which the adaptation of *Bitten* as a series in 2014 by Sky TV may have contributed; the seventh book in the series, *No Humans Involved* (2007), was Armstrong's first *New York Times* best-seller. The series features werewolves, vampires, necromancers, demons, and witches struggling to pass as regular humans while facing various obstacles and foes.

In this chapter I mainly focus on the novels which include a young witch: *Waking the Witch* (2010), *Spell Bound* (2011) and *Thirteen* (2012). The protagonist of this trilogy within the series is Savannah, a 21-year-old witch who works as a private investigator in her former legal tutor's detective agency. Even though there are other novels and short stories by Armstrong that feature witches, they are slightly older than Savannah and therefore do not fit within the young adult or emerging adult category. Besides, Savannah is the protagonist and narrator of the story. Nevertheless, it will be essential to consider other novels and short stories in which Savannah appears as a minor character to provide a full understanding of her evolution from a 12-year-old teenager to a young adult woman. Savannah is a secondary character in *Dime Store Magic* (2004), *Industrial Magic* (2004), *Haunted* (2005), *No Humans Involved* (2007) and *Personal Demon* (2008). She is also featured in the short stories: "Escape" (available online, 2005), "Wedding Bell Hell" (in *Tales of the Otherworld*, 2010), "The Case of El Chupacabra" (in *Tales of the Otherworld*, 2010), "Vanishing Act" (in *Otherworld Nights*, 2014) "The Ungrateful Dead" (in *Otherworld Secrets*, 2015), "Counterfeit Magic" (in *Otherworld Secrets*, 2015), and "Baby Boom" (in *Otherworld Chills*, 2016).

Savannah is older than the other witches in my dissertation and it could be argued that she does not fit within the group of young adults. While the other witches go through adolescence and hit young adulthood by the end of their narratives, Savannah is already in her young adult phase in the novels in which she is a protagonist and a narrator. Still,



young adulthood is considered to encompass persons aged 17-26 and although Savannah is already legally an adult by the time she becomes a narrator, she is still negotiating her position within society. In any case, the first time Savannah makes an appearance she is 12 years old and readers can see her grow up throughout the series.

The *Women of the Otherworld* series differs from the other series in this dissertation not only because it features an older protagonist but also because of the fantasy setting it displays. While Pratchett and Chupeco create complete secondary worlds and Rowling makes use of wainscot fantasy for the *Harry Potter* series, Armstrong includes fantastic elements and characters in current Earth; her series is urban fantasy. In the following section, therefore, I will examine which elements of urban fantasy apply to Armstrong's series and how these elements shape the character of the witch.

4.1.2 The Otherworld: Urban Fantasy in Armstrong's Fiction

Armstrong's *Women of the Otherworld* could be labelled as horror, paranormal romance and urban fantasy. Armstrong's website, however, describes her series as a supernatural thriller. Defining the genre of a series can be complex and unfruitful, especially when the series mixes and draws from several sources and influences, which is certainly the case of Armstrong's novels and a key characteristic of urban fantasy. As Ekman observes:

That urban fantasy is at least a generic hybrid is often pointed out (...); its root genres are not only fantasy but Gothic horror and romance, and it can also draw on mystery, science fiction, and crime fiction. How much, and what, each root contributes to the works of particular urban fantasists—indeed, to particular texts—varies greatly. (2016: 452)

Urban fantasy, therefore, is a subgenre in the broader speculative fiction category. The origins of urban fantasy are not clear—some argue that its roots go as far back as ancient Greece—but the 1990s are usually taken as a point of reference for the expansion of urban fantasy novels and the publication of many texts which set the ground for the genre's



conventions. Anyiwo and Hobson contend that one of the originators of what now is commonly understood as urban fantasy is Laurell K. Hamilton's *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter* Series (1993-present). According to these scholars, Hamilton's series established what would become the core features of urban fantasy:

The series also initiates a trend in urban fantasy of a first-person, often female, narrator that has a strong personality, a compelling back-story, and a preternatural power that grows exponentially. It is the introduction of a kick-ass heroine that establishes both Blake as a character and the genre as whole. With twenty-five books and counting, Anita Blake is not just the point of origin but an on-going example of what works about the genre. (2019: 3)

Due to the increasing popularity of urban fantasy novels which included some form of romance, many critics grouped together the subgenres of urban fantasy and paranormal romance. However, even though many narratives are classified under the umbrella term UF/PR, the main difference is the importance of the romantic plot within the text. In paranormal romance, the driving force of the plot are romance and relationships, and the characters need to fall in love and culminate their relationship in a "happily ever after" ending. Besides, paranormal romance novels tend to include explicit depictions of sex. On the other hand, urban fantasy texts might or might not include a romantic subplot, yet this is never the focus of the story. In the novels selected to be part of my study there is a romantic subplot between Savannah and Adam, her love interest, which will be furtherly explored in section 4.4.2 of this chapter but it is not the driving force of the story.

When considering urban fantasy, it is necessary to acknowledge that one of the genre's most significant aspects is precisely its hybridity. While other genres present more strict conventions, urban fantasy "draws broadly from the structures of a number of other genres and subgenres to both reinforce and subvert certain genre expectations" (McLennon, 2014: online). Furthermore, urban fantasy is also heavily influenced by elements from popular culture, especially horror movies. Urban fantasy's generic hybridity allows it to be in constant evolution and renovation, thus demonstrating that



genres are not static or fixed and that the (un)favourable reception of certain texts influences the genre's nature and progression. Urban fantasy's potential to redefine and reformulate is intrinsically linked to the witch's own ability to change and alter how she is perceived and therefore it is not uncommon to find a vast number of witches within urban fantasy. What is more, the fact that many urban fantasy texts are intended for a young adult readership and its massive popularity reinforces the idea that readers welcome non-traditional depictions of classical fantasy and horror characters.

Another key aspect in urban fantasy is precisely its portrayal of an urban environment. It is common to find big cities such as New York or London used as the setting of an urban fantasy text as they can often be interpreted as another character within a novel, such as Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1996), which features a representation of the underground world of London Below. The importance of the urban setting within urban fantasy is that "UF authors deliberately connect the intersection of the non-rational and real-world setting of the city to unsettle the reader" (*The Artifice*, online) and "it is necessary for the narrative to develop believable (in the context of the story) elements that unsettle, but do not evoke disbelief. UF authors must then draw on atmospheric qualities to guide the reader into moments of fear, dread and anxiety within the believable boundaries of their cities" (*The Artifice*, online). Urban fantasy also encourages the reader to consider the urban space in a different light and the dangers and threats they might face. The urban spaces in *Women of the Otherworld* (Boston, Portland, Upstate New York, Toronto) frame the setting of the story, and in *Waking the Witch* the small town of Columbus is described as follows:

Ghost town was too fanciful a term for Columbus, conjuring up visions of porch swings creaking in the breeze and tattered vintage Coke signs flapping. This place was a zombie, rotting before my eyes, dead but still somehow functioning.

The population sign looked as if it had recently been reduced from four digits to three, even that estimate bearing an air of desperate optimism. (...) Columbus was the kind of place that wouldn't have anything to recommend it except good-paying industrial jobs. It was an ugly town in a beautiful state. Portland was close enough



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for commuting, but so were lots of other, better places, with highway access.
(*Waking the Witch*, 23)

The rundown atmosphere of the town contributes to the feelings of restlessness that protagonists and readers might experience. Thus, the description of the setting in urban fantasy is as important as the world building is in other types of fantasy.

In “Defining Urban Fantasy and Paranormal Romance: Crossing Boundaries of Genre, Media, Self and Other in New Supernatural Worlds” (2014), McLennon provides a list of different aspects commonly found in the genre, which I paraphrase:

1. The stories contain paranormal, supernatural, fantastic, and monstrous identities.
2. The stories are set in specific locations which closely mimic our contemporary reality. Within this reality, the supernatural elements might be secret or unknown to the general population or they might be part of the everyday.
3. The stories feature a monster-hunter, investigator or detective as a protagonist using a thriller/mystery plotline.
4. The protagonist of the story possesses a supernatural power or monstrous nature which might be preternatural or acquired.
5. Most of the stories feature a young female protagonist.
6. Most of the stories are told from a first-person narrative perspective.
7. The stories are hybrid in nature: they use elements from other genres and other media, thus “transgressing boundaries between reality and the fantastic and the self and Other”.

The *Women of the Otherworld* series checks all the points: the protagonists in the series are young women with supernatural abilities (werewolves, vampires, witches, necromancers, half-demons); several real locations are referenced throughout the series, with Portland being Savannah’s place of residence although she travels around the USA; and in *Waking the Witch* she is already a personal investigator assistant who takes on her first solo case. Savannah is a witch/sorcerer hybrid who has inherited her powers from both progenitors, the books are narrated from a first-person view, some books from the series have been adapted to TV and its popularity has brought about several novellas and short stories outside the main thirteen books which conform the series, thus demonstrating its transmediality.



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As noted, an important aspect of urban fantasy is its hybridity and Armstrong's *Otherworld* series draws indeed from several genres and conventions. The texts are filled with creatures from fantasy and horror fiction such as zombies, vampires, and witches but there are also characters with advanced medical and scientific knowledge, a trait which is more typically found in science fiction. Besides, the three novels featuring Savannah follow a detective/thriller format with a romantic subplot.

One of the most intriguing aspects of urban fantasy is how the fantastic elements enter the text and the way the supernatural and the mundane relate to each other. Mandelo (2010) proposes two modes in which the supernatural elements are presented in the text: they are either concealed and therefore humans are oblivious to the supernatural elements surrounding them or, on the contrary, the "real" world is aware of the supernatural elements. The *Otherworld* series belongs to the first category while *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*, by Charlaine Harrys (2001-2011) serves as an example for the second category, as in this series vampires' existence is public knowledge.

The fact that most urban fantasy novels depict a contemporary setting with supernatural protagonists could lead to its confusion with wainscot fantasy. In wainscot fantasy, as I have argued in Chapter 2, the secret society formed by supernatural people has its own social system and regulations. In *Harry Potter*, for example, witches and wizards have their own government and legislation. The people and creatures in wainscot fantasies can interact with mainstream society and many physical locations can overlap. However, not everyone can move from one society to another⁷⁴ and there must be exceptional circumstances for both realities to cross paths. Urban fantasy, on the contrary, is set in our contemporary world and it follows its social system and regulations. In other

⁷⁴ This is exemplified by Petunia, Harry's aunt. When Lily (Harry's mother) discovers she is a witch and that she will be attending Hogwarts, Petunia asks to be admitted to the school as well. However, since she does not possess magical abilities, she is rejected. Being rejected from Hogwarts is what makes Petunia resent her sister and the magical community.



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words, it does not have a society of its own although its characters might form groups and organizations with their internal rules and regulations. In the case of witches, it is common to find urban fantasy novels in which they are part of a coven.

Within urban fantasy, we may find works which make use of the trope of the Masquerade. Within Masquerade, supernatural beings hide their existence from humans whilst living amongst them. The reasons why supernatural beings hide their existence from humans are varied; the most common being that humans would not accept them and therefore they would persecute, kill, or use them as subjects to be experimented on. In Armstrong's series, the majority of supernaturals remain hidden as they are afraid of being discovered because of the reasons mentioned.

The fact that urban fantasy is set on real-life Earth and not in a secondary or constructed fantasy world shows the impact that modern society has had on the fantastic elements included in the text: supernaturals use highly advanced technological elements which help them to achieve their goals. In *Otherworld*, supernatural characters are not immortal. While werewolves age slowly and are granted longevity and vampires live a long existence, after several centuries they eventually die. Yet, there is an organization of supernaturals (the Supernatural Liberation Movement) who are trying to achieve immortality by mixing the DNA of several magical races which have prolonged longevity. The introduction of scientific elements within fantasy has been labelled 'science fantasy', a hybrid genre which combines elements from both fantasy and science fiction. However, although Armstrong's series contains scientific elements it cannot be considered science fantasy since there are no realistic explanations to justify the supernatural events within the story.

Having established the two ways in which the fantastic elements enter the mundane in urban fantasy I now explore how the protagonists relate to the supernatural. Waller and



Ormes (2012) propose three different approaches: (1) the supernatural elements come as a surprise to the protagonist and therefore the narrative follows a story of development, (2) the protagonist is familiar with the supernatural (and they either believe in it or not) and (3) the protagonist knows about the supernatural because they are part of it or the world is aware of it. According to Ekman:

The world aware of the supernatural, for all that it may resemble the actual world, is a different place—it is a world which, at its extreme, could be considered a secondary world. In this secondary world, the fantastic elements are not an irruption but a commonplace. Here, the mundane is not intersected by and interwoven with the supernatural but is supplanted by it. (2016: 462)

The *Otherworld* series falls into the third category. The protagonists are all supernatural creatures themselves and the supernatural elements are never questioned or dismissed⁷⁵. Savannah Levine, the witch analysed in this chapter, grows up with the knowledge that she is a witch/sorcerer hybrid. However, the novels also include humans who are aware that supernaturals exist and the last book in the series, *13*, explicitly deals with the wish of many supernaturals to become known to the rest of the world and stop living a hidden existence.

Another characteristic of urban fantasy in any media is that it “typically occurs in series and, in the literary form, often in long-running series, in which the action transpires over years and even decades” (Anyiwo and Hobson, 2019: 2), which is a characteristic of young adult fiction as well. Armstrong’s *Women of the Otherworld* includes, as I have noted, thirteen books in the main series and many novellas and short stories that complement the main texts. Seriality offers the possibility to grow and expand the fantastic setting, as well as its characters: urban fantasy “also allows for shifting narrative perspectives, as many series focus on ensemble casts that all act as protagonists pushing

⁷⁵ The first book of the series, however, might fall into the first category since Elena Michaels is a human girl who is bitten and thus transformed into the first female werewolf. In the following book, *Stolen*, Elena has limited knowledge of the supernatural world and she first questions the existence of demons, witches and other supernaturals.



the series forward and more importantly involved in overcoming whatever disaster has befallen the world” (Anyiwo and Hobson, 2019: 4). In *Otherworld*, there are several narrators throughout the series and each of them gives their own perspective and account of the events described, thus providing readers with different perspectives of the Otherworld.

Finally, another characteristic of urban fantasy is its inclusion of predominantly female protagonists, “typically narrating their own adventures from the first-person perspective. (...) Protagonists no longer simply fight monsters, but themselves become increasingly monstrous. Heroines who began as mostly human in the 1990s become increasingly supernatural” (McLennon, 2014: online). As its title indicates, the *Women of the Otherworld* series features mainly female narrators with the occasional inclusion of a male perspective (Lucas Cortez, a sorcerer in *Personal Demon*; John Findlay, a necromancer in *Living with the Dead*). The popularity of female protagonists in urban fantasy might be attributed to the romantic subplots which such texts include which presumably attract female readers. McLennon contends that texts such as *Anita Blake* and the TV series *Buffy, Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) established a new genre convention focused on “a strong female protagonist in the role of an investigator and action heroine”:

Characters like Huff’s Vicki Nelson, Hamilton’s Anita Blake and Whedon’s Buffy Summers manifest the contemporary cultural significance of girl-power, and post- and third-wave feminism that emerged the 1990s. These heroines refuse the traditional position of victim in the horror genre. In UF/PR, they instead embrace the agentive role of the heroine. (2014: online)

In *Women of the Otherworld* Savannah is constantly threatened and endangered yet she refuses to be seen as a victim, even when she loses her powers in *Spell Bound*. Even though she struggles without being able to cast spells, she continues fulfilling her role as heroine and takes a proactive stance in the fight against their enemies.

In short, the *Women of the Otherworld* series fits all the criteria to be considered urban fantasy. The hybridity of the genre allows for the exploration and reinterpretation



of different conventions and genre expectations which in turn aligns with the myriad ways in which the character of the witch can be represented. Having outlined the different urban fantasy aspects found in *Women of the Otherworld*, I turn now to examine the new adult aspects of the books selected for this chapter: *Waking the Witch*, *Spell Bound* and *13*.

4.1.3 The Problematics of Genre Classification: New Adult Fiction

The previous chapters have focused on texts which are classified under the young adult label. However, Armstrong's series is aimed at an older readership and most of the protagonists in the series are women between 24 and 40. Savannah Levine is, as noted, 21 years old while Tiffany, Hermione and Tea are still teenagers by the conclusion of their narratives. If young adult fiction is considered a type of narrative aimed at adolescents, the *Women of the Otherworld* series does not belong to this category.

The term "new adult" was coined by St. Martin's Press in 2009 when a contest was held to find "protagonists who are slightly older than YA and can appeal to an adult audience. Since twenty-somethings are devouring YA, St. Martin's Press is seeking fiction similar to YA that can be published and marketed as adult—a sort of an 'older YA' or 'new adult'" (St Martin's Press, 2009, online). Perhaps unknowingly, St Martin's Press set the ball rolling for the establishment of a new genre. Since 2009 "what new adult means has shifted dramatically over the decade or so that it has existed. The term clearly has staying power, but it is also a floating signifier" (McAllister, 2021: 1). The new adult genre has been around for 15 years, and therefore the amount of research available on the topic is limited yet some scholarly attention has been paid to the emergence of this genre. According to Patee, "Like children's and young adult literature, new adult fiction is a literary category dependent on a relationship between the books in this category and a particular audience that has been constructed, of late, as 'emerging adults'" (2017: 219).



The term ‘emerging adults’ was devised by psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett in 2004. Commenting on “The rise in the ages of entering marriage and parenthood, the lengthening of higher education, and prolonged job instability during the twenties”, he proposed the label *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2004: 4), to distinguish it from ‘late adolescence’ and ‘young adulthood’. The intended audience of new adult fiction are emerging adults, that is readers in their early to mid-twenties. The biggest difference between young adult books and new adult books is that the former are “about surviving adolescence and coming of age” and the later “about how to live your life after that” (Baker, 2012: online).

In *New Adult Fiction* (2021), Jodi McAllister traces the origins and development of the ‘new adult’ genre and how it has evolved in the 21st century, as well as considering the paratextual factors which contribute to the formation of a genre. Initially, new adult fiction was perceived (mostly negatively) as a category created solely for marketing purposes to “mobilise a particular demographic (people in their twenties)” (McAllister, 2021: 6). Therefore, in new adult fiction the intended readership of the texts is what defines the genre rather than its narrative content. As McAllister also argues, this implies a series of negative assumptions: “(1) that adults in their twenties need books marketed especially to them; (2) that these books will necessarily be more infantile in quality (...); and (3) that this demarcation is plainly for commercial reasons, rather than serving any kind of expressed audience need” (2021: 7). Nonetheless, “what ‘new adult’ denotes has evolved substantially” so that “a single, fixed definition cannot encompass the term” and “would fail to recognise the complex and changing ways that genres emerge and develop in the contemporary literary marketplace” (2021: 7).

Hence, it might seem that the only distinct marker of new adult texts is their inclusion of protagonists who are between the age range of 18 to 29 years old. However,



as McAllister observes, the publishing industry began to change in the 2010s due to the impact of digital publishing, which “provided new opportunities for the authors and the texts to find their readerships” (2021: 34); therefore, “the texts that emerged as major new adult blockbusters all had strikingly similar plot features, aligning this new form of fiction much more strongly with a genre defined by its narrative trajectory: romance” (34). However, it would be unwise to understand new adult texts solely as romance novels for emerging adults. Even though the majority of the novels that have been published under the term new adult deal with romance and relationships of people in their twenties, this is not a core characteristic of the genre. Attebery’s theory of the ‘fuzzy set’ to discuss fantasy might be applied to new adult texts. While romance is at the centre of the new adult fuzzy set, the boundaries are blurred “with fantasy, paranormal and some forms of erotic romance making some incursions into the generic space” (McAllister: 71) and fantasy novels are “making significant incursions into the new adult space” (74). Still, even though the term new adult is a BISAC code⁷⁶, it seems to have fallen out of use: books are now rarely marketed as new adult.

