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**Exploring the Function and Aesthetics of Sex in Young Adult Fantasy Literature**

Bakalářská práce

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Tomáš Roztočil

Olomouc 2024

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem veškeré použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne:..... Podpis: .....

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my supervisor Mgr. Tomáš Roztočil for his precious time he dedicated to me, and unwavering patience during the creation of this thesis.

## **Abstract**

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**Title:** Exploring the Function and Aesthetics of Sex in Young Adult Fantasy Literature

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**Number of pages:** 41

**Year of defence:** 2024

This thesis offers a comprehensive study of the depiction of erotics in contemporary Young Adult (YA) fantasy novels, specifically Sarah J. Mass's *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series and Jay Kristoff's *The Nevernight Chronicles*. It offers an analysis of the role of sexual intercourse within the narrative, investigating its implications for character development and thematic exploration. The study questions revolve around the purpose of sex scenes in YA literature, examining its function in the narrative.

The thesis uses the method of close reading and theoretical frameworks, particularly drawing from Mike Bal's conceptual theories. It focuses on the representation of sexuality in these novels, delving into themes such as the portrayal of virginity loss, the influence of fantastic setting on erotic imagery, and the functions of erotics within the narrative.

Through analysis, this research demonstrates that the depiction of sex in YA fantasy literature serves as an important component of storytelling. It highlights how these novels present themes such as transition to adulthood, approach to intimacy, and manipulation through sexual attraction. The analysis reveals distinct approaches taken by each series in addressing these themes, emphasizing their relevance to the intended YA readership.

The first part of this thesis is devoted to a theoretical section that introduces the definition of concept, the Young Adult literature as a literary category, focusing on the distinction between YA and Adult literature, defining fantasy genre. Following the subchapters present the representation of erotics in YA.

The practical analysis of the thesis applies the theories mentioned in the theoretical part. It uses the method of close reading on the selected work, investigating the role of erotics in the selected works. The thesis aims to present that the, in many cases very graphic, sexual scenes have its role in the series dedicated to young adults.

**Keywords:** Young Adult literature, Fantasy genre, *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series, *The Nevernight Chronicles*, sex, erotics, manipulation, intimacy, conceptuality

## **Anotace**

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**Vedoucí práce:** Mgr. Tomáš Roztočil

**Počet stran:** 41

**Rok obhajoby:** 2024

Tato bakalářská práce nabízí komplexní studii zobrazování erotiky v současných fantasy románech pro mládež, konkrétně v sérii Sarah J. Massové *Dvůr trnů a růží* (*A Court of Thorns*) a v *Kronikách Nikdynoci* (*Nevernight*) Jaye Kristoffa. Nabízí analýzu role sexuálního styku v rámci vyprávění a zkoumá jeho důsledky pro vývoj postav. Hlavní otázky výzkumu se točí kolem účelu sexuálních scén v YA literatuře a zkoumají jejich funkci ve vyprávění.

Práce využívá metodu analýzy a staví na zavedené teoretické koncepci, zejména čerpá z konceptuálních teorií Mikea Bala. Zaměřuje se na reprezentaci sexuality v uvedených románech a zabývá se tématy jako je zobrazení ztráty panenství, vliv fantastického prostředí na erotické obrazy a funkce erotiky v rámci vyprávění.

Prostřednictvím analýzy tento výzkum ukazuje, že zobrazování sexu ve fantasy literatuře pro mládež slouží jako důležitá součást vyprávění. Zdůrazňuje, jak tyto romány prezentují témata, jako je dospívání, přístup k intimitě a manipulace prostřednictvím sexuální přitažlivosti. Analýza odhaluje odlišné přístupy jednotlivých sérií k těmto tématům a zdůrazňuje jejich význam pro cílovou skupinu čtenářů literatury pro mládež.

První část této práce je věnována teorii, která představuje definici pojmu literatury pro mládež jako literární kategorii, zaměřuje se na rozlišení mezi literaturou pro mládež a literaturou pro dospělé a vymezuje žánr fantasy. Následující podkapitoly představují zastoupení erotiky v literatuře pro mládež.

Praktická analýza práce aplikuje teorii uvedenou v teoretické části. Využívá metodu analýzy na vybraných dílech a zkoumá roli erotiky. Cílem práce je prezentovat, že, v mnoha případech velmi grafické, sexuální scény mají svou roli v knihách určených pro mládež.

**Klíčová slova:** Literatura pro mládež, fantaskní literatury, *Dvůr trnů a růží*, *Nikdynoc kroniky*, sex, erotica, manipulace, intimita, koncept

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## **Introduction**

This thesis investigates the concept of sex and erotica in contemporary Young Adult fantasy novels, specifically Sarah J. Mass's *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series and *The Nevernight Chronicles* by Jay Kristoff. The thesis will analyse the role of sexual intercourse in the narrative, and ask questions such as: "is sex in YA literature present only to catch the reader's attention and what function the scenes have in the story? The analysis will focus on the realization of erotic motifs and the effects of sex on the character's development. Not only does the thesis study the sexual imaginary and its role in the YA literary category but also how the texts approach social concepts related to sex, for instance, the motif of losing virginity. The YA category has become massively popular in the last decades and its approach toward sex has recently shifted from portraying almost completely asexual characters to graphic sex scenes and explicit displays of desires.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part sets the theoretical grounds for the latter practical part of the work. It first introduces the category of Young Adult literature, dividing it from the Adult literary category and briefly touching on the category's approach toward erotics. The thesis focuses on a rather narrow category of the Fantasy genre – the YA subgenre, therefore the last subchapter of the theoretical part focuses on defining its relation to the genre of Fantasy. The theoretical framework for this thesis is approaching the subjects of the analysis as concepts, introduced by Dutch theorist Mieke Bal. Building on this theoretical outline the practical part uses given theory and the method of close reading for the analysis of chosen literary works.

The practical part provides a synopsis of the story of each analysed series. The analysis uses the method of close reading, to study the concept of losing virginity. Defloration is often tight to innocence; the analysis focuses on how the particular series depicted the process of defloration and the effect it had on the protagonists.

Furthermore, the analysis studies the influence of the fantasy setting of the novels on the erotic imagery. How the elements of fantasy, such as supernatural characters or usage of magic, affect the erotic scenes in the chosen series, and how it differs from sexual stereotypes. The last subchapter focuses on the role of erotics in the narrative. The analyses aim to discover if the sexual scene affects the narrative or characters in any way.

## **1. Conceptual background**

### **1.1. Defining YA literature**

In this chapter, I would like to briefly introduce the category of Young Adult (YA) literature and explore its defining features and related body of criticism. The YA literature can be defined alongside many different aspects; the themes, the age of the portrayed fictional characters or the age of the target audience, the didactic aspect, or a combination of all of the above as well as other aspects relevant to this thesis, like relatability of the narratives towards the intended audience and primary focus on experience in teen's life.

Considering Young Adult fiction's recent popularity, the first question might be 'Do we define YA as a mode or genre or is it just an advertising label?' Jen Doll argues that "Y.A. is a category, as with adult literature, containing all sorts of types of writing, from fiction to nonfiction"<sup>1</sup>, as a literary category, YA contains distinct genres such as fantasy, romance, sci-fi etc. To narrow the scope of such a general label, this thesis will approach Young adult literature as a literary category and will focus on the realisations of the fantasy genre within such a category.

Young adult fiction is a category that covers volumes dedicated to readers who are no longer children, but at the same time, they did not enter the world of adults. Regardless of the stereotype, the category of YA deals with topics relevant not only to the younger generation. Focusing on such tension between children and adult target audience, this work aims to demonstrate how texts, dedicated to teen readers approach the first contact with adulthood and directly aim at first contact with love, desire and sex in written fiction, taking a peculiar stance towards the meaning of those experiences as a transition between a child's and an adult's life.

### **1.2. 'Chasing the Dragons': A Line between Children's and Young Adult Fiction**

The category of YA literature emerged from Children's literature, therefore, there is a very close connection between the two. Not so long ago these two categories were considered one, therefore the origin of the YA category lies within the history of Children's literature.

However, these two categories should not be considered one, as Perry Nodelman point out in his book *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*; "the foundational assumptions

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<sup>1</sup> Jen Doll, "What Does 'Young Adult' Mean?" *The Wire*, April 19, 2012. p . 3



about youthfulness that all texts of Children's and Young adult literature share also account for their difference."<sup>2</sup> Even though both audiences are in the early stages of life, each of them is very different in terms of what they want to read and experience through the text. Let me now briefly look into the definitions of Children's literature and the foundations it provides for the YA category.

There are different ideas on when Children's Literature originated, Peter Hunt points out that: "most of the histories set the beginnings of children's literature in the eighteenth century – sometimes dated as precisely as 1744 with John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*."<sup>3</sup> From the birth of literature for children category to nowadays came numerous definitions. Categories of literature are usually defined by the writers of the texts "Victorian literature was all written by Victorians, and most women's literature is written by women"<sup>4</sup>. However, none of the Children's literature on bookstore shelves is written by children. The literary category for children is not defined by its writers, but by its dedicated audience, which is an attribute shared by Children's and Young adult literature. Nevertheless, this definition limits the volumes of this category only to narratives written for children, the problem with such a definition is pointed out by Carrie Hintz in her volume *Children's Literature (The New Critical Idiom)*; "when defining children's literature as the literature that adults write with a child audience in mind, we violate the often-stated tabu in literary criticism against the 'intentional fallacy,' the assumption that the meaning of a work is inherent in the intentions of the author."<sup>5</sup> A volume published as Children's literature is not defined, by the fact the books are written or owned by a child. This thesis will focus on a definition of literature for children as a literary category introduced by Peter Hillindale, which points out that "childless is the distinguishing property of a text in children's literature, setting it apart from other literature as a genre, and it is also the property that the child brings to the reading of a text."<sup>6</sup> This is one of the aspects that separate Children's literature from Adult literature, and it is also one of the aspects that distinguish Young Adult literature as a separate category.

