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*The Fantastic Ecofeminism: Nature and
Women in the Selected Works of
Contemporary Fantasy*
(Bachelor Thesis)

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla jsem veškeré použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne:

Podpis.....

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The Fantastic Ecofeminism: Nature and Women in Selected Works of the Contemporary Fantasy
(Bakalářská práce)

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis focuses on ecofeminism, a movement which started with activist aims and slowly worked its way to different areas of study, one of which is literature. Ecofeminism is based on the idea that there is a similarity between how women and nature are treated in relation to the existence of the hierarchical structure of society, and therefore, that there is an inclination to discriminate against them by the dominating side, such as men and progress. This movement is firstly explored through its historical context, starting from its roots in the 1970s and how it evolved into a theory that can be applied to various areas. Next, a few key concepts, namely *the other*, nature, spiritual connection, goddess worship, and interconnectedness, are presented and explored in order to establish a methodology that would serve as a guiding point through the analysis of selected contemporary fantasy works. By focusing on these concepts, this thesis aims to capture how ecofeminism can be depicted in this genre and what conclusions can be drawn from it. Comparing their differences and similarities should lead to a better understanding of what role ecofeminism could play in fantastic works and to a conviction that ecofeminism in fantasy is worth more diving into.

Key words: ecofeminism, activism, woman, nature, movement, discrimination, degradation, hierarchy, heterarchy, the other, spiritual connection, goddess worship, speculative fiction, fantasy, interconnectedness, magic, folklore

Abstrakt

Bakalářská práce se zabývá ekofeminismem, hnutím, které začalo s aktivistickými cíli a postupně se propracovalo k různým studijním oblastem, mezi něž patří i literatura. Ekofeminismus je postavený na myšlence, že mezi způsoby, jakým se k ženám a přírodě přistupuje ve spojení s existencí hierarchické struktury společnosti, se dají najít podobnosti, a tedy, že dominantní strana, jako muži a progres, má inklinaci je diskriminovat. Tohle hnutí je nejprve prozkoumáno z hlediska historického kontextu, který započal v 70. letech 20. století, a z hlediska vývinu na teorii, kterou je možné aplikovat v různých oblastech. Následně je představeno a prozkoumáno pár klíčových konceptů, jmenovitě *druhý*, příroda, spirituální spojení, uctívání bohyně, vzájemné propojení, s cílem vybudování metodologie, která by měla vedoucí charakter v rámci analýzy vybraných současných děl fantasy. S pomocí těchto konceptů práce zachycuje, jak může být ekofeminismus zobrazen v žánru fantasy a k jakým závěrům to může vést. Porovnání jejich rozdílů a podobností by mělo umožnit lepší pochopení role, již je schopný ekofeminismus ve fantasy hrát, a taky k přesvědčení, že se vyplatí věnovat mu více pozornosti.

Klíčová slova: ekofeminismus, aktivismus, žena, příroda, hnutí, diskriminace, degradace, hierarchie, heterarchie, *druhý*, spirituální spojení, uctívání bohyně, spekulativní fikce, fantasy, vzájemné propojení, magie, folklor

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 9 |
| 1 See the prison through ecofeminism | 11 |
| 1.1 The roots of ecofeminism | 11 |
| 1.1.1 Ecofeminism as an activist movement..... | 11 |
| 1.1.2 Ecofeminism in writing | 12 |
| 1.2 <i>Nature and the other</i> | 14 |
| 1.2.1 <i>The other</i> | 15 |
| 1.2.2 <i>Nature</i> and feminism | 17 |
| 1.3 Goddess worship and <i>the circular</i> in speculative fiction..... | 19 |
| 1.3.1 Speculative fiction and its tools..... | 20 |
| 1.3.2 Spiritual ecofeminism and magic | 20 |
| 2 Theoretical background summary..... | 23 |
| 2.2 Conceptual framework and methodology..... | 23 |
| 3 The practical part | 26 |
| 3.1 The authors and their works..... | 26 |
| 3.1.1 Ursula K. Le Guin and <i>The Tombs of Atuan</i> (1970)..... | 26 |
| 3.1.2 Samantha Shannon and <i>The Priory of the Orange Tree</i> (2019)..... | 26 |
| 3.1.3 Curtis Craddock and <i>An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors</i> (2017) | 27 |
| 3.2 <i>The other</i> | 28 |
| 3.2.1 <i>The Tombs of Atuan</i> | 28 |
| 3.2.2 <i>The Priory of the Orange Tree</i> | 31 |
| 3.2.3 <i>An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors</i> | 34 |
| 3.3 <i>Nature</i> | 36 |
| 3.3.1 <i>The Tombs of Atuan</i> | 36 |
| 3.3.2 <i>The Priory of the Orange Tree</i> | 38 |
| 3.3.3 <i>An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors</i> | 40 |
| 3.4 Interconnectedness, spiritual connection, folklore | 42 |
| 3.4.1 <i>The Tombs of Atuan</i> | 42 |
| 3.4.2 <i>The Priory of the Orange Tree</i> | 43 |
| 3.4.3 <i>An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors</i> | 45 |
| 4 Summary and discussion | 47 |
| Conclusion..... | 52 |
| Bibliography..... | 56 |

Introduction

As the title suggests, this bachelor thesis shall focus on uncovering the forms of the depiction of ecofeminism in contemporary fantasy. As an activist movement, ecofeminism raises questions regarding the standing of women and nature in today's society. In spite of approximately five decades of existence, the issues ecofeminism is trying to address are yet to be solved, and raising awareness of these problems sometimes inevitably leads to misconceptions of how feminism should look like, i. e. that women are in some instances trying to overrule men. Ecofeminism is one of the ways how to show this is not the case as it relies heavily on the idea of all things being interconnected, of the equal importance of all sides, representing a heterarchy rather than hierarchy. This activist character stayed true to its form even as ecofeminism found its way to other areas of study. Including it in literature, could, too, lead to a better understanding of the basic ideas this movement is trying to present and possibly motivate everyone to start living by them. Fantasy, in particular, could offer an environment where ecofeminist themes and motifs could thrive in different ways than it does in other genres of speculative fiction and since it is a popular genre today, its role in potential change, which is the ultimate goal of ecofeminism, should not be ignored or discarded when it has the means to reach masses of people and pass on ideas which should be accessible to everyone. This is why this thesis came to being.

In order to encompass the importance of ecofeminism in fantasy, this movement is first looked upon as the activist movement it was created to be, drawing out the allegory of nature and women being intertwined and how it started posing questions which would shape it to its current form. Ecofeminism is also shown in terms of literary discourse, presenting key studies of this development. The final part of the next section opens on understanding how this theory works through concepts that could be considered essential, namely *the other*, *nature*, spiritual connection, and interconnectedness. They are presented through their theoretical backgrounds and particular examples of how they could be analyzed. An emphasis is also given to fantasy as a genre that presents unique tools that offer different forms ecofeminism could take on to pass the main messages of this movement, which is something that should be taken into consideration when analyzing contemporary fantasy through an ecofeminist lens.

The practical part of this thesis analyzes how these concepts are encompassed in three fantasy works selected for this research, namely *The Tombs of Atuan* by Ursula K. Le Guin (1970), *The Priory of the Orange Tree* by Samantha Shannon (2019), and *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors* by Curtis Craddock (2017), particularly how they apply to the

protagonists of each work. Their forms are being analyzed one by one which eventually leads to comparing them and determining whether it results more in differences or similarities between the concepts respectively throughout the novels. Rather than aiming to set up a firm pattern, the essential part of this analysis is to present potential possibilities of how the ecofeminist message could be interwoven into the genre of fantasy. Focusing on three works should in no way lead to the assumption that this is all fantastic ecofeminism can entail and should instead present the idea of this research as worth acknowledging and diving into further.

1 See the prison through ecofeminism

1.1 The roots of ecofeminism

Let me open the discussion on ecofeminism by following the ecofeminist theory from its roots. As the key theory for this thesis, looking into the background of ecofeminism might prove crucial in understanding how and why the movement came to be, what primary questions are being asked by the ecofeminist scholars, and why it is worthwhile to take these questions and their answers into consideration when it comes to literary criticism.

1.1.1 Ecofeminism as an activist movement

Despite branching out in various directions, ecofeminism had been born with singular motivation – to evoke change. Scholar and philosophy professor, Karen J. Warren, describes ecofeminism started as a political movement back in the 1970s.¹ The term was first coined by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 “to call attention to women’s potential to bring about an ecological revolution”.² According to Barbara T. Gates, she emphasized the necessity to understand the responsibility of men in overpopulation and destruction of our resources by seeing them as planters of seeds both in the earth and in women,³ which created tendencies that resembled a practical movement with activist aims more than a theoretic one. By using a naturalistic metaphor of such a kind, she called for a new way of thinking by connecting women and nature and how they are viewed and treated.

Connections between women and nature are crucial in understanding the harsh injustice and the necessity for its critique that is the baseline of this movement. If men are the planters, and women are the soil, it is implicitly stated men are always above women and have the deciding position on how and when women are used, just like soil when it comes to planting seeds. Polemicizing about it should feel uncomfortable and therefore it needs to be brought to attention. Lee Quinby sums up the movement by pointing out it is more of an interrogative theory rather than prescriptive. It is meant to pose difficult questions,⁴ which ultimately should lead to a change. This thesis will follow this approach as well.

¹ Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Philosophy on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 21.

² Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Le Feminisme ou La Mort* (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974), 213-52, quoted in Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000), 21.

³ Barbara T. Gates, “A Root of Ecofeminism: Ecoféminisme,” in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 16.

⁴ Lee Quinby, “Ecofeminism and the Politics of Resistance,” in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), 122-27

Once these first connections between women and nature came to be recognized, it needed to be specified what this movement calls to question and what goals are being pursued. Ecofeminist writers Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy call ecofeminism “a practical movement for social change” driven by women struggling to “sustain themselves, their families, and their communities.”⁵ These struggles are on the one side whereas the “maldevelopment” and “environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism” are on the other.⁶ What ecofeminists seek is “environmental balance, heterarchical and matrifocal societies, the continuance of indigenous cultures, and economic values and programs based on subsistence and sustainability.”⁷ When we look at what the women stand against, we can once again see the similarities between them and nature, which, too, is struggling to sustain itself the more technologically advanced humankind becomes. Nature has been seen as less important compared to progress, and ecofeminism suggests the same distribution of importance applies to gender and other aspects of our lives that could lead to discrimination.