This is certainly the case of Armstrong’s *Women of the Otherworld*, which includes several protagonists who fall under the age category of books considered new adult yet which are not marketed as such. Nonetheless, genres are flexible, non-static categories and this is exemplified by Armstrong’s series. As I have explored in the previous section, a text might be classified with several labels, and it might include different generic conventions. The three novels analysed in this chapter could be easily shelved under the new adult category since their protagonist is a 21-year-old woman who is navigating her position in society, but they might also be classified as urban fantasy,

⁷⁶ BISAC is an acronym for Book Industry Standards and Communications. BISAC codes “can determine where the work is shelved in a brick-and-mortar store or the genre(s) under which it can be searched for in an internal database’ (BISG n.d.)” (quoted in McAllister, 2021: 61).



supernatural thriller or paranormal romance. Still, a common feature shared by young adult, new adult and children's fiction is the fact that all imply an intended reader: adolescents in young adult fiction, emerging adults in new adult texts and children in children's fiction.

Many of the tropes we find in young adult fiction might be applied to the three books which feature Savannah Levine as a protagonist, even though she is slightly older than the average character in a young adult novel. Besides, readers of the series discover Savannah in the second novel in the series, *Stolen*, when she is only 12 years old, and she appears in several other novels as a secondary character which allows readers to see her development throughout the series until she reaches the age of majority. Therefore, there are two stages in Savannah's development which shall be explored: the first one is scattered through several novels in which Savannah is a teenager and not a narrator; the second one occurs when Savannah is already an emerging adult and a narrator. Therefore, I will first consider Savannah's adolescence as represented in some novels of the *Otherworld* series and then I will move on to explore Savannah's emerging adulthood.

4.2 Reaching Adulthood in the Otherworld: Savannah Levine's Case

4.2.1 In Bits and Pieces: Savannah's Adolescence

Readers of the *Otherworld* series are introduced to Savannah Levine in *Stolen* (2002), the second novel in the series, and from that novel onwards she is frequently featured as a secondary character until she becomes a narrator in her own right in *Waking the Witch*, when she is already 21 years old. Readers of the series only get a glimpse of Savannah's coming of age through what other characters think of her and through the interactions they have with her, thus providing a biased and limited perception of her character. Savannah does not provide a first-person account of her growing up and readers



have a partial perception of her personality until she becomes a narrator. When asked about her choice of introducing Savannah as a narrator in *Waking the Witch*, Armstrong commented that: “Savannah has made appearances in at least half the novels and many short stories since then. Readers have been waiting for her to get her own story. Now that she’s twenty-one, she’s finally ready” (in Granquist, 2010: online). Armstrong waited until Savannah was older to reflect her point of view, which limits the analysis of Savannah’s coming of age within the Otherworld. Still, her journey is well documented in the series, especially in the novels featuring Paige Winterbourne, her legal tutor, as a protagonist. Therefore, in this section I aim to trace Savannah’s coming of age within the series. To do so, it is necessary to provide a close reading of the novels in which Savannah is featured as a secondary or minor character to explore how she developed from a teenager to an emerging adult.

Savannah is the daughter of Eve Levine, a dark witch, and Kristof Nast, a sorcerer. Readers know very little about Savannah’s childhood except that she moved around frequently because her mother had a reputation for being a dark witch who had made many enemies. As a child Savannah did not know her father’s identity because Eve kept it a secret; she discovers that she is a witch/sorcerer hybrid aged 13. When Savannah is 12 years old, she is captured together with her mother by a group of scientists who want to study and experiment with supernaturals. In the short story “Escape” Eve Levine narrates the events of her attempted escape from the compound where she and Savannah are kept imprisoned. Trying to escape, Eve is murdered by one of the guards, and Savannah is kept hostage with other supernaturals in the compound. In *Stolen*, the second novel in the *Women of the Otherworld* series, readers see Savannah for the first time through the voice of Elena Michaels, the werewolf fellow prisoner and narrator, who is astonished such as young witch has been captured:



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‘The absolute best age,’ Matasumi said. ‘Witches come into their full powers with the onset of their first menses. Being on the brink of puberty, Savannah presents us with the perfect opportunity to study mental and physiological changes that might explain a witch’s ability to cast spells.’

(*Stolen*, 142)

The emphasis on Savannah’s age and the focus on her menses is crucial since it will become a plot point in the next novel where she is featured, *Dime Store Magic*. Savannah’s physical description is also provided in *Stolen* through Elena: “She was tall for her age, whip-thin, with a face that was all planes and sharp angles. Waist-length jet black hair fell so straight it seemed weighted down. Huge dark blue eyes overpowered her thin face. An odd-looking child with the promise of great beauty” (*Stolen*, 143).

Apart from Elena, Ruth Winterbourne, a witch, is also captured and brought to the compound. Ruth and Savannah are put in the same cell and Ruth takes advantage of the situation to teach Savannah some spells and incantations. Ruth is aware of the power Savannah holds from such an early age (*Stolen*, 241) and she realizes that if Savannah is not properly trained, she could become reckless just as her mother had been. While trying to escape, Elena gets a glimpse of Savannah’s powers and she wonders whether it is wiser to rescue her or to leave her in the compound where her powers could be contained (*Stolen*, 334) though she ultimately helps the interracial council (formed by a member of each supernatural race in the Otherworld to keep peace between the different species) to save her. After being rescued, Savannah is placed under the care of Paige Winterbourne, Ruth’s daughter. The events of *Dime Store Magic* revolve around the fight between Paige and Kristof Nast, Savannah’s father, for her custody. Another important plot point in *Dime Store Magic* is that Savannah menstruates for the first time. The first menses is of special significance as: “First menses marks the passage into true witchhood, when a witch comes into her full powers. A witch’s abilities increase automatically, but she must also undergo a ceremony on the eighth day, which fully releases her powers. Skip the ceremony and you forever forfeit that extra power” (*Dime Store Magic*, 68). Savannah herself is very



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pleased to get her first menstruation because it means she will attain her full powers and celebrates the event accordingly before a surprised Paige:

She lunged into my arms, hugged me and kissed my cheek. The first spontaneous display of affection she'd ever shown, and I could only stand there like an idiot, thinking, 'Well, that explains a lot.'

'Your... you got your period?'

'Yes! Isn't that great?' She whirled around and punched the air.

(*Dime Store Magic*, 221, original ellipsis)

Menstruation has been conventionally regarded as shameful and repulsive by patriarchy and a process which should be concealed. In *The Monstrous Feminine*, Creed argues that the representation of menstrual blood in many horror texts perpetuates the negative views on women and menstruation: "Woman's blood is thus linked to the possession of supernatural powers, powers which historically and mythologically have been associated with the representation of woman as witch" (1993: e-book). Creed also mentions the importance of the first menses: "Witches were also accused of vampirism and of using menstrual blood, particularly that from a girl's first bleeding, to perform magic and concoct poisonous potions" (1993: e-book). Traditionally, women's menses have been used to define women as monstrous. In Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974) the arrival of the protagonist's menses unleashes terrible powers which she uses to enact revenge on those who have wronged her, thus perpetuating the image of the traumatic arrival of the menarche and the image of the witch as a spiteful woman. However, in recent young adult novels the arrival of the first menses is the first step into their journey to becoming powerful witches and therefore it is presented as something to be celebrated, not feared.

Savannah's change from girlhood to womanhood also marks her initiation as a witch. Within the structure of the North American Coven, witches start training at sixteen, provided they already menstruate, "meaning they receive voting rights and begin learning second-level spells. At twenty-one they graduate to third level, and at twenty-five to the fourth and final tier" (*Dime Store Magic*, 105). A witch's first menses is not only of



interest for the Coven but also for the sorcerer-run Cabals,⁷⁷ who believe that by changing the structure and spells of the menses ceremony they can secure the loyalty of a witch to work for them (*Dime Store Magic*, 223). Regarding the ceremony, Savannah is adamant to perform it as her mother told her to do, a version different from the Coven-approved ritual. After some initial reluctance, Paige finally agrees to perform Eve's ceremony to give Savannah her full powers.

Many of Savannah's character traits are also explored in *Dime Store Magic* and confirmed in other novels in the series. From other character's perspectives, particularly humans, Savannah is often described as conceited. When Paige is being harassed by a group of humans outside her house, Savannah casts a spell to get rid of them, which alarms Paige:

'Don't expect me to say I'm sorry,' she said, standing in the bathroom doorway. 'I'm not sorry'.

'You—do you know what you've done?' I stalked across the bathroom and pushed open the window. 'Do you see that? The ambulances? The paramedics? People got hurt, Savannah. Innocent people.'

'They shouldn't have been there. Stupid humans. Who cares about them?'

(*Dime Store Magic*, 205)

However, thanks to Paige's and her then boyfriend and later husband Lucas' influence and education she becomes more understanding and compassionate towards other people, which is clearly seen in the novels where she is a narrator.

A key aspect that will frame Savannah's maturation process is the fact that she accidentally kills her father in *Dime Store Magic*. As I have already noted, Kristof Nast learns that Savannah is his daughter and he fights Paige for custody. After some initial reluctance, Paige and Kristoff reach an agreement and Savannah accepts to stay with her

⁷⁷ "Cabals are sorcerer run organizations and billion-dollar corporations with international interests. Many would compare a Cabal to the mafia, in a way they are right, but even so, it is a bad analogy. Cabals are in all appearances, legit companies. At the top of hierarchy is the CEO, the head of the sorcerer family. Next comes the board of directors, composed of the CEO's family, radiating out in power from sons to brothers to nephews to cousins. Within the lower ranks you have unrelated sorcerers, half-demons, necromancers, shamans, whomever the Cabal could hire, but no vampires or werewolves." (otherworld.fandom.com/wiki/Cabals, n.d.: online).



father. However, some of the witches hired by the Cabal perform a ceremony which involves human sacrifice to protect Savannah, and she is traumatized by the experience and needs to be sedated. Immediately after, Paige is kidnapped and almost raped and killed but she manages to escape. When Savannah wakes up, she discovers that Paige has disappeared and believing that Kristof killed her, she starts using her powers to destroy and kill everything and everyone around her, including her father, and tries to resurrect her mother. Accepting that she killed her father in a moment of blind rage and forgive herself is a process that Savannah undergoes for the rest of her life: “I pretend that I don’t remember that day, but I do. All of it, as much as I try to forget” (*Waking the Witch*, 301).

After that incident, we can infer from the series that Savannah leads a relatively typical teenage life. In *Haunted* (2005), the fifth novel of the series, the narrator is Eve Levine (in the form of a ghost), and readers get a glimpse of Savannah through her mother’s eyes. In *Haunted* readers learn that at 15 years old, Savannah attends high school (*Haunted*, 150), spends her summers with the werewolf pack (*Haunted*, 116) and plays basketball (*Haunted*, 233). It seems, therefore, that after the initial threats that Savannah faced in *Dime Store Magic* and *Industrial Magic* (where she was targeted by a vengeful vampire for being the daughter of a Cabal CEO), Savannah leads a peaceful life. However, in *Haunted* Savannah is targeted again, now by the Nyx, an entity which possesses the bodies of those inclined to kill and pushes them to commit murders. Savannah’s mother is working for the Fates, deities in the Otherworld who act as guardians and impart justice once supernaturals die (*Haunted*, 18). She has been tasked with the mission of finding and capturing the Nyx. Once the Nyx realizes Savannah is being followed by Eve, she possesses the girl so that the only way to eliminate her is by killing Savannah herself. Eve, however, manages to kill the Nyx and save Savannah.



Through the snippets that Armstrong includes about Savannah in other books, readers see how she leaves her adolescence behind to become an emerging adult. In *No Humans Involved* (2007) Savannah is already 17, and she must decide what to do once she finishes high school, as she is hesitating between professional training in graphic design and a college degree in fine arts. When Savannah becomes a narrator in *Waking the Witch* readers learn she chose not attend college and started working in Paige's and Lucas' detective agency as an assistant instead. Although she is technically an adult, she does not feel as one. Consequently, the novels in which she is a protagonist, as well as the short stories and novellas published after *13* in which she is present, depict her journey into full adulthood. In the ensuing section, therefore, I explore Savannah's coming of age in her emerging adulthood phase.

4.2.2 Another Coming of Age: Savannah's Emerging Adulthood

To support my reading of Savannah's journey into full adulthood, I apply Arnett's theory of the emerging adult and Halverson's *Writing New Adult Fiction* (2014) to my analysis. Halverson provides nine features which mark new adult novels: "main characters who are within the NA range, themes related to identity establishment, independence as a story driver, a self-focused perspective, heightened sense of change and instability, clash of high expectations and harsh reality, peer-heavy social circles, significant romances and NA relevant circumstances" (2014: e-book). Besides, a core characteristic of NA novels are the "alternating points of view from book to book" (Halverson, 2014: e-book). What marks the trilogy in which Savannah is a protagonist as new adult novels is essentially her age. When Savannah is presented as a narrator for the first time, she has just turned 21 and is working as executive assistant for Paige and Lucas'



PI Agency (*Waking the Witch*, 5), without pursuing higher education. In a conversation with another detective, she explains why:

‘No college. Maybe someday. I wasn’t ready. I’d planned to go through for art, then realized it wasn’t what I wanted to do with my life. You know how some kids deal by writing angsty poetry? That’s what art was for me. I still enjoy it, but the older I get, the less I do. Good thing I realized that before I blew a bundle on tuition.’
(*Waking the Witch*, 153)

Many new adult novels focus on the protagonists’ struggles during their university years or immediately after they finish higher education and they begin their professional career: *Beautiful Disaster* (2011), by Jamie McGuire and *The Hawthorne University Witch Series* (2020) are some examples of NA protagonists experiencing the stage of university education. However, Savannah skips this phase and after graduating from high school she enters the working world. It must be noted, however, that she had the opportunity to do so because Paige and Lucas had already established a PI agency.

In *Waking the Witch*, however, Savannah has already been working for four years in the PI agency, yet she has not yet been given the opportunity to handle a case on her own. When another PI asks for Lucas’ assistance in an investigation, she sees the opportunity to take the case, as Lucas and Paige are on vacation:

I could take this case. My first solo investigation. I’d been asking for one since I turned eighteen. By the time I reached twenty, I realized I had to stop bugging and start working my ass off to prove I could handle it.
I had a hell of a reputation to overcome, though. I’d make more mistakes as a teen than most people do in a lifetime. (*Waking the Witch*, 15)

Wanting to prove not only to herself but also to Paige and Lucas that she can handle an investigation on her own is a distinctive characteristic of new adult fiction: “In emerging adulthood, work experiences become more focused on laying the groundwork for an adult occupation. (...) they learn what kinds of work they are *not* good at or *do not* want to do” (Arnett, 2004: 10, original emphasis). While Savannah successfully manages to solve the case, she loses her supernatural powers in the process, which leaves her feeling lost and as a failure. At 21 years old, Savannah has already mastered all the spells and skills she



needs as a witch and she is a proficient user of magic. However, at the end of *Waking the Witch* Savannah discovers that a little girl (Kayla) will be placed into foster care because she uncovered the truth about her grandmother (Paula) being the murderer of one of the girls who were part of the case Savannah was investigating. Savannah says that: “If I could fix even one thing and give Kayla back her grandmother, I’d gladly give up my powers” (*Waking the Witch*, 324) and a superior entity, which is later discovered to be her demon grandfather Balaam, takes her magical powers.

In a conversation with Adam, a close friend of hers, Savannah confesses her doubts:

‘What am I going to do?’ I whispered. ‘Without my powers, I’m-’
‘Exactly the same person you are with them. Just a whole lot less dangerous.’
I was Savannah Levine, ultrapowerful spellcaster. Daughter of a Cabal sorcerer and a dark witch. Without my powers, I’d be a human PI working for an agency specializing in supernatural cases. As useful as an ashtray on a motorcycle.
(*Spell Bound*, 42)

Overcoming the fear of failure and knowing how to deal with disappointment is something that emerging adults must experience to become well-rounded members of society. In *Spell Bound* and *13*, Savannah needs to come to terms with the fact that she might not get her powers back and understand that it is not only her magical abilities what define her as a person. Quoting Halverson:

NA characters are embroiled in the act of self-definition. It has them exploring and experimenting, sometimes leaping and sometimes cowering, through their plots. NA narratives often include conscious thought about the protagonists’ need to know who they really are and what they really want in life now that they get their say. This active exploration is laced with both desperation and hope. (2014: e-book)

To successfully reach adulthood, Savannah needs to overcome her self-entitlement to become worthy of her powers. Re-learning how to channel and use her magical abilities as well as understanding that she cannot abuse them for her survival is a key factor in Savannah’s development. As a teenager, Savannah was depicted as feeling contempt for humans and belittling them because they lack supernatural abilities. As an emerging adult



and after working her first case as a detective, Savannah is shown to have matured and developed empathy and respect towards other people.

Another developmental stage that emerging adults must undergo is to leave their parents' home, which is normally signalled by the adolescent going to college. However, there are many emerging adults who continue living with their parents even though they are attending higher education either because they do not want to move out or they cannot.⁷⁸ Still, according to Arnett, “emerging adults see the three cornerstones for becoming an adult as *accepting responsibility for yourself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent*” (2004: 48, original emphasis). At 21, Savannah is financially independent since she both receives a salary for her work at the agency as well as an allowance provided from her older half-brother Sean.⁷⁹ Even though Savannah is independently wealthy, she still lives with Paige and Lucas. In *Waking the Witch*, readers see Savannah struggle with the anxiety of being on her own:

I supposed when I got access to the funds, I'd buy a condo or something. I didn't have any firm plans. That applied to most of my life right now. I liked where I was. Occasionally, I got the feeling I should be leaving home and setting out on my own, but it never happened. I'd go when I was ready, I guess. (*Waking the Witch*, 74)

In this passage we can appreciate Arnett's theory of the emerging adult. People in their twenties are not ready for the obligations that come when entering adulthood, not even when the conditions appear to be favourable: “Adulthood and its obligations offer security and stability, but they also represent a closing of doors—the end of independence, the end of spontaneity, the end of a sense of wide-open possibilities” (2004: 6). While Savannah is still not ready to leave Paige and Lucas' home in *Waking the Witch*, she makes the

⁷⁸ The socio-economic factors which contribute to emerging adults to stay at their parents' homes is beyond the scope of my research. For more insight, see Arnett (2004).

⁷⁹ Savannah's father, Kristof Nast, was the former heir and CEO of Nast Corporations. When Kristof Nast died, Sean assumed his role and set up a trust fund for Savannah. (*Waking the Witch*, 74)



decision to become independent in *13*, thus showing that she has reached another stage in her life. In a conversation with Adam, her boyfriend, she tells him the following:

‘Time to find an apartment, too. I’m moving out as soon as we get back to Portland.’

‘Good. There’s a vacancy at my apartment.’ He lifted a hand before I could speak. ‘In my apartment *building*, I mean. I know you’re not ready for cohabitation. You need to live on your own. At least for a while.’ (*13*, 416)

Therefore, one of the characteristics of new adult fiction is the representation of the anxieties and struggles emerging adults face in that period of their lives.

Finally, another key narrative device in NA fiction is the use of the “happy for now” ending instead of the traditional “happily ever after” of most children’s and young adult texts: “An important aspect of the NA experience is the notion of feeling in a state of temporary. (...) New adults don’t generally have a strong need for “happily ever after” yet. Rather, there’s a sense of conquering and moving on” (Halverson, 2014: e-book).

While the ending of Savannah’s trilogy provides closure and resolution, it leaves room for further stories:

Things had happened in the last few weeks. Big things. Maybe even things that would ultimately alter our world. But one thing wouldn’t change. There would always be work to do, threats to defeat, adventures to be had.

I wouldn’t want it any other way. (*13*, 426)

Four years after the publication of *13*, Armstrong published a collection of short stories titled *Otherworld Chills* (2016). In this anthology, readers find out that Savannah is pregnant with her first child (“Baby Boom”, *Otherworld Chills*, 423) and this event marks the ending of Savannah’s emerging adulthood. As Arnett has argued, having children is one of the markers that signifies reaching adulthood (2014: 214), however, as he himself argues, parenthood is not the only marker by which emerging adults feel they have reached adulthood (2014: 216).