Even though the history of Children's literature dates back three centuries, the term Young Adult literature is relatively new. The in-between category of Children's and Adult

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<sup>2</sup> Nodelman, Perry. *The hidden adult: Defining children's literature*. (JHU Press, 2008.), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Hunt, Introduction to Understanding Children's Literature (Second Edition), edited by Peter Hunt (New York: Routledge, 2005), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Nodelman, Perry. *The hidden adult: Defining children's literature*. (JHU Press, 2008.), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Hintz, Carrie. *Children's Literature*. (Taylor & Francis, 2019.). 12.

<sup>6</sup> Hollindale, Peter. 1997. *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*. Stroud, UK: The Thimble Press. p. 15.

literature formed slowly. Even though they share some tendencies like focusing on the specific life stage of their audience, or volumes being delivered from adult writers to young readers, Children's literature and YA fiction differ from one another. As Carrie Hintz points out "Children's literature can be defined against its 'adult' counterparts, young adult literature often serves as a foil to children's literature, with an inclusion of elements such as sexuality and the critique of authority that are ostensibly absent from children's literature."<sup>7</sup> This definition strikes an important note for this thesis focus when YA fiction crosses the boundary of presenting an interest in sexuality to its readers. The question is when did the YA literature separate from Children's literature? In the volume *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* Michael Cart gives the historical context of the coinage of the term: "When the term first found common usage in the late 1960s, it referred to realistic fiction that was set in the real (as opposed to imagined), contemporary world and addressed problems, issues, and life circumstances of interest to young readers aged approximately 12–18."<sup>8</sup> However, this definition rapidly involves over time, hand in hand with the category itself, not only with the growing number of books published but also with their maturing readership, there is a certain ambiguity in the definition of a young adult, depending on how old these young adults really are and what they want to read.

Contemporary YA did not remain fiction set in the real world, the category is enriched with various genres, such as fantasy and sci-fi. Within those widely read genres, authors of this category still focus on real-life problems and experiences, allowing their readers to explore aspects of adulthood life such as sex, relationships, or moral dilemmas. Creating a mixture of the new adulthood experiences with the fantasy setting that's desirable for young adult audiences.

### **1.3. 'Awaking Desires': The Erotics in YA Literature**

As the readerhood of YA literature grew wider, there was a visible change in approaching certain themes including the imaginary depiction of erotic scenes. What started as a scene behind 'closed doors', has come to be very graphic descriptions of sexual acts. It's a prevalent phenomenon, not only fulfilling the aesthetic function of literature but also giving its readers a first glance at the transmission to life as an adult, as Kristine Moruzi states: "Fictional texts (whether aimed at adults or young people) offer opportunities for young readers to imagine

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<sup>7</sup> Hintz, Carrie. *Children's Literature*. (Taylor & Francis, 2019.). 30.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2010).

sexual intimacy and to consider the emotional consequences without having to live them in real life.”<sup>9</sup> Sex scenes in YA literature differ from those in Adult fiction, as was stated before, the intended audience prototypically lacks any or has very little experience with sexual intercourse or physical intimacy. For instance, all the books chosen for the latter analysis touch upon the motif of defloration.

How did a very simple age limit indicator for libraries, teachers or parents become a phenomenon setting grounds for a whole category? The YA category is related to one’s life period, works written to be relevant to the reader in that in-between stage when they are not a child, but not an adult. Sara K. Day points out that “today, a life stage that was once so short as to be almost non-existent has stretched to more than a decade, as young people postpone or reject the milestones—choosing a career, getting married, running a household of one’s own—that have traditionally signalled entrance into adulthood.”<sup>10</sup> As this period prolongs the range and scale of formative emotions and experiences described in these books prolong with it.

However, if the books cover topics that are relatable for 20-year-olds, but have the same ‘YA fiction’ label as books for 12-year-olds, where is the line between relatable content and a pornographic scene that is too graphic for a younger audience? If the fantasy series chosen for analysis in this thesis were made into movies, the guidelines introduced by the Motion Picture Association would rate them as R–Restricted for language, graphic nudity, and sexual assault. This rating means that “children under 17 must be accompanied by parent or guardian”<sup>11</sup>. However, there are no such guidelines for YA fiction, so where is the borderline between Young Adult fiction and fiction dedicated to adults?

#### **1.4. YA and Adult Fiction: Drawing a Border**

In the same way, there is a needed separation between Children’ and YA fiction, there is one important boundary between YA and Adult literature. Peter Hunt first focuses on the difference between Children’s and Adult fiction, “Children’s books are different from adults’ books: they are written for a different audience, with different skills, different needs, and different ways of reading; equally, children experience texts in ways which are often

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Venzo and Kristine Moruzi, eds., *Sexuality in Literature for Children and Young Adults* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021). p. 2

<sup>10</sup> Sara K. Day, *Reading Like a Girl: Narrative Intimacy in Contemporary American Young Adult Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 15.

<sup>11</sup> Motion Picture Association, "Film Ratings," Motion Picture Association, <https://www.motionpictures.org/film-ratings/>.

unknowable, but which many of us strongly suspect to be very rich and complex.”<sup>12</sup> Different focuses of each mentioned category are intertwined with its reader's thematic interest and most importantly experience in their life.

Volumes published in those categories differ in how their intended audience relates to the characters, themes and motifs. Adult literature is intended for adult audiences, working with more mature readers and approaching the motifs differently to stay relatable to their readers. Children’s fiction is written by adults to a younger reader, adults, who do not write from their current experience, but with a memory of what it was like to be a child. As Jacqueline Rose stresses in the volume *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*, “children's fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first and the child comes after.”<sup>13</sup> The children in child’s fiction are created by the author's idea of a child and the world they live in. Even though some Children’s books give the reader a chance to take a look at cruelty and reality outside of child’s play, the narratives are adjusted to the reader.

For example, books of this category are written in simpler language, because as Peter Hunt states, “language enables individuals to compare their experiences with the experiences of others, a process which has always been a fundamental purpose of children’s fiction.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, books for children do not have complicated phrases and confusing symbolisms, but that does not mean they cannot express important messages, about society, emotions and experiences. As is mentioned by Peter Hunt; “the representation of experiences such as growing up, evolving a sense of self, falling in love or into conflict, and so on, occur in language and guarantees that the experiences represented are shared with human beings in general.”<sup>15</sup> For example, adult readers already know that the Big Bad Wolf is not asking for grandma’s address just out of curiosity, but children hold their breath when he outran Little Red Riding Hood. Therefore, “if we judge children’s books by the same value systems as we use for adult books – in comparison with which they are bound by definition to emerge as lesser.”<sup>16</sup> This does not entail that YA lacks richness and complexity of its own kind and does

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Hunt, Introduction to Understanding Children’s Literature (Second Edition), edited by Peter Hunt (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Rose, Jacqueline. *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*. (TPB, 2001.), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Hunt, Introduction to Understanding Children’s Literature (Second Edition), edited by Peter Hunt (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Hunt, Introduction to Understanding Children’s Literature (Second Edition), edited by Peter Hunt (New York: Routledge, 2005), 75.

<sup>16</sup> Hunt, 6.

not thematically target serious topics like the role of sex in entering an adult's life, and creating one's identity.

YA literature, being one of the subgenres of children's literature, shares many features that make it different, when compared to Adult fiction, despite the readers of this category being slightly older than readers of Children's literature, it still has to stay relevant and most importantly relatable to its readers. YA aims at an audience that is slowly entering the world of adults. Young Adults meet with feelings that come with looking for one's place in the world, such as loneliness, depression anxiety, but also, love and desire. For some teenagers, literature means not only experiencing those feelings through the characters but also creating an opinion on how the relationships work, what they consider as desirable or, on the other hand, learning that intimacy can be used in a form of manipulation and power play. Works chosen for analysis in this thesis, demonstrate different approaches toward sexuality and sexual intercourse because those are one of the most expressive aspects of YA fiction. Characters having sex not only express love towards their chosen partner but also have sex as a way of escaping from depression or using their desirability to manipulate more powerful individuals, the characters of the series often feel empowered, once they enter an intimate relationship and get to know, what it means to be desired. The sexual scenes between the characters are never only pornographic, the series presents focus on 'erotics'. According to Audre Lorde the erotic is "a measure between the beginning of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. [...] Experiencing the fullness of this feeling means recognising its power."<sup>17</sup> The characters of YA fantasy novels do not perceive sex as a pornographic experience, sex is used as a tool of power, acceptance of magical bonds or escapism from anxiety or depression.

Undoubtedly, themes such as desire, romance, heartbreak, etc. also appear in adult fiction. Nevertheless, Young Adults often stays committed to its intended readership and portrays all these themes from the point of view of a relatable character, a teenager. This is exactly one of the main aspects that makes books for young adults differ from those for adults. As Campbell asserts "The central theme of YA fiction is becoming an adult. No matter what events are going on in the book, accomplishing that task is really what the book is about."<sup>18</sup> Young Adult fiction shows its readers that the journey to adulthood won't be easy

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<sup>17</sup> Lorde, Audre, Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin. "Uses of the erotic: The erotic as power." *Women and Culture: An Intersectional Anthology for Gender and Women's Studies* (1984). 206.