1.1.2 Ecofeminism in writing

For ecofeminism to become a literary theory, the concepts of similarity between women and nature needed to be established in the sphere of literary criticism. Nature was not an unknown concept but realizing that it could potentially give the feminist ways of thinking and tendencies a room to grow was not automatic and turned out to be a groundbreaking step for this movement’s development. Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok, and Serpil Opperman note that apart from social change activism, the roots of ecofeminism can be traced to women’s environmental writing, second-wave feminist literary criticism, and eco-cultural critique. The emerging ecocriticism in North America played an important role because it came from both literary studies of classical Euro-American male nature writers and feminist literary criticism. Annette Kolodny was among the first literary critics to look at environmental literature through the lens of a feminist perspective. In her studies *The Lay of the Land* (1975) and *The Land Before Her* (1984), she uncovers how the perspective of a white, heterosexual male, “who regularly feminized the land and used that feminization as a rationale for subordinating nature” dominated in environmental narratives.⁸ As a social construct, *wilderness* is viewed as *empty*

⁵ Greta Claire Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, introduction to *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), ii.

⁶ Gaard and Murphy, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ii.

⁷ Gaard and Murphy, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ii.

⁸ Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Opperman, introduction to *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), iii-iv.

and, therefore, fit for “clearcutting old-grown forests, damming rivers, hunting/trapping/shooting wild animals, and enslaving, infecting, relocating, murdering and raping indigenous peoples.”⁹ These associations are similar to the metaphor about men planting seeds that were previously mentioned by Gates.¹⁰ By this reasoning, if wilderness, i. e. nature, is viewed as empty, it is meant to be taken and filled with whatever the opposing side sees fit and the same applies to women.

These were the beginnings of ecofeminism as a literary theory which set up the basic principles and allowed more theorists to contribute. Greta Gaard (et al.) add that Annette Kolodny’s feminist readings were followed by important studies by Mary Daly (1978), Susan Griffin (1978), André Collard and Joyce Contrucci (1989), and Carolyn Merchant (1980), which led to establishing “the importance of feminist perspectives on literary and cultural narratives about the environment.”¹¹ The 1990s are when “ecofeminism is finally making itself felt in literary criticism.”¹² It might be more convenient timing for other minorities, in terms of sexualities and gender identities that were believed to be less conventional, to become part of this movement and identify with the discriminated nature and women. With the door to becoming more known as an approach open, new ways of thinking and ideas of how to include ecofeminism in literature and use its interrogative character are given more space to grow.

The scope of ecofeminism enlarged. Karen J. Warren notes that, eventually, it became an umbrella term referring to multiple positions which are not always compatible.¹³ For example, it could be argued that if feminists seek heterarchy, matrifocal societies go against it just as much as patriarchal because it suggests that someone or something is in the center whereas everything else circles around it, which ultimately makes them similar to patriarchy and does not lead to the balance, which is one of the key aspects of what ecofeminism is trying to accomplish. However, what all can agree on, according to Warren, is that “there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women and nature”.¹⁴ We can use it as a starting point of what this theory was supposed to envision, but it is important to keep in mind, that the negative connections are not the only kind of connections one can make. There are more layers to the phenomenon of being closer to nature than discrimination and injustice,

⁹ Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Opperman, introduction to *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), iii-iv.

¹⁰ See citation no. 2

¹¹ Gaard, Estok and Opperman, *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, iv

¹² Greta Claire Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, introduction to *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), ii

¹³ Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Philosophy on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 21

¹⁴ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Philosophy on What It Is and Why It Matters*, 21

which can be analyzed while performing an ecofeminist reading. The purpose of this thesis is to discover which connections between nature and women are more prominent in selected works of fantasy writers. To identify these correctly, it is important to make ourselves acquainted with the idea of ever considering women and nature as connected, how it began and what purpose it serves.

What started as an activist idea, meant to ask difficult questions, continued to evolve into other spheres than just literature. According to Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy ecofeminism, at first, in terms of academic discourse, was explored almost exclusively in departments of philosophy, women's studies, and partly environmental studies, but eventually, it worked its way into other departments, such as criminology, political science, cultural studies, and English departments.¹⁵ This thesis shall focus on ecofeminism in terms of literary criticism, but it is worth mentioning this is a diverse theory and can be used in different areas.

This section provided a brief overview of the conceptual background of ecofeminism, how it started as an activist movement with interrogative tendencies, and how it found its way into literature thanks to various studies focusing on environmental narratives. In order to understand why connecting two seemingly very different concepts, such as women and nature, can be done and should be done, it was clarified that they share certain features which identify them as an object of discrimination that needs to fight to survive. Finally, it was mentioned ecofeminism is applicable to more areas of study than literary criticism. The conceptual background of ecofeminism this thesis provides is meant to aid in identifying ecofeminist features and connections between women and nature which can be found in the fantasy works selected for this research and to attempt to find reasons why these connections differ or whether they stay the same even with time and the humankind moving constantly forward. The next section is going to discuss some of the important aspects one should look for in analyzing through the lens of ecofeminism.

1.2 Nature and the other

Despite the fact that the aforementioned theories cover the basic concepts of ecofeminism, they do not provide clear instructions regarding the ecofeminist method of reading literature. This method shall become clearer in this chapter. The aforementioned theories, however, provide a few key concepts, such as nature, which are essential to look for when doing an ecofeminist reading, but even these can have various meanings, which may not

¹⁵ Greta Claire Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, introduction to *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), v

be prominent enough at first sight. Another key concept which has not been mentioned yet but is of importance is the term *the other*. This chapter will elaborate on these two concepts and their relation.

1.2.1 *The other*

Understanding *the other* is useful in understanding how discrimination works and will help in establishing a method for this thesis. It could be said that one of the key concepts of discrimination is the aspect of being different. If one of the differing objects can be perceived as the most common or conventional, it tends to become the center which dictates how the other objects are perceived and understood. Not as an entity that stands on its own, but as an entity that differs from another object. This entity becomes easily called *the other* and the term itself comes from psychoanalysis. According to Dylan Evans, Jacques Lacan distinguished two types of *the other*. “The little other is the other who is not really other, but a reflection and projection of the EGO. [...] The big Other designates radical alterity, an other-ness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification.”¹⁶ *The big other* is the one deserving of attention when it comes to ecofeminism because it goes against concepts such as *illusory*, *imaginary*, and *identification*, therefore, the differences that define it are real, tangible and so radical that two objects can never become one. Because of this radical alterity, it can be assumed that there are boundaries between two concepts, one of which is considered to be *the other*. When women were assimilated into the soil, a radical barrier was set in place, marking them as *the big other* and, therefore, as unable to cross the barrier and become the same as men. It is tendencies such as this which ecofeminism is going against. In order to understand the issue of opposition and power within ecofeminist discourse, I shall depart from the definition and discussion of *the other*. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy highlight it accordingly:

*This concept is prevalent in literary study as a result of the influence of psychoanalytic theory and feminist critique. But the “other” must be rethought through grounding it in physical being.*¹⁷

¹⁶ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 135-136

¹⁷ Greta Claire Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, introduction to *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), v

It is implied that if there is *the other*, it exists because it goes against the majority, the most prominent, i. e. dominating, aspects. The result of this grounding should be that *the other* is viewed as a complex physical being and therefore not oversimplified:

One aspect of such grounding is to reject the notion of absolute difference and the binary construct of inside and outside. The discipline of ecology challenges any such dichotomy. Ecology is not a study of the “external” environment we enter – some big outside we go to. Ecology is a study of interrelationship, with its bedrock being the recognition of the distinction between things-in-themselves and things-for-us. The latter entities result from intervention, manipulation, and transformation.¹⁸

What this means is that whereas there is always going to be something that can be defined as *the other* if one of the sides, groups, or entities dominates over the rest, it is oversimplifying to talk about it in terms of binary constructs, i. e., see it as a complete opposite. Most often than not it is more realistic to expect that the boundaries between such concepts shall not be as prominent and could blend instead, and therefore, go against the idea of radical alterity. For example, if we say progress and nature stand at opposing sides and are binary constructs, to which side should we assign fire? Nature as one of its elements or progress because our ability to create it and tame it was a groundbreaking point for humankind? Differentiating between things-in-themselves and things-for-us might be a better-suited approach, but if we look at the words *intervention*, *manipulation*, and *transformation*, it is clear nature is viewed as more as the latter, something *empty* and therefore fit for intervention. The goal is to stray from this mindset and to see nature, women, and simply *the other* as things-in-themselves. In the words of Gaard and Murphy:

Feminism demands male recognition of the “other” as not only different but also of equal ontological status. Such an ontology would indicate the need to view the self/other distinction as one of relative difference on the basis of heterarchy rather than hierarchy.¹⁹

¹⁸ Greta Claire Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, introduction to *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), v.

¹⁹ Gaard and Murphy, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, v.

If *the other* stands for nature, it is important to stop asking questions, such as what it is good for, stop seeing it in relation to us, but as a concept of its own, which can live on without being dominated, and apply the same process to how women are viewed. While performing an ecofeminist reading, perceiving through binaries becomes inevitable, but the result should, instead of maintaining the idea of some concepts existing purely as opposites to the conventional, lead to disregarding it and comprehending that being different does not necessarily have to mean being *othered* in a radical sense and degraded. This non-binary approach is what the reading of selected fantasy works in this thesis should lead to.

1.2.2 Nature and feminism

Women are one of the key concepts of ecofeminism, but they are not the only entity that can fall under the term *the other* and the meaning of nature can also go beyond the first idea that comes to mind. According to Gretchen T. Legler, ecofeminist literary criticism is “a hybrid criticism, a combination of ecological or environmental criticism and feminist criticism.”²⁰ It allows us to read the text through lenses which help “investigate the ways nature is represented in literature and the ways representations of nature are linked with representations of gender, class, and sexuality.”²¹ This specifies that unjust treatment of women is not the only thing we can expect while performing an ecofeminist reading. There are more entities which could prove to be degraded in works of literature when faced with something else, such as class and sexuality and therefore, they fall into the sphere of *the othered* just like women and nature. As Val Plumwood notes, nature can have various meanings:

*Both rationality and nature have a confusing array of meanings; in most of these meanings reason contrasts systematically with nature in one of its many senses. Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and madness. In other words, nature includes everything the reason excludes.*²²

From these examples, one can imagine the connections between nature and women. If nature stands for emotions, faith, passions, and women are said to be closer to nature, they are

²⁰ Gretchen T. Legler, “Ecofeminist Literary Criticism,” in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, ed. Karen J. Warren (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 227-236

²¹ Legler, *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, 227-236.

²² Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 19-20.

considered to be closer to all these aspects. The problem is that if nature is the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, it means all these aspects are seen as being lesser compared to reason and some of them explicitly have negative associations, such as primitive, uncivilized, irrationality, and madness. Saying that ‘nature includes everything the reason excludes’ means that all the things that are considered to be *nature* cannot in any way be ever considered to be in the sphere of reason, i. e. men can never have passions, faith, can never be viewed as primitive or irrational because they are not the ones closer to nature and women can never fall into the category of reason. This oversimplification suggests a dichotomy which is challenging because we have two contrasting spheres standing on the opposite sides and one of them is always going to be inevitably degraded and addressed as *the other*. Yet, according to Julia Tofantšuk, theorizing binaries/dualisms is crucial when it comes to ecofeminism because “it explains the logic of domination of what is constructed as marginal groups.”²³ This is why Plumwood’s associations with nature²⁴ are so important. Whereas it is not right to completely exclude women from the sphere of reason and to exclude men from the sphere of nature, it is useful to keep all the meanings of nature from above in mind while analyzing the text through the ecofeminist lens.

This approach can have varying results. Carmen Flys Junquera describes the term ‘parallel domination’ by analyzing similarities between the oppression of women, animals, and rural traditions in a work of Spanish literature. The female main character feels fascinated by rural traditions and emotionally closer to wolves who are irrationally hated by male oppressive characters.²⁵ This is one example of connections one can look for while performing an ecofeminist reading. The female main character represents women whereas wolves and rural traditions represent nature and while the majority of people are being alienated from the concepts of nature, she is being drawn to them. She feels sympathy for wolves, i. e. the inferior emotions, according to the majority, are prominent in her, whereas the others kill wolves without feeling any remorse.

²³ Julia Tofantšuk, “Ecofeminist philosophy and issues of identity in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Lolly Willowses* and *Mr. Fortune’s Maggot*,” in *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 68-83.

²⁴ See citation no. 15

²⁵ Carmen Flys Junquera, “Wolves, singing trees, and replicants: Ecofeminist readings of contemporary Spanish novels,” in *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 140-157.

Junquera gives another example by analyzing the oppression of “human-alien *others* and nature”²⁶ in the novel *Lágrimas en la Lluvia* [Tears in rain] by Rosa Montero (2011) where the main character, Bruna, is a combat android and feels the oppression caused both by her being *othered* and by her being a woman. Nature is almost absent since many plants and animals have gone extinct.²⁷ Once again, the term *the other* is emphasized and shows that not only gender can be the basis of discrimination, but also different aspects, which point toward a hierarchy, i. e. the existence of the superior and the inferior. It also points toward dualism because Bruna as an android and humans, who discriminate her, stand on opposing sides. Seeing the work through the lens of binary opposites allows us to have a better understanding of who is part of the marginal group and, ideally, to reach the point where this way of thinking would be eliminated, and the society would be recognized as heterarchy. Women and nature would be, in the words of Gaard and Murphy, “a-thing-in-itself” rather than “a-thing-for-us”²⁸ and no one would be considered closer to nature because that kind of distribution would be no longer necessary. Ecofeminism, therefore, goes against binary opposites and is trying to deconstruct them, but in order to accomplish this, they have to be found and emphasized, which is why they play a crucial role in this theory.

This section provided insight on keywords such as *the other* and *nature*. By uncovering parts of their background, it was stressed that both can have various meanings that stretch beyond women, and nature in physical terms, which should be given equal attention while performing an ecofeminist reading. Most importantly, the theory of binaries/dualism was introduced as one of the issues ecofeminism is trying to counter by using it as a tool in understanding how domination over certain groups came to be and how, in the end, it could help in erasing the notion of radical alterity.

1.3 Goddess worship and *the circular* in speculative fiction

What may also be worth diving into are the more direct, palpable connections that can be found between women and nature and are more characteristic of speculative fiction. They are worth inspecting because they offer insights the other categories of genres cannot show or they have to find different means to do so.

²⁶ Carmen Flys Junquera, “Wolves, singing trees, and replicants: Ecofeminist readings of contemporary Spanish novels,” in *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 144.

²⁷ Junquera, *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, 144.

²⁸ See citation no. 12

1.3.1 Speculative fiction and its tools

Speculative fiction involves stories with worlds that are different from our world. Brian Attebery calls this genre a *fuzzy set* – a category which, instead of being defined by clear boundaries or any characteristics, is defined by “resemblance to a single core example or group of examples”.²⁹ Aside from this resemblance, fuzzy sets also involve degrees of membership, which, in his words, means that “instead of asking whether or not a story is science fiction (SF), one can say it is *mostly* SF, or *marginally* SF, or *like* SF in some respects.”³⁰ Marek Oziewicz uses the term *fuzzy set* to define speculative fiction as “a fuzzy set super category that houses all non-mimetic genres – genres that in one way or another depart from imitating consensus reality”³¹. Both of these definitions essentially tell us that speculative fiction is a broad category with various tools at its disposal that can make works resemble what a work of speculative fiction should be like – not representing reality, not sticking to rules that apply to our world. Fantasy, as one of the possible branches of speculative fiction, goes against imitating our world because it uses supernatural features such as magic or creatures that do not exist in reality. These features make fantasy different from other subcategories within speculative fiction, therefore, they are essential and of relevance to this thesis, and they can offer a different kind of ecofeminist discourse than, for example, science fiction or gothic novels can. Since this thesis is focusing on ecofeminism in fantasy works, these special tools need to be taken into consideration and looked at through the ecofeminist lens.

1.3.2 Spiritual ecofeminism and magic

This approach of considering tools of speculative fiction does not necessarily need to start in fantasy works but can be traced back to folklore, fairytales, or mythology, that use similar tools. Brenda E. F. Beck and Peter J. Claus describe women’s roles in Indian folklore, pointing out they “frequently appear in semimagical roles [...] Often they shift back and forth between human, vegetal, animal, and divine forms.”³² Similar phenomena seem to be recurrent throughout different types of folklore, fairytales, and mythology. For example, beings such as mermaids and dryads are inherently bound to nature by magic and can potentially serve as an inspiration for fantasy works even today. Sometimes, a special emphasis is given to the divine

²⁹ Brian Attebery, *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 33.

³⁰ Attebery, *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, 33.

³¹ Marek Oziewicz, "Speculative Fiction." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*. 29 Mar. 2017; Accessed 14 Mar. 2022. <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-78>.

³² Brenda E. F. Beck and Peter J. Claus, introduction to *Folktales of India*, ed. Brenda E. F. Beck, Peter J. Claus, Praphulladatta Goswami and Jawaharlal Handoo (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), xxx-xxxi

association women can have with nature, such as belief and reverence in Mother Earth, which may bring us to a particular branch of ecofeminism called spiritual or cultural ecofeminism.

It is worth mentioning that *belief*, *reverence* or even *Mother Earth* are words not associated with a derogatory meaning which makes them foregrounded among the conclusions of unfairness and injustice ecofeminism usually leads to and is trying to fight against. According to Carolyn Merchant, spiritual ecofeminism “celebrates the relationship between women and nature through the revival of ancient rituals centered on goddess worship, the moon, animals, and the female reproductive system.”³³ The connection between women and nature is, in this case, not an unwanted side effect that should not need to be acknowledged in an ideal world, and is instead something to be cherished. Although it is unlikely all the aforementioned notions of spiritual ecofeminism will play a role in the reading analysis of this thesis, the genre of fantasy gives space for a spiritual interconnectedness of this kind either by openly relating to goddess worship or by relating to magical abilities interwoven with nature in possession of female characters rather than male. If it can happen in folktales, and form messages that may not always put women and nature in degrading position but still keep to the idea of ecofeminism, the same could apply to fantasy works, where the conventions of the real world do not necessarily have to apply.

It is the search for the spiritual or, in case of fantasy, the magical part of the world that can sometimes lead to what ecofeminists are trying to accomplish. To quote P. Mary Vidya Porselvi about Indian folktales:

*Folktales highlight a circular pattern in terms of themes and techniques. This pattern symbolises the spherical shape of Mother Earth. It denotes a holistic approach and life and emphasises interdependence. The folktales defy the binary opposition of day/night, life/death and good/evil.*³⁴

The tendency and need to go against binary oppositions are once again brought to light, which is something ecofeminism opposes. These folktales encourage the perception through spheres and circles where there is no top or bottom that suggests hierarchical structure, or no corners which might give the impression of being altered and remote from other parts of the entity. The

³³ Carolyn Merchant, *The Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 191.

³⁴ P. Mary Vidya Porselvi, *Nature, Culture and Gender: Re-reading the folktale* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 27.

concepts of the holistic approach and the interdependence are the most prominent, showing that spiritual interconnectedness and the celebration of Mother Earth may lead to what the ecofeminists are trying to accomplish. Although spiritual ecofeminism relies on the divine connection between women and nature, I argue that women appearing in magical roles that are somehow intertwined with nature should be part of ecofeminist reading of fantasy where such phenomena are possible just as much as they are in folklore in order to determine whether they support the idea of holistic approach and interdependence. Not all such characters necessarily inspire reverence, however. For example, sirens are creatures believed to be half women and half birds in Greek mythology, using their singing to lure sailors into the sea to kill them.³⁵ *The Old Woman in the Wood* is a German fairy tale which is part of the collection by the Brothers Grimm (*Kinder und hausmärchen: gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm*, 1857) and presents a character of an old woman who changes a man into a tree. Neither of these cases evokes the image of goddess worship and their connection to nature does not necessarily make them part of ecofeminist discourse, but it is this connection that makes them part of *the other*. Where Carmen Flys Junquera presented a sense of *otherness* in being a combat android³⁶, the same could be done in fantasy works, using their tools such as female characters with magical abilities intertwined with nature.

This section briefly touched upon the concept of goddess worship and how it applies to ecofeminism. By referring to folktales, it was established that opposing dualism leads to a world being interlinked and interdependent, forming a sphere rather than a pyramid. It was also argued that female characters who are connected to nature through magic should be considered to be potentially part of ecofeminist discourse. These concepts were explored to help in providing clues what could be analyzed through ecofeminist reading, particularly in the genre of fantasy.

³⁵ Cambridge Dictionary, s. v. “siren (n.),” accessed February 21, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/siren>

³⁶ See citation no. 27

2 Theoretical background summary

This section introduced ecofeminism as a key theory for this thesis. It was shown that it started as an activist movement, asking questions that deal with gender, nature, and what role power plays in relation to them. These questions were not supposed to be easy to answer but needed answering. The field has been built on an allegory, a connection between how women and nature have been treated – as if they were something lesser in comparison to men and progress. Such injustice has been established as the core item from which this theory emerged with its ultimate goal being calling for change that would lead to a mindset of not perceiving societies as a hierarchy but as a heterarchy. Potential similarities between women and nature were given so the idea of ever connecting them made sense and seemed worthwhile in order to accomplish a shift in society that would lead away from discrimination. This call for change is what has stayed being vital to ecofeminism even as this movement continued to grow and evolve to being an umbrella term, parts of which can sometimes contradict each other, but they always seek the same.