In conclusion, the three books in which Savannah Levine is the narrator and protagonist of the story (*Waking the Witch*, *Spell Bound* and *13*) should be regarded as



new adult fiction. As I have demonstrated in this section, many of the parameters and markers that signal emerging adulthood are applicable to Savannah and the texts reflect that stage of life. Moreover, besides the inclusion of a protagonist who is between the age range of the intended reader of new adult literature, there are other narrative signs which are indicative of a new adult text as found in Savannah's trilogy, which I have explored within this section. Even though new adult fiction is regarded as another marketing category, it has its own parameters and defining elements and despite the series not being marketed as new adult, Savannah's trilogy definitely fits all the parameters to be considered as such.

4.3 Special Snowflake Syndrome: Savannah's Powers

4.3.1 Innate or Acquired: The Magic System in the Otherworld

Kelley Armstrong's *Otherworld* series is populated with characters from classical horror and fantasy texts, such as vampires, werewolves, witches and even zombies. Undoubtedly, urban fantasy draws elements from popular culture and Armstrong's text is no exception. As I have explored elsewhere in this chapter, it is important to understand how the fantastic elements are presented and introduced in urban fantasy: they are either concealed or known by the public, and they must be coherent within the fantastic world building and setting. In Armstrong's series the magical elements are exhibited as being part of a 'real' world but hidden from humans since many supernaturals consider that the discovery of people with special powers would harm their existence. One of the plot points which is constant throughout the series is the fact that some humans have discovered that magical people exist and the fight of supernaturals to avoid being exposed. In the novels where Savannah is the protagonist, the fight between supernaturals



who want to reveal their identity and those who want to keep it secret becomes one of the driving forces in the plot.

As I have mentioned, some humans know of the existence of supernaturals and they want to study them so as to harness their powers. In *Stolen*, for example, readers learn about the organization which held Savannah captive when she was 12 years old. Therefore, it seems that in the Otherworld, supernatural abilities can be either inherited or acquired. The aim of this section, consequently, is to explore how the supernatural abilities of the characters are presented in the text and demonstrate why Savannah is regarded as an extraordinary supernatural, as well as exploring how she learns to use her powers.

The Otherworld divides supernaturals into two separate categories, major and minor races:

Major and minor refer to the degree of power a race possesses. Major races include witches, half-demons, shamans, sorcerers, necromancers, vampires, and werewolves. These groups are relatively small. Minor races are much larger. In fact, it would be a misnomer to even call them ‘races’ because they often have no blood ties. Typically, they are normal people who display a certain aptitude and may have been trained to hone these talents. These minor races include Vodoun priests, druids, psychics, and many others. (*Stolen*, 133)

The race separation in the Otherworld is mainly based on what type of powers each supernatural possesses since most of the races are genetically human:

Sorcerers and witches can harness the power of magic, necromancers can speak to the dead, half-demons can influence weather or create fire, and shamans can project their spirits from their bodies, but we are all essentially human. We look human. We share a human anatomy. We live a human life, with human vulnerabilities, and die a human death. Should we choose to deny our powers, we can pass for human. (“The Case of El Chupacabra”, *Tales of the Otherworld*, e-book)

This passage suggests that even though the majority of supernaturals are human, there might be some genetic difference. Although the origins of supernaturals are not clear within the series, it could be argued that there might have been a genetic mutation that propelled the existence of supernaturals, as in *Harry Potter*:



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No one knows when sorcerers and witches originated, or which came first. Like most supernatural races, they've been around since the beginning of recorded history, starting with a handful of 'gifted' people who grew into a fully-fledged race, still rare enough to hide from the human world but plentiful enough to form their own micro-society. (*Dime Store Magic*, 23)

In the Otherworld, thus, it seems that the majority of supernaturals have inherited their powers. Nevertheless, the series also suggests that some supernaturals have acquired their magical abilities: vampires and werewolves are the two races in which the powers can be inherited or acquired, whereas with witches and sorcerers it is suggested that powers are inherited from their progenitors. In a short story about Aaron, one of the vampires in the series, readers learn that vampirism can be hereditary:

A graceful shrug of her shoulders. 'Curiosity. The curse of our race. Live long enough, and anything new tickles your fancy. And you certainly are new. Hereditary, I presume?'

When his brows knitted, she said, 'Vampirism is in your bloodline?'

'Is there any other way?'

'Yes, but you don't strike me as the kind of young man who would choose such a thing.'

(“Rebirth”, *Tales of the Otherworld*, e-book)

Yet readers also learn that humans can be converted into vampires, although the method is never discussed. In a short story in *Otherworld Secrets* (2015) readers learn how a human girl, Zen, becomes a vampire:

Most vampires inherit the genes and are reborn on death. There is a second way to become one, but the process is horrific. They say you can't force it on another person. They're wrong.

By the time Jane and her friends were finished with me, months later, I was half mad. But I was a vampire. (“Zen And The Art of Vampirism”, *Otherworld Secrets*, 295)

Werewolves can also inherit their powers from their parents or become one by being bitten. The werewolf gene, however, is believed to be only passed to male offspring. When Elena Michaels is bitten and survives the werewolf transformation, she becomes an oddity as she is the first female werewolf. Later in the series, Elena and her partner Clay have twins (a male and a female) and both inherit the werewolf gene.



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As it can be appreciated, the supernatural powers in the Otherworld can be either inherited or acquired. However, in some races there seem to be genetic constraints which determine what type of supernatural one will become. Sorcerers, for example, can only produce male offspring and witches can only give birth to females. Half-demons, who are the children of human females and a demon, can produce both males and females but they cannot pass their powers to their offspring.

The series suggests that, to reproduce, supernaturals usually mate with humans. The study by Ramagopalan et al. of the origins of magic in *Harry Potter* might also be applied to the Otherworld series: “Matings between muggles and magical folk always seem to result in offspring with magical abilities, suggesting that a dominant gene is at play” (2007: 1300). Such is the case in the Otherworld, where supernaturals mating with humans produce offspring with supernatural powers. Savannah’s case, however, is exceptional because she is the daughter of a half-demon witch and a sorcerer, which makes her a hybrid supernatural with increased powers but an oddity since it is believed that sorcerers can only produce males.

Eve Levine, Savannah’s mother, is a half-demon witch whose father was Lord Demon Balaam, which makes her also a hybrid. Eve’s mother, a witch, summoned and seduced Balaam to be impregnated by him (“Bewitched”, *Tales of the Otherworld*, e-book), which was viewed with suspicion by the other coven witches. Kristof Nast, Savannah’s father, is a sorcerer and heir to the Nast Corporation, the largest Cabal in the United States. Very little is known about Kristof Nast except that he already had two sons (Sean and Bryce) with his human wife before he met Eve and conceived Savannah. Within the series, Savannah seems to be the first (and only) sorcerer-witch hybrid because sorcerers and witches have been on hostile terms since the Inquisition and they are



extremely suspicious of each other.⁸⁰ Thus, Savannah receives magical powers from both parents which makes her adept at learning both witch and sorcerer's spells. Although Savannah does not inherit Eve's half-demon powers,⁸¹ the demon blood in her system enhances her powers, which makes her a target for the people studying supernaturals. Although Armstrong seems to be breaking the internal rules of the Otherworld by presenting a sorcerer-witch hybrid, Savannah's hybridity might be explained by the fact that both progenitors possess magical abilities and therefore the magical gene counteracts the gene which decides the baby's sex. While it is stated in the texts that witches only produce females and sorcerers produce males, this might only occur when one of the progenitors is human.

To be able to use her power, Savannah must learn to control it and be taught the spells and incantations. While in Rowling's and Chupeco's texts witches go through formal training and education, Armstrong's witches are trained by other witches or they self-teach spells and incantations, similarly to Pratchett's witches. In *Dime Store Magic* readers learn that spell knowledge is contained in grimoires, and they master the spells through practice. Witches and sorcerers also need to know basic Latin, Greek and Hebrew to be able to cast spells. Readers also discover that spells are classified in different levels and that the fourth level is the highest (*Dime Store Magic*, 105). By the times she was 13, Savannah had already mastered all coven-approved spells in all levels (*Dime Store Magic*, 17) and she already knew some dark magic spells which her mother had taught her before dying. Unlike Paige and other coven witches, Savannah is not against using dark magic if it suits her purposes:

⁸⁰ In the short story "Baby Boom" (*Otherworld Chills*, 2016) Paige realizes she is pregnant and thus her and Lucas' child will also be a hybrid.

⁸¹ Balaam's children have the power of enhanced visual abilities. There are three types of visual half-demons (Acies, Conspicio, Aspicio). Eve was an Aspicio half-demon, with the power to see through solid objects.



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I collect the spells. I practice them. I store them away in my secret safe deposit box and, when they fit the bill, I use them.

As for why a sleeping spell would be a secret dark magic spell, it was—like most of the spells I kept in my box—not the result that caused concern, but either the materials needed to cast it or the spell’s potential side effects. In this case, the side effect was narcolepsy.

Like my less savory contacts, these spells have a place in my tool-box, and if inducing a few weeks of narcolepsy in an innocent woman would help me stop someone who’s killing innocent women, then I didn’t see a problem with that. Trouble was, the spell, like most dark magic, required dark ingredients. (*Waking the Witch*, 91)

By including the presence of grimoires, covens and the need to use special ingredients and tools to perform certain spells, Armstrong is adhering to the traditional portrayal of witches in fantasy fiction, which draws from the early depictions and beliefs of witches.

In contrast to *Harry Potter* where the constant use of magic does not seem to debilitate the caster, in Armstrong’s Otherworld witches need to ‘recharge’ before being able to cast spells again and their powers are affected if they are sick, or drugs enter their system. Savannah refers to her magic as “juice” and when she loses her powers at the end of *Waking the Witch*, she realizes that she must limit and control her power management, as she relies too much on her magical abilities:

I’d been able to successfully cast simple things like a light ball. And that flare of magic with the biker chick had reinforced something I’d experienced once before—that if I tapped deep enough into my power, I could cast on emotion, without even reciting a spell. That was serious mojo. If this temporary power drain meant I could reach that level someday, then it was worth it. But right now, I needed all the juice I could get. (*13*, 24)

Therefore, in the Otherworld the spellcaster’s power is depleted every time they conjure a spell. This system has been named ‘mana’, a term which comes from Polynesian mythology. However,

the most widespread use of the term ‘mana’ today comes from game players. In video games, trading card games, and tabletop role-playing games, ‘mana’ is a unit of energy used to cast spells. It is this usage, employed by tens of millions of people who participate in the global culture of fantasy game play, that is most common today. (Golub and Peterson, 2016: 309)

Apparently, early videogame developers found inspiration in Larry Niven (1938-), the acclaimed science fiction and fantasy writer, who first used mana in his fantasy short story



“Not Long before the End” (1969): “While Niven’s use in 1969 was thus not the first time that fantasy fiction met mana, the earlier precedents were just name-dropping. Niven, on the other hand, produced a detailed account of mana, one that was specific enough that it could be incorporated into a game” (Golub and Peterson, 2016: 323). While in videogames characters can replenish their mana by drinking special potions, in the Otherworld the only way of recovering mana is by resting: “His power was like mine—if you use it a lot, you need to rest and let it recharge” (13, 387).

Savannah’s ability to cast complex spells and incantations together with the enhanced power she receives from the demon blood in her system makes her an oddity even within the supernatural world. Knowing that she is special, Savannah sometimes misuses or overuses her powers, especially as a teenager when she still does not know how to fully control them. As noted before, Savannah can cast spells connected to emotion and there are several examples in the series when she does that.

In conclusion, as I have explored in this section, supernaturals in the Otherworld series can either inherit or acquire their powers yet most supernatural races apparently inherit their powers as becoming a supernatural is depicted as an arduous and extremely painful process. To reproduce and continue their lineage, supernaturals tend to mate with humans yet there are instances of supernaturals mating with other supernaturals, such as Eve Levine and Kristof Nast, a witch and a sorcerer respectively, who produce what is known in the series as a hybrid: their daughter Savannah. By having witch, sorcerer, and demon blood in her system, Savannah is thus one of the most powerful spellcasters in the series and together with her knowledge of dark magic, she is someone who other supernaturals would prefer to have as an ally rather than as enemy. I shall explore in the ensuing section the use Savannah makes of her powers and whether she can be considered a hero within the series or if she stands in a moral grey area like Chupeco’s Tea.



4.3.2 Ambiguous Heroism: Savannah's Role as a Female Hero

The damsel in distress trope is a recurrent narrative device in which a female character is confronted with a dangerous situation from which she cannot escape and therefore must be rescued by a (typically) male character. Savannah Levine, the protagonist of the last three novels in the *Women of the Otherworld* series, frequently finds herself in perilous situations from which she might not extricate herself. However, most of the times Savannah manages to save herself with the occasional help of another character (male or female). Thus, it is my aim to argue in this section that Savannah Levine represents the opposite of the damsel in distress commonly found in many early fantasy narratives: she is presented as a female hero, similarly to the other witches in this dissertation. However, Savannah's role as a hero is ambiguous like Tea's: although she possesses many of the traits associated with the character, she sometimes refuses to play such a role.

More often than not, the protagonist of a narrative is linked to the trope of the hero and they are supposed to embody its main traits: goodness, strength and intelligence. Traditionally, heroes were always white heterosexual men until other narratives featuring other types of hero started to emerge, including the female hero. The image of the tough female hero dates back to the 1800s in the United States with Calamity Jane and Annie Oakley (Innes, 2004) yet in the last two decades there has been an explosion of female heroes in many areas of popular culture, including films, comics and especially young adult/new adult fantasy fiction. More recently, the witch has started to occupy not only the role of protagonist but also the role of female hero. In the *Women of the Otherworld* series, all the female protagonists face tricky situations, yet they succeed in "saving the day" with more or less help from other characters. Placed in the position of protagonist,



Savannah is no exception, but she does not conform to the traditional characteristics of a hero. Thus, Savannah's condition as a female action hero must be analysed along her status as a witch since traditionally witches, as I have been arguing, were always considered the villain.

I have already explored Campbell's theory in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, but it is nonetheless necessary to acknowledge that Campbell's notion of the female hero dissents from the more advanced representations of female heroes:

Campbell's operative archetypal paradigm of the female hero is none other than the primordial image of woman as "the Mother." This is unfortunate, for, although the idea of "the mother as hero" conveys a truth basic to female experience and to cultural values, it nonetheless imprisons women in an all-too-familiar conceptual and representational "box." (Frontgia 1991: 15)

However, as Frontgia also argues: "Like Campbell's heroic male boon-bringer, the heroine also returns with both knowledge and power, as well as with a new sense of personal strength and authority" (17).⁸² At the end of her narrative, Savannah has re-established the status quo in the Otherworld and she emerges as a new, more mature and focused protagonist.

Nonetheless, before Savannah reaches this stage, she must undergo a journey of self-discovery. As I have previously stated, Savannah does not conform to the stereotypical notions of a hero: although she becomes more sympathetic throughout the series, she sometimes refuses to act altruistically: "'Hell, no,' I murmured. 'I've had enough of playing hero'" (13, 34). In 13, Savannah and Jaime (a necromancer) are captured and trapped in a police cell with a human woman and another witch. Outside the cell there is a loose werewolf who attacks them, but they only manage to escape by leaving the human woman behind as bait: "I didn't look back at all. Didn't dare, because

⁸² A clarification is needed on the terms hero and heroine. A heroine is a female protagonist of a narrative who might or might not display heroic characteristics. Hero is a more gender-neutral term to define characters with typically heroic features.



if I did, I might go back and try to save her. If I tried, I'd lose the opportunity to get us out of there. So I didn't" (13, 29). This short passage demonstrates that even though Savannah acknowledges she *might* have gone back to save the girl, she did not do so because her sense of self-preservation is bigger than her willingness to save others. Savannah's reluctance to save others is often explained as her having inherited her mother's personality. Eve Levine was considered a selfish and cold-blooded half-demon witch who did not care about anyone but her daughter and herself. In *Waking the Witch* Savannah is faced by the decision to either save a homeless man from Leah, a half-demon who has been trying to kill her, or save herself:

Paige would do something without a second thought. Lucas would pause to analyze the situation, but he wouldn't sit by and watch an innocent man die.

But I *was* my mother's daughter and I could analyze this situation in the cold light of reason and say, 'There's nothing I can do. Nothing I *should* do.' I was too sick and too helpless without my spells.

Save myself. Save Adam. Whoever this guy was, I couldn't save him. (*Waking the Witch*, 299, original emphasis)

However, being raised by Paige and Lucas, who are considered a couple of do-gooders within the series, does in fact influence Savannah, as she tries to save the homeless man: "And yet, as the man struggled, his eyes rolling in terror I realized I wasn't completely my mother's daughter. Not anymore. She pushed the needle into the man's neck. I leapt forward" (*Waking the Witch*, 299). Even though Savannah fails at saving the man, the fact that she tries already confers her the status of hero. Savannah's dualistic traits—selfishness and self-sacrifice—complicate the definition of what a hero is. As Lori Campbell argues: "While retaining the obvious and ubiquitous qualities (strength, courage, a willingness to self-sacrifice) that have long defined her male counterpart, the female hero performs these traits in her own way, both complicating and problematizing the tropes of heroism itself in the process" (2014: 283).

The female hero that Savannah embodies is ambiguous as she sometimes acts and behaves in ways that problematize her characterization as a hero. As Brown contends:



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Even within feminist film theory the modern action heroine has emerged as an extremely fruitful but difficult character to interpret. On the one hand, she represents a potentially transgressive figure capable of expanding the popular perception of women's roles and abilities; on the other, she runs the risk of reinscribing strict gender binaries and of being nothing more than sexist window-dressing for the predominantly male audience. (2004: 47)

This is especially relevant when considering the passages in which Savannah uses her looks to flirt and obtain what she wants. In *Waking the Witch*, Savannah tries to find information about the murderers, and she flirts with one of the suspect's lawyers:

Flirting also kept him [the lawyer] distracted enough not to jump in with objections when I questioned Cody.

(...)

I flirted some more with Tommy, which seemed to convince him I wasn't anything more than a pretty face. Screwing potential: high. Threat potential: zilch. (*Waking the Witch*, 126)

This quotation provides evidence that demonstrates how Savannah plays with the assumptions that a young woman is naïve and harmless when, in fact, she is dangerous and cunning. Quoting Campbell: "A major consideration of defining the female hero involves rescuing stereotypically feminine traits from the negative connotations that might have previously compromised perceptions of her heroism" (284). If a young woman flirts and presents herself as gullible, she might have not been considered the hero of the story. However, by using patriarchal conceptions of womanhood to her benefit, Savannah is demonstrating that she is aware of how she is perceived and therefore can use this knowledge to her advantage.