<sup>18</sup> Patty Campbell, *Campbell's Scoop: Reflections on Young Adult Literature*, no. 38, Scarecrow Studies

and all the struggles they might encounter are shared with their beloved character. This includes the first encounters with sex and romance. Losing one's innocence is an important aspect of the transition from childhood to adulthood and it is defining to Young Adult literature.

### **1.5. Adults Writing Teenagers: Approach to sex in YA fiction**

In this subchapter, I want to briefly document the diachronic process of sexualization and eroticization of YA literature and delineate how authors of YA literature changed their approach towards portraying teenagers' sex life in literary fiction from something non-existent to being an integral part of daily life.

Faithful to its label, YA literature is developing with the need to stay relevant to new generations of teenagers as Chris Crowe indicates "Some aspects of adolescence are universal, and because they're universal, they are central to the plots of most young adult stories"<sup>19</sup>. The literary works reflect changing tendencies in sexual education and how for most teenagers media, such as literature, TV shows and others, are major sources of information. In their article Ward and Friedman state that "evidence increasingly suggests that the media are likely to play a prominent role in the sexual socialization of youth. Across several studies, teenagers commonly rank the media among their top sexual informants, often placing them second after peers and before parents in importance,"<sup>20</sup> and the literature is not staying behind. There are various approaches to teen's sexuality, and some texts portray teenagers as innocent, slightly grown-up children that do not even think of experiencing intimacy. Paul Venzo shows that until recently "depictions of sexuality in children's literature have remained opaque, aside from heterosexual expectations that girls would eventually grow up, marry, and have children, while boys pursued homosocial adventures before possibly settling down."<sup>21</sup> These texts depict teens as innocent individuals who do not even think about any form of sexual desire and are aware that sex is the transition line to adulthood.

In classics like Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977), but also more recent works like Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* (2008), the main protagonist meets a friend of

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in Young Adult Literature (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 74

<sup>19</sup> Crowe, Chris. "Young Adult Literature: Finding Common Ground: Multicultural YA Literature. Discoveries: Some New or Overlooked YA Books Worth Reading." *The English Journal* 88, no. 2 (1998): 124.

<sup>20</sup> Ward, L. M., & Friedman, K. (2006). "Using TV as a Guide: Associations Between Television Viewing and Adolescents' Sexual Attitudes and Behavior." *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 16, 133.

<sup>21</sup> Venzo, *Sexuality in Literature for Children and Young Adults* 2

the opposite sex and the interaction between the two introduces a potential romance, but it is never realised.

Another complete absence of sexuality can be found in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), as researcher Auba L. Pons points out, "In the last book, Harry is seventeen, and yet he remains highly inexperienced about sexuality for a person of his age."<sup>22</sup> In most recent YA works, such as Saraj K. Mass's *Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015) or Holly Black's *Cruel Prince* (2018) the characters fully express and voice their sexual desires. I chose three recently published series (2014–2023), with a strongly graphic approach to sex and desire. I will analyse the role of sex in each narrative and study the portrayal of sexually active teenagers. The tendency to include sexual content in YA literature has started only in the last few decades. Moruzi assigns this to "the publication of texts that depict desiring adolescents who can be understood as sexual subjects."<sup>23</sup> With this arising of sexual scenes in books for young people, there also emerges the uncertainty about how this issue of sexuality in fiction should be depicted.

The depiction of sexuality in literature dedicated to teenagers and young adults is a controversial topic, there are no known guidelines for teachers or parents that would warn them that the book their child is reading has very descriptive sexual imagery. However, sexual acts are part of becoming an adult. YA works came from teenage protagonists with no interest in sex whatsoever to characters that hardly think about anything else. The progression of YA narratives, where the protagonists evolve from innocent children to young adults with sexually active lives, is a recent phenomenon, and there is no clear borderline between what is appropriate for a 15-year-old to read and what should stay hidden in the adult sections of libraries.

Recently published books such as those that were chosen for this work's analysis, contain very mature sexual content but are being marketed by bookstores and libraries as appropriate for teens. With no known guidelines on what should be restricted to readers of YA literature, authors of this category push boundaries of what was once taboo and give teenage readers access to very mature content across all genres, from romantic fiction to sci-fi. a very popular genre of this category is fantasy, the mature content of the YA category is affected by the specific genre. This thesis aims to explore how are the erotic motives,

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<sup>22</sup> Venzo, *Sexuality in Literature for Children and Young Adults* 2

<sup>23</sup> Venzo, *Sexuality in Literature for Children and Young Adults*. 3

presented to teenagers, realized within the fantasy genre. To properly explore fantasy, let the author define the genre of Fantasy.

### **1.6. Defining fantasy**

Fantasy is one of the most popular genres in the YA category. Its popularity among a wide readership lies with a certain form of escapism from the ‘real world’. The fantasy genre offers great potential for the writers to depict a reality that is exciting, yet relatable. As Daniel Baker highlights in his article *Why We Need Dragons: The Progressive Potential of Fantasy*, “By going past reality, by plunging through and beyond it, fantasy can offer an interesting, at times disturbing, perspective.”<sup>24</sup> Fantasy setting these characters in a fantasy setting makes the narrative more appealing to young readers while showing that although the character has magical powers, or lives in a world full of fantastic creatures, they still deal with the same emotions as the readers. As is pointed out by Ursula K. LeGuin “Children know perfectly well that unicorns aren't real, but they also know that books about unicorns, if they are good books, are true books.”<sup>25</sup> Meaning that even though fantasy fiction deals with unrealistic settings there is always a reflection of real life.

Focusing on the thesis topic the aspects of Fantasy are reflected in numerous erotic scenes, for example using magical powers to increase pleasure or shapeshifting to be more attractive or have attributes of some magical creature, presenting various forms of sexual intercourse. However, to study the influence of fantasy on erotica and pornography one must set a clear definition of the Fantasy genre.

The Fantasy genre has no singular, clear definition, there are experts, theorists, critics, and fans who tried to define this popular genre, but there is very little agreement in those definitions. One thing that could be agreed on is that “fantasy is about the construction of the impossible whereas science fiction may be about the unlikely but is grounded in the scientifically possible.”<sup>26</sup> However, the opinions differ from here. Editors of *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* state that the definition that gets closest to covering all aspects of fantasy is the definition by the critic Brian Attebery who defines fantasy as a “genre unfixed and negotiable ‘fuzzy set,’ members of which are recognizable through their ‘family

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<sup>24</sup> Baker, D., 2012. *Why we need dragons: the progressive potential of fantasy*.

<sup>25</sup> Le Guin, U. K. (1979). *Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons? The language of the night: Essays on fantasy and science fiction*, 45

<sup>26</sup> Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1.



resemblances' with one another, rather than due to an inherent set of characteristics common to all examples."<sup>27</sup> With this definition one doesn't have clear boundaries of the genre but at least some exemplary writers and motifs that could help to map the space.

As was mentioned before, YA literature is significant to teen readers, who through literature get their first contact with emotions like desire. The fantasy aspects often influence sex in YA fantasy novels. However, intimate relationships are not portrayed only with the concept of losing virginity or the beginning of a relationship. Sex in YA fantasy also plays a role in a power play between the characters. It helps the character gain social status and is used as a form of manipulation. As Mozuri points out "the norms for young adult literature and the relative lack of sexually explicit content can be subverted through the fantastic setting, thus enabling sexually active protagonists, within radically unbalanced relationships of power."<sup>28</sup> Protagonists often start as helpless young girls who slowly gain their magical powers, putting them on the same power level as the male characters, keeping with the hero's journey scheme. This power also reflects their confidence and attraction in their relationships, this highlights the tendency of YA literature to portray sex to young adults is not only to portray it as a transition to adulthood or put it in the spotlight as losing one's innocence. But also, a normal part of life, that can be used to manipulate other human beings. As a genre and mode of telling, Fantasy enables the author to speak about strong desires and hide them in magical powers, or other aspects linked to fantasy settings.

### **1.7. "In the Realm of Thought": Theoretical Echoes**

This thesis approaches Young Adult literature as a literary category that functions as a bridge between children and Adult literature via its themes, motifs and discussed concepts. The theoretical framework of this thesis was inspired by the theory of concepts by Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal, who works with the concepts as fluid mental constructs, that change their form not because they mean the same thing to everyone, but because they do not."<sup>29</sup> Bal demonstrates the term 'travelling concepts' that travel among academics, fields, and society. Travelling concepts enable different approaches to the portrayal of teen sexuality and highlight the importance of how the reader experiences the aspects of pornographic scenes. Importantly, it has been discussed that YA literature is linked with relatability and portraying

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<sup>27</sup> John Clute and John Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Venzo and Kristine Moruzi, eds., *Sexuality in Literature for Children and Young Adults* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021). p. 82

<sup>29</sup> Bal, Mieke. "Working with Concepts." *European Journal of English Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2009, p.17

experiences that are fresh and important in the life of a young adult. Sex inevitably belongs to parts of life that are exacting to a young person and the erotic or almost pornographic scenes in YA books play an important role for its readers. The theory of travelling concepts shows how the same concepts such as love and desire can be distinctly approached in YA fiction as opposed to Adult literature. YA works with such concepts differently, trying to portray experiences that might be new to its reader and showing a different role of sex in the character's journey.

Approaching themes like desire, romance, and loneliness from the perspective of a teenager and throughout the language enables young people to experience the transition between a child and an adult. The author of this thesis focuses on the portrayal of erotic and pornographic scenes in YA literature, highlighting the shifting tendency from implicit to explicit depiction of sexual desires, concretely within the fantasy genre.