The theoretical part also commented on how ecofeminism started to form in writing, and how the idea came to be from different types of literature, such as environmental narratives and second-wave feminist literary criticism, that led to establishing ecofeminism as a part of cultural studies. Key studies that help in establishing ecofeminism in literary criticism were mentioned to help see the potential of developing ecofeminism in the sphere of literature. What was emphasized is that while change is the ultimate goal of ecofeminism, it does not necessarily mean every connection between women and nature should circle around discrimination or the concept of being weaker or less important. Ecofeminist reading can sometimes lead to positive associations which show balance and interconnectedness between women and nature. Injustice is not the only tool capable of causing a change when there are possible examples when the interconnectedness already plays a part and therefore shows the ultimate goal of ecofeminism is possible.

2.2 Conceptual framework and methodology

Ecofeminism was also shown as a theory that is applicable to more areas than just activism and literary discourse. The development of this movement was given to draw out the reasons for its existence and to provide the first helpful clues on how to approach literary works through ecofeminism.

In ensuring understanding of this approach, *nature* and *the other* were introduced as concepts that are essential for ecofeminism. The term *the other* came from psychoanalysis and

the ecofeminist use it to convey the idea that the discriminated parties tend to be viewed through radical alterity, i. e. unable to ever identify with or stand on the same level as the conventional groups. This way of thinking introduced the theory of dualism/binaries, an idea that the two concepts, meaning men and women, for example, will always stand on opposing sides, unable to cross the boundaries between them. Ecofeminists do not agree with this concept which is why it is important for their theory. By identifying these tendencies, ecofeminists aim to understand how discrimination came to be and how to fight it. Looking for binary oppositions will be part of the practical part of this thesis, focusing on characters and worldbuilding.

Nature was introduced as a concept with meanings that go beyond its physical form. It was said not only women can be recognized by ecofeminist discourse, but also other groups that face the injustice of not being seen as equally important to everyone else. Particular examples of ecofeminist literary analysis were given to show that the key concepts, *nature* and *the other*, are used and important and that dualism does have a role in discrimination.

Finally, speculative fiction was introduced as a category with no clear boundaries that uses tools that make its works go against imitating the real world. Fantasy falls under speculative fiction and since this thesis will focus on analyzing contemporary fantasy works, it was highlighted that the tools of fantasy which differentiate it from other genres of speculative fiction should be taken into consideration because it possibly allows new ways of how ecofeminism could be interwoven to literature, such as women being directly connected to nature through magical abilities. Spiritual ecofeminism was introduced as one of the ways, considering the connections between women and nature it makes are built on the celebration, belief, reverence and openly seeking to be one with the nature. Folklore was mentioned as one of the cases that use these tendencies and point toward a world built on heterarchy and interconnectedness rather than perception through binary oppositions. Although folklore was introduced in this thesis primarily for introducing examples of women interconnected with nature through supernatural themes, such as magic, the practical part of this thesis will look for folklore with feminine overtones in the selected works of fantasy. More importantly, however, it was argued that while goddess worship may not always play a role in fantasy stories, magic often does and could lead to interesting conclusions that would support what ecofeminists are trying to accomplish.

The next section is going to focus on highlighting ecofeminist aspects of contemporary fantasy fiction, what role this theory plays, and what conclusions can be drawn from it. Three contemporary fantasy works were chosen as the subjects for this study: *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970) by Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Priory of the Orange Tree* (2019) by Samantha Shannon,

and *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors* (2017) by Curtis Craddock. Le Guin's work was chosen because she was one of the first feminist fantasy writers and marked the beginning of including gender and feminist concepts in speculative fiction in a significant way. Shannon and Curtis's works were chosen because they are more recent and by analyzing them, it can be further determined how ecofeminism in fantasy evolved from its early stages to today. The goal is to search for the concepts that were presented, such as *the other*, *nature*, spiritual ecofeminism if it is present, folklore with feminine overtones, and magic connecting women and nature. The depiction of the aforementioned concepts will be compared throughout the novels in order to see potential differences or similarities between them. The protagonists will be inspected under the ecofeminist lens, i. e. this thesis will try to determine if the protagonists could embody different forms of the concept of *the other*, whether there is a connection with nature to speak of, whether they support the idea of interconnectedness, and whether they are bound to nature by tools more typical for fantasy, such as magic. Afterward, this same approach shall be applied to the worldbuilding to determine whether ecofeminist tendencies go beyond the main characters or not. This method should lead to examining the tensions between binary oppositions and heterarchy.

3 The practical part

This section will use the concepts that were introduced about ecofeminism in analyzing contemporary works of fantasy fiction. These three works, along with their authors, shall be briefly introduced, and then, in each subsection, this thesis will focus on the concepts, such as *the other*, nature, interconnectedness, spiritual connection, and folklore, one by one, comparing them throughout the works to determine how they differ in the range of these authors and their approaches.

3.1 The authors and their works

To understand the context of concepts that shall be inspected under ecofeminist lenses, this part is going to briefly present three works that have been chosen for this thesis and their authors.

3.1.1 Ursula K. Le Guin and *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970)

Le Guin was an American author most notably known for her works of science fiction, such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), and her works of fantasy, such as *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), but she also attributed to children's literature, realism, poetry, and literary criticism. Her stories often deal with themes of gender and coming of age.³⁷ *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970) is the second novel from her fantasy series *The Earthsea Cycle* (1968-2001). It tells a story of a young girl, named Tenar, who was taken from her family when she was five years old and brought to the Tombs of Atuan because she was born on the same day the High Priestess of the Tombs died, so she is believed to be a reincarnation of the Priestess. Leading a lonely life, she grows up in the Tombs and is eventually shown a way to the Undertomb and the Labyrinth that reside beneath them. A treasure is stored in this Labyrinth. Reaching the age of fourteen, she officially becomes the High Priestess. One day she finds a wizard in the Undertomb, and because wizards are not kindly looked upon in the Tombs, she traps him there. She reveals his presence to another priestess but refusing to let him die as she is told to do, she keeps him alive and is eventually faced with the choice of leaving the Tombs with him or staying. As they escape, the Tombs collapse, and they travel to the coast to a boat and then sail away.

3.1.2 Samantha Shannon and *The Priory of the Orange Tree* (2019)

Samantha Shannon is a British author. She studied English Language and Literature at St. Anne's College, Oxford. She is most notably known for her series, *The Bone Season* (2013-

³⁷ "About Ursula K. Le Guin," Ursula K. Le Guin, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://www.ursulaklequin.com/biography>

) which she started publishing at the age of 21. *The Priory of the Orange Tree* (2019) is her first book outside this series.³⁸ In the story, Ead is posing as an ordinary Chamberer of Sabran IX, the queen of Inys, but she is, in fact, an initiate of the Priory of the Orange Tree and has been sent to Inys to protect the queen because of a prophecy that says the Nameless One, a dragon with his huge army of wyrms, shall return to their world and destroy it the day Sabran's lineage discontinues. Sabran is pressured to marry and gets pregnant but when a dragon attacks the royal couple, her husband dies and she miscarries and is unable to conceive again afterward. Tané is another storyteller. She lives in the East and has trained to become a dragon rider. Breaking an important rule results in her friend Susa's execution. She becomes a dragon rider, but her dragon is soon kidnapped by pirates and she is sent to exile. She saves her dragon and comes into possession of a magical jewel, which, combined with a matching jewel owned by Ead, is capable of defeating the Nameless One who is believed to rise soon. Tané goes to Inys and she and Ead, together with the recently allied kingdoms, fight the Nameless One and its forces of wyrms and win. Afterward, Tané is given back her position as a dragon rider. Ead returns to serving The Priory of the Orange Tree.

3.1.3 Curtis Craddock and *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors* (2017)

The third author this thesis shall introduce is Curtis Craddock. It is not as likely to hear about him as it was about Le Guin and Shannon. In fact, the book *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors* (2017), which has been chosen for this thesis, is his debut work. Apart from that, he published two more books that together with the first one make up his series called *The Risen Kingdoms* (2017-2020). He is an American author who teaches English to inmates in a state penitentiary.³⁹ *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirros* (2017) is the first part of the trilogy and tells the story of Isabelle, a daughter of Comte and Comtesse des Zephyrs who rule over l'Île des Zephyrs. She was born without sorcery which was her birthright and with a mutilated hand and grew up without love from her parents. When an opportunity presents itself for her to marry the Aragothic prince, Julio, and stove off the incoming conflict between the kingdom of Aragoth and l'Empire Céleste, she agrees to go even though it has been known both women that were previously betrothed to Julio were murdered. In doing so, she becomes part of a conspiracy and finds out the prince she meets is an imposter and the real Julio is held captive. Her and Julio's lives are intertwined, however, and she is prophesized to give birth to a new Savior, who is believed to one day come and save the Risen Kingdoms from corruption. To make sure the

³⁸ "About," Samantha Shannon, accessed May 9, 2022, <http://samantha-shannon.blogspot.com/p/about.html>

³⁹ "Curtis Craddock," Book Reporter, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://www.bookreporter.com/authors/curtis-craddock>

prophecy is fulfilled, she is kidnapped by Kantelvar, an artifex, but together with the real Julio, they manage to defeat him and put a stop to the impending overthrow of power in the kingdom of Aragoth that resulted from framing one of the princes for the king's murder, establishing truce known as Grand Peace. Wanting to marry her, Julio decided to give her a year during which they could get to know each other before he would ask for her hand again. She became the envoy of l'Empire Céleste, finally earning the power she has never had.

3.2 *The other*

This subsection will focus primarily on seeing the aspects of being *othered* on the protagonists, i. e. seeing them as part of a minority against a dominating force, unable to ever really pass the barrier that is separating these two sides.⁴⁰

3.2.1 *The Tombs of Atuan*

Starting with Tenar, there are several ways we can look at her through these lenses. In the words of Val Plumwood, *the other* is “a deviation from the centrality of the One”⁴¹, and although the word *deviation* implicates some sort of degradation to take place, it is the aim to also look for the kinds of *otherness* that are created by circumstances but do not necessarily say that the majority is openly degrading *the other* and instead merely show the two opposing sides as too different and, therefore, unable to cross the threshold of radical alterity. This approach shall be prominent throughout the analysis of *the other* in all novels' protagonists.