Another aspect which turns Savannah into an atypical female hero is her status as a witch. As I have already argued, witches are traditionally found in the position of villain and therefore when they occupy the slot of the hero they are reclaiming a space which had often been denied to them. The traditional image of the witch as the monster made it difficult to envision her as a potential hero as "Being a witch was not a self-chosen identity but an accusation, a forceful imposition based on suspicion, interrogation, and torture until confession" (Zanette, Rinallo and Mimoun, 2022: 12). However, contemporary



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representations of witches, such as Savannah's, refuse to be aligned with the trope of the wicked witch and embrace their identities as witches with pride. What is more, in popular fiction a protagonist's identity as a witch is what allows them to become the anti-patriarchal hero:

Patriarchy, racism, and capitalism, those who destroy Nature and those who claim that the witch is deluded or that magic is charlatanism are all antagonists to be confronted usually collectively, by the heroic (usually minority or subaltern) witches who are the subject and not the helper as in Campbell's model. (Zanette, Rinallo and Mimoun, 2022: 25)

Therefore, witches who are portrayed as having heroic agency are reclaiming a space that was previously denied to them. Savannah needs to be considered a heroic witch since she performs heroic and selfless acts to the point that she forfeits her magical powers so that a young girl does not grow up without her grandmother. In *Waking the Witch*, Savannah is hired to solve the case of a murdered young woman. However, as she is investigating, she becomes aware of the murder of two other young women: Ginny and Brandy. Ginny had a daughter, Kayla, who was placed in the care of her grandmother, Paula, after her mother's death. After solving the case, Savannah discovers that Paula accidentally killed her own daughter, Kayla's mother, and that she is in fact the murderer. However, Savannah refuses to tell the truth to the authorities knowing that Kayla will be placed in foster care. Leah O'Donnell, one of the antagonists in the novel, in a ploy to hurt Savannah even after having been defeated, sends evidence to the police which results in Paula's arrest and the consequent placement of Kayla in foster care. Savannah, angry at herself, wishes she could relinquish her powers so that Kayla could return to her grandmother (*Waking the Witch*, 324). Without her powers, Savannah believes she has lost the only element which makes her powerful and allows her to be heroic and valuable:

Now my powers were gone. And they weren't coming back either. I was as lost without them (...)

I cried until I realized I was crying. Me. Savannah Levine. Breaking down like a little girl. (...) (*Spell Bound*, 42)



However, throughout *Spell Bound* Savannah learns that what makes her a hero are not her powers but her willingness to overcome challenges and help others. Once Savannah realizes she must earn her powers back, she begins her hero's journey of self-discovery. When Adam finds a ritual which might help Savannah recover her powers, she asks him to wait because she believes she will only deserve her powers if she works towards that goal, which demonstrates that she has matured and faced her fear of becoming irrelevant without her magical abilities. As Campbell suggests, "female heroism—like heroism in general—is a work in progress and success is typically not realized without pain and hard work" (2014: 8).

Savannah's journey of self-discovery ends when she defeats the entity which has been behind the ploy to reveal supernaturals to humans, her grandfather the Lord Demon Balaam, and the one who had taken her powers. In order to succeed and prevent supernaturals from becoming known to humans, Savannah needs to fight Balaam and send him back to his hell dimension:

If I failed—I didn't want to think of what would happen if I failed. But I had to, because that was the only thing that was going to make it damned well certain I'd give this everything I had. Fail, and Balaam would kill Adam. Fail, and Balaam would unleash the virus. Fail, and my world—and everyone in it—could be destroyed.

Do not fail. That was the only option.

I recited the incantation and then I recited it again and then—

A hand on my shoulder. A voice in my ear. "It's over, Savannah. He's gone." (13, 399)

By defeating the major threat of the Otherworld Savannah secures both her position as a hero and as a witch. Even though Savannah's condition as a witch makes her role as a hero ambiguous, she still proves that a witch can fulfil that role. Therefore, by presenting a witch with heroic characteristics Armstrong is adding to the tradition of portraying witches in heroic roles which had been previously denied to them. As Guzkowski argues (though I do not share his opinion entirely):



Upon initial examination, some of the constructions of the figure of the witch in the work of Kelley Armstrong might appear sexist, essentialist, or biologically deterministic. And many of them are indeed all of those things, to some extent. Yet these texts also offer strong female (witch) protagonists who, as they mature over the course of the *Women of the Otherworld* series, achieve greater levels of rhetorical agency and power, and have greater spheres of impact and influence. (Guzkowski, 2015: 183)

Consequently, Savannah's role as witch hero in the *Women of the Otherworld* series contributes to the erasure of the idea of the witch as a monstrous woman. Although sometimes ambivalent and ambiguous, the overall picture that Savannah offers as a witch is progressive and positive, which aligns with the image of the other witches discussed in this dissertation.

4.4 Men and Women of the Otherworld: Exploring Gender Issues in Armstrong's Fiction

4.4.1 A History Lesson: Witches and Sorcerers in Armstrong's Fiction

One of the distinctive features of Armstrong's series is that its protagonists are almost always female, except for some chapters narrated by male characters: Lucas in *Personal Demon*, John Findlay in *Living with the Dead*. In 2010, Armstrong published a collection of short stories and novellas titled *Men of the Otherworld* in which she gives voice to some of the male characters from the *Women of the Otherworld* series. When asked if she would include more male narrators and protagonists, Armstrong answered that:

“Three of the four stories in *Men* are actually older ones, from years of doing e-serials for readers. I added a new one for the collection and all my proceeds from the book go to World Literacy of Canada. But I do hope to use those stories to prepare my readers for a novel from a male point of view. With my latest contract, I was clear that I wanted to scrap the “Women of the Otherworld” title and any restrictions it carries.” (in McNally Robinson, 2009, para. 13)

Still, even though Armstrong wanted to remove any constraints that the series' title conferred on her books, that most of the protagonists are female implies that gender does



indeed matter in the collection. In an interview for *Speculating Canada* (2012), Armstrong was specifically asked about the role of gender in her *Otherworld* series and she replied: “My goal is to let it play as small a role as possible. Of course characters are male or female, and shaped by that, but otherwise, as characters, they are equal—just as likely to be strong or weak, good or bad, intelligent and capable... or not” (in Newman-Stille, 2012, original ellipsis). Despite Armstrong’s reluctance to consider gender a major factor in her series, the texts are filled with issues and topics which need to be analysed from a Gender Studies perspective. Many of the female characters face dangers and threats that are usually, but not always, perpetrated on women, such as rape. What is more, in all other magical races (necromancers, vampires, clairvoyants) sex does not affect a person’s ability to use their powers yet the author divides people with magical abilities according to their sex (male sorcerers and female witches) which provides room for investigating which role gender/sex has in the series. This section, thus, is devoted to the study of the difference between sorcerers and witches in the *Otherworld* and the representation of the suffering and trials to which women believed to be witches were subjected to.

As I have previously mentioned in this chapter, supernaturals are divided into minor and major races, with witches and sorcerers being part of the latter. Witches and sorcerers appear for the first time in *Stolen*, the second novel in the *Otherworld* series. In “Can the Witch Speak? The Supernatural Subaltern in Kelley Armstrong’s *Otherworld*” Adam Guzkowski analyses the figure of the witch in her novels and he contends that the witches firstly appear as the “spoken subject”:

Initially, most of what we learn about witches, their historical and contemporary relationship to both supernatural and mundane social and political contexts, is learned through characters talking about witches, rather than witches speaking for themselves. (...) Paige begins as the spoken subject, with the understanding of her world defined primarily through the narratives of others. (2015: 175)



I partially disagree with Guzkowski's argument since Elena, the werewolf protagonist in *Stolen*, who is unaware of the existence of other supernaturals, learns about witches and sorcerers from Ruth's and Paige's explanations. From the onset, sorcerers are described as a "nasty bunch" (*Stolen*, 179) and positioned in the role of villains since one sorcerer is part of the organization that captured them. Witches, on the other hand, unwillingly occupy the role of victims. Although *Stolen* is not a novel focused on a witch, readers start to see the differences between sorcerers and witches and how the animosity between one another are rooted in historical events:

'I know my history lessons,' Paige said. 'Any true powers sorcerers have come from witches. We taught you everything, but when the Inquisition began, did you protect us? No. The moment you were targeted, you handed them our heads on a silver platter. We gave you power and you betrayed us.' (*Stolen*, 434)

The history lessons on witches and sorcerers continue in *Dime Store Magic*, where readers learn about the downfall of witches at the hands of the sorcerers. Armstrong relies on real historical events to portray the misfortune of women who were considered witches: "The earliest references to true witches show that they were valued for their healing and magical skills, but in Medieval Europe women with such powers were viewed with growing suspicion" (*Dime Store Magic*, 22). The witches' persecutions in Europe began as early as 1245 (Cawthorne, 2004: 31) but the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* around 1486 propelled the propagation of trials and executions, as I have noted. In Armstrong's fiction, sorcerers and witches had worked together for centuries. Witches taught sorcerers spells, incantations, and potion-making and in return sorcerers provided witches with an income and protection from those who viewed them with suspicion:

The system worked for centuries. Sorcerers gained power, in both the human and supernatural worlds, while the witches gained security, through protection and a guaranteed income.

Then came the Inquisition.

Sorcerers were among the first targeted by the Inquisition in Europe. How did they react? They turned on us. The Inquisitors wanted heretics? The sorcerers gave them witches. Freed from the moral restrictions imposed by Covens, the sorcerers turned



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to stronger and darker magic. While witches burned, sorcerers did what they did best, becoming rich and powerful. (*Dime Store Magic*, 23)

This passage demonstrates several points. Firstly, that the Otherworld is also set in a patriarchal society since women who displayed special powers also needed protection from men if they did not want to be persecuted. Secondly, facing the danger of becoming persecuted, sorcerers found no shame in delivering those who they deemed lesser important than them to the authorities: witches. Having been betrayed, witches were cast in the position of victims and fearing persecution again, they chose to dismiss their most powerful magic and only focus on healing and protection spells. As to why witches decided to hide instead of confronting sorcerers, Armstrong alludes to the “moral restrictions” (*Dime Store Magic*, 23) imposed by covens.

Although Armstrong takes some artistic licenses in the portrayal of the European witch hunts, the author is recalling the fact that betrayal from patriarchal and corrupt men is what leads to women’s misfortune:

Today, sorcerers rule as some of the most important men in the world. Politicians, lawyers, CEOs—search the ranks of any profession known for greed, ambition, and a distinct lack of scruples and you’ll find a whole cadre of sorcerers. And witches? Ordinary women leading ordinary lives, most of them so afraid of persecution they’ve never dared learn a spell that will kill anything larger than an aphid. (*Dime Store Magic*, 23)

Thus, sorcerers (patriarchal men) contributed to the oppression of witches in the Otherworld, which mirrors how patriarchal men accused real life women of witchcraft and therefore abused and mistreated them. Both in the Otherworld and in our world, witches occupied the role of victims at the hands of patriarchal men.

Nevertheless, Paige and Savannah, the two main witches in the series, are adamant that the situation must change. Although Paige has inherited the prejudice against sorcerers from her mother and other witches, she does not want to comply with the assumed, subservient role of the witches: “For several generations now the Coven has taught its children to practice indoors, preferably in a locked room with no windows. By



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forcing neophytes into locked rooms, it seems to me that they reinforce the idea that we are doing something wrong, something shameful” (*Dime Store Magic*, 67). When Paige becomes coven leader, she intends to change some of the most rooted assumptions of the coven and return power and agency to all coven witches. As Guzkowski reveals:

Having recognized the disempowering decisions that have been made by the Coven Elders, Paige and Savannah actively engage in the reclamation of traditional knowledge and practices (...). They research the absences and silences they have noted in both spellcasting lore and the rituals for the coming of age ceremony, and succeed in finding and recovering the “lost” grimoires from where the Coven Elders had hidden them away. (2015: 177)

However, Paige and Savannah are shunned from the coven before they can enact any changes. The elders’ reluctance to allow witches to become more powerful demonstrates their own internalized patriarchal assumptions that witches should not be more than wise old women with healing powers. Armstrong blames the Coven’s mistrust to another historical event, the Salem Witch trials:

Four hundred years ago, when the Coven first came to East Falls, it was a Massachusetts village steeped in religious prejudice, small-mindedness, and self-righteous morality. Today, East Falls is a Massachusetts village steeped in religious prejudice, small-mindedness, and self-righteous morality. They killed witches here during the new England witch trials—five innocent women and three Coven witches, including one of my ancestors. (*Dime Store Magic*, 19)

Once the witches were murdered and forced into hiding, they became used to their clandestine existence and were reluctant to recover the power and status that was taken from them in fear of being persecuted again. Thus, having accepted their roles as victims, many witches consent to being disempowered and refuse to use their full potential. Paige and Savannah, on the other hand, demonstrate that they do not conform to the image of the witch as a victim:

In their own way, each of the witch protagonists in Armstrong’s world (Ruth, Paige, and Savannah) struggle to change the internalized oppressions and entrenched institutions shaped by gendered and racialized social norms; they work to confront the histories of power and control that have served to confine and subjugate witches for generations. (Guzkowski, 2015: 181)



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Armstrong uses two historical events to justify why witches were forced into hiding and their reluctance to use their full powers. However, by portraying two witches who do not conform to what is expected of them, she is depicting the image of the antipatriarchal witch who refuses to be seen as monstrous: “In Paige Winterbourne (and Savannah Levine), Kelley Armstrong has created a protagonist that exemplifies the complexities of negotiating gendered and racialized subjectivities and illustrates the power and future possibilities of (re)claiming voice and agency” (Guzkowski: 183).

As I have stated, witches are positioned in the role of victims with Paige and Savannah fighting to overcome such prejudices and misconceptions while sorcerers are mostly regarded as villains. However, just as not all witches are satisfied with their assigned role as victims, not all sorcerers are cold-blooded, murderous men. Lucas Cortez, who becomes Paige’s lover and Savannah’s foster parent, is the exception to the stereotype of the cruel sorcerer. Cortez, heir to the most powerful Cabal in the United States, is determined to focus his efforts and knowledge on Cabal procedures to help those who have been wronged by one. In Armstrong’s fiction a Cabal is represented as a patriarchal organization, and it is often compared to the mafia. Readers learn that Cabals originated after sorcerers betrayed witches, based on the witch concept of a Coven (*Dime Store Magic*, 184). However, Cabals focus on achieving monetary gain and success, which means they thrive under a capitalistic, patriarchal society. By introducing a character such as Lucas Cortez, who is against and actively fights Cabals, Armstrong is portraying an anti-patriarchal man who, together with two antipatriarchal witches, fights against their predetermined roles in society.

Another key point to consider when discussing witches and sorcerers in Armstrong’s Otherworld is that they can recognize each other without having been previously introduced: “This is a peculiarity specific to our races. We need only look one



another in the eye, and witch recognizes sorcerer, sorcerer recognizes witch” (*Dime Store Magic*, 22). The reason is not specified in the novels, but Guzkowski theorizes that

How difference comes to be, as well as how it comes to be known and understood, is an important facet in the positioning of the witch in Armstrong’s work. The witches in the Otherworld are always already gendered and racialized subjects, and immediately recognize and are recognized by their patriarchal/colonial oppressor (sorcerers). (2015: 181)

Being able to recognize one’s oppressor might be linked to the theory of cultural trauma. As Jeffrey Alexander writes: “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (2004: 1). There is evidence in *Dime Store Magic* that might refer to his theory:

In first-year psychology I read a theory that all the major phobias are the result of hereditary memory, that our distant ancestors had good reason to fear snakes and heights, so evolution passed those fears on to future generations. Maybe that explains witches’ fear of fire. I fight against it but seem unable to completely overcome the fear. (*Dime Store Magic*, 49)

Therefore, witches are capable to recognize sorcerers because of the oppression they suffered from them in the past. This suggests that the trauma of being persecuted has been passed down through generations of witches and that sorcerers inherit their tendency to become oppressors.

Another aspect to consider is the ability to cast spells according to one’s sex. Apparently, witches and sorcerers can cast the same spells but the results are different depending on whether one is a witch or a sorcerer: “Sorcerers can cast witch spells, but at a reduced potency, as our ability to use sorcerer spells is handicapped” (*Dime Store Magic*, 22). However, the notion of one’s sex determining one’s capacity to spellcasting is problematized with Savannah as she has both witch and sorcerer blood. Savannah excels at both witch and sorcerer spellcasting and the fact that she is of mixed race makes her doubly powerful. What is more, Paige and Lucas are also depicted practicing each



other's magic and the more practice they have the more adept they become. Thus, I believe that what Armstrong is suggesting with the idea that only a specific sex can perform specific spells but then dismantling this notion through the main characters is that sex does not play a role in determining one's capacity to perform magic. Therefore, a witch's and a sorcerer's power is not biologically determined nor is the notion that witches can only have daughters and sorcerers can only engender sons.

To conclude, as I have argued in this section, Armstrong draws from real historical facts (the Inquisition and the Salem witch trials) to provide the background for the witches' presentation in the role of victims at the beginning of the *Otherworld* series. Nevertheless, the two witch protagonists, Paige and Savannah, refuse to be seen either as the victims or the monster, and as I have previously discussed in section 4.2, Savannah is in fact an ambiguous hero. Even though the *Otherworld* is described as a patriarchal society with the Cabals exemplifying the evils of capitalism at the hands of patriarchal men,

By situating protagonists within a discourse in which they are always already coded not only as women, but as marginalized yet simultaneously threatening "Others", contemporary fantasy featuring witches may be a rich and interesting narrative mode within which to examine feminist agency realized within systems and structures of knowledge and power to such agency. (Guzkowski, 2015: 183)

Thus, by portraying two defiant witches who refuse to be submissive and accept their historical role as victims and who actively fight against oppressive systems, Armstrong is confirming that one of the roles of the witch within contemporary urban fantasy is to challenge stereotypes regarding the character and that witches have become examples of anti-patriarchal characters.

4.4.2 Is Age Just a Number? Savannah and Adam's Relationship

Armstrong's *Women of the Otherworld* series can be classified within the urban fantasy genre yet as I have previously discussed, urban fantasy and paranormal romance



are two labels often used interchangeably. Unsurprisingly, the trilogy focused on Savannah also includes a romantic subplot following the pattern of the previous novels in the collection. This section, thus, focuses on two aspects of Savannah and Adam's relationship: firstly, the relative importance of the romantic subplot within the trilogy and secondly, how the age difference between the two characters might affect how they and others see their relationship. To offer an analysis of Savannah and Adam's romantic involvement, I provide a close reading of the books, novellas and short stories in which their romance is referenced. Besides, sociological and psychological studies on age-difference relationships are also acknowledged, as well as studies on how the paranormal romance genre portrays romantic relationships.

As I have formerly examined, urban fantasy and paranormal romance are two labels which are sometimes paired together as they share common tropes and characteristics. However, the crucial difference between the two genres is that in paranormal romance desire and love are the plot's driving force and "its plot is determined by its erotic dimensions" (Kaveney, 2012: 220). Even though we find erotic and sexual descriptions in *Women of the Otherworld*, the protagonist's romantic relationships are never the main focus of the story. Still, it is important to examine which role(s) these romantic relationships play within the series, especially in Savannah's case, as it provides evidence for the change the character of the witch has experienced within young adult/new adult fantasy fiction.

Paranormal romance's main characteristics are "two beings in love, having that love tested, and surviving the trial to live happily ever after" (Davis, 2003: 222). It is important to note Davis's use of the word "beings" as paranormal romance features humans falling in love with supernatural creatures such as vampires and werewolves, but also includes supernaturals falling in love with each other, which is Savannah and Adam's



case. In the 21st century, paranormal romance has increased its popularity partially because of the success of the *Twilight* series by Stephanie Meyer (*Twilight*, 2005; *New Moon*, 2006; *Eclipse*, 2007; *Breaking Dawn*, 2008) but it is not a new phenomenon: the genre has its roots in gothic fiction, (Crawford, 2014) with examples such as “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” (Keats, 1819). Crawford suggests that one of the factors that contributes to the popularity of paranormal romance is the figure of the outsider, who “can be attractive to the extent that we long to share their freedom or to alleviate their loneliness, and fearsome to the extent that we dread that freedom being used against us” (Crawford, 2014: 7). However, in Armstrong’s fiction the outsiders fall in love with each other, thus changing one of the most common features in paranormal romance.