In the following practical part, this thesis offers an analysis of three contemporary YA fantasy series chosen for the analysis. Sarah J. Mass's *The Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015), *The Nevernight Chronicles* (2016) by Jay Kristoff and *Savage Lands* (2020) by Stacey Marie Brown, each series portrays a female, who through character development becomes a strong and powerful character with their feminine side still remaining, while exploring their sexuality as the narrative proceeds. The analysis will focus on this exploration of one's sexuality, but also on the different roles of erotic scenes, for example, the evolving intimacy of a relationship, a gain of power or establishing a role in society. Nonetheless, these pornographic scenes are closely intact to the volume's fantasy settings, in so of works sexual intercourse has a role in magical ritual or is presented as a way of accepting the bond with a chosen partner.

## **2. Introducing YA Desires: A Practical Analysis**

The practical part of this thesis aims to analyse the depiction, conceptualization and symbolics associated with various instances of sexual intercourse in YA fiction volumes aimed at the teenage audience. It shall not speculate on the reaction of the reader but on the role of erotics in the narrative.

As it has been discussed in the theoretical part, Young Adult literature is thematically focused on the process of growing up and entering the world of adults. Through this literary category, young readers encounter intimacy and sex early on in their "young adult" life. As Christine Stamper points out, these "narratives discuss the feelings, physical and/or

emotional, provoked by sexual encounters”<sup>30</sup>, prototypically the authors of YA books present those feelings to a target readership who most likely did not encounter such situations in real life. Despite this fact, the sexual scenes could be rated as strongly explicit. The analysis will further focus on the genre-driven influence of fantasy on these erotic scenes, and how the fantasy influences the depiction of sex, for example using fantastic and/or symbolic attributes as a key component of the depicted sexual intercourse.

This thesis will analyse the role of erotics in YA narratives using the method of close reading. Following the opening observations, the thesis’s primary focus will be on the concept of defloration and what role it plays in the character’s journey, how is sex used as escapism from depression and anxiety and how an intimate relationship can play a role in the position of power, the distinction between sexual relations between characters who are in love, and characters using sex as a way of manipulation, reflecting, on what way is the fantasy genre reflected in sexual acts.

## **2.1. A Court of Thorns and Roses series**

### **Introduction of the series**

*A Court of Thorns and Roses (ACOTAR)* is a series written by American author Sarah J. Mass, the series currently consists of five published books, but the thesis will focus on the first two books of the series following the canonical narrative. Mass started writing *A Court of Thorns and Roses* as a retelling of the fairy tales *Beauty and the Beast*, *East of the Sun and West of the Moon* and *Tam Lin*. The book is set in the fantasy world named Prythian, where the world of humans and the world of Faeries are separated by ‘the Wall’, a magical border. Prythian is divided into six courts which function as separate kingdoms, each having its king called ‘High Lord’.

The main protagonist is a human girl named Feyre, who is taken into the magical world of Faerie after killing a faerie in the form of a wolf. She is taken by the High Lord of the Spring Court Tamlin, as punishment for the life she took. As she lives in Spring Court she develops feelings for her capturer. When the antagonist of the first novel Amarantha takes him ‘Under the Mountain’, Feyre must save him. To do so she must make a pact with Tamlin’s rival Rhysand, High Lord of the Night court. Feyre manages to save Tamlin but

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<sup>30</sup> Stamper, Christine N., and Mollie V. Blackburn. "‘I will not be a 17 year old virgin’: female virginity and sexual scripting in graphic narratives for teenagers." *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 10, no. 1 (2019): 47.

sacrifices her own life. The seven High Lores offer her a drop of their power, and she comes back to life as a Fea.

After these events, Feyre returns with Tamlin to his court. However, he treats her like a possession, locking her up in his mansion. After a mental breakdown, Feyre is saved by Rhysand and lives in Night Court instead. Rhysand is partly High Fea but is also of an Illyrian. The Illyrians are a warrior race, characterized by their bat-like wings. Over time Feyre enters a romantic and sexual relationship with Rhysand. There is a starting war with the neighbouring world, Feyre and Rhysand try to ally with the High Lords of Prythian, but they are too late. War has come and they do not have all their forces prepared. During the final battle, most of the courts and humans answer their call and they manage to win the war. Afterwards, there is a discussion of how the two nations; Fea and humans will live side by side.

## **2.2. Thorn's Secrets: Analysis of ACOTAR**

The analysis of *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series is divided into three parts. The first part will analyse the concept of losing innocence and the heroine's approach towards her virginity. The second part will analyse the use of magic in sexual relations, the role of sex in the narrative.

## **2.3. Lost Petals: Defloration Journey**

This subchapter will focus on the series' approach towards virginity and its effect on the character's development. Virginity is connected to one's innocence, Jodi McAlister states that, "the pathologisation of female desire meant that virginity came to be associated strongly with ideas of innocence and ignorance, congruent with this notion of sexual silence"<sup>31</sup>. While the character remains a virgin, she's morally good and while she waits for her ideal partner, she still keeps the image of an innocent girl. As Christine Seifert points out; "you can be vapid, stupid, unethical, but so long you've never had sex, you're a 'good' girl and therefore worthy of praise."<sup>32</sup> However, from the novel's beginning, Feyre is the opposite of innocence. Despite being the youngest girl in the family, after losing her mother, she is the one who starts to take care of the family.

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<sup>31</sup> McAlister, Jodi, and Jodi McAlister. *The Consummate Virgin: Female Virginity Loss and Love in Anglophone Popular Literatures* (2020): 30.

<sup>32</sup> Seifert, Christine. *Virginity in young adult literature after Twilight*. Vol. 47. Rowman & Littlefield, 2015; 10

From the beginning Feyre is portrayed as the one hardened by life, compared to her sisters, Feyre is stripped of all innocence. Even though the family lives in poverty, the two older sisters won't be drawn into the hard reality of their lives. "Nesta picked at her long, neat nails. 'I hate chopping wood. I always get splinters.' She glanced up from beneath her dark lashes. "Besides, Feyre," she said with a pout, "you're so much better at it! It takes you half the time it takes me. Your hands are suited for it—they're already so rough."<sup>33</sup> Nesta and Elain, Feyre's older sisters, stay at home with their father and do nothing to help the family. Feyre shows different behavioural patterns, when she takes the responsibility for her family's survival. As Buttsworth points out; "In YA fiction, it seems that the best thing a heroine can be is nothing like other girls."<sup>34</sup> Such differentiation reflects in the relationship between the girls in the family. Her sisters view Feyre as the one who will take care of their wellbeing. However, they do not show any gratitude; they view Feyre in a negative light. Nesta shows signs of disgust whenever she comes home covered in blood after hunting animals the whole day. Nesta never fails to show how disapproving she is about Feyre's relationship with a village boy named Issac, with whom Feyre lost her virginity. Nesta and Elain remain innocent in all aspects of their life including their virginity status.

Feyre does not show any signs of regret or a negative approach towards losing her virginity or sexual intercourse. The relationship between her and a young man from the village who took her virginity is strictly physical. Their time together is presented as a way to relieve stress and satisfy their needs; "There was no love between us, and there never had been. He'd been my first and only lover in the two years since. But every time was the same: a rush of shedding clothes and shared breaths and tongues and teeth."<sup>35</sup> The reader is presented with a reality where losing virginity does not mean crossing the border into adulthood. Feyre's losing of innocence is tied to the death of her mother and the need to provide for her family, the events of her first defloration have no greater meaning, other than escapism and the need for closeness. "Simple, easy, perhaps a bit awkward, but he'd left me at my cottage feeling not quite so ... alone. A week later, I pulled into that decrepit barn."<sup>36</sup> Despite the general stereotype, that according to McAlister "made marriage the point at which

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<sup>33</sup> Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. Bloomsbury, 2015; 20

<sup>34</sup> Buttsworth, Sara. "'Bite Me': Buffy and the penetration of the gendered warrior-hero." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 186.

<sup>35</sup> Buttsworth. *Bite Me': Buffy and the penetration of the gendered warrior-hero*. 36

<sup>36</sup> Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. Bloomsbury, 2015; 35

sex became acceptable for women”<sup>37</sup>. that dictates virginity is something that must be protected by the young girls that must wait, preferably after they wed, to enter the world of sexual activities. Feyre breaks this stereotype and from the beginning of the series, she’s sexually independent and views sex as a form of pleasure and/or even escapism.

#### **2.4. Magical Seduction: Exploring the Influence of Magic in Sexual Dynamics**

As was already stated, one of the focal points of this thesis is an analysis of how the fantasy mode influences sexual scenes in the volumes at hand. When Feyre, the main protagonist of the series, leaves the human world, her relationship with a villager comes to an end. As she spends time in the High Lord’s manor, Feyre starts to feel desire and attraction towards Tamlin. She notices how attractive the High Lord is early on. However, it is later in the narrative that Tamlin’s actions start to affect Feyre and she starts to show signs of desire. “He purred, the sound rumbling through my fingers, arms, legs, and core. I wondered how that sound would feel if he were fully pressed up against me, skin-to-skin.”<sup>38</sup> Feyre is aware of her desires and she feels empowered by her sexuality. She even challenges Tamlin to continue kissing her, asking “That’s it?”<sup>39</sup> after he stops. Even though Feyre faces creature much more powerful than herself she’s not afraid of challenge, thanks to positive sexual empowerment and power she gains in such a position.

As Diamond suggests “there has been an increase in the ‘ownership’ of desires in female protagonists of young adult literature, with more young women characterised as embracing and asserting sexual agency.”<sup>40</sup> However, Feyre is a prisoner in the High Lord’s manner and she is not given a chance to consent to the relationship, being a powerless human, she is in a submissive position. As Borgia points out “extreme dominance of the female partner is characterized as ideal masculinity.”<sup>41</sup> Both male leads in the series show this extreme dominance. Nevertheless, each male exhibits dominance over Feyre differently.