Tenar comes into the story as a small girl who has been born on the same day the previous High Priestess died, which automatically makes her a candidate to be the next Priestess. Only if she turned out to be a sickly child, she would be deemed unlikely to be the reincarnation of the High Priestess. As a small child, she is seen playing wildly in nature, carefree of the impending troubles that await her. Taking her to the Tombs of Atuan results in severe isolation from the outer world and loneliness. All the girls taken to this place can be considered to be *othered* since they have been taken away from their homes and families and they are forced to grow up rather than enjoy their childhood. Le Guin describes their experience when she writes “the girls of the Place of the Tombs spent their time at classes and disciplines. They did not play any games. There was no time for games.”⁴² Games in this case stand for the girls' lost childhood, innocence, and freedom. They are not allowed to do what they want, they did not choose this life, and they cannot escape it, partly because it is all they have known and,

⁴⁰ For more information about the concept of being *othered*, see pages 5-7

⁴¹ Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 104.

⁴² Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 13.

therefore, it does not occur to them to seek a life beyond the Tombs of Atuan. Tenar can no longer remember her mother and she does not even want to because, in her mind, she belongs here and nowhere else.

Consequently, a barrier is also formed between these girls and boys in general because boys can never be chosen to go live in the Tombs. It is said that “boys won’t do...”⁴³ when a search for potential priestesses takes place. This, too, puts another layer to the girls’ *otherness*. On the one hand, the girls have no chance of having encounters with boys their age, on the other, the life of a priestess is not described as something to be desired. Sometimes the common folk even lies about their daughters being born on the same day the High Priestess died to get rid of their child because many people live in poverty and, therefore, they prefer to give their daughters away. This presents a dichotomy because boys and girls stand on opposing sides. Boys cannot become priests and they lead normal lives. The girls can be chosen to go to the Tombs and in doing so, they live in isolation from the outer world.

Tenar’s *otherness*, however, goes beyond her simply living in the Tombs. She is believed to be the reincarnation of the High Priestess which automatically differs her from everyone else around her. She had a warden assigned to her specifically, she slept partly separated from the other girls who “giggled and whispered before they slept, and yawned and plaited one another’s hair in the gray light of morning.”⁴⁴ Once she underwent a ceremony where her name was taken from her and exchanged for a new name, Arha, she lived alone which isolated her further. It is repeatedly emphasized this ceremony took her identity away, that Tenar and all she represented were “eaten”⁴⁵, and only Arha, the reincarnated High Priestess, remained.

Her friendship with Penthe, another girl from the Tombs, also emphasizes how she is treated differently. When they were twelve years old, they were seen sitting on the Men’s Wall instead of attending to their duties. Penthe was whipped “with a bundle of reed canes”⁴⁶ and had to go without food that day and the next as a form of punishment whereas Tenar is merely told how unfitting it is for her, specifically, to be running and climbing with other girls, and do anything else but what is expected of her as the future High Priestess. Once she is fourteen, she officially takes on this role and from then on, everyone bows to her and she gains responsibilities that engrave a sense of isolation into her even more, such as sacrificing prisoners who were sent to the Tombs because they have committed a crime against the

⁴³ Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 11.

⁴⁴ Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 13.

⁴⁵ Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 7.

⁴⁶ Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 20.

Godking who rules over the empire Atuan is part of. She sentences them to death from starvation.

It is all these aspects of being *othered* she has to face to be able to leave the Tombs for good. Even she believes in the radical alterity defining her character in a way since she thinks Arha is all she is supposed to be and when Penthe tells her she would rather “marry a pigherd and live in a ditch”⁴⁷ than spend all her remaining days in the Tombs, Tenar does not understand her contempt for their life. A barrier is set also between her and Ged, a sorcerer whom she finds inside the Labyrinth. Magic and everyone who wields it are taught to be the enemy and she sees him as an intruder and thief. The Labyrinth is said to be inescapable and so he is destined to face the same end the prisoners faced. All Tenar needs to do is maintain the radical alterity and let him die, but what she did to the prisoners has stayed with her and she refuses to go through with it again. She would prefer Ged had a quick death. This decision eventually leads her to help him survive instead, to her remembering her real name, and to trusting him enough to leave the Place of the Tombs of Atuan for good and, therefore, to breach all the layers of her *otherness* because she gives up her role of the High Priestess, she leaves the only place she has known, she entrusts her life to a complete stranger who even wields magic and she finally enters the outer world and has a chance to get to know it for herself.

By inspecting Tenar through these lenses, it was uncovered that her *otherness* is represented by isolation and loss of identity. She is isolated from the world because she has been brought up in the Tombs, but she is also isolated from everyone else around her because only she is believed to be the reincarnation of the High Priestess and this alters her life to the point any kind of real connection she could have with other priestesses or wardens is impossible. She only finds this connection when she meets Ged who also helps her find herself and remember the name that has been taken from her and realize she wants to escape the Tombs. Her deviation from the center, i. e. the real world, but also the other girls, has several layers, and more often than not, it does not mean she has fewer rights or is not as important. On contrary, with her being the High Priestess, it should stand to reason she is more important, but paradoxically it does not give her any more power over her own life than the other girls in the Tombs have. However, since all these layers of *otherness* are the source of her inability to connect with people around her, they should be looked upon through ecofeminist lenses even though the degrading character does not always play a role. The aspect of being *othered* is

⁴⁷ Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 40.

prominent in her character development and moves the story since the barrier is eventually breached and radical alterity remains unfulfilled.

3.2.2 *The Priory of the Orange Tree*

Shannon introduces more characters that could be potentially considered to be *the other*. This subsection shall focus primarily on two of the storytellers, Ead and Tané.

3.2.2.1 Ead

Starting with Ead, one of the initiates of the Priory of the Orange Tree, a trained fighter and wielder of magic that is granted to her by eating the fruit from the enchanted tree, after which the Priory is named, she is introduced as being on a secret mission to protect Queen of Inys, Sabran IX of the House of Berehnet. To remain undiscovered, she poses as one of her chamberers. Ead is from the South, while Inys resides in the West, which creates a mild tension between her and the rest of the court. Despite her living in the palace for four years and converting to the Inys's faith called Six Virtues, she is still considered an outsider and no one trusts her. In their eyes, she is a heretic and is ridiculed for her origins. This so-called heresy is one of the reasons she can be considered *the other* because she holds onto her faith and it defines her and how she views others throughout the novel. For example, she is once asked by Sabran to tell a tale both the West and South know but have different versions of. If she were to tell the version she believes in, the one of the South, she notes she would "doubtless face the pyre"⁴⁸, and so she says the version the queendom of Inys believes in – "the butchered tale."⁴⁹ She is so disgusted by the false version of the tale that she finds herself unable to go on and starts telling the version she believes in which angers the queen and she orders Ead to tell it as the people of the West know it. This is a detail that, in the grand scheme of things, reveals the dichotomy the characters are put in because of their own religious faith and the stories they have been told. These stories circle the same concepts but interpret them so differently that they find themselves standing at opposing sides more often than not and in order to banish the evil, they have to overcome these differences and reach understanding.

With Ead, in particular, this starts with her eventually falling in love with Sabran despite the fact that, in the beginning, they stand on opposing sides in their beliefs. While it breaches the barrier between them, it creates another barrier that makes Ead *othered*. On the one hand, they are two women in love, which is not completely unheard of and there have been cases of queens of Inys taking other women as their lovers, but it is still considered unconventional and

⁴⁸ Samantha Shannon, *The Priory of the Orange Tree* (London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 68.

⁴⁹ Shannon, *The Priory of the Orange Tree*, 68.

Ead and Sabran keep it a secret. On the other hand, it complicates Ead's mission and creates a barrier between her and the Priory because she mixed her own feelings into the mission and what is worse, she holds these feelings for someone from the West, which once again highlights the antagonistic relations defined by religious faiths that stretch through the novel's world.

Another aspect that makes Ead *othered*, at least in relation to the queendom of Inys, is her ability to wield magic, which, too, is considered heresy and feared in the West. "The Inysh in their witlessness would call it *sorcery*. Their ideas about magic were born of fear of what they could not understand."⁵⁰ She used it to protect Sabran and she continues to use it throughout the novel. Her intentions are never evil, but magic is considered evil in the eyes of the Inysh, which once again shows a dichotomy because it presents a belief that everyone who wields magic is inherently evil and, therefore, stands on the opposing side of those who do not wield it.

Another example of radical alterity defining Ead as a character is her oversimplifying view of dragons. Being raised in the Priory, she was taught to think of them as enemies who serve the Nameless One who will one day return and kill everyone. She does not consider the fact there must be a difference between the dragons in his army and the dragons which live in harmony with humans in the East. When one of the characters suggests an alliance with the East to her, she considers this to be heresy and does not believe that any dragons can be anything but evil. This might not make her *othered* in a sense that results in being part of a minority because, at least, in this case, she is not going against the belief of her surroundings. Both the West and the South follow this belief that dragons are purely evil and, therefore, see through the lenses of radical alterity. But it is one of the aspects of her life she eventually has to face and overcome to save the world from the forces of the Nameless One.

3.2.2.2 Tané

Taking the same approach with Tané, another storyteller, does not provide so many layers of being *othered*. Unlike Ead, she is the child of the East and she does not need to make any arrangements to hide it. She is ambitious and wants to become a dragon rider which is something many people in her surroundings share with her. Perhaps, one of the first aspects of her life which marks her as going against the majority is how she is introduced – breaking a rule of her people by going outside to “immerse herself in the sea once more before Choosing Day”, the day she would be named a dragon rider. She was supposed to stay in seclusion, but instead, she went out and found a stranger, which dictates how her life is going to evolve. She cannot

⁵⁰ Shannon, *The Priory of the Orange Tree*, 72.

report him because that would reveal her crime, but she cannot leave him there either. She entrusts him to the care of her friend Susa which results in her execution which, too, might add a semblance of *otherness* to Tané's character because she is a dragon rider now, she believes she was god-chosen, i. e. her word should hold some power, but she is helpless to stop the execution and Susa dies before her eyes.

This highlights her main struggle – to be able to overcome the radical alterity she herself firmly believes in. For example, just the idea of sailing with people who hate their dragons is appalling to her. When she questions another character, Thim, on this matter, he asks her whether she thinks the world would be any better if they were all the same. She is unable to give him any answer, which shows her viewing the barriers between the East and the rest of the world as prominent, but at the same time, it hints her rising doubt which eventually leads her to be able to work with them.