Another controversial factor that contributes to the popularity of the genre is that although it subverts traditional gender roles (Davies, 2006: 222), most paranormal romances empower women while subtly undermining them. Crawford suggests that paranormal romances follow a specific pattern:

Simultaneously endorsing the values of monogamy, domesticity, child-rearing, and heterosexual love traditionally embodied by their heroines, and the anti-social values of passion, freedom, excitement and violence traditionally embodied by their ‘Alphaman’ heroes, they (paranormal romances) posit that the best of both worlds is a combination of the two: a version of monogamous domesticity which still contains as much freedom, passion and excitement as possible. (2014: 104)

This is the case in the *Women of the Otherworld* series. Savannah and Adam end up in a monogamous heterosexual relationship and they have a child together (“Baby Boom”, *Otherworld Chills*, 423) thus perpetrating the traditional values of domesticity. Nevertheless, Savannah and Adam presumably continue working as detectives in Paige and Lucas’ agency which tends to place them in dangerous and exciting situations, so they are not forfeiting their desire and need for adventure. Even though it might be argued that the portrayal of a conventional heterosexual relationship which follows the traditional patterns of domesticity might not be an accurate representation of what many men and



women strive to achieve in the 21st century, it is nonetheless an advancement in the representation of witches within fantasy fiction. While many witches were only accepted because they were presented as domesticized from the beginning and their purpose was to use their powers to help their families, Savannah is not presented as such from the beginning and her having a relationship and becoming a mother is presented as a choice she has made. What is more, the romantic story line within the series is not what drives the plot forward: readers only get glimpses of Savannah's thoughts and feelings for Adam and the series does not follow the typical structure of a paranormal romance; the books do not centre on how Savannah and Adam overcome obstacles to be together but on how they fight their enemies side by side. Therefore, although the romance within the series might seem unimportant and the plot would be unaffected by its exclusion, the fact that the witch protagonist is rewarded with the typical happy ending of a fairy tale demonstrates once more that witches are no longer the monsters they used to be within fantasy fiction and that they also deserve a fulfilling happy ending. In contrast to the domesticized witch who is accepted because she is always portrayed as benevolent and pleasant, Savannah is depicted and described as sometimes selfish, rude and disobedient. Crawford also provides a trope which applies to if not all, most heroines in urban fantasy fiction: "They're all tough, assertive, sexually attractive, capable young women with supernatural powers, often hiding their inner vulnerability beneath a veneer of hardness and cynicism; most are also skilled fighters, with ever-escalating body counts to their names". Furthermore,

They all work as detectives, bounty hunters or covert government operatives, and thus become regularly entangled in violence and mysteries in the line of duty. They each have one or more supernatural love interests—mostly vampires, although werewolves are also popular—and explicit sex scenes generally follow sooner rather than later, especially in the more recent additions to the genre. (...) Most are sexually adventurous; all, however, are pretty firmly heterosexual. (2014: 147)



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This image of the urban fantasy witch/heroine is, thus, radically different from the image of the domesticized witch. According to Gibson, “To be acceptable, a witch still needed a family—not independence, or an ideology” (2006: 101). Savannah, however, fits Crawford’s definition and she is portrayed as being independent, both economically and ideologically, sexually active, and resistant to conform to others’ expectations of her. Therefore, her choice to form a family does not come from a need to be accepted by society and Armstrong’s decision to give Savannah a happy ending follows the pattern of the positive representations of witches in young adult/new adult fantasy fiction. Having explored the importance of the romantic subplot in Savannah’s trilogy, I shall turn now to examine the relationship *per se* since it might be controversial that Savannah, who is 21 years old, becomes romantically entangled with someone who is 11 years her senior.

Savannah and Adam meet for the first time when she is 12 and a captive in the compound. Elena, Paige, Clay (Elena’s partner) and Adam return to save her and the other supernaturals who are still in captivity:

‘Adam Vasic,’ Adam said, stepping into the room with a mock bow.
Savannah stifled a giggle. ‘Ruth mentioned you. The fire-demon. That doesn’t sound too bad, but what can you do? Besides start fires?’
(...) Adam extended his hand with a flourish, paused, then put his finger to the wall. The drywall smoked. Using his finger, he scorched S. L., then drew a heart around it. Savannah’s face lit up, but she struggled to hide it under a veil of indifference. ‘Not bad. But anyone can do that with a magnifying glass. Don’t you have any real powers?’

(*Stolen*, 430)

This scene is important as it shows that Savannah and Adam occupy then two different positions: Savannah is the victim who needs to be rescued and Adam is the knight who comes to her rescue. That Savannah is placed in the position of victim from the moment she meets Adam is problematic: by having her develop a crush on and later falling in love with the guy who saved her, Savannah occupies an inferior status and thus they do not start their relationship as equals. However, Savannah is unwilling to be seen as the victim and she undermines Adam’s self-confidence (“Don’t you have any real powers?”),



something she continues to do throughout their relationship so as to reaffirm her unwillingness to perform as a victim.

In *Waking the Witch*, Savannah's feelings for Adam are confirmed:

I'd been in love with Adam since I was twelve. I'd grown up secure in the knowledge that while other girls dreamed about their ideal partner, I'd already found mine. I just needed to wait until I was old enough for him to realize I wasn't just his friends' ward; I was his soul mate. (*Waking the Witch*, 18)

From the beginning, Savannah knew that the age difference was too pronounced, and that Adam would never accept to be romantically involved with someone that young. Aged 21, Savannah feels that the age gap is no longer an issue for her and Adam, then 32, to be together. Still, the fact that Savannah fell in love with Adam when she was only 12 is questionable: she was still too young and immature to understand the implications of becoming romantically involved with someone much older than her. Besides, Adam had never showed any romantic inclinations towards her and he treated her as a close younger sister. As Savannah grew up she realized that to be with Adam she needed to wait:

Sixteen sounded about right. By the time I actually reached sixteen, though, I realized it was way too young. No decent twenty-seven-year-old should be interested in a kid that age. Eighteen then. When eighteen passed, I told myself the gap was still too wide. Twenty? Nope. Twenty-one. It had to be twenty-one. (*Waking the Witch*, 18)

Even though the age of legal majority is 18 in the United States, where the books take place though the author is Canadian, it could be argued that the choice to wait until she is 21 responds to Savannah's choice to leave behind her teenage years. Still, a 21-year-old is, in general, not as mature as a 32-year-old, as they have not had the same life experience. Nonetheless, Adam is portrayed as not being as mature as he should be and that might explain, albeit not justify, why it might not be a problem for them to be together. It is often mentioned in the books that Adam has had several girlfriends but never a committed relationship. Savannah finally decides to seduce Adam for her birthday, yet she does not succeed:



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We went out for my twenty-first birthday, just the two of us. That wasn't a sign of anything—we've always been good friends. When he asked where I wanted to go, I said the most expensive place in town, just to give him a hard time. Then I bought a knockout dress, got my hair done, even had a manicure. That night Adam would finally I the smart-ass, irresponsible Savannah was gone for good. I was a woman now.

If he did notice, it didn't seem to make any difference. I wasn't his friends' ward anymore. I was his coworker and pal and that was all I was ever going to be. (*Waking the Witch*, 18)

In the above passage Savannah is presented as performing and acting as she thinks she must so as to attract her love interest. Since Adam does not reciprocate Savannah's feelings at first, she becomes disheartened: "In some ways, it was like mourning after a bad breakup" (*Waking the Witch*, 84).

Savannah accepts that Adam is not interested in her romantically and therefore she stops pursuing him, though she has never told him directly how she feels. Besides, it bodes well for Adam that he never shows any inclination that he might be attracted or interested in Savannah romantically, as he is aware that she is too young. However, their relationship changes at the end of *Spell Bound*, when Adam kisses Savannah after seeing she had survived a building's explosion with her inside. According to Rockwood, "What we need in a friends-to-lovers story is a central plot event that acts as a catalyst to change the friendship" (2003, online). The belief that she had died triggers Adam to finally show Savannah that he has feelings for her.

Nevertheless, Savannah and Adam do not have the opportunity to talk about the change in their relationship until later, as the events taking place keep them apart from each other. Once they get the chance to be together there are two matters they need to consider before moving forward in their relationship; the fact that they do not want to jeopardize their friendship and the age gap:

'We already have something good, right?'

'We do.'

'And we risk mucking it up entirely if we try to make it something better. There's no satisfaction guaranteed or your old relationship refunded. But if you're asking if I'm serious enough to give this a shot, I am. Are you?'

He held my eyes for a long second before saying, 'Absolutely.'



(13, 261)

This quotation provides context for understanding how Adam and Savannah approach their relationship maturely, outlining the pros and cons of being together and ultimately agreeing that both are serious about their relationship and willing to work on it for it to be successful. Still, Adam is worried about Paige's and Lucas' reaction when they discover that he and Savannah are together. Adam has been previously portrayed as someone who has never had a meaningful relationship and who might have been emotionally irresponsible towards the women he dated, as he tended to "ghost"⁸³ them once he believed the relationship was over (13, 336). It is understandable, thus, that both Paige and Lucas are concerned about Adam's treatment of Savannah: they do not want her to become emotionally hurt. When they finally find out, Paige is not surprised since she had sensed that Adam and Savannah would ultimately be together, and the age gap does not seem to bother her because "The maturity gap isn't that big" (13, 336). Lucas, on the other hand, is more concerned since he is worried about the implications of Savannah and Adam being in a relationship when running dangerous missions: "With the change in your relationship, I'm not altogether comfortable putting you together on this" (13, 351). However, Adam assures Lucas that their romantic involvement will not affect their work performance:

'I didn't just wake up yesterday and realize I have feelings for Savannah. Even before it was this kind of feeling, I cared about her. That hasn't changed. Your situation was different. No offense to Paige, but when you two started working together, she needed someone to watch her back. Savannah can take care of herself.' (13, 353)

Although Savannah, Adam and Paige might disregard their age difference by arguing that their maturity levels are the same, there is nonetheless a gap of 11 years between them. There are studies which focus on how relationships in which one partner

⁸³ Ghosting is a colloquial term used to describe the practice of ending all communication and avoiding contact with another person without providing any reason or explanation.



is significantly older than the other are viewed. In a 2015 study, Collison and Ponce De Leon concluded that “the more people believe older partners reap greater rewards than younger partners within age-gap relationships, the more prejudice they express towards age-gap couples” (2015: 2115). Lucas’ reaction to the news of Adam and Savannah being together reflects this trend yet he finally becomes comfortable with the situation, as readers learn in the short story “Baby Boom”.

In another short story, “Vanishing Act”, readers get another glimpse at Savannah and Adam’s relationship. In this story Adam finds out that Savannah has applied to college without telling him, and he is angry with her since he feels betrayed. Although Adam is not against Savannah pursuing higher education and moving to another state, the fact that she concealed her intentions hurts him. After the events in *13*, Savannah felt that she needed to improve herself as a person by going to college, moving out of Lucas’ and Paige’s apartment and starting her own life as an adult. However, Savannah has conflicting ideas as she feels that, on the one hand, she should experience going to college and educating herself, but on the other, she is perfectly content with her situation: “I was happy – utterly and unreservedly happy. Happy with my job and my life. Ecstatically happy with Adam. And that was all I wanted. This life with this guy, and nothing more. I felt like that was wrong, like I should want more” (“Vanishing Act”, *Otherworld Stories*, e-book). Savannah is portrayed here as the typical emerging adult: conflicted about which path to follow. Savannah’s insecurity about her future is what worries Adam: he feels he might be moving too fast for her in wanting to live with her and how the age difference might affect what they want in life. Nevertheless, Savannah assures him that the age difference is not a problem: “The bigger problem, it seems, is you worrying that you’re moving too fast for me, because of my age” (“Vanishing Act”, *Otherworld Stories*, e-book). Nonetheless, Savannah is ready to share her life with Adam, as she tells him:



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‘I see you guys get excited when I talk about college. About what I want to specialize in. Maybe I’ll find it someday. But I’m okay for now. Just like I was okay with moving straight from their house to your building. I would have been fine moving into your place. I wanted an independent life, but...’ I looked at him. ‘This *is* my independent life. Being with you. Staying in Portland. Working at the agency with Paige and Lucas. Nothing’s holding me back. This is just what I want. What I’m happy with.’ (“Vanishing Act”, e-book, original ellipsis)

Therefore, in Savannah and Adam’s case, age does seem to be just a number: she feels that the fact that Adam is older than her does not condition what she wants in life or that she is forgoing any experiences she would have if she was not with him. What Savannah wants is precisely to be with Adam and build a life together.

To conclude, as I have argued in this section the romance portrayed by Armstrong in the trilogy in which Savannah is the witch protagonist has a twofold function: firstly, to demonstrate that witches are also deserving of a happy ending. Despite not being presented as a domesticated witch who cares to please others, Savannah is rewarded at the end with a relationship with the man she loves and having a child with him. Secondly, the portrayal of the age-gap relationship succeeds in demonstrating that such relationships can grow and succeed if both partners understand that the age difference does not need to condition what they want in life. Once Savannah completely shares her feelings and emotions with Adam and reassures him that she is not forfeiting any dreams or ambitions to be with him, they begin their relationship understanding what each other expects. Although relationships in which there is a considerable age difference are viewed with scepticism and disparagement, Armstrong’s portrayal of a relationship in which neither party seeks to take advantage of the other demonstrates that in some relationships, age is indeed just a number.

4.5 Conclusions: The Witch Hero of Urban Fantasy

This chapter has focused on the analysis of Savannah Levine, the 21-year-old witch protagonist in the *Women of the Otherworld* series. Armstrong’s series follows the



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conventions established by Hamilton's *Anita Blake* series of having a first-person female narrator with a strong personality, a compelling back story and a supernatural power. Albeit this formula might seem repetitive, it is nonetheless proven to be successful and popular amongst readers, as there is a growing number of novels portraying this character.

I have also explored urban fantasy's potential to redefine, reformulate and reimagine the character of the witch in other scenarios: in Armstrong's series we find a witch who works as a detective in a private agency and who navigates the struggles of becoming an adult. Savannah needs to be considered a 21st century witch who is vastly different from the other witches in my dissertation but who nonetheless helps to reinforce the idea that witches are no longer the villains. Besides, the fact that Armstrong used the series format and introduced Savannah for the first time when she was 12 years old in the second book of the series allows readers to see how she went from being held captive in a compound and thus being placed in the position of victim to becoming one of the most powerful and respected supernaturals in the Otherworld.

As well as in other narratives, the arrival of the first menstruation is an important moment in a witch's journey and Armstrong attaches great importance to that occasion. In *Dime Store Magic* readers learn that a witch can only obtain her full potential if a specific ceremony is performed. However, contrarily to other narratives in which the menses are portrayed negatively, Armstrong reinforces the idea that the menses are something to be celebrated.

Another topic which has been discussed in this chapter is how Armstrong's series needs to be considered within the new adult genre. Although Savannah is not a teenager, she is still negotiating her position within society and she exemplifies what emerging adults go through: deciding whether to go to college, move out of their parents' house and begin their first serious romantic relationship. However, Savannah is portrayed as



reaching adulthood when she becomes pregnant, as is depicted in the short story “Baby Boom”, as Arnett (2014) marks child-bearing as one of the markers of adulthood.

Just as the other witches in my dissertation, Savannah must also overcome obstacles and overtake enemies to ultimately triumph and achieve her happy ending. In that sense, Savannah is rewarded with the return of her powers once she has demonstrated that she can be a hero. Despite not having the typical features of a hero, Savannah still performs as such and this problematizes the concept of a hero, which is linked to urban fantasy’s capacity to subvert and reimagine concepts and traditions.

Gender also plays an important role in Armstrong’s series: the division between sorcerers and witches exemplifies how patriarchal men have always been afraid of women’s power and how they have tried to suppress them to prevent a real egalitarian society from developing. Although Armstrong takes some artistic liberties when depicting the historical witch hunts, this historical period serves to exemplify how women (and some men) were targeted because of their difference. Although the witches in Armstrong’s series are first presented in the role of victims, Savannah and Paige demonstrate that it is possible to free oneself from the place one has been assigned. By refusing to be seen as victims and by making use of their agency, both Savannah and Paige exemplify the character of the anti-patriarchal witch.

Finally, the romantic subplot in Savannah’s trilogy helps to strengthen the idea that witches are not monstrous creatures undeserving of love and happiness. On the contrary, the romantic subplot reinforces the idea that witches are capable of loving and being loved and deserving of their own happy ending without needing to conform to society’s expectations of them or necessitating to be domesticized and at the service of men. Besides, the plot structure does not revolve around the romance between Adam and Savannah which demonstrates that even though the witch is rewarded with love at the



end, it is not her priority. Therefore, Savannah has earned her place in any discussion of contemporary representations of anti-patriarchal witches within young adult/new adult fantasy fiction.



CONCLUSIONS. WITCHES IN YOUNG ADULT FANTASY FICTION: VINDICATING THE CHARACTER

“bitch”, he spits.
“witch”, he sneers.
and i say,
“actually, i’m both.”
- *reclaim everything.*

Amanda Lovelace,
the witch doesn't burn in this one

I believe that it is befitting that I end my dissertation with Amanda Lovelace’s short poem quoted above, as I have framed my dissertation on the premise that second wave feminists’ reclaiming of the term ‘witch’ for themselves propelled the portrayal of the character in a positive light within fiction. The four texts I have analysed in this dissertation were all published between the 1990s and the 2010s, long after the second wave feminists reclaimed the term, yet they demonstrate that the notion of the witch as an anti-patriarchal character prevails and is still relevant today.

As I argued in the introduction, the figure of the witch is closely linked to the female experience, and it has been used as an archetype for the malevolent and defiant woman. A popular character in children’s literature, the witch had almost invariably been always portrayed as wicked and as the villain in the story. However, as I stated in the introduction, the image of the witch has changed and as Gibson (2006) argues the witches found in texts written and published during the 1990s and the early twenty-first century challenge the notion of the witch as a villain. Consequently, the four texts selected to be part of my study demonstrate such change.

I have centred my research on witches present in young adult fantasy fiction and therefore there are three aspects which frame my discussion: the figure of the witch, the

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fantasy genre and young adult fiction. These three aspects of my dissertation coalesce in the sense that all of them present features which defy the status quo. As I have argued, the witch used to be presented as a marginalized figure, an outsider and a destabilizer of the order created by patriarchal societies. As such, she used to be represented as monstrous and therefore she could only occupy the position of the villain in many fictional texts. Nevertheless, after second wave feminists reclaimed her as a powerful figure for women's representation, the witch no longer held negative connotations. After being liberated from her negative connotations, the witch became more present in texts where she was the hero of the story, as it is the case of the four series chosen to be part of this study.

Although representations of good witches had been present in children's fiction (*The Wizard of Oz*, 1900), the characteristics of the new anti-patriarchal witch differ from those presented by witches such as The Good Witch of the North. The new anti-patriarchal witches defy expectations placed on them and refuse to be domesticized to be accepted within the patriarchal order. Even though witches such as Sabrina, from the Archie Comics series *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1962) were represented under a positive light, their portrayal was still framed under patriarchy's assumptions that a witch was only benevolent and acceptable if she remained unproblematic. However, more recent representations of the witch depict her as an empowered female figure who refuses to be bound by society's expectations about her, a representation which keeps in line with what second wave feminists expected from the reclamation of the character. Consequently, it is befitting that the presence of the witch increased in fantasy and young adult works as both genres present the perfect setting for such a character to flourish.

This leads me to the second aspect which frames my dissertation: fantasy, a genre which has gained enormous popularity in the last decades. Even though in its origins fantasy was considered a genre devoid of interest and literary merit, works like *The Lord*



of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien undoubtedly helped to legitimize it. As I hope to have demonstrated, fantasy's capacity to adapt and evolve paired with its unfixed characteristics is the perfect setting for the character of the witch to flourish and explore the character's possibilities. The four texts analysed in this dissertation offer different types of fantasy settings yet in each of them the witch thrives.

Pratchett uses fantasy to subvert and challenge the traditional characteristics of the fairy tale tradition, a genre in which the character of the witch has always occupied the position of villain. Tiffany Aching, however, becomes a hero and a much-respected witch in the Discworld. Thus, the chapter begins by analysing how Pratchett bends and breaks prototypical fantasy conventions using irony and sarcasm. By reversing some of the clichés commonly found in fantasy fiction, Pratchett dismantles the notion of the witch as the villain and places the witch at the centre of the story, thus reversing the character of the witch from traditional villain to hero.