In the novel’s setting, High Lords are described as one of the most powerful beings in the world, “The seven Courts of Prythian, each ruled by a High Lord, all of them deadly in

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<sup>37</sup> McAlister, Jodi, and Jodi McAlister. *The Consummate Virgin: Female Virginity Loss and Love in Anglophone Popular Literatures* (2020): 5.

<sup>38</sup> Mass. *A Court of Thorns and Roses* 178.

<sup>39</sup> Mass. *A Court of Thorns and Roses* 97.

<sup>40</sup> Diamond, F., 2011. Beauty and the Beautiful Beast: Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Saga and the Quest for a Transgressive Female Desire. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 26(67). 43

<sup>41</sup> Borgia, Danielle N. "Twilight: The glamorization of abuse, co-dependency, and white privilege." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 47, no. 1 (2014), 154.

their own way. They are not merely powerful—they are Power.”<sup>42</sup> Tamlin’s magical powers and his function as a ruler only underline his dominance. This dominance is important in the first sexual experience the two characters share. They meet on the night of Calamnai, a faerie ritual in which the High Lord of the Spring Court, must find an unmarried fae, and the magic forces him to have sex with her. During this ritual, Feyre is advised to stay in her room, for the magic of the ritual “could strip away any sense of self, of right or wrong.”<sup>43</sup> Presenting a reality where the High Lord does not have to face consequences of his own action, no matter what he would do. When Feyre accidentally meets him in the hallway, after he performs the ritual, Tamlin pins her against the wall and refuses to let her go. Tamlin blames her for his sexual frustration, but this dominant behaviour is excused and desired by the heroine. According to Muzori, “this encounter naturalises patriarchal dominance within an intimate relationship and presents this dominance as desirable.”<sup>44</sup> Tamlin is not confronted with his aggressive and possessive behaviour, because he was under the ritual magic’s control. When Feyre sees him, she describes him as; “When I looked into his eyes, remnants of power flickered there. No kindness, none of the wry humour and gentle reprimands. The Tamlin I knew was gone.”<sup>45</sup> The influence of magic and the power that is evident from Tamlin’s character intensifies male dominance which Feyre finds desirable. During the time Tamlin has Feyre pinned to the wall, Feyre describes how she feels trapped on the other hand she proclaims; “heat pounded between my legs, and as he ground his body against me, against every aching spot, a moan slipped past my lips.”<sup>46</sup> Feyre is afraid of Tamlin’s action, in the same time she’s attracted to Tamlin and his behaviour fills her with sexual desire.

Feyre cannot move and Tamlin physically restrains her, even though she refuses this interaction. As Moruzi highlights, “the fantastic setting enables the repositioning of this encounter as sexually arousing.”<sup>47</sup> Tamlin then proceeds to bite Feyre on her shoulder and the whole interaction is completed with him proclaiming; “Don’t ever disobey me again,”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. Bloomsbury, 2015; 134

<sup>43</sup> Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. Bloomsbury, 2015; 134 199.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Venzo and Kristine Moruzi, eds., *Sexuality in Literature for Children and Young Adults* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021). p. 98

<sup>45</sup> Maas, *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. 200.

<sup>46</sup> Maas; *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. 201.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Venzo and Kristine Moruzi, eds., *Sexuality in Literature for Children and Young Adults* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021). p. 80.

<sup>48</sup> Maas. 201

Given the fantastic mode, it is not only viewed as arousing but also excused. This phenomenon was pointed out by Kristine Deffenbacher, who states: “The animalistic “natures” of [...] supernatural creatures make possible the reanimation and transformation of a host of rape myths. An infusion of the paranormal thus allows otherwise unviable narratives—stalking and rape as courtship and seduction, jealous ownership, and control as love—to appear in a sort of twilight, at once receding and returning, disavowed, and embraced.”<sup>49</sup> The magic that possess, the paranormal creatures, often adds up to the level of masculinity and dominance. When the series present a powerful male protagonist, he can show a possessive and toxic behaviour. However, because of his power his incorrect behaviour towards females is excused for the amount of power he possesses. This is evident in the *ACOTAR* series. Feyre is bitten as a punishment for her disobedience. The following day, a close friend of Tamlin questions the bruise on her shoulder, Tamlin does not apologise, not take responsibility for his behaviour, claiming “So, if Feyre can’t be bothered to listen to orders, then I can’t be held accountable for the consequences.”<sup>50</sup> In the interaction between the two males, Feyre has no chance to speak or give her point of view, and the portrayal of Tamlin’s dominance is strengthened. Throughout the series, the male’s dominance is a constant aspect of expressing sexual attractiveness.

Feyre’s relationship with the other male lead, Rhysand, High Lord of the Night Court, is presented as less problematic than her relationship with Tamlin. Rhysand respects Feyre and her boundaries. However, despite this relationship being presented as ‘healthy’, Rhysand still expresses aggressive behaviour and repeatedly claims Feyre as his possession, when there is another male in their presence, Rhysand possessively claims her, proclaiming; “‘She’s mine’,” he said quietly, but viciously enough that his warriors nearby heard.”<sup>51</sup> Despite Feyre turning into a High Fea and gaining magical powers of her own, Rhysand still holds power over her and controls her life, from the position of her rescuer from the toxic partner. Although Rhysand represents the ideal partner in the storyline, Feyre is remains under his control, and he remains to show his power over her. According to Foucault, “the exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others.”<sup>52</sup> Rhysand does not punish Feyre for disobedience, but

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<sup>49</sup> Deffenbacher, Kristina. "Rape Myths' Twilight and Women's Paranormal Revenge in Romantic and Urban Fantasy Fiction." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 47, no. 5 (2014): 923.

<sup>50</sup> Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. Bloomsbury, 2015; 204.

<sup>51</sup> Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Mist and Fury*. Vol. 2. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016; 476.

<sup>52</sup> Foucault, M., 1982. The subject and power. *Critical inquiry*, 8(4). 778.



as was already mentioned, Rhys claims her as property even before they enter a romantic relationship. Such claiming is linked to Rhysand's masculinity that he expresses throughout the whole series.

## **2.5. Masculine Magic: Power Dynamics in YA Fantasy Erotics**

The masculine male lead role is not an uncommon concept throughout storylines in romances. According to Janice A. Radway; "The hero is always characterised by spectacular masculinity. [...] Almost everything about him is hard, angular, and dark."<sup>53</sup> However, she also mentions that this ultimate masculinity also comes with "the presence of a small feature that introduces an important element of softness into the overall picture."<sup>54</sup> Rhys represents an ideal partner for Feyre, their relationship is sealed by a 'mating bond', a magical link between a pair that is destined to be together. "Mate—their equal, their match in every way."<sup>55</sup> When the couple finds out about the bond and decides to accept it, they are controlled by their sexual desire. The characters find themselves in a magical state where the couple just 'can't help themselves'.

With the acceptance of the bond, the reader does not witness any forceful behaviour, Rhysand does nothing against Feyre's will and during the scene, the magic has the same effect on her just like it does on him. "I couldn't stop, couldn't get enough of the taste of him in my mouth, the feel of him inside of me. More, more, more— until I thought I might burst out of my skin from pleasure." The pair spends the whole night in sexual activities and later Rhysand explains that this infinite desire is connected to the ancient magic of the mating bond, "When a couple accepts the mating bond, it's ... overwhelming. Again, harkening back to the beasts we once were." The ancient magic makes the characters return to their animalistic state and they are no longer connected to their conscious self during sexual intercourse.

In conclusion, the fantasy aspect of the *ACOTAR* series provides the characters with the ability to control the magic and the magical power equals the ability to control other characters socially, and sexually. The two male characters that Feyre takes as her sexual partners are High Lords, the most powerful creatures in the series. However, their magical

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<sup>53</sup> Radway, Janice A. *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009; 141.

<sup>54</sup> Radway. *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. 141.

<sup>55</sup> Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. Bloomsbury, 2015; 180.

power takes control of their behaviour and male sexuality stereotypes. Such an effect of a fantastic setting entails the forceful scenes, when the heroine has no chance to refuse or protect herself from male domination, into a desirable scenario; the heroine fears the male's power but at the same time experiences sexual arousal. *ACOTAR* series makes the fantasy setting into an excuse for possessive and aggressive behaviour, then proceeds to make it into something to be desired in the male lead. This desire to be owned and controlled by male protagonists is reflected in the role of sex in the narrative. However, it is not considered to be a healthy relationship pattern to a modern reader.

## **2.6. Lust and Storytelling: The Role of Sex in Narrative**

The theoretical part of this work already established that the target readership of the YA category is teenagers, and the theme of the YA novels is prototypically the process of transition into adulthood. This subchapter will focus on the role of erotics in the narrative. In the analysed novels transition comes with entering the world of sexual desire and erotic relations. The reader of the *ACOTAR* series experiences and provides perspective of views sexual scenes from Feyre's point of view, who from the beginning of the novel uses sex as a form of escapism and while when she enters the world of Fae, she shows no signs of fear of how the Fea embrace sexual intercourse as a part of their culture. As was mentioned in the subchapter analysing the series' approach towards losing virginity, Feyre does not start her first sexual relationship for any romantic feelings. Feyre seeks Isaac for deeper connection, satisfying her sexual desire, and to escape from her life in poverty.