She is eventually revealed to be a descendant of an important line and worthy to eat the fruit from the orange tree which makes her different from people around her, but it does not put her in a degrading position or one which would deem her unable to connect with other people. It does not require her to make her peace with it either. Therefore, her *otherness* comes mostly from the crime she committed upon her introduction because it is a secret she bears with her even in front of her dragon with whom she should have no secrets. It is what makes her different because no one else has sought one last moment of freedom before they would become a dragon rider and it eventually leads her to question her own beliefs in radical alterity.

Both Ead and Tané present an interesting kind of deviation from the center because they too perceive the world through binary oppositions. Plumwood describes the ideal way of approaching the other as an open communication that leads to acknowledging all the differences but not seeing them as imperfections, therefore not creating a hierarchy where one group is the center and the rest is something that deviates from the center.⁵¹ To a certain extent, this is what both Ead and Tané refuse to do at first which is why even though they are *the other*, they are also the source of this phenomenon in return. Both dragons and magic are viewed as non-human and the antagonistic way they are perceived prevents them from being understood as a thing-in-themselves. C. Flys Junquera talks about the ideal understanding of the other when she mentions the protagonist of the novel *Beatriz and the She-wolf* (López Llamas, 2015) “acknowledging the complexity of the wolves and establishing a visual and emphatic

⁵¹ Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 194.

communication with Oak”⁵² – the she-wolf. This is achieved in Shannon’s work as well when Ead and Tané start working with each other despite the fact prejudices against dragons and magic put them on opposing sides.

Inspecting two protagonists, Ead and Tané, under the lenses of *the other* and radical alterity showed that their *otherness* is mostly dictated by their surroundings and where they come from. Different beliefs were key to shaping their characters, and most importantly, overcoming the radical alterity, in this case, means finding the ability to view the world differently, understand it and accept it as it is. It is not a struggle of identity, of finding their selves, as it was with Tenar in *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970). Ead and Tané have to overcome prejudices to reach interconnectedness within the kingdoms.

3.2.3 An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors

Isabelle is the only case of a protagonist in this thesis that can be considered *the other* from her birth. She was born with a mutilated hand which dictates how she is perceived by other people despite her being a princess. “her right wrist tapered off to a stunted hand with only one twisted finger,”⁵³ is how her hand is described and it is the very reason why the midwife present during her birth lies to the comte and says she is stillborn and then attempts to smother her. Followers of the Builder, who is one of the main religious figures of the novel, believe “deformities such as this marked unclean souls, abominations, the Breaker’s get.”⁵⁴ Especially, *the Breaker’s get* is a term that has been following Isabelle her whole life. It is never said exactly who Breaker was, but it is mentioned that unleashing her “shattered the world”⁵⁵, and that being called thusly is “the fate so terrible that anything else looked good by comparison.”⁵⁶ Isabelle, therefore, depicts the kind of deviation from the center which is more prototypical, is associated negatively, and is the source of degradation. Plumwood describes the other as “a part of radically separate and inferior group”⁵⁷, which is exactly how almost everyone in her own kingdom sees her, the only exception being Jean-Claude, a musketeer who is like a father to her and guarded her ever since she was born, and Marie, her handmaiden and the only person Isabelle considers a friend. However, it is a paradox that her hand is something she has no control over and is the constant source of people around her seeing her as *the other*

⁵² Carmen Flys Junquera, “Wolves, singing trees, and replicants: Ecofeminist readings of contemporary Spanish novels,” in *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 147.

⁵³ Curtis Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors* (New York: Tor Books, 2017), 22.

⁵⁴ Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*, 22.

⁵⁵ Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*, 37.

⁵⁶ Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*, 81.

⁵⁷ Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 104.

in the most degrading sense to exist in this story's world, but, at the same time, she garners her strength from it because at the end of the day, it is her hand and when Kantelvar takes it away from her, she feels horror and notes that "amputation was surely one of the greatest insults a body could endure."⁵⁸ Being constantly judged because of her hand affects her emotionally, but she never gives in to believing the notion of her being an abomination and she never refuses to take a stand in what she firmly believes in and it is her hand that allows her to find the way to sympathize with Xaviera, the wife of Príncipe Alejandro, Julio's brother, who, too is judged by the imperfection of her body – her inability to conceive.

Isabelle does not wield any magical powers which is another aspect that makes her *othered*. It is her birthright to wield magic, which is called bloodshadow. Her father has it and although not possessing it is not as degrading as her hand, it poses many difficulties in her life because it is yet another reason her father treats her cruelly. It is emphasized that he has never been able to make his peace with the fact she does not have magic despite her being from his bloodline, which resulted in him trying to force her to manifest her magical powers violently to make her defend herself against his attacks, but it never worked. The final test comes when the comte makes her friend Marie a bloodhollow, which essentially means he sucks out her soul and leaves her body as an empty walking vessel to live and serve but do little else than follow orders. Isabelle is left helpless to stop it which is something that haunts her for years until she asks Kantelvar to bring her friend's soul back. Her father recognizes her inability to use magic as her rejecting her "saintly blood"⁵⁹ and refuses to acknowledge her as his child afterward. To him, she is not a thing-in-itself, he despises her for what she is not and should have been and he repeatedly tries to bend her to his will without success. This is an example of radical alterity which is never overcome even though magic eventually manifests within her.

The last aspect of Isabelle's character which makes her generally perceived as *the other* in eyes of people around her is the fact she is a woman. Her parents wanted her to be a boy and although having a daughter is nothing compared to having a child who is considered to be the Breaker's get, it is emphasized having a daughter was less desirable for them. Furthermore, she is not encouraged by her surroundings to pursue her passions. She is very intelligent and likes to read books about philosophy, history, and mathematics. She is very skilled in her knowledge, but has to keep it a secret simply because being so knowledgeable is not considered to be something women should do. She even created a male persona under whose name she published several mathematical treatises which have been very well received. It presents radical alterity

⁵⁸ Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*, 306.

⁵⁹ Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*, 38.

in a very prototypical sense because she is unable to live in full harmony with men, knowing what they know without risking herself. Men and women have radically different rights in this novel and Isabelle has to overcome this prejudice and, in the end, earns herself a position of respect at the court without having to marry the prince of Aragoth.

Isabelle is a different case of *the other* because unlike the other protagonists inspected in this section, her *otherness* results openly in degradation and discrimination. Unlike Tenar, she is not searching for her identity, and unlike Ead and Tané, she is not trying to overcome beliefs that have been embedded into her since she could remember. With her, erasing the barriers of her *otherness* has more to do with trying to escape oppression that has been present her whole life and live a life beyond the prison her father and people around her have put her in. She has always wanted to follow her heart, all she needs is to find the strength to do so.

This subsection provided various types of *otherness* that could have been found in the selected contemporary fantasy works chosen for this thesis. It was shown that *the other* can have different forms, particularly it can result from isolation, loss of identity, different beliefs and prejudices, the ability to wield magic, and, in turn, the lack of magical abilities, physical imperfections, and the discrimination against women. The protagonists were briefly compared to emphasize different approaches to the concept of *the other* which proves various perceptions of how *otherness* can be depicted in contemporary fantasy.

3.3 Nature

This subsection is going to inspect how *nature* is presented in the three novels selected for this thesis. Aside from the physical representation of *nature*, different forms and meanings which have been introduced as falling into the sphere of *nature*⁶⁰ will be inspected as well.

3.3.1 The Tombs of Atuan

Nature in Le Guin's novel highlights the contrast between Tenar's life before and after she has been taken from her home by the priestesses. She is introduced as a little girl, running outside when "the apple trees were on the eve of blossoming" and "one flower had opened early, rose and white, like a faint star."⁶¹ This alone highlights her freedom because she is seen running with joy, and peace that everything is as it should be because trees and flowers are blossoming. Not long after, however, her parents are talking, they already know she has been chosen as the next High Priestess and they know they have to let her go. The contrast comes from the idyllic depiction of spring from before and the way the clear sky is described to have

⁶⁰ For more information about the concept of *nature*, see pages 7-9.

⁶¹ Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 1.

darkened above the man once he convinced the woman they had to let the girl go. Instead of seeing the future as the start of something good and hopeful, as the blossoming trees suggest, the future is dark and not something to look forward to.

The depiction of nature turns grim once Tenar comes to the Tombs of Atuan. It is emphasized there were deadly, frozen weeds and icy stones which is a huge contrast between the blossoming trees she was running around. She can no longer do anything like this and since she has been forced to deny her own self, it is as if the nature around the Tombs was mirroring her and she, too, is closer to being dead and frozen rather than blossoming. Nature, however, stays as a form of an escape for her or a pillar she can lean onto. When Le Guin describes the regular days in the Tombs, she highlights one particular part accordingly:

*The best thing that could happen was to be allowed to go fishing in the murky green river that flowed through the desert a half mile northeast of the Place; to take along an apple or a cold buckwheat Bannock for lunch and sit all day in the dry sunlight among the reeds, watching the slow green water run and the cloudshadows change slowly on the mountains.*⁶²

Here, nature is described as a form of shelter for the girls, as the closest resemblance of freedom they are still able to get. It takes them away from the harsh rules of their lives and their time spent fishing is peaceful. Once Tenar escapes the Tombs, nature becomes a larger part of her life, so much so that it almost scares her because it is such a striking contrast from what she has known her whole life. It is especially visible if we compare her perception of the Labyrinth where she finds Ged, and of the outside world once she escapes the Tombs. As the High Priestess, it is emphasized that although she is merely fourteen, everyone will bow to her and she is in charge of the whole place. She is one of the few people who know how to make their way through the Labyrinth and not get lost, and her descriptions of it are always accompanied by dread and lack of life. It is said the air inside is so dead that even candles are only barely burning. There is dust everywhere, walls are rough, it is cold and dark, and “there was no time or light: days, months, years, ages all gone to dust.”⁶³ According to Gail Sidonie Sobat, “the physical setting of the Place reflects its inhabitants; it is in the truest sense, a wasteland.”⁶⁴ This

⁶² Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 13.

⁶³ Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 93.

⁶⁴Gail Sidonie Sobat, “The Night in Her Own Country: The Heroine’s Quest for Self in Ursula K. Le Guin’s ‘The Tombs of Atuan.’” *Mythlore* 21, no. 3 (81) (1996): 24–32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26812580>.

is a drastic change not only from the *murky green river*, the *dry sunlight* or the acknowledgment that time does matter during the days spent fishing, but also from the stream that ran under the trees, “narrow but powerful, shouting, muscular over its rocks and falls, too hasty to freeze,”⁶⁵ and Tenar’s honest happiness when she finds a squirrel’s cache of nuts, which are two of the first impressions she had of the world around her once she escaped the Tombs. From this, nature can be perceived as Tenar’s fulfilled search for her own self, her freedom, and the crucial realization that what authority she had as the High Priestess was not worth what she had lost.