In *Harry Potter*, Rowling presents readers with wainscot fantasy which allows them to see how even in societies where witches and wizards are the norm, those which are perceived as outsiders because of archaic and narrow traditions still face prejudice. Although magic is an innate ability, as the study by Ramagopalan et al. (2007) demonstrates, magic persons born from two non-magical parents are ostracized. Hermione Granger, however, successfully demonstrates that by studying and learning about the wizarding world and how its magic operates she is more adept at becoming a prosperous witch than some pure-blood wizards and witches. Rowling's series follows the structure of the school story and embeds it with magic to create the perfect fantasy setting for a witch to thrive.

Chupeco's *The Bone Witch* trilogy is high fantasy and in the secondary world that the author created witches are called *asha*. The Eight Kingdoms, the name the secondary



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world is given in the series, mirror a medieval-like society inspired by Western depictions of high-fantasy lands. Nevertheless, Chupeco included many elements of Asia/Middle-East culture and folklore in the creation of their secondary world. By including these elements, Chupeco is distancing their text from traditional Westernized notions of high fantasy and provides readers with a more cosmopolitan secondary world. Within Chupeco's fantasy, witches are honourable members of society yet those capable of wielding the dark runes are ostracized. Chupeco mirrors in her narrative the figure of the *mangkukulam*, Filipino witches who are only tolerated for the medicine they can provide. By revealing the hypocrisy of The Eight Kingdom's attitude towards bone witches, Chupeco is also criticizing how the witch has been perceived: only as tolerable when a patriarchal society can benefit from her. Thus, the fantasy setting of The Eight Kingdoms is also the perfect atmosphere for a witch to demonstrate her capacity of rebelling against injustice.

Finally, Kelley Armstrong's *Women of the Otherworld* series could be labelled urban fantasy yet as I have explored in Chapter 4, urban fantasy draws from and mixes several genres and conventions. Although urban fantasy and paranormal romance are labels which are sometimes used interchangeably, the main aspect of the former is that although there might be a romantic plot, this is never the focus of the story. As I have argued, urban fantasy's capacity to adapt and reformulate its nature and characteristics based on the external influences the genre receives provides the witch with the right context to explore her own capacities to reinvent herself. Even though urban fantasy contains many fantastic elements, it portrays a version of the real-life world and as such, it draws from actual historical events, such as the infamous witch hunts. Thus, I have explored how the fantastic elements enter the text in an urban fantasy setting and a common characteristic is the use of the trope of the Masquerade: supernaturals living



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among humans but hiding their existence. Such is the case of the *Women of the Otherworld* series: although some humans are aware of the existence of supernatural creatures, most people are unaware of their presence. Thus, the witches in Armstrong's world can go unnoticed and not face persecution as they once did.

The third aspect that frames my dissertation is young adult fiction and I have hoped to provide an analysis of how each of the series that are part of this study obeys some of the premises set by the genre. Even though young adult fiction is not new (its origins date back to the 1940s when the label teenager was starting to be used in the United States) it is still difficult to provide a taxonomy for the genre. The most accepted definition for what constitutes a young adult text is by delimiting its readership: persons between the ages of twelve and twenty-five. However, as Chapter 4 has demonstrated, individuals older than nineteen might be looking for other representations of life experience and thus a new label was created: new adult fiction. If young adult fiction focuses on the experiences of adolescence, new adult texts depict what happens after that. Both young adult and new adult fiction, however, revolve around the protagonist's process of maturation and how they face the challenges of either becoming part of society or rejecting it altogether. Thus, it has been essential to analyse the coming of age of the four witches selected for my dissertation, as they offer a new representation of the character. While witches have been present in coming-of-age narratives, they were either depicted as the villain or some marginalized character. In the texts this dissertation explores, however, we have examples of the coming of age of four different witches which points to an improvement of the position of the character within fiction: the witch is no longer relegated to the margins.

The journey the four witches undergo is twofold: they become young adults by the end of their narrative and also proficient witches. Because of these parallel journeys,



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it has been of the utmost importance to study not only the Bildungsroman, or coming-of-age narrative, but also how the witches learn to use and harness their powers. Tiffany, Hermione, Tea, and Savannah need to learn how to enhance their powers as they're growing up. Following Wilkins's (2019) premise that overcoming the fantastic challenges mirrors facing the challenges presented by adolescence, the witches in my dissertation do both simultaneously: they mature as women but also as witches. However, the maturation process is presented differently in the texts.

Tiffany begins her journey as a nine-year-old girl whose ambition is to become a witch, something which in the Discworld is presented as a career option. Tiffany discovers, however, that becoming the witch of The Chalk (her native land) is not an easy task, as witches are not as respected as they are in other areas of the Discworld. Still, Tiffany endures the challenges and trials she is put through and finally becomes one of the most respected witches not only in her native land, but also in the Discworld.

As I have argued in Chapter 2, Hermione's coming of age is more challenging to analyse as she is a secondary character to whom we have limited access to. However, through a close reading of the series we can infer that Hermione matures to become one of the best witches in her generation and although she sometimes reacts poorly to some situations, especially those which involve her love interest Ron, she has become a composed and mature young woman by the end of the narrative. Although Hermione faces prejudice from the very beginning, she is not only able to overcome it but also to fight against the marginalization of others in the wizarding world.

In *The Bone Witch*, Tea leaves Knightscross, her village, at the age of 11 to be trained to become an asha. Tea's coming-of-age centres on her insubordination to the asha association: aware of how the association treats Dark asha like her, Tea refuses to comply with their expectations and becomes increasingly disobedient. As in many other



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coming of age stories, Tea also undergoes specific ceremonies and tests before she can be considered an asha. Tea's Bildungsroman, however, is truncated at the end of the narrative as she sacrifices herself to rid The Eight Kingdoms of magic and thus end the inequality that has been perpetrated for centuries. Still, Tea's coming of age aligns with Moretti's (1987) thesis: if the protagonist cannot assimilate within society, their death is expected. However, as I have argued, Tea's death is ambiguous, and it is left to the reader to decide what happens in the end.

Finally, Savannah's coming of age is divided into two periods: her adolescent years and her emerging adult phase. Savannah's adolescence is not portrayed directly in the books where she is a protagonist and to provide a close reading of her maturation process it has been necessary to consider all the books in the *Women of the Otherworld* series. It has been possible, however, to establish how Savannah matures through the perception that other characters have of her. Savannah is traumatized by the murder of her mother when she is only twelve years old, and she becomes a target for those who want to study supernaturals like her. However, Savannah proves to have a strong personality which helps her to overcome challenging situations and this paired with Paige's (her mentor and legal tutor) lessons, she becomes an extraordinary young woman. I have also explored in Chapter 4 the concept of emerging adulthood and how it applies to Savannah in the novels where she is a protagonist. Emerging adulthood is a concept developed by Jeffrey Arnett (2004) which states that people between the ages of 18 and 29 are still defining themselves and finding their place within society before they reach adulthood markers such as getting married or having children. Since Savannah is 21 years old in the trilogy where she is a protagonist, she falls under the emerging adult label. Thus, Savannah's coming of age involves becoming a proficient detective and exploring



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and deciding who she wants to be. Besides, Savannah's coming of age is linked to her losing her powers and learning that in order to deserve them she needs to earn them.

I have also explored an interesting aspect related to the maturation process of the witch that is only presented in two of the texts: the arrival of the first menses. Only Tiffany and Savannah are depicted as getting their period, yet this is a relevant moment for both protagonists as it will condition their experience. In Tiffany's case, the arrival of her menstruation is linked to what society expects from her from that moment onwards: getting married and having children. Tiffany, however, refuses to abide by these expectations and focuses her energy on training to become a witch. In *Women of the Otherworld* the arrival of the menses is of the utmost importance for a witch as her powers will not be enhanced if the ceremony is not performed. The menses acquires a great importance for Savannah's development as she wants to perform a specific ceremony passed on to her by her mother which will increase her powers. In both texts, nevertheless, the menses is not portrayed as something shameful to be concealed but something to be celebrated.

As I have previously stated, the witches undergo a double journey into adulthood. As such, it has also been necessary to study how the witches learn to use their powers and what type of education they receive. Tiffany, Hermione, Tea, and Savannah need to learn how to improve their powers yet in the four texts the way in which they learn to do so is presented differently. While Hermione and Tea follow a structured education, Tiffany and Savannah learn to perform magic through books and their senior's informal but practical teachings. Exploring the education witches receive is important to determine that without the focus placed on the betterment of the witches' powers and capacities, the witch would not be presented as a character worth of admiration. In other words, by giving the witch the chance to strengthen her powers through education, the texts demonstrate



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that the witch should not be feared despite her potential to use magic. Instead of concealing the witches' powers and repressing them as harmful, the texts advocate for an appreciation of the witches' ambition to excel.

I concluded each chapter by exploring the gender issues present in each of the texts. In the *Tiffany Aching* series, we find two examples of patriarchal abuse and how the witch faces them. The first case Tiffany must face is that of a father mistreating his daughter and provoking her to miscarriage. The second instance affects Tiffany directly, as she is targeted for being a witch. Nonetheless, Tiffany manages to face both situations and she demonstrates that although witches in the Discworld might face challenging situations, they possess the necessary knowledge and courage to endure them. In Hermione's chapter I focused on analysing Hermione's fight against social injustice and how her Muggle background allows her to clearly see the prejudices present in the wizarding world. In Chapter 3 I considered how the witch protagonist, Tea, becomes an ally for LGTBQ+ persons as she helps her friend, Likh, to become an asha. The Eight Kingdoms are presented as a patriarchal and close-minded society where men and women occupy specific roles, especially people who have magical abilities. By confronting tradition, Tea is the image of a progressive and inclusive witch who not only fights for her rights but for those of others as well. Finally, in Chapter 4 I explore the differences between witches and sorcerers in the Otherworld. Armstrong draws for real historical events to frame the enmity between witches and sorcerers to finally dismantle the patriarchal notion that women are only adept at a certain type of magic.

Within the sections where I discuss gender issues present in the texts I have also considered the romantic subplots introduced in all the series. What these four series demonstrate by giving the witch a romance is that she is no longer presented as an unlovable character undeserving of the traditional happy ending. Although the witches in



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this dissertation do not necessarily achieve a happily ever after romance they demonstrate that a romantic relationship is possible for the witch. Even though there have been representations of the witch which involve romance this was always represented as either domesticized or it portrayed the witch as using her powers in order to obtain love (*The Witches of Eastwick*, 1984). In the four series analysed here, none of the witches use their powers to obtain love: they are loved because of who they are.

Thus, my initial thesis stands: the witches present in young adult fantasy fiction written and published between the 1990s and the 2010s challenge previous sexist conceptions placed on the character of the witch and, in turn, offer a new vision of the witch as anti-patriarchal hero who is a respected and loved character, both within and outside the narration.

My thesis contributes to the ongoing conversation of how the witch is being represented in fiction and how her metamorphosis into an anti-patriarchal figure has contributed to expanding the ways in which women are portrayed in fictional works. By analysing texts which are within the genres of fantasy and young adult fiction, I have provided a new understanding of the character within these immensely popular genres. While the witch is certainly present in a myriad texts, from theatre and poetry to historical fiction, her presence in young adult fantasy fiction remains to be explored and thus I hope to have filled an important gap regarding the study of the witch's representation in fiction. Besides, the popularity of the works analysed in this dissertation helps to substantiate the fact that the witch is not rejected when she is placed in the position of the hero. What is more, the witch is not shunned but celebrated. Tiffany, Hermione, Tea, and Savannah are characters much beloved by the readers of the series and provide great examples of what witches within young adult fiction should aspire to be.



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An aspect which has not been considered within this dissertation is reader-response to the figure of the witch presented as an anti-patriarchal character. I believe there is room for exploring how readers relate to these new representations of the witch, as exploring this matter would shed light into how the witch has become an anti-patriarchal symbol for many. Analysing how the witch is presented in other genres and within different conventions is also something I would like to do more research on. Besides, there is also room for exploring how the witch is depicted in texts which are not influenced by Western notions of the characters. Although I tackled the topic in Chapter 3 with Chupeco's portrayal of a witch coded as Filipino, there is plenty of room for expansion as there are novels specifically portraying different witches and different types of magic within fantasy fiction. I would be interested in exploring all these topics in more depth, not only within fantasy and young adult fiction but also in historical fiction. The witch has demonstrated to be a malleable and resilient character which can embrace and portray different types of womanhood and femininity. Undoubtedly, there is plenty of room to explore how the witch continues to be a provocative symbol that challenges patriarchy's impositions on women and therefore her presence in fictional texts deserves to be acknowledged and examined.



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APPENDIXES

INTERVIEW WITH RIN CHUPECO, AUTHOR OF *THE BONE WITCH* TRILOGY

Laura Luque i Brugué
January 2023⁸⁴



Rin Chupeco (b. Manila, Philippines) is a non-binary Chinese-Filipino writer. They have authored popular adult fantasy series such as *The Bone Witch*, comprising *The Bone Witch* (2017), *The Heart Forger* (2018) and *The Shadowglass* (2019). Previously, Chupeco had worked as a graphic designer but their first novels, namely *The Girl from the Well* (2014) and its successor *The Suffering* (2015), popularized the author and allowed them to become a full-time writer. Chupeco has recently published *Silver Under Nightfall* (2022), their first fantasy adult novel. This interview mostly focuses on the author's most popular series, *The Bone Witch* trilogy since it features a rising character within young adult fantasy: the witch as

protagonist and not as antagonist villain. Unfortunately, Chupeco's novels have yet to be translated into Spanish.

You have stated that Tea, the protagonist in *The Bone Witch* trilogy, is a reflection of who you were when you were a teenager. Who is Rin Chupeco and how was your growing up in the Philippines?

I was a very angry kid who was often frustrated by a lot of injustices I saw. When I was very young, I saw a good friend killed by the military and where justice was never served, even though people knew who the killer was, a high-ranking military officer. His name was Mark Welson Chua and you'll find a lot of articles about what happened to him online. He died because he was trying to fight back against the corruption inherent within both the government and the military, and it had always left a bad taste in my mouth, feeling helpless to do anything about it back then, even though I was just a teen. It's why I like writing protagonists who have power to push back against a world that would have killed them without another thought.

Could you describe your writing process? What do you enjoy more, character writing or world-building?

I usually like to start with a very rough outline, as inspirations for my plot usually starts with an image in my head, like a screenshot of a movie, so I try to describe as much of that as I could to form my outline. From there, I start world-building and creating my characters at the same time, trying to choose what kind of characters I'd enjoy writing in context to the world I'm making. I have to say that I love both character writing and world-building equally – both have similarities in that you build up on something new for the first time, and it's a serotonin boost for me!

⁸⁴ Originally published in *Hélice*, 9.1, 2023, pp. 107-112.



You have mostly written books which are part of a series and therefore the story has the capacity to expand more than in just one stand-alone novel. What does seriality offer you?

I do have a lot of readers who always ask me if there's more books of a certain series that they like (*The Girl from the Well* especially has a lot of fans who want at least another book). But sometimes when I write a book there are some more things in it that I want to expound upon but wasn't able to do because I had to keep the novel's word count in mind. There are some details and side plots that aren't as integral to the main story that I would have liked to explore some more, and some long arcs like *The Bone Witch* isn't something that could be written into just one book without everything feeling rushed. *The Girl from the Well* was actually a standalone that I had already expanded into another book, as a sort of companion novel for the first!

Tea's story is told from two different timelines narrated by two different people: Tea herself and the Bard. What were the challenges of writing in this way and what was the reason to do so?

I wanted to experiment, and I thought that it would be fun to write about two timelines that eventually converged, to see the immediate consequences of some of the things that Tea told the Bard playing out in that second timeline. I thought that readers won't necessarily get the full story unless they see how Tea's actions in the past actually affect the events of the present, and I thought they would enjoy piecing things together themselves, seeing where each timeline aligns with the other! It was absolutely fun trying to tie the loose ends in each together, and I plan to employ that same technique in another upcoming work!

Back in 2017, when you published *The Bone Witch*, you said that you had based the character of Tea on Filipino witch doctors and Geisha. Is this right? How much did you research to prepare for the writing of the books?

The Asha in the *Bone Witch* were inspired by *mangkukulam*, who are the Filipino version of witch doctors. People actually fear them and go out of their way not to involve themselves with them—until they need help, such as needing medicines only they could provide, or wanting a way to get rid of a curse that had been cast upon them. So like bone witches in my book, there's a strange dichotomy that's similar—people fear and even loathe *mangkukulam*, but still go to them for help, which is obviously a bit hypocritical. I wanted that same push and pull of tension that Tea has to deal with when it comes to interacting with people who don't actually care about her well-being until they need something from her.

Witches used to be depicted as old, wicked characters. However, in the past twenty years witches have been popularized and portrayed favourably not only in fantasy fiction but in all kinds of media. Why did you choose to have a witch as the protagonist of a story?

I do love witches! I'm not Wiccan, but I am fascinated by the culture and the history behind practicing witches and the very notion of witchcraft as practical magic. I enjoyed reading about black magic and ghosts as a kid and actually had a lot of books on the subject, though I wasn't one to actually do any of the recipes and practices that I wound up collecting. I was just really fascinated by the notion of good witches and the idea of how potions and magic spells could be so powerful, and I suppose they were the



symbols of being outsiders / outcasts in a society that didn't quite understand them, which I could very much relate to!

The case of Tea within *The Bone Witch* is a very interesting one when it comes to the representation of witches within young adult fiction because even though witches, or Asha, are an extremely important part of The Eight Kingdoms (the fantasy world created by Chupeco), it seems that there is always the one character that needs to be vilified so the others can be accepted. Along the narrative, Tea fights to dismantle the negative connotations associated to Bone Witches (who receive this name because of their ability to raise the dead) but she also worries about falling victim of darkrot (corruption of the mind and soul), seemingly having internalized the loathing towards Bone witches. Therefore, Tea's journey is about accepting who she is and fighting to change the system that makes her and others like her ostracized. What was the most difficult part of writing Tea's character and journey?

I think the most difficult part was how much I could identify with her, and writing about Tea also made me reassess myself as a person as well. I'm non-binary and pansexual, and being those had no place in a country that was extremely religious and conservative. Like bone witches as well, LGBTQ+ people here are tolerated but only for entertainment purposes. There are no laws here that actually protect them, and gay people aren't even allowed to have same-sex marriages or legal unions. I have also seen far too many gay people here try to cope with this by sometimes internalizing how society treats them, by arguing that they don't even need those protections or leaning heavily into stereotypes so they could find work and meet expectations (in show business especially). And I feel very strongly for Tea in particular because like her I had always felt like an outsider in a place I had lived at all my life, where it felt like everyone would reject the real me.

In 2014, you wrote in your blog that *The Bone Witch* trilogy is a fantasy version of the Middle East / Asia influenced by the Ayyubid dynasty. Could you be more specific about the cultures that influenced your writing and the choices you made to create such diverse characters?

For *The Bone Witch*, it was actually a mix of Middle Eastern and Filipino influences, with certain kingdoms having some Chinese elements. I am Chinese-Filipino, and the Philippines is a melting pot of different cultures, especially from neighbors like Indonesia and Malaysia, so I tried to portray a fantastical version of my own country through these influences. For the Middle Eastern inspiration, I was always fascinated by the Ayyubid dynasty, especially during King Saladin's rule, which is often depicted as an enlightened period where a lot of economic progress was made, in no small part because of King Saladin's forward thinking and his humanity (I've written a thesis on the subject back in college, so it's something I've been interested in for a while). I love the aesthetic of that time period, and wanted to bring something similar to it to my work, but I also thought that Saladin was the kind of ruler I wanted some of my protagonists to be like (mostly with Prince Kance) and the way Saladin ruled to also be the kind of progressive nation that Odalia was.

Most of my characters are heavily coded as Filipino as well, though it's not mentioned outright in the book. There are hints that I tried to convey without being too direct about it (how Tea and Fox interact as siblings, the naming conventions for Kance, Kalen, and Khalad where their names all start with the same letter, etc.) because I do want some distance between depicting real world elements and the fantasy setting that I was creating, so that it becomes more immersive for readers.