In the second novel of the series, *A Court of Mist and Fury*, Feyre enters a relationship with Tamlin. After she saves him from 'Under the Mountain', the novel is inspired by a fairytale, therefore, pointing towards a happy ending and marriage. Jack claims that "marriage is the major event of nearly every fairy tale; it is the reward for girls, or sometimes their punishment."<sup>56</sup> At the beginning of the novel, everything in Feyre's life seems perfect. However, Feyre recovers from the trauma she has had to endure, which Tamlin, or any other character around her, does not notice. Tamlin's ignorance leads to problems in their relationship. While the sex, as Moruzi points out, "occurs amidst arguments, with sex becoming a way for the characters to reconcile without actually discussing their

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<sup>56</sup>Zipes, Jack. *Don't bet on the prince: Contemporary feminist fairy tales in North America and England*. Routledge, 2014.

differences.”<sup>57</sup> Feyre uses sexual intercourse not only for forgetting her relationship’s problems, but also to escape trauma and nightmares from the events that lead to saving Tamlin. At the beginning of the second novel sexual desire and act are used as an escapism.

The motif of escaping can be spotted even in the depiction of the sexual intercourse itself where Feyre seeks to lose herself; “I cried out, and he buried himself in me with a mighty stroke. For a moment, I was nothing, no one.”<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, despite her rich sexual life, Feyre still shows signs of trauma, not only does she suffer from nightmares, but also experiences vomiting and rapid weight loss. As Gordons states “Trauma disrupts our digestion as predictably and dangerously as it does our thinking and feeling.”<sup>59</sup> Even though Feyre’s suffering is physically visible Tamlin, or his friend Lucien do nothing to help her. During their time together, Tamlin becomes more obsessive, and Feyre is saved by Rhysand when Tamlin locks her up in his manor, which causes Feyre's mental breakdown; “I was trapped inside this house. I might as well have been Under the Mountain; I might as well have been inside that cell again.”<sup>60</sup> Feyre takes time to recover from her trauma. Furthermore, in the narrative as she escapes her toxic relationship with Tamlin in the Spring Court, moves to the Night Court, and starts relationship with the second love interest in the series she starts to heal.

At the Night Court, Feyre learns to control her powers, gains back her weight and grows closer to Rhysand. As their relationship grows, Feyre helps Rhysand in the upcoming war. When Rhysand plans a visit to a Court of Nightmares, a part of his land, he forces Feyre to wear a dress that is “two shafts of fabric that hardly cover her breasts flowed to below her navel, where a belt across her hips joined them into one long shaft that draped between her legs and barely covered her backside.”<sup>61</sup> She’s dressed in minimal clothing to highlight her sexualized position. She must play the role of the High Lords lover, while Rhysand presents her as “The High Lord’s whore”<sup>62</sup>. Rhysand and Feyre play a game together, they present Feyre Rhys’ sexual toy to manipulate the idea of Feyre’s position in Rhysand’s court. Even though Tolman states that “it is challenging to make sense of sexual empowerment when girls

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<sup>57</sup> Paul Venzo and Kristine Moruzi, eds., *Sexuality in Literature for Children and Young Adults* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021). 86.

<sup>58</sup> Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Mist and Fury*. Vol. 2. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016; 29.

<sup>59</sup> Gordon, J.D., 2019. *The transformation*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

<sup>60</sup> Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Mist and Fury*. Vol. 2. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016; 135.

<sup>61</sup> Maas. *A Court of Mist and Fury* 434.

<sup>62</sup> Maas, *A Court of Mist and Fury*. 439.

and young women have become commodities to be dressed for and consumed by male sexual desire.”<sup>63</sup> Feyre is presented on Rhysand’s lap and he freely touches her, she still feels empowered by Rhysand’s touch and does not care about public disposal. “I became the music, and the drums, and the wild, dark thing in the High Lord’s arms. His eyes were wholly glazed—and not with power or rage. Something red-hot and edged with glittering darkness exploded in my mind.”<sup>64</sup> Feyre and Rhys use their erotic behaviour to manipulate the minds of Rhys’s subjects and enemies. By being publicly intimate they make a statement of Rhysand’s ownership over Feyre.

Erotics in *The Court of Thorns and Roses* are presented as a form of escapism for the main heroine. Feyre escapes to sex to get away from her trauma, depression, and nightmares. However, the feeling she seeks; losing all her control and self is only momentary and Feyre does not heal from the traumatic events. Later in the narrative, public show of sexual relations manipulates the public judgement about Feyre's loyalty to the High Lord of the Night Court. Being freely presented on Rhysand’s lap manipulates people into thinking that he claims the status of ownership over Feyre. Erotics in *ACOTAR* series present a form of escapism and manipulation. Feyre’s relationship with Tamlin is presented as abusive, Tamlin does not respect Feyre’s wishes, does not acknowledge her trauma, and there is no form of communication. Sexual intercourse between them works as a way for dealing with the relationship’s complications, which escalates to Tamlin imprisoning Feyre in his manor. On the other hand, Rhysand is presented as ideal romantic interest. However, Feyre and Rhysand’s sexual relations begin as a form of manipulation, and Rhysand’s possessiveness of Feyre shown as attractive.

## **2.7. Nevernight Chronicles**

### **Introduction of the series**

*Nevernight Chronicles* by an Australian author, Jay Kristoff, is a fantasy YA novel set in the world with three suns that almost never set. The main protagonist is a female called Mia Corvere. Mia is a young girl, who at a very young age witnessed her father’s execution. Years later, Mia discovers she can control the shadows, and during the narrative she is accompanied by a shadow in a form of a cat. Their conversation during the series is a source of humor in the narrative. Mia’s only wish is to get revenge for her father, who was beheaded by a group

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<sup>63</sup> Tolman, D.L., 2012. Female adolescents, sexual empowerment, and desire: A missing discourse of gender inequity. *Sex roles*, 66, pp.746-757.

<sup>64</sup> Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Mist and Fury*. Vol. 2. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016; 444.

of the most powerful politician. As a orphan she's found and adopted by an assassin, a man called Mercutio, who trains her in combat and the art of assassination. When Mia reaches the age of sixteen, she has learnt everything Mercutio has to offer, and decides to join the 'Red Church', a secret organization that trains the best assassins in the land. During her training, Mia faces deathly trails, making connections and enemies among her classmates. In the 'Red Church' she meets a boy Tric who becomes her love interest. In their relationship Mia explores the possibilities of her sexuality, while learning how to seduce a man in order to kill. Alongside with learning art of seduction and different strategies of assassination, she learns more about her powers and the secrets of the Church. Mia is getting close to finishing her training, when she finds out that her father was not as honourable as she thought him to be, and she discovers he died, because he betrayed those that trusted him. Despite this fact, Mia's goal remains the same, when discovers that one of the people responsible for her father's downfall is one of her teachers, she confronts him and kills him in the final battle. The novel ends with Mia starting a new journey, to find out more about her identity and powers.

## **2.8. Nevernight Chronicles Analysis**

The following subchapters will present an analysis of the *Nevernight Chronicles*. The analysis will follow the same structure as the previous analysis. The first part will focus on the event of Mia's defloration, how does the narrative approach the process, and what role does losing virginity have in the narrative. The second part will analyse how the fantasy genre affects the erotics of the series and the third part will focus on the role of erotics on the narrative.

## **2.9. Whispers in the Moonlight: Tale of Virginity Loss**

The analysis made in this subchapter will focus on the main heroine's journey of losing her virginity. The author of this theses already established that the loss of one's virginity is connected to losing one's status of innocence. As Mia prepares for her journey to the Red Church, in order to become a professional assassin, she decides to lose her virginity to a male-prostitute. Mia's prepared to leave all her innocence behind and pragmatically makes the decision to lose her virginity. Younger establishes that, "As their bodies develop and mature, teens become increasingly aware of sex and sexuality, and sexuality is undeniably one of the more challenging aspects of growing up."<sup>65</sup> Such awareness leads to Mia's decision, and her defloration is lived out as a necessary procedure.

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<sup>65</sup> Younger, B., 2009. *Learning curves: Body image and female sexuality in young adult literature*. Scarecrow Press.

Mia does not choose to lose virginity to a man who she has feelings for. Mia's decisions are very practical. Mia chose, in her opinion, a very attractive man. The reader witnesses the event from her point of view, and the man is described as; "black curls on the right side of unruly. Strong hands and hard muscle and his eyes, O, Daughters, his eyes. Five thousand fathoms deep. Pulling you in to laugh even as he drowned you." <sup>66</sup> Even though Mia is attracted to the prostitute the whole scene shows signs of coercion. However, not from the man's side, before anything is bound to happen, the man makes sure she wants it; "are you sure?" he asked. She'd looked up into his eyes, then. Took him by the hand. "I'm sure," she whispered."<sup>67</sup> Mia is sure of her decision but is very anxious about the situation. Seifert highlights that "girls operate in a state of unrelenting obsessive sexual desire, constantly feeling angst about whether or not to give up their virginity."<sup>68</sup> In the heroines case, Mia does not operate on behalf of 'obsessive sexual desire', she, as was already mentioned, does in out of pure pragmatism. Even feels like she must do it; "a canal murmured beneath them, its sluggish flow bleeding out into the ocean. Just as she wished to. Just as she must. Praying she wouldn't drown." <sup>69</sup> The narrative gives the reader a confused description of the whole event, where Mia's fearful, but at the same time she feels pleasure. Portrayal of defloration in the series is full of fear, the whole process is compared to the act of murder. Both acts, defloration and murder, are something that Mia 'needs to do'. Her job as an assassin forces her to murder a man, and as she realizes that her innocence could mean a weakness in her future, she decides to lose it. Her decision is purely practical.

At the beginning Mia's only reacting to the experience as something that needs to be done. However, when the man starts to pleasure her, she finds the experience confusing, proclaiming; "She couldn't speak. She didn't want this to begin or to end. [...] she crushed her lips to his, sinking down onto the bed. Just she and he, now. Skin to skin. Her moans or his, she could no longer tell."<sup>70</sup> Compared to the previous analysis of the *ACOTAR* series, where Feyre describes her experience as a way to escape from her miserable life, and close to another human being, Mia's experience is negative, she feels pain, does not feel save with her partner, and the narrative of the whole process is very graphic.