The images of nature were inspected to find a connection with the story’s protagonist, Tenar. It was revealed that nature could be viewed as staying true to herself and free. During her life in the Tombs, nature is often not as prominent as it was when she was still a child running around her home or when she finally runs away. Often, even if it is present, it is cold and not so full of life, and therefore, to a certain extent, it resembles how Tenar believes her inner self is gone, *eaten*, and impossible to be returned to her.

3.3.2 The Priory of the Orange Tree

Nature is incorporated into Shannon’s work in various ways. Starting with the enchanted tree after which the book is named, it shows nature as a source of inhuman abilities. The orange tree is said to channel fire from the core of the world and everyone who is worthy of this magic can eat its fruit as both Ead and Tané can. There were two additional trees that could grant similar powers – the mulberry and the hawthorn. The hawthorn was what gave Kalyba, the Lady of the Woods, and the story’s antagonist, her power and immortality. The mulberry, too, granted immortality but is discovered as cut down and long dead. A connection between these trees and women is apparent since only female characters seem to be worthy of receiving the fruit from any of the trees. To a certain extent, it resembles the semi-magical roles women often play in Indian folktales, which have been mentioned earlier⁶⁶ because the trees grant magical abilities, they change the people who eat their fruit, make them more non-human, and also closer to nature. It can also serve as another case of dichotomy since the mere existence of these trees creates radical alterity. The orange tree is a source of magic that some view as heresy and the others worship it. The mulberry granted Neporo, Tané’s ancestor, immortality, but at the same time, it is this immortality that causes everyone to see her as a mere abomination and draws everyone away from her. In a way, these trees also show nature in a degrading position

⁶⁵ Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 130.

⁶⁶ See citation no. 32

because they are a dying breed. Out of three enchanted trees, only one remains which definitely is not cherished by the majority of people.

If we consider that dragons fall into the sphere of nature, this, too, provides a dichotomy that has already been illustrated in this thesis. They are one of the main things which create tension between the kingdoms. They are hated by one of the sides the same way Junquera highlights wolves are in *Beatriz and the She-wolf* (López Llamas, 2015) – because they are not comprehended, not viewed as their own entity which needs to be acknowledged solely for what it is and not just what it represents to humankind.⁶⁷ This misconception of dragons comes mainly from the inability to differentiate between two types of these creatures. The dragons of the Nameless One, called wyrms, are said to be one with fire whereas dragons of the East are “gentle creatures” who are “one with air and water”.⁶⁸ In this case, they can be seen as two opposing sides regardless of how they are perceived by humans. One side wants to conquer humankind and destroy it, the other wants them and the humans to live in harmony. In the beginning, when these dragons came to the world, they wanted to befriend people, they even brought gifts, but these people responded by throwing spears at them and the dragons disappeared back into the sea. This is another case of how nature in this work causes fear because, just like the enchanted trees, dragons are something people find difficult to understand. From the way dragons are perceived and treated, it is easier to hate and seek to dominate or destroy that which is seemingly incomprehensible. However, just like the orange tree, the fact that people of the East are capable of living in harmony with dragons suggests that interconnectedness is possible.

Nature, in this story, is also perceived as something to be worshipped. As a form of faith, it “had been practiced before the foundation of the House of Berehnet, in the days when knighthood was still young and the country had been haunted by the Lady of the Woods”⁶⁹, but it was never an official religion of Inys. Even in this case, however, it serves as another example of radical alterity because nature is shown as something inspiring reverence and worship whereas the other side sees such belief as heresy which needs to be punished. If Lady of the Woods is to be considered part of the sphere of nature, it provides another insight into how nature is not looked kindly upon in this work’s world. Tales that inspire fear are said about the Lady of the Woods, that she was “a child-stealer, a hag, a murderess. Monster of the tales of

⁶⁷ ⁶⁷ Carmen Flys Junquera, “Wolves, singing trees, and replicants: Ecofeminist readings of contemporary Spanish novels,” in *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 142.

⁶⁸ Shannon, *The Priory of the Orange Tree*, 108.

⁶⁹ Shannon, *The Priory of the Orange Tree*, 104.

old.”⁷⁰ She is called *of the Woods* which suggests how she is perceived to be part of nature and, therefore, depicts nature not in a way of interconnectedness but as a dangerous place to be wary of.

This subsection inspected the most distinguishable forms of how nature is represented in *The Priory of the Orange Tree* (2017), particularly the enchanted trees granting magical powers to those considered worthy, dragons and how they are perceived, nature as a form of worship, and, one of the characters, Lady of the Woods. It was shown that nature is one of the tools this work uses to encompass the characters’ everpresent perception through binary oppositions and if we consider all the aforementioned concepts to be nature, the results often lead to feelings of fear or the inability to understand, to accept the possibility that the humankind and nature could be on the same level, instead of how nature represented Tenar’s inner struggles and then her peace once she found herself again outside The Tombs of Atuan.

3.3.3 *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*

Nature in its physical sense is not as prominent in this work as it was in the ones already mentioned. The world of *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors* consists of floating lands that do have trees and flowers growing on them, but they are not given much attention. Isabelle can appreciate nature in her life, however. Once she has already made the decision to leave her home, she looks upon the trees with buds that “were just beginning to swell, like they had every year of her life,”⁷¹ and she realizes she will not see them bloom again. This way, nature is shown as an object of reminiscence which provides an insight into Isabelle since her life as a princess had not been kind to her, but the buds on the trees that are yet to bloom establish a connection between her and her home which shows that leaving what she has known her whole life behind is not easy for her.

Since floating lands are one aspect of worldbuilding that makes this fantasy work different from the other two talked about in this thesis, it should potentially be considered part of the sphere of nature. Underneath the floating lands resides what is called *the Gloom* – “a fathomless abyss of lightning-shot clouds.”⁷² It is described as a place “where the clouds never parted, the rain never ceased, and the wind ripped ships and men to pieces”.⁷³ For Jean-Claude, it carries a sense of dread because sometimes it happens that people fall off the flying ships and there is no saving them. Isabelle, on the other hand, has not left her home her whole life and when she

⁷⁰ Shannon, *The Priory of the Orange Tree*, 460.

⁷¹ Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*, 83.

⁷² Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*, 12.

⁷³ Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*, 12.

experiences her first voyage, she does not share Jean-Claude's worries about falling. This is a similar case of connection to nature the way Julia Tofantšuk describes the protagonist of *Lolly Willowes* (Sylvia Townsend Warner, 1926) experience when she is not scared of the windy and rainy weather as her family foretold.⁷⁴ Isabelle, too, is not scared of the danger that looking down the Gloom poses. In fact, it changes her perception because she has looked at the sky numerous times before but always for a reason. From the board of the ship, however, she looks at the sky simply because it is beautiful and she does not need to understand how the laws of nature work. In this sense, it can be said she is closer to nature than Jean-Claude, for example, because she wishes to understand how things around her work, but at the same time she can look at the sky and just see it for what it is, i. e. she found the balance between reason, and passion, which falls into the sphere of nature.

What could also be considered to be looked at through the lenses of nature, albeit not in the traditional sense, is the existence of artifexes. These are men tasked with preserving the purity of sorcerous bloodlines. It is their responsibility to make sure those who are considered *saintblooded* should marry only those who are *saintblooded* too. What is special about artifexes is that they could be considered half men and half machines. Oftentimes, they had metal limbs or an orb of metal instead of an eye. Kantelvar is an extreme case of an artifex because he has lived for centuries, changing bodies once they get too old to function, and his mind is said to be part of the machinery that goes from body to body. It could be said he goes against nature because he is more machine than a man and he is going against the laws of nature that he should age normally and eventually die. It is not the traditional sense of nature, but it represents a distance from what is considered natural. Isabelle defeats him by using both her intelligence, i. e. reason, and by retaining who she is. This is how nature eventually becomes more prominent in the story.

Nature in this world full of machinery is not easy to look for. Despite that, it was concluded Isabelle can be considered closer to nature since, unlike the most, she can look at it and appreciate it simply for what it is and not for what it is good for. She is also a contrast to Kantelvar because unlike him, she is fully herself without any mechanical upgrades even though most people consider her imperfect and sullied.

This subsection provided the forms of nature most prominent in the fantasy works chosen for this research. It was determined that connections between nature and women can be found

⁷⁴ Julia Tofantšuk, "Ecofeminist philosophy and issues of identity in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* and *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*," in *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 74.

throughout all three books but have different meanings, such as embodying a character's search for identity, a source of magical powers and a tool for encompassing the radical alterity, and even lack of nature or an open refusal of it. The variety of these meanings shows there are more ways how to encompass nature within fantasy works and how to make connections between nature and female characters prominent.

3.4 Interconnectedness, spiritual connection, folklore

The following section will focus on how interconnectedness, spiritual connection to nature, and folklore with feminist features are encompassed in the works that are being analyzed. The reason why these concepts were not given separate sections, like *the other* and *nature* were, is because in itself, neither of them necessarily has such a vital presence in the novels, and it is more like they supplement each other. In case of the interconnectedness, this is a concept that has already been mentioned throughout this analysis, and therefore, this section should also serve as a unifying point of all that has been said about it.

3.4.1 *The Tombs of Atuan*

The spiritual connection between nature and Tenar is merely represented by what has already been determined – it mirrors her struggle to search for her identity, therefore, it can only be found through interpretation. If we follow the conception of spiritual connection that Theresa L. Burriss draws out in her analysis of the work *Strange As This Weather Has Been* (Ann Pancake, 2007) that it means allowing “for a total synthesis of” oneself “with all that surrounds” them,⁷⁵ this can be said to apply to Tenar as well since there is an emphasis on how a large amount of nature outside the Tombs scares her at first, but then she becomes enraptured by it – she sees beyond what separates her from it and instead accepts it as part of her life.

There is no goddess worship despite the fact the idea of Tenar being a High Priestess could potentially give it room to grow. Even though she is in a very high position, she, too, merely serves someone else. In this case, it is an entity called the Nameless Ones. Her connection to them does not come from reverence or even interconnectedness because in order to serve them she had to give up her own identity. It is not their intention to protect her, “they have nothing to give. They have no power of making. All their power is to darken and destroy.”⁷⁶ And only when Tenar realizes with Ged's help that she does not need to be their slave, she is able to escape the Tombs. Folklore, therefore, does not offer ecofeminist aspects

⁷⁵ Theresa L. Burriss, “Ecofeminist sensibilities and rural land literacies in the work of contemporary Appalachian novelist Ann Pancake,” in *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 108.