Tea is described as having brown skin and most characters in the series are non-white. Skin color in the series does not seem to be a cause for concern or something characters are discriminated against, since many characters of color hold positions of power. What role do you think race plays in *The Eight Kingdoms*? Did you consider race a factor when writing the series?

I grew up in the Philippines and the majority of the people here are brown-skinned, so it was just something I wanted to incorporate in my books as well when depicting a fantastical version of it. I was actually pretty adamant that race in my books be something that isn't given the same weight as it has nowadays, particularly because during the heyday of some kingdoms like in Greece and Rome, skin color was actually not a factor. Discriminating because of skin color is a product of more recent periods in history because it's been weaponized by people who claim they're only preserving their own culture which is, honestly, all just in their heads. 'Culture' constantly shifts and adapts, and it's only because it extends beyond our own lifetimes that we think it is permanent in the short timeframe where we experience it. Culture changes all the time; it's people who are resistant to change because we find comfort in what is familiar.

The ending of *The Bone Witch* trilogy leaves no one indifferent, as it is not clear what the ultimate fate of the protagonist is. Had you always planned it would be like it is, or did you change your mind as you were writing?

When I start writing a book or a book series I usually already know how I'm going to start it, and how I'm going to end it—it's everything in the middle that I always find difficult to do. I mentioned before that when I get an idea for a book I usually have an image of it in my head first, like a screenshot from a film, and that usually serves as the start of my novel. With *The Bone Witch*, that image was of a girl facing a dragon-like creature, and that was the scene that I did start the novel with. Usually after that I get another screenshot in my head, this time of how I envision it might end, and it's of a couple looking up at a statue of the girl in the first 'movie' still, now venerated as a heroine. I tried my best to make that a bit more ambiguous so that people are free to choose the ending they prefer.

Back in 2020 you published a short story in your blog based on Kalen's POV. Have you considered doing the same for other characters in the books? There are plenty of great secondary characters in the series and I am sure that many readers would love to read more about them.

I originally wrote the Kalen POV as a thank you to readers, because Kalen was easily one of the most popular characters in *The Bone Witch*. I'm not quite sure yet if I would write about other characters in the series that extend beyond the books' ending—when I usually conclude a trilogy, I do my best not to go back and write more. It's like coming back for repeated encores—eventually, the original ending feels more diluted and less impactful with every new performance. I was very pleased with the way I ended the trilogy and didn't want to keep adding to it. Kalen was a special case, because you don't quite get into his head for a large portion of the books—you only have Tea's perception of him for the most part, so it was easy enough to write down some of his thoughts as the story progressed, and I'm pretty happy with how that ended as well. The only other character I can think of who can benefit from that same treatment might be Likh, who is also another fan favorite. I won't promise that I'd write anything in her POV in the future, but for her I am at least open to the possibility!



If the trilogy was to be adapted to become a series or a movie, what actors do you envision portraying the characters?

That's a hard question to answer! I actually would really like it if unknown actors and actresses can be cast for the role—unfortunately, there aren't as many Filipino or Middle Eastern actors as there are American or British, so I'm convinced that there's someone out there who would be perfect for the roles of say, Tea or Fox or Kalen, but their names are unfamiliar to me. The emphasis would be more about finding the right casting director who would be willing to listen to my requests to make chosen actors as close to their characters as possible. (If they cast Tea as someone white I am pretty sure I will be the first to rebel—a lot of people think that authors can influence who gets to be cast on any movies based on their books, but the reality is that they have no influence at all!) There has actually been some interest over the years but Hollywood moves at a glacial pace, so I try not to dwell on it too much!

I do think there is one actress/singer who would make an amazing Tea, though! Her name is Ylona Garcia, and I think she has the right looks and personality that would make her perfect for the role!

You have recently published *Silver Under Nightfall*, your first fantasy adult novel. How was the experience of writing for a different public? Now that you have both written for both an adult and a young adult readership, what does young adult fiction offer you as a writer?

I think that YA fiction is always going to be where I write the kind of books that I wished I could have read when I was a teenager, because back then I never saw books that talked about my experiences and my culture, and what little that did was always parsed through a Western viewpoint. But writing adult fantasy is where I write books that present 'me' wants to read, and I want it messy and explicit and a bit smutty and all those experiences that me in my twenties and thirties had that a teenage me wouldn't have known about yet! So it's also very freeing and cathartic to write for the me in the present while I write YA fiction for the childhood me.

How do you feel about being the object of academic interest?

A bit intimidating! I've wanted to write since I was a kid, but beyond writing the books I didn't really think much about how people would look at me as a writer or about what kind of personality I inadvertently reveal in those pages. Writers joke a lot that when they write books, they mine what trauma they've experienced to make their novels better and it's true on my end, but it's not something we consciously think about until after the book's done. I call myself an extroverted introvert and I do enjoy talking with other readers about books but I usually find myself needing to recharge afterward and hide somewhere where I don't have to be perceived. So I try not to think about all that and just assume that the majority of people are more focused on my books instead of anything about me as a person!

Your works have not been translated to many languages. What languages would like them to be translated into?

I've actually had some of my works translated into Belgian Flemish, French, Russian, and Turkish, which I found cool! I just recently signed a contract that would also allow some of my books to be published in Italy and translated into Italian! There's been a lot of interest in translating my books into Filipino as well—most Filipinos read and speak English, but some do prefer reading books in the mother tongue—but there isn't



any big book distribution company in the Philippines like in other countries to make that happen, unfortunately.

What are your next projects?

I'll be writing the first book for Nickelodeon's new *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* book series, which I loved to watch as a kid! I also have some more YA horror coming out in the next couple of years, and a few more non-YA horror I still can't talk about yet! I'll still be writing adult fantasy, and have plans to finish one that's a spin on a popular fairy tale, but with a villain as the love interest!



WITCHES IN LITERATURE

630–540 BC	The Witch of Endor in <i>First Book of Samuel</i>
c. 700 BC	Hecate, Medea in <i>Theogony</i> , Hesiod
8th or 7th century BC	Circe in <i>Odyssey</i> , Homer
2 nd or 1 st century BC	Aganice of Thessaly in <i>De defectu oraculorum</i> , Plutarch
35-33 BC	Canidia in <i>Satires</i> , Horace
431 BC	Medea in <i>Medea</i> , Euripides
1120s	<i>The Witch of Berkeley</i> , William of Malmesbury
1150	Morgana Le Fay in <i>Vita Merlini</i> , Geoffrey of Monmouth
14 th century	<i>The Decameron</i> , Bocaccio <i>Gesta Romanorum</i>
15 th century	“The Witch of Eye”, John Lydgate
1414	“Le Champion des Dames”, Martin Le Franc
1610-1611	Sycorax in <i>The Tempest</i> , William Shakespeare
1621	Elizabeth Sawyer in <i>The Witch of Edmonton</i> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford
1623	The weird sisters in <i>Macbeth</i> , William Shakespeare
1755	Baba Yaga in <i>Russian Grammar</i> , Mikhail V. Lomonosov
1781	“The Witch of Ravensworth”, George Allan
1790	“Tam O’Shanter”, Robert Burns
1808	Gretchen in <i>Faust I</i> , Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
1812	<i>Children and Household Tales</i> , Grimm Brothers “Hansel and Gretel” (-) “Mother Holle” (+) “Snow White” (-) “Rapunzel” (-) “The Goose Girl at the Well” (+) “The Three Spinners” (+) “Frau Trude” (+/-) “All Kinds of Fur” (+)
1819	“La Belle Dame Sans Merci”, John Keats
1820	“Lamia”, John Keats
1820	“The Witch of Atlas”, Percy Bysshe Shelley
1837, 1843, 1844	“The Little Mermaid” (-) “The Nightingale” (-) “The Snow Queen” (-) Hans Christian Andersen
1891	Unorna in <i>The Witch of Prague</i> , F. Marion Crawford
1900	The Good Witch of the North, the Wicked Witch of the East, the Wicked Witch of the West, the Good Witch of the South in <i>The Wonderful Wizard of Oz</i> , L Frank Baum
1938	<i>Many Mansions</i> , Isabel Bolton
1943	<i>Conjure Wife</i> , Fritz Leiber
1945	<i>Witch House</i> , Evangeline Walton
1950 - 1956	Jadis, the White Witch and Lady of the Green Kirtle, in <i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i> , C.S. Lewis



1950	<i>Bell, Book and Candle</i> , John Van Druten
1951	<i>The Witch Diggers</i> , Jessamyn West
1953	<i>The Crucible</i> , Arthur Miller
1958	Kit Tyler in <i>The Witch of Blackbird Pond</i> , Elizabeth George Speare
1960	<i>The Witch Family</i> , Eleanor Estes <i>The Witches</i> , Peter Curtis (Norah Lofts) <i>The Little Leftover Witch</i> , Florence Laughlin
1962	<i>Sabrina the Teenage Witch</i> , Archie Comics
1963	<i>Witch World</i> , beginning of the <i>Witch World</i> series, Andre Norton
1966	Perdita in <i>The Witch's Daughter</i> , Nina Bawden
1968	<i>A Wizard of Earthsea</i> , Ursula K Le Guin
1970	<i>The Tombs of Atuan</i> , Ursula K Le Guin
1971	<i>The Girl Who Knew Tomorrow</i> , Zoa Sherburne
1972	<i>The Farthest Shore</i> , Ursula K Le Guin
1974	<i>The Worst Witch</i> , Jill Murphy
1975	<i>Witch's Sister</i> , beginning of the <i>Witch Saga</i> , Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
1977	Melian in <i>The Silmarillion</i> , J. R.R Tolkien
1982	<i>Witch Week</i> , Diana Wynne Jones
1983	<i>The Witches</i> , Roald Dahl
1984	<i>The Witches of Eastwick</i> , John Updike <i>The Changeover: A Supernatural Romance</i> , Margaret Mahy
1986	<i>I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem</i> , Maryse Condé (original in French)
1987	Granny Weatherwax in <i>Equal Rites</i> , Terry Pratchett
1988	Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, Magrat Garlick in <i>Wyrd Sisters</i> , Terry Pratchett
1990	Mayfair Witches in <i>The Witching Hour</i> , Anne Rice <i>Tehanu</i> , Ursula K Le Guin <i>The Wheel of Time</i> , Robert Jordan
1991	<i>The Awakening</i> , beginning of <i>The Vampire Diaries</i> Series, L.J. Smith <i>Witches Abroad</i> , Terry Pratchett
1992	<i>Lords and Ladies</i> , Terry Pratchett
1993	Mayfair Witches in <i>Lasher</i> , Anne Rice
1994	Mayfair Witches in <i>Taltos</i> , Anne Rice
1995	Elphaba in <i>Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West</i> , Gregory Maguire <i>Practical Magic</i> , Alice Hoffman <i>Maskerade</i> , Terry Pratchett
1997	Hermione Granger in the <i>Harry Potter</i> Series (1997-2007), J.K Rowling
1998	<i>Daughter of the Blood</i> , beginning of the <i>Black Jewels</i> Series, Anne Bishop <i>Carpe Jugulum</i> , Terry Pratchett
2000	<i>Witch Child</i> , Celia Rees
2001	<i>The Other Wind</i> , Ursula K Le Guin



2003	<i>The Wee Free Men</i> , beginning of the <i>Tiffany Aching</i> series, Terry Pratchett
2006	Athena in <i>The Witch of Portobello</i> , Paulo Coelho
2007	<i>City of Bones</i> beginning of <i>The Mortal Instruments</i> Series, Cassandra Clare
2008	<i>The Witch's Daughter</i> , beginning of <i>The Witch's Daughter</i> Series, Paula Brackston
2009	<i>Witch and Wizard</i> , beginning of the <i>Witch and Wizard</i> Series, James Patterson and Gabrielle Charbonnet <i>The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane</i> , Katherine Howe
2010	<i>Hex Hall</i> , beginning of the <i>Hex Hall Series</i> , Rachel Hawkins <i>Waking the Witch</i> , beginning of Savannah Levine's trilogy in <i>Women of the Otherworld</i> Series, Kelley Armstrong
2011	<i>A Discovery of Witches</i> , beginning of the <i>All Souls</i> Series, Deborah Harkness <i>Witch Song</i> , beginning of the <i>Witch Song</i> Series, Amber Argyle <i>Tales of Earthsea</i> , Ursula K Le Guin <i>Akata Witch</i> , beginning of the <i>Nsibidi Scripts</i> Series, Nnedi Okorafor
2012	<i>Born Wicked</i> , beginning of the <i>The Cahill Witch Chronicles</i> Series, Jessica Spotswood <i>Shadow and Bone</i> , beginning of the <i>The Grisha</i> Trilogy, Leigh Bardugo <i>Engelsfor</i> Trilogy, Sara B. Elfgren and Mats Strandberg <i>Witchstruck</i> , beginning of <i>The Tudor Witch</i> trilogy, Victoria Lamb
2013	<i>The Winter Witch</i> , beginning of the <i>Shadow Chronicles</i> , Paula Brackston
2014	<i>Half Bad</i> , beginning of <i>The Half Bad</i> trilogy, Sally Green <i>The Young Elites</i> , beginning of <i>The Young Elites</i> Series, Marie Lu
2015	<i>The Witches of Avalon</i> , beginning of <i>Morgan</i> Trilogy, Lavinia Collins <i>Uprooted</i> , Naomi Novik <i>Trial by Fire</i> , beginning of <i>Worldwalker</i> trilogy, Josephine Angelini <i>The Witch Hunter</i> , beginning of <i>The Witch Hunter</i> series, Virginia Boecker
2016	<i>Truthwitch</i> , beginning of <i>The Witchlands</i> Series, Susan Dennard <i>The Graces</i> , Laure Eve <i>The Witch's Kiss</i> , beginning of <i>The Witch's Kiss</i> series, Katharine Corr <i>Hexenhaus</i> , Nikki McWatters
2017	<i>The Witchfinder's Sister</i> , Beth Underdown <i>The Black Witch</i> , beginning of <i>The Black Witch Chronicles</i> , Laurie Forest <i>The Bear and the Nightingale</i> , beginning of <i>The Winternight</i> Trilogy, Katherine Arden <i>The Bone Witch</i> , beginning of <i>The Bone Witch</i> Trilogy, Rin Chupeco
2018	<i>The Witch Elm</i> , Tana French



	<i>The Curses</i> , Laure Eve <i>The Witch of Willow Hall</i> , Hester Fox
2019	<i>Witches of Ash and Ruin</i> , E Latimer <i>The Vine Witch</i> , beginning of <i>The Vine Witch Series</i> , Luanne G. Smith <i>The Witch's Kind</i> , Louisa Morgan



HISTORICAL WITCHES' TIMELINE

1755-1750 BCE	<i>Code of Hammurabi</i> Punishes Malevolent magic (Egypt and Babylonia)
1550 BCE-50 BCE	<i>Book of the Dead</i> Collection of texts consisting of a number of magic spells intended to assist a dead person's journey through the Duat, or underworld, and into the afterlife and written by many priests over a period of about 1,000 years. It included spells and incantations.
4th century BCE	Theoris of Lemnos Ancient Greek woman believed to be a witch and condemned to death
331 BC	170 women were executed as witches in the context of an epidemic illness. (Livy, <i>History of Rome, Book VIII, Chapter xviii</i>)
5th century BCE	<i>Exodus 22:18</i> "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."
3 rd -5th century CE	<i>Talmud</i> It is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law (halakha) and Jewish theology. It depicts cases of magic and forms of punishment for witchcraft and sorcery.
415 CE	Murder of Hypatia She was murdered by a mob of Christians. Considered by Wilhelm Gottlieb Soldan the first "witch" to be punished by Christian authorities
10th century CE	<i>Canon Episcopi</i> It is an important source on folk belief and surviving pagan customs in Francia on the eve of the formation of the Holy Roman Empire. The folk beliefs described in the text reflect the residue of pre-Christian beliefs about one century after the Carolingian Empire had been Christianized. It does not believe witchcraft to be a real physical manifestation; this was an important argument used by the opponents of the witch trials during the 16th century, such as Johann Weyer.
2 nd -14 th century CE	Medieval Inquisition The inquisition provided methodologies and ideologies that supported the witch hunts.
13 th century CE	<i>Summa Theologiae</i> Thomas Aquinas. It is a compendium of all of the main theological teachings of the Catholic Church, intended to be an instructional guide for theology students, including seminarians and the literate laity. Aquino briefly addressed magic and sorcery. He assumed that consulting demons included making a pact with them, which was by definition, apostasy. Aquinas accepted that demons could assume the shapes of actual people.
1258	Pope Alexander IV declared that Inquisition would not deal with cases of witchcraft unless they were related to heresy
1307	King Philip IV arrests the Knights Templar accusing them of heresy and witchcraft



about 1450	“Errores Gazaziorum” A papal bull, or decree, which identified witchcraft and heresy with the Cathars.
1478-1834	Spanish Inquisition
1484	Pope Innocent VIII issued “Summis desiderantes affectibus”. authorizing two German monks to investigate accusations of witchcraft as heresy, threatening those who interfered with their work.
1525-1526	Basque witch trials (Spain)
1485	Trials at Innsbruck
1486	Publication of <i>Malleus Maleficarum</i>
1492	Columbus finds America
1525-26	Navarre witch trials One of the earliest mass witch trials in Europe
1536	Execution of Anne Boleyn Failing to bare a son for King Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn was investigated for high treason and briefly accused of witchcraft
1542	First witchcraft act passed in England by King Henry VIII
1555	Derenburg witch trials (Germany)
1562-1563	Wiesensteig witch trial (Germany)
1566	Agnes Waterhouse One of the first women executed for witchcraft in England
1580	<i>On the Demon-Mania of Witches</i> (1580) Jean Bodin in favour of the witch hunts
1581-1593	Trier witch trials (Germany)
1584	<i>The Discoverie of Witchcraft</i> Written by Reginald Scot. intended as an exposé of early modern witchcraft. It contains a small section intended to show how the public was fooled by charlatans, which is considered the first published material on illusionary or stage magic. Scot believed that the prosecution of those accused of witchcraft was irrational and not Christian, and he held the Roman Church responsible. He set himself to prove that the belief in witchcraft and magic was rejected by reason and by religion and that spiritualistic manifestations were wilful impostures or illusions due to mental disturbance in the observers. His aim was to prevent the persecution of poor, aged, and simple persons, who were popularly credited with being witches.
1589-1593	Witches of Warboys (England)
1590	North Berwick witch trials (Scotland)
1591-1595	Amersfoort and Utrecht witch trials (The Netherlands)
1594-1596	Orkney witch trials (Scotland)
1595	Asten witch trial (Peelland)
1597	<i>Daemonologie</i> (King James VI of Scotland) It included a study of demonology and the methods demons used to bother troubled men. The book endorses the practice of witch hunting.
1608	<i>Compendium Maleficarum</i>



	Francesco Maria Guazzo. This friar compiled a collection of witch information, which includes famous woodcuts of sabbath scenes
1610	Bredevoort witch trials (The Netherlands)
1612	Lancashire Trials (England)
1613	Roermond witch trial (The Netherlands)
1616	Spa witch trial (Belgium)
1622-1696	Northern Moravia witch trials (Czech Republic)
1623-1631	Bamberg trials (Germany)
1625-1631	Würzburg witch trial (Germany)
1634	Ramsele witch trial (Sweden)
1640s	One of the periods of frequent witchcraft trials in England
1645-1647	East Anglia Witch Trials (England)
1662-1663	Vardø witch trials as part of the Christianization of the Sámi people (Norway)
1675	Torsåker witch trials (Sweden)
1679-1682	Liechtenstein witch trials (Liechtenstein)
1682	Bideford witch trial (England) St Osyth Witches (England)
1692	Salem Witch Trials (Massachusetts)
1711	Islandmagee witch trial (Northern Ireland)
1712	Jane Wenham was among the last subjects of a typical witch trial in England in 1712, but was pardoned after her conviction and set free.
1727	Janet Horne executed for witchcraft in Scotland
1735-1736	The English Witchcraft Act was repealed, formally ending witch hunts and trials.
1782	Last known official witch trial in Europe
1904	<i>Thelema</i> Aleister Crowley
1921	<i>The Witch Cult in Western Europe</i> Margaret Murray
1954	<i>Modern Witchcraft</i> Gerald Gardner
1960s	Second-Wave feminists reclaim the witch as a symbol



PLOT SUMMARY OF PRIMARY SOURCES

The *Tiffany Aching* Series by Terry Pratchett

The Wee Free Men (2003)

The Wee Free Men follows the adventures of Tiffany Aching, a 9-year-old girl who lives in a small region of the Discworld known as The Chalk. While Tiffany and her brother are playing by the river, two tiny blue men warn her of Jenny Greenteeth, a green water monster. Tiffany uses her brother Wentworth as bait to defeat Jenny Greenteeth, with a frying pan and after accomplishing this feat, Tiffany goes into town and she finds Miss Tick, a witch who recruits young girls to become witches and who had been watching Tiffany. Miss Tick explains to Tiffany who the blue men are: a clan of Feegles (pictsies) who call themselves The Wee Free Men. Later on, Tiffany's brother is kidnapped by the Queen of the Elves and she seeks the help of The Wee Free Men to rescue him. Rob Anybody, the leader of the Wee Free Men accepts to accompany Tiffany if she agrees to become their new Kelda, as the current one is on the verge of dying. Tiffany and the Feegles cross the barrier to Fairy land and after some challenges and a series of trials, Tiffany succeeds in defeating the Queen of the Elves and save her brother and Rolan, the Baron's son, who had also been kidnapped. Once she returns home, Tiffany is ready to begin her training as a witch, as she had decided to become one after witnessing how an innocent old woman is mistreated for being considered a witch.