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<sup>66</sup> Kristoff, Jay. *Nevernight*. Vol. 1. Macmillan, 2016. 13

<sup>67</sup> Kristoff. *Nevernight* 14

<sup>68</sup> Seifert, C., 2015. *Virginity in young adult literature after Twilight* (Vol. 47). Rowman & Littlefield.13

<sup>69</sup> Kristoff, Jay. *Nevernight*. Vol. 1. Macmillan, 2016. 13

<sup>70</sup> Kristoff. *Nevernight* 15

Fear is the strongest motive of the whole scene. Next to fear there is a very strong motive of pain in relation to penetration. “Then she’d felt him, hot and so astonishingly hard, pressing against the softness between her legs. And then there was pain, pain, O, Daughters, it hurt. He was inside her—it was inside her—so hard and real she couldn’t help but cry out, biting her lip to muffle the flood.”<sup>71</sup> Mia knew it would hurt, she expected the pain. However, one of the reasons she wanted to lose her virginity was to find what pleasure and desire felt like. As Maul states, “the fear caused by the pain and bleeding which usually accompany defloration seems to be opposed to a number of other more favourable human features.”<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, Mia’s expectations are not met in any way. “But he was so heavy, and she was trying not to cry, and she wished this wasn’t the way it had to be. She’d dreamed of this, hoped it some kind of special. But now she was here, she thought it a stumbling, clumsy affair. No magic or fireworks or bliss by the handful.”<sup>73</sup> The pain is too intense for Mia, in this point of the scene, the reader is thrown into a different scene, where Mia kills for the first time. The narrative compares Mia’s feeling; fear, anxiety, and pain, to fear of the murdered man. During the murder Mia’s in the same position, on top of her target, as her lover during the sexual scene. The two scenes, one of defloration, the other of murder, are presented simultaneously, with similar use of language. Comparing Mia’s pain to the murdered man’s pain. “It was inside him—she was inside him—stabbing hard as he tried to cry out, her hand over his mouth to muffle the flood.”<sup>74</sup> In the end of both scenes Mia is filled with the feeling of emptiness. This puts the pain of knife stabbing and penetration in juxtaposition. Comparison of losing innocence and losing life strips the sexual scene off any pleasurable and aesthetic aspects and presents it as a necessity to the heroine.

Mia’s negative experience reflects in her future sexual experiences. As she becomes a student of Red Church, she develops romantic feelings towards one of her classmates, a boy named Tric. During the narrative she feels sexual desire towards him and is scared to have sexual intercourse with him. As Hoffman points out, “when a person’s first encounter with intercourse is perceived negatively, it can influence how the person experiences intercourse in the future.”<sup>75</sup> After Mia talks to one of her friends Ash about her experience she’s told; “Ah.

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<sup>71</sup> Kristoff. *Nevernight* 18.

<sup>72</sup> Maul, A., 2007. An evolutionary interpretation of the significance of physical pain experienced by human females: defloration and childbirth pains. *Medical hypotheses*, 69(2), pp.406

<sup>73</sup> Kristoff, Jay. *Nevernight*. Vol. 1. Macmillan, 2016. 19

<sup>74</sup> Kristoff. *Nevernight* 20

<sup>75</sup> Hoffman, Amanda J. "Virginity loss experiences: The negative experience of waiting until marriage." Alliant International University, 2019. 9.

One of those. And now you can't understand what all the fuss is about, or why you'd ever want to do it again?"<sup>76</sup> Ash advises Mia to try again. The heroine later in the narrative eventually sleeps with Tric and proceeds to have much better experience. After her night with Tric, she's more comfortable with her sexuality and eager to explore it.

The *Nevernight Chronicles* presents the loss of virginity into very graphic detail. Compared to *ACOTAR* series, which did not focus on heroine losing virginity and described it as a form of escapism, the *Nevernight Chronicles* presented a detailed description of the defloration's process. Mia's first sexual experience with a male prostitute was fearful, anxious, and very painful. The heroine descriptively focuses on the pain she feels and during the whole process she thinks "Was this the way it should feel?"<sup>77</sup> Mia's experience does not meet any of her expectations. Her pain and fear is compared to the pain and fear of her first victim, who she murder on his bed in the same position that the male prostitute deflowered her. Such negative experience later influences, how she feels about sexual intercourse, and does not know why she should do it again. Only after Mia sleeps with a partner, with whom she has built a romantic relationship, she feels safe enough to explore her sexuality and feel comfortable with it.

## **2.10. 'Fantasy Seduction': The role of Fantasy Setting in Erotics**

The novel is set in the world called the Republic Itreya, a land with three suns that almost never set. The characters of the series are members of various nations, all have their separate traditions and customs. Only a few individuals wield magical powers. As was mentioned, Mia knows how to control the shadows. Her closest friend is a shadow in the form of a cat, Mia's repeatedly talking to him seeking advice, while he answers her back. During her first sexual intercourse it sits by and watches "The cat who was shadows watched from its perch on the bedhead. Watched her the way only the eyeless can. It said not a word."<sup>78</sup> Mia never uses her powers during sexual intercourse, and her shadows do not play a role in the representations of erotics.

Nevertheless, the fantasy setting does reflect in the series' approach towards intimacy. As Mia enters the Red Church one of her lessons consist of learning how to seduce her target, and how to use intimacy to get information or make the victim vulnerable. The lecturer

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<sup>76</sup> Kristoff, Jay. *Nevernight*. Vol. 1. Macmillan, 2016. 235.

<sup>77</sup> Kristoff. *Nevernight* 18

<sup>78</sup> Kristoff. *Nevernight* 34



teaches them “persuasion. Seduction. Sex. That kind of thing.” Mia almost choked on her mouthful. “... She teaches sex?” “Well, not the basics. Presumably we all know that much. She teaches the art of it.”<sup>79</sup> Shahiid Aalea, the teacher of the sexual lessons, possesses a magical power to form a human body. In the space of Red Church the students are taught how to use their attractiveness to manipulate their target, and how sexual desire can manipulate the target’s mind.

Every student of Red Church gets ‘reformed’ into the most desirable forms of themselves. Afterwards, they are taught how to use sexual desire and attraction as a weapon. “This is a world of senators and consuls and Luminatii—of republics and cults and institutions built and maintained almost entirely by men. And in it, love is a weapon. Sex is a weapon. Your eyes? Your body? Your smile?” “Weapons.”<sup>80</sup> Mia, at first refuses to use her body as a weapon, given her negative experience with intimacy, she does not feel safe to change her body and use it as a form of manipulation. Here Mia goes against gender stereotype. As Hall highlights, “forms of murder in Western literature and culture are clearly gendered, as evident in the different methods of murder, distinguishing between female poisoners and male executors of brute force. In cultural production, inevitably violence is intertwined with sexual and gendered themes.”<sup>81</sup> Mia’s preferred form of murder is through brute force, not poison. However, as she gets more comfortable in her sexuality, she lets her teacher change her body and Mia learns to use desire to manipulate her targets.

The fantasy setting of the series *Nevernight* presents erotics as character’s form of weapon. The students of Red Church are reformed with magical abilities of one of the teachers. Mia, as one of the students, changes her body and from her original appearance that’s described as; She wasn’t a pretty thing. “The tales no doubt described her beauty as otherworldly; all milk-white skin and slender curves and bow-shaped lips. But the composition seemed ... a little off. “Milk-white” is just pretty talk for “pasty,” after all. “Slender” is a poet’s way of saying “starved.”<sup>82</sup> However, as her teacher reforms her body, her old identity, and the self-conscious feelings go away. Mia constructs a new identity, that is empowered by the knowledge of how sexual desire, her body triggers, influences the mind of men, and learns how to use this power in her missions.

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<sup>79</sup> Kristoff, Jay. *Nevernight*. Vol. 1. Macmillan, 2016. 234.

<sup>80</sup> Kristoff. 256.

<sup>81</sup> Hall, Amy Laura. "Torture and Television in the United States." *Muslim World* 103, no. 2 (2013). 6.

<sup>82</sup> Kristoff, Jay. *Nevernight*. Vol. 1. Macmillan, 2016. 32.

## 2.11. 'The Language of Lust': Analysing Role of Erotics in the Narrative

The erotic scenes presented in the *Nevernight* series are very graphic and the sexual desire and intimacy is often tied with manipulation or violence. The previous subchapter considering the concept of virginity, already established that at the beginning of the novel Mia was inexperienced and her conception of her sexuality was negative, given her defloration experience being painful and unpleasant. After Mia sleeps with her classmate Tric, her viewing of intimacy changes and she is more comfortable in her sexuality. Mia's second sexual experience is much better, she does not feel drowned during the moment. However, Mia still shows signs of anxiety, "she wanted more. But a cool fear burned in back of her mind, rising in volume even as she kicked off her remaining pants leg, swung herself up and straddled him."<sup>83</sup> During Mia and Tric's first intimate time together, the heroine is still scared and feels she's not ready, therefore she stops her lover and leaves the room.

Nevertheless, it is evident that Mia feels empowered by Tric's desire and starts to develop a positive view on sexual intercourse. Mia realizes she holds power over her lover and teases him. When Tric complains that Mia's cold when the heroine refuses to sleep with him "she took his hand, pressed it between her legs. "Say again?"<sup>84</sup> and comes to realization; "he'd do anything to have me at this moment. Anything I asked. Kill for me. Die for me. Bathe in the blood of hundreds just so he could breathe his last inside me. This is power."<sup>85</sup> The conceptualization of sex as a resource of power, is present throughout the whole novel.

Mia was training in combat, poisons, and murder ever since she saw her father's beheading, she's used to using brute force to eliminate people, when she comes to Red Church, Mia learns that, it is expected of her to learn how to manipulate with her targets, through the art of seduction and manipulation. After Mia discovers, how erotics can affect her targets, and how empowered she feels while being intimate with her lover Tric. Heroine uses the empowerment not only to manipulate her target but shows it during the intimate time with Tric. After Mia starts to regularly have sex with Tric, she becomes dominant and almost predatory. "Dragging herself up, she twisted in place, pushing him back down as he lunged after her, eyes bright with lust. Climbing atop him, she took him in her hand, near drunk with need."<sup>86</sup> All descriptions of the erotics in the series are focused on the female pleasure, and

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<sup>83</sup> Kristoff, Jay. *Nevernight*. Vol. 1. Macmillan, 2016. 408.

<sup>84</sup> Kristoff. *Nevernight* . 410

<sup>85</sup> Kristoff, Jay. *Nevernight*. Vol. 1. Macmillan, 2016. 411

<sup>86</sup> Kristoff. *Nevernight* 469.

Mia's lover becomes object only used for sex. Tolman highlight that "some adolescent girls navigate the dynamics of sexual intimacy as a vehicle for self-empowerment, after discovering the effect on their partner."<sup>87</sup> Such empowerment leads Mia to develop the skill of seducing her targets into giving her the information she needs, or even elimination.

Mia uses the power of sexual desire to kill one of the man responsible for her father's death. After meeting her target at the ball she slowly seduces him, "the man poured, passed the full glass. Mia took it with a knowing smile, let her fingertips brush the young don's wrist, archemical current prickling between their skin."<sup>88</sup> In the end of the night Mia ends up in bed with the young man and his lover, a young girl about Mia's age. During the sexual act she repeatedly warns the girl to kiss her; "not on the mouth",<sup>89</sup> The girl obeys Mia's order, the reader later finds that Mia had a poison on her lips. Mia is moving from breaking the stereotype, as a female character who kills with blade, to a heroine who uses more discrete ways of killing. Helfield highlight that "poisoning is a crime of secrecy and cunning. One could speculate that it was a crime ideally suited to the skills of women"<sup>90</sup> Mia successfully kills the man as a form of her revenge during sexual intimacy; "drawing in a ragged breath, the young don coughed a mouthful of bright red blood all over Mia's breasts." Mia's characters develop from a scared virginal maiden to an empowered woman very aware of the possibility to use sex as a form of manipulation.

The erotics in the *Nevernight Chronicles* constitute from of character development. Mia's at first terrified of sexual intimacy, but quickly realizes that she won't avoid her lessons during her time at Red Church. During her training, Mia finds a love interest, her classmate named Tric, who she gets to know before she's intimate with him, in comparison to the male prostitute, who deflorates her. After Mia and Tric's first night together, she discovers that desire is a form of power, and Mia embraces her sexuality. The heroine feels empowered by the male desire and she realizes, she could use sexual attraction as a manipulation, which she precedes to do. The erotics play a big role through the main character's development and are presented as a weapon.

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<sup>87</sup> Tolman, Deborah L. "Female adolescents, sexual empowerment and desire: A missing discourse of gender inequity." *Sex roles* 66 (2012): 746-757.

<sup>88</sup> Kristoff, Jay. *Godsgrave*. Vol. 2. Macmillan, 2017. 33.

<sup>89</sup> Kristoff, Jay. *Godsgrave*. Vol. 2. Macmillan, 2017. 35

<sup>90</sup> Helfield, R., 1990. Female Poisoners of the nineteenth century: A study of gender bias in the application of the law. *Osgoode Hall LJ*, 28, 55.

## Conclusion

This thesis explored the role of erotics in two contemporary literary fantasy series, *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series and *Nevernight Chronicles* series, dedicated to teenagers. Young Adult literature has become massively popular. YA fiction creates an in-between category, connecting Adult and Children literature. It has a specific teenage readership, and the themes and motifs the category covers, aims to achieve relatability. Novels of this category often have teen protagonist, who during the narrative crosses to adulthood and matures. Part of losing one's innocence is entering the world of sexual relationship, which are covered in most of the books published in the YA category. The representation of the erotics moved from the scenes 'behind closed door,' to very graphic depiction of the concept. These phenomena spread across all genres of YA, from romance novels to Sci-fi. This thesis focuses on genre of fantasy. The analysis focuses on three concrete concepts presented in both chosen series; representations of the concept of losing one's virginity, the role of fantasy setting on the erotics and the function of erotics in the narrative.

The thesis was divided into two parts. The first part focused on the theory used to analyse chosen novels. It introduced the literary category of Young Adult and drew a borderline between the Adult's fiction and YA category. Furthermore, it defined the representation of the erotics and why the series cover concepts, such as sexual desire or intimacy. The last part of the theory behind this thesis was dedicated to the very ideal of concept, as used by Mieke Bal. Bal's 'traveling concepts' introduces that, despite the fact, concept are interpersonal they are perceived differently by individuals. Based on this theoretical background the thesis moved to the practical part.

The first concept explored was approach of the series towards the concept of virginity. The main heroine Feyre loses her virginity to a village boy, and they proceed to keep meeting and engaging in sexual activities, until Feyre's taken away. The defloration, in this series, is not represented as losing one's innocence. Feyre lives in poverty, and she enters adulthood in the moment her mother dies, afterwards Feyre is forced to take care of her father and sisters. Feyre lost her virginity to feel connection to other human being, afterwards Feyre uses sex with her as comfort, and form of escape from the reality. On the other hand, Mia decides to lose her virginity to a man who's complete stranger, a male-prostitute. Mia realizes, that when she enters the training in the assassin academy called 'Red Church', she will need to leave all her innocence behind. Her defloration is purely pragmatic decision, and the whole process is very graphically described. Mia's in pain and remains fearful during the scene. The

*Nevernight Chronicles* compares the the pain, and fear of losing one's virginity to the pain of knife entering the body, and following fear of death. The particular scene, in which Mia murders a man is intertwined with her defloration, which strips sexual scene of any pleasurable aspect.

The second concept studied in this work was the Fantasy influence on the erotics. *ACOTAR*'s protagonists possess different forms of magic and repeatedly use it to please their partners. The concept of magic controlling one's body is frequent motif. The magic controlling Feyre's second love interest, High Lord named Tamlin, strips him of all sense of self. In their first sexual encounter, he forcefully pins Feyre to the wall, and freely touches, even though she refuses him. Given the control of the magic, the whole rape scene is presented as attractive, given the fact Tamlin does not act from his free will, and Feyre is attracted by this dominance and power. Later on in the series, Feyre experiences the force of magic, when she accept an ancient bond with her last love-interest Rhysand. In order to accept the bond, Feyre and Rhysand have sex, the magic of the bond that controls them, and they share a consuming sexual desire for one another. In contrast, to this effect of magic, *Nevernight* series' characters possess magic only occasionally, they do not use it in order to pleasure their partner, and the magic does not control them in any way. Mia's powers are the ability to control the shadows. She has a shadow companion in a form of a cat. However, this companion does not interwien into her love life. The only Fantasy aspect of the series, concerning the depiction of erotics, is magical powers of one of Mia's teachers. The teacher knows how to reform once body into a version that will trigger sexual desire. When Mia undergoes this reforming, she realizes that the desire she triggers can be used as a weapon in killing her targets. The erotics are presented as a form of manipulation.

The role of erotics in the *ACOTAR*'s narrative presents the sexual intercourse as a form of escapism and way of connection to other individuals. After the event of the first book Feyre is depressed, and her relationship with Tamlin becomes possessive. Feyre proceeds to sleep with Tamlin, in order to, for a short moment forget about her depression. The pair, uses sex to deal with the problems in their relationship instead of talking about them. When Feyre leaves Tamlin, in order to live in the Night Court with Rhysand, he presents her to his court as his sex toy, to manipulate the politics during the war. Adding to using erotics as escapism, the *ACOTAR* series present it as a form of manipulation. This concept is shared among the series. Both series depict the possibility of using intimacy in order to gain power or manipulate them. In case of *Nevernight Chronicles*, Mia develops from a scared maiden into an individual that

seduces her victims, in order to get information or eliminate them. When Mia overcomes her negative experience from her first time, and discover what pleasure the sexual relation offers, it has a huge effect on the characters development. Mia finds empowerment in her lover's desire, and changes from a scared girl, in dominant individual. From her fear of being intimate, Mia dissociates from sexual interaction and proceeds to kill one of her enemies in the middle of the act. Erotics in the *Nevernight Chronicles* are stripped of any aspects of intimacy between two partners. Sexual interaction is presented as a form of manipulation in order to get information or even kill a target. The novel presents the motif of losing one's virginity as a stepping stone to adulthood, which belongs to one of the main themes of YA literature. However, the decision of the main protagonist is purely practical and not based in any romantic feelings.

Conclusively, the practical part of the thesis, arrived to a intended conclusion that the erotics in the YA literature are not present only to interest the reader, but have their function during the story; the concept of losing one's virginity as a transition to an adult life, the sexual intimacy as a form of escapism and human connection, on the other hand sex is used as way to manipulate one's mind through sexual desire. Each analysed novel approaches the chosen concepts differently, but both focused on relevance to their intended readership. Approaching the representation of erotics from different possible points of view, covering different experience coming out of the concepts, such as losing virginity as a stepping stone to adulthood, discovering how sexual intercourse can have different dimensions in one's life and how intimacy does not equal to love, which are relevant to young adults.

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