A Hat Full of Sky (2004)

In *A Hat Full of Sky* Tiffany is 11 years old and she leaves her home to become an apprentice under Miss Level's instruction. While waiting for Miss Level, Tiffany and Miss Tick are attacked by the hiver, an entity which can possess bodies and which causes chaos. After settling in her new home, Tiffany discovers that Miss Level occupies two bodies and she lives with a spirit who cleans her house named Oswaldo. Tiffany also meets Petunia, another witch-in-training who introduces her to other witches, including Annagramma, the leader of the group and the one training under Mrs Earwig. Annagramma is condescending and rude and she makes fun of Tiffany. Back in her room, Tiffany is possessed by the hiver and she starts acting recklessly under its influence: she kills one of Miss Level's bodies and she steals some money from one of the villagers. Tiffany manages to break free from the hiver with the help of the Feegles, but she memories of previous victims linger in her brain. In order to completely rid herself from the hiver, Tiffany goes to the mountains with Granny Weatherwax and she finally succeeds in helping the hiver die. When Tiffany and Granny Weatherwax return, they attend the witch trials, where young witches show what they have learnt. After the trials, Tiffany returns to The Chalk and she takes her place as the hag o' the hills.

Wintersmith (2006)

Now 13 years old, Tiffany is training with Miss Treason. Miss Treason takes Tiffany to see the *morris dance*, a secret dance performed to welcome in the winter. Captivated by the music, Tiffany joins in the dance, despite having been warned by Miss Treason not to do so. In the middle of the dance, Tiffany comes close to the Wintersmith (the personification of winter), who mistakes her for Lady Summer (the personification of summer). The Wintersmith is enchanted by Tiffany and he will pursue her romantically: he sends her gifts and tries to find her after she dropped a horse-shaped pendant given to her by Roland. Tiffany also discovers that she has some of the powers of Lady Summer (plants and flowers grow where she walks barefoot and the Cornucopia appears, which



causes problems as it spurts food and animals in abundance. After Miss Treason's death, Tiffany moves in with Nanny Ogg. To help Tiffany cast away the Wintersmith, Granny Aching asks the Wee Free Men and Roland to descend into the underworld and awake Lady Summer from her slumber. Meanwhile, the Wintersmith is covering the Discworld with snow and Tiffany must act to prevent it from freezing. Tiffany finally gets rid of the Wintersmith by kissing him as with her kiss, completing the Dance of the Seasons.

I Shall Wear Midnight (2010)

In *I Shall Wear Midnight* Tiffany is working as the witch of the Chalk, her native land, and she is taking care of the Baron's poor health, who finally dies. After the Baron's death, Tiffany is met with suspicion, and she is accused of his murder. Tiffany travels to Ankh-Morpork, the biggest city in the Discworld to inform Roland, the Baron's son, of his father's death. After the Feegle destroy a pub, Tiffany is arrested as witches are beginning to be resented. When Tiffany is released, she meets Eskarina Smith, a female wizard who tells her who the Cunning Man is and how it is his fault that witches are starting to be disliked. Tiffany and the Feegles return to the Chalk but Roland, under the influence of the Cunning Man, throws her into prison. However, Tiffany escapes and she finds Letitia, Roland's fiancée, who is an untrained but gifted witch. Before Roland and Letitia's wedding, Tiffany, Letitia, Roland and Preston (Roland's castle guard) meet in the fields and they lure the Cunning Man so they throw him into a fire and get rid of him. After this event, a year passes and Preston shows Tiffany his love for her, which Tiffany reciprocates.

The Shepherd's Crown (2015)

The Shepherd's Crown is the last novel in the *Tiffany Aching* series and it begins when Tiffany is already seventeen years old. In this novel Tiffany is very busy with her duties in The Chalk, which increase when Granny Weatherwax dies and leaves her steading to Tiffany. After Granny's death, Tiffany is assumed to become the leader of the witches, even though they do not have a recognized leader. In *The Shepherd's Crown* readers meet Geoffrey, a young boy who wants to become a witch and thus heads to Lancre to ask Tiffany for a position as apprentice. Meanwhile, Granny Weatherwax's death has thinned the veil between the Discworld and the domain of the Elves, and the latter prepare for an invasion. Peaseblossom, one of the Elves, usurps the Queen's position and leads the revolution to conquer the human world. Nightshade, the former Queen of the Elves, is found wingless by the Feegles. Tiffany teaches Nightshade what it means to be human and she gathers the witches to prepare for the approaching Elvish invasion. Together with the villagers and the Feegles, as well as with Nightshade's help, Tiffany manages to banish the Elves from her land. Tiffany finally decides to devote all her time to work in the Chalk, giving Granny Weatherwax's steading to Geoffrey, and she builds her own shepherd's hut.

The *Harry Potter* Series by J.K. Rowling

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (1997)

Eleven-year-old Harry discovers that he is a wizard and that he has been accepted to study in Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. At Hogwarts, Harry befriends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, who will help him uncover the truth of the Philosopher's Stone, a precious gemstone which grants longevity. Harry also discovers that his parents were murdered by the nefarious Lord Voldemort, one of the most terrible



dark wizards of all times. Voldemort, who disappeared the night he killed Harry's parents, is determined to come back to life and retrieve the philosopher's stone from Albus Dumbledore, Hogwarts' headmaster and Voldemort's nemesis. After a series of trials, Harry manages to prevent Voldemort from obtaining the stone, thus thwarting Voldemort's plan to come back to life.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (1998)

In *Chamber of Secrets* Harry is 12 years old and he is visited by Dobby, a house-elf who warns him not to come to Hogwarts because strange and dreadful things are going to happen. However, Harry is rescued by Ron and his brothers from Privet Drive, where he lives with his relatives, and he goes back to the school. Once at Hogwarts, students start to show up petrified and it appears that the Chamber of Secrets, which shelters a terrifying monster, has been opened. Besides, Harry starts to hear voices in his head, which is not a good sign even in the wizarding world. Thanks to Hermione, the trio discover that the monster is a basilisk, a creature which can kill with its look. As time passes, more attacks are perpetrated on Hogwarts' students, including Hermione, and Ginny, Ron's sister, is taken to the chamber of secrets. Harry and Ron decide to go after Ginny and Harry manages to kill the basilisk and the ghost of Tom Riddle, who is a manifestation of Lord Voldemort. After this incident, the petrified students are cured and Harry returns to Privet Drive to spend the summer with his relatives.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (1999)

Prisoner of Azkaban begins when Harry becomes infuriated with his uncle's sister and accidentally inflates her. Harry decides to leave Private Drive and he spends the rest of the summer in the Leaky Cauldron, a rundown inn in Diagon Alley, London. Harry learns that Sirius Black, a former Voldemort follower, has escaped Azkaban, the wizarding prison, and that he is hunting him. Back at Hogwarts, Harry and the other students are informed that the school is now guarded by Dementors, creatures which are in charge of guarding Azkaban and which are capable of draining one's happiness. Harry discovers that he is more affected by the Dementors than other people, and the new teacher of Defence Against the Dark Arts, Remus Lupin, teaches him the Patronus charm to protect himself against them. Harry is also given a magical map by Fred and George, Ron's twin brothers, which reveals Hogwarts' secret passages as well as everyone inside Hogwarts and its grounds. In a visit to Hagrid's, Hogwarts' gamekeeper and friends of Harry's, Ron's rat Scabbers escapes and runs to the Shrieking Shack in Hogsmeade, a wizarding village. Following the rat, the trio discover Sirius Black and Lupin hiding there and they learn the truth: Scabbers is in fact Pettigrew, an animagus (a person who can transform into an animal) who is in reality the person who betrayed Harry's parents. When they emerge the Shack, Lupin transforms into a wolf and Pettigrew escapes amid the chaos. Black is apprehended but Harry and Hermione use a Time Turner to save him. Finally, having saved Black, Harry returns to Privet Drive.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2000)

Goblet of Fire begins with Harry's attendance to the Quidditch World Cup where a group of Death Eaters (Voldemort's followers) torture some Muggles (non-magical people). Once at Hogwarts, students learn that the Triwizard tournament will take place in the school. The Triwizard tournament is a competition between three magical schools where a representative of each school must overcome a series of trials to become the winner. Harry is selected to become the champion for Hogwarts together with Cedric Diggory and he will need to face dangerous situations. In the third and final task, the



champions are required to overcome a maze filled with obstacles to reach the winning cup. Harry and Cedric join forces and touch the cup at the same time, which transports them to a cemetery. Cedric is killed by Pettigrew and Harry witnesses how Voldemort comes to life again. After duelling with Voldemort, Harry manages to escape and returns to Hogwarts, where he tells everybody that Voldemort has returned.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (2003)

After the events of *Goblet of Fire*, Harry becomes increasingly frustrated at his inability to participate in the fight against Voldemort. One evening, Harry is attacked by a group of Dementors and he is evacuated from Privet Drive by a group of members of the Order of the Phoenix, an organisation which fights against Voldemort. The Ministry of Magic denies Voldemort's return, and they defame Harry and Dumbledore. Besides, the Ministry has infiltrated Hogwarts by appointing the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Dolores Umbridge. Harry starts having visions about what Voldemort is doing and Dumbledore asks him to take occlumency lessons with Professor Snape from preventing Voldemort from entering Harry's mind. In one of his visions, Harry sees that Voldemort has taken Sirius Black and he decides to leave Hogwarts and go to the Department of Mysteries to rescue him. Harry's friends accompany him and a battle ensues between members of the Order and Death Eaters. Bellatrix Lestrange, Voldemort's fiercest follower, kills Sirius Black and Harry is filled with rage. Voldemort arrives to kill Harry, but his plans are thwarted by Dumbledore. In the aftermath, the whole wizarding community becomes aware of Voldemort's return. Harry also learns that there is a prophecy which states that neither he or Voldemort can live while the other is alive.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (2005)

After Sirius' death, Harry is allowed to spend part of the summer with the Weasleys. Once they return at Hogwarts, the students learn that the new Professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts is Snape, whom Harry loathes. Harry also becomes captain of the Quidditch team and he starts developing a crush on Ron's sister, Ginny. Harry takes some private lessons with Dumbledore, who teaches him valuable information on Voldemort. Dumbledore asks Harry to retrieve a memory from Slughorn, the new Potions teacher, as they need this memory to understand Voldemort's inability to die. Dumbledore and Harry discover that Voldemort created six horcruxes, magical objects which encase a piece of one's soul and prevent you from dying. Dumbledore and Harry embark on a journey to find one of the horcruxes but Dumbledore is poisoned and when they return to Hogwarts, they see the Dark Mark above the astronomy tower. Once they reach the top, Dumbledore petrifies and hides Harry so that he is not discovered, and readers see how Draco Malfoy, one of Harry's classmates and his rival, attempts to murder. Unable to do so, Snape uses the killing curse to murder Dumbledore. The book ends with Dumbledore's funeral and Harry's decision to find and destroy the horcruxes to eliminate Voldemort.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (2007)

The last book in the heptalogy focuses on Harry, Ron and Hermione's journey to find and destroy the horcruxes. After attending Bill and Fleur's wedding, the Ministry of Magic falls to Voldemort's rule and the trio initiate their pursuit of horcruxes. Once they find the first horcrux, the trio are incapable of destroying it, and after some infructuous months, Ron abandons Harry and Hermione, leaving them hurt and resentful. Guided by a Patronus charm, Harry finds Gryffindor's sword, which is impregnated with basilisk's venom and which can help them destroy horcruxes. Ron returns and they resume their hunt for horcruxes. However, the trio are captured and brought to Malfoy Manor, where



Hermione is tortured. Thanks to Dobby, they finally manage to escape and Harry has a vision of what are the remaining horcruxes: Nagini, Voldemort's snake, and one hiding at Hogwarts. Harry also learns that Voldemort is in pursuit of the Deathly Hallows, three magical objects which convert the one who has them into Master of Death. Although Harry also wants to find the Deathly Hallows, Hermione convinces him that the only way to defeat Voldemort is by eliminating the horcruxes. Thus, the trio return to Hogwarts and a battle ensues since Voldemort has been alerted of Harry's whereabouts. Finally, Harry defeats Voldemort and peace returns in the wizarding world.

***The Bone Witch Trilogy* by Rin Chupeco**

The Bone Witch (2017)

In *The Bone Witch* is the story of a young girl, Tea Pahlavi, who discovers that she has the power to raise the dead. After Tea's brother Fox dies, Tea manages to bring him back to life at his funeral. Tea is then approached by a bone witch, Mykaela, who tells her she must move to Kion, the capital, to train as an asha. Asha are women capable of wielding magic whose job, amongst others, is to entertain people. However, people like Tea and Mykaela are called bone witches and viewed with suspicion, as their powers are different from the other asha. Bone witches are in charge of subduing the Daeva, dragon-like monsters which terrorize The Eight Kingdoms and who are sometimes controlled by the Faceless, a group of dissenters with magical abilities. Tea manages to control the most powerful of the Daeva, the Azazi, and she keeps it in her mind. However, Tea does not share this feat with her sister asha as she is growing suspicious of the asha association, a group of elders who lead and control the asha. Meanwhile, one of the Faceless, Aena, has infiltrated Tea's mind and forces her to murder her sister. Tea is stripped of her position as an asha and she decides to go into exile. *The Bone Witch* is narrated from two viewpoints: Tea's and the Bard's, who is in charge of documenting Tea's journey. Therefore, there are two timelines: the events that Tea recalls and the current events narrated by the bard.

The Heart Forger (2018)

The Heart Forger centres on Tea's decision to come out of exile to enact revenge over those who killed the love of her life. In this second novel, Tea is older, and she is completely trained as an asha. Her former mentor, Mykaela, is dying due to a life dedicated to putting down Daeva and Tea is resolute to finding the solution so that other bone witches do not suffer the same fate. The Eight Kingdoms become more suspicious of Tea and her powers and in turn, her growing scepticism on the asha association is confirmed: they prevent bone witches from fully achieving their potential. In *The Heart Forger* Tea also narrates how she fell in love with Kalen, who is cousin and bodyguard of Prince Kalen of Odalia, and the events that led her to his murder and her exile. Tea uncovers that Kance's father, King Telemaine, plotted against his brothers to ascend the throne and rise to power with Aena's help. *The Heart Forger* is also narrated from two points of view: the chapters narrated by the Bard are the current events happening between Tea's fight against the Kingdoms while the other are Tea's relating what led her to unchain her wrath against them.

The Shadow Glass (2019)

The Shadow Glass is the last instalment in the trilogy and it focuses on Tea's quest to create shadowglass, a substance which grants immortality. However, conjuring



shadowglass requires having a black heart, and Tea's continues growing dark as she persists on enacting revenge on those who have wronged her. *The Shadow Glass* is also narrated from two points of view, but the two storylines finally meet to describe the current events. In *The Shadow Glass* readers learn that one of Tea's sister asha is colluding with the faceless and thus she has betrayed them in favour of achieving immortality. Many of Tea's friends die in her path to uncover the truth but she is resilient and does not surrender until she achieves her goal. Tea discovers that shadowglass can also be used to rid the world of magic and this is what she intends to do so as to create a fairer, better society. Finally, Tea succeeds in her pursuit, but she needs to sacrifice her life in exchange.

Women of the Otherworld Series by Kelley Armstrong (selection)

Waking the Witch (2010)

Waking the Witch centres on Savannah Levine, a twenty-one-year-old sorcerer/witch hybrid who lives in Portland, USA. After her mother's death when she was 12 years old, Savannah moved in with Paige Winterbourne, also a witch, and Lucas Cortez, Paige's sorcerer partner. Savannah is working as an assistant at Paige's and Lucas' PI agency and when the opportunity to take her first solo case arises, she does not hesitate to take it. Savannah is hired to solve the mysterious murder of three young women. Savannah arrives in Columbus and she meets Kayla, the daughter of one of the murdered women. The murders appear to have been committed by humans, but a closer look reveals that some supernaturals might have been involved. Savannah also realizes that she is being followed and put into dangerous situations which test her ability as a witch. Finally, Savannah discovers that the culprit behind two of the murders is one of her former enemies, Leah O'Donnell. The other girl's murder, Ginny, was perpetrated by Kayla's grandmother who accidentally fired a gun. Savannah decides not to tell the police the truth she uncovered but foreshadowing her death, Leah had already sent the police a file which incriminated Paula, Kayla's grandmother who also has custody of her. After being arrested, Kayla is taking to foster care and Savannah, feeling guilty, promises to give up her powers if Paula is freed and Kayla can return living with her.

Spell Bound (2011)

After promising to give up her powers, Savannah discovers that someone has taken up on her offer and she finds herself powerless as she is still being followed. Savannah discovers that her stalker is Roni, a woman who is part of a group of women raised to become witch hunters. Meanwhile, a group of supernaturals who call themselves the Supernatural Liberation Movement are recruiting as many supernaturals as possible in their aim to make themselves known to humans. The SLM movement wants Savannah to join them as they believe she is the missing piece to fulfil the prophecy that foreshadows their release. Savannah, however, refuses to join them and therefore she becomes a target. Savannah and her friends must find the leader of the movement and stop the chaos that will ensue if humans discover that witches, sorcerers, vampires, and werewolves are real.

13 (2012)

Thirteen is the last novel in Armstrong's *Women of the Otherworld* series and the story picks up where *Spell Bound* let off. Savannah is still powerless, and she is a journey to recover her powers and stop the Supernatural Liberation Movement from outing supernaturals. In her quest to recover her powers, Savannah discovers that there is a new,



more powerful magic growing inside her and she recognizes she will need to control it or otherwise be controlled by it. Meanwhile, the SLM movement have created a “vaccine against immortality” which contains DNA from vampires, werewolves, and zombies. The vaccine, however, has terrible effects on those who are injected with it. Savannah’s half-brother, Bryce, is fighting to survive the injection and Savannah must find the antidote. Finally, Savannah faces Gilles de Rais, a French nobleman and immortality quester from the 15th century, who is the leader of the SLM movement together with Balaam, Savannah’s demon grandfather. After a strenuous fight, Savannah defeats Balaam and she gets her powers backs, thus restoring the order in the Supernatural world.