⁷⁶ Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan*, 106.

either because the belief the priestesses are god-chosen just leads to them living life as slaves. The interconnectedness comes from breaking free of this belief. In Tenar's case, it comes with meeting Ged who shows her not everyone who wields magic is evil, who convinces her she can be free, and who shows her that interconnectedness is the key to survival. She saves him by giving him water, he saves her by making her remember who she is.

Despite the fact that spiritual connection does not play a prominent role in the *Tombs of Atuan*, and that goddess worship is completely absent, Tenar reaches interconnectedness by letting go of her life as a priestess and by embracing herself. Interconnectedness, therefore, has two forms – Tenar's connection with Ged and Tenar's connection with herself.

3.4.2 *The Priory of the Orange Tree*

Spiritual connection in this fantasy work is represented by the worthiness to eat the fruit from the enchanted trees, and therefore, to wield their magic. It is a much more physical synthesis with nature than was the case with Tenar, so one could argue whether it could still count as spiritual, but it is the result of ecofeminism being approached in the environment of fantasy where tools such as magic could show a much more palpable connection. The orange tree, in particular, shows interconnectedness and goes against the radical alterity because it is said to channel fire from the core of the world. The wyrms of the Nameless One are also said to be children of fire which results in many people fearing a fire in general and perceiving it as something inherently evil. However, the orange tree shows fire can be used to do good too, and therefore, fire is not a binary opposition but is instead a thing-of-itself that can be used both for good and evil purposes. Ead summarizes it well when she says that “not all fire is to be feared.”⁷⁷ A spiritual connection can also be found between the dragon riders and their dragons because not everyone can become a dragon rider. People of the East view dragons as gods and each potential dragon rider needs to be chosen by their dragon.

Goddess worship is more prominent in this story since nature used to be a form of religion in the past. In the present, it is considered a heresy, but it used to be worshipped before a new religion was formed and before it was tarnished by the existence of the Lady of the Woods. Goddess worship and folklore with ecofeminist themes can also be found in the story of Cleolind Onjenyu, a princess who together with Neporo managed to defeat the Nameless One the last time he tried to destroy the world. Afterward, Cleolind left to start the Priory of the Orange Tree which makes her a significant figure for all the initiates that came after her, including Ead. Cleolind, therefore, is not worshipped in the traditional sense of goddess worship

⁷⁷ Shannon, *The Priory of the Orange Tree*, 523.

this thesis presented, i. e. there is no focus on fertility or even a direct connection to nature, like animals, but she is worshipped for leaving everything behind to dedicate herself to living in constant connection to the enchanted tree. She defeated fire, i. e. the Nameless One, and instead of banishing it from her life entirely, she chose to live in harmony with it.

An important part of folklore in this story is the belief surrounding the Lady of the Woods. However, instead of reverence, she inspires fear, and instead of reaching interconnectedness, she seeks to help the Nameless One to destroy the world. She depicts a connection to nature, just like Ead, but her actions do not represent or result in ecofeminist aims. However, it is yet another proof of nature playing an important role in this fantasy work.

Interconnection is established by overcoming the characters' differences regarding their beliefs and opinions. Ead falls in love with Sabran, even though she is from the South and can wield magic, and she learns how to work together with Tané despite the fact, that she has been trained to fight dragons. Tané overcomes her prejudice that all people who fear the dragons of the East are evil. The kingdoms unite to defeat the Nameless One and just the fact that both Ead and Tané have to work together, like Cleolind and Neporo once did, shows how everything is interconnected. Calley A. Hornbuckle describes interconnectedness in the writing of Anna Letitia Barbauld as "human selves and nonhuman selves co-existing within the interconnected whole, with each having intrinsic value in its own right."⁷⁸ Dragons, magic-wielders, and people with different opinions in Shannon's work follow this pattern and regain an intrinsic value in the eyes of others.

By analyzing concepts such as spiritual connection, goddess worship, and interconnectedness, it was determined that characters have a spiritual connection with nature through magic, i. e. the enchanted trees, and through their companionship with dragons. Goddess worship, in terms of nature, is present explicitly in nature being a form of religion before it became heresy. It is also present in the heroine Cleolind who defeated the Nameless One and started the Priory of the Orange Tree. While the Lady of the Woods was said to be part of the folklore, it was revealed she does not support ecofeminist themes, such as interconnectedness. Interconnectedness was shown in its various forms, mainly how it represents various kingdoms and characters managing to overcome their prejudices and differences to defeat evil.

⁷⁸ Calley A. Hornbuckle, "Anna Letitia Barbauld's ecological sensibility," in *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 24.

3.4.3 *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*

Of all the three fantasy works that are being analyzed, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors* includes these concepts the least. Isabelle cannot be said to be spiritually connected to nature and she does not wield magic at first. Even if she did, she could not be considered a depiction of interconnectedness, like Ead can be, because only the *saintblooded* have this kind of magic, which suggests a hierarchy, and because the magic itself is used mostly in degrading ways, such as taking Marie's soul away and slowly killing her, using her body as a form of spying on Isabelle. Isabelle shows interconnectedness through her fight against prejudices. She has been constantly put down her whole life, but she finds a way how to stop Kantelvar, who represents recoiling from nature, and she helps establish peace between the two kingdoms and earns herself a respectable position.

One aspect that could be talked about in relation to goddess worship and folklore, however, is the story behind Saint Céleste who is later revealed to be Isabelle's ancestor. However, even she cannot be taken as the traditional depiction of a goddess in terms of nature because her sigil is described as "a four-armed woman bearing a gearwheel, an escapement, a spiral spring, and a ratchet"⁷⁹, which are tools that would rather be considered far from nature than close to it. What may make Céleste associated as a goddess is the fact she wielded a different kind of magic called l'Étincelle that had the ability to "breathe life into the lifeless".⁸⁰ It can be said that a divine ability, such as giving life, is associated with a female heroic figure. This power is also later manifested within Isabelle, which puts her in even bigger contrast to Kantelvar who preserves his life by switching bodies and maintaining his mind inside a machine, and Isabelle possesses the power of giving life naturally. This goes hand-in-hand with the meaning of goddess Carol P. Christ talks about when she says that "we find in Goddess a compelling image of female power, a vision of the deep connection of all beings in the web of life, and a call to create peace on earth."⁸¹ Isabelle can be said to depict this image of a goddess because on one hand, she can create life with her magic, but on the other, she also stays true to herself and fights the alienation Kantelvar lives by, and therefore, retains life in a sense. Ultimately, she accomplishes peace, both literally between the kingdoms but also between the opposing sides of the discriminating and the discriminated because she shows her capabilities have nothing to do with her gender.

⁷⁹ Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*, 76.

⁸⁰ Craddock, *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*, 211.

⁸¹ Carol P. Christ, preface to *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1997), xiii.

What is also worth mentioning is the prophecy which is the whole reason Isabelle was taken from her home in the first place – that she is destined to give birth to the new Savior. It depicts her as a goddess whose fertility should be revered. In this sense, it goes hand in hand with the concept of goddess worship this thesis introduced, but instead of carrying out the prophecy, Isabelle refuses it and the result is that she can finally live the life she has chosen for herself. The interconnectedness between her and Julio is not accomplished by marriage, but by earning each other's respect – seeing each other in terms of heterarchy, not hierarchy.

Although a spiritual connection with nature is not present, goddess worship can be found in the story behind Saint Céleste who had the ability to give life, which Isabelle inherited. Fertility is shown in a sense that should be revered, but instead of fulfilling the prophecy, Isabelle reaches interconnectedness by earning respect from people around her despite being judged for her appearance, gender, and lack of magic her whole life.

This subsection determined how concepts such as interconnectedness, spiritual connection, and folklore were embedded into the three fantasy works. A spiritual connection was found through interpretation as a depiction of Tenar's search for her identity, as a magical connection through the enchanted trees and through the bond with dragons, and was even found absent in one case. Goddess worship was not present in Le Guin's world, but it was explicitly associated in the *Priory of the Orange Tree* with nature as a form of religion, and it was also denied that Lady of the Woods could be considered part of this concept. Goddess worship in *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors* was found through the story of Saint Céleste who wielded the power of giving life, which Isabelle inherited. Each fantasy work, however, worked with interconnectedness and showed it in various ways, such as earning back one's identity, overcoming the prejudices and differing opinions, and earning the respect that has been previously denied.

4 Summary and discussion

The practical part of this thesis analyzed three selected contemporary works of fantasy fiction by searching for how the ecofeminist concepts, which had been presented in the theoretical part, meaning *the other*, nature, interconnectedness, goddess worship, and folklore, were represented throughout the novels, or in some cases completely absent. It was done firstly by presenting the authors and the works which had been chosen for this research in order to establish the context of each work that could help in understanding what kind of role ecofeminism could play.

Then, concepts were being inspected through separate chapters, starting with *the other*. This concept turned out to be the most prominent throughout all three works. In Le Guin's work, *the other* was depicted through Tenar's isolation from the outer world but also from the girls living in the Tombs with her because her life has always been different considering she was being raised to become the High Priestess. Her *otherness* also came from the belief she was merely a reincarnation of the previous High Priestess, therefore, she could never be herself fully because she was *the eaten one*. This radical alterity between Tenar and everyone else was most prominent when it was emphasized that she could not understand why her friend Penthe thought of her life in the Tombs with such contempt. It also played an important role when Tenar discovered Ged in the Labyrinth because meeting him led to her eventually overcoming the radical alterity within her.

In Shannon's work, *otherness* was associated with characters being raised in different parts of the world and therefore having opinions that did not correlate or agree with each other embedded in them. Mainly, these differences were concentrated on the misplaced belief that all magic and all dragons are inherently evil. Therefore, a connection can be drawn between these two works since the *otherness* is in both cases created by the way the protagonists were raised, and overcoming this radical alterity has to start with them, i. e. Ead and Tané have to overcome their prejudices and Tenar has to start believing she is her own person and not just a reincarnation of someone else.

In Craddock's work, a much more prototypical case of *the other* was presented since Isabelle is a character who is openly discriminated against because she is a woman, aside from more fantastic aspects of her *otherness* such as her being considered a Breaker's get because of her mutilated hand and because of her inability to wield magic. Her overcoming the radical alterity means overcoming all the obstacles of the society she lives in. She does not need to

change her own beliefs to do so which is where she differs from other protagonists this thesis analyzed.

It can be concluded that the phenomenon of *otherness* and radical alterity plays a prominent role in all three works. The prototypical form which has been presented in the theoretical part of this thesis, representing discrimination based on gender or other factors which could be argued to be degrading in certain contexts was only present in one of the works where the protagonist had to convince her surroundings against the false conception of viewing women and physical imperfections as inessential. In two cases, *otherness* was caused by different opinions and beliefs which were not built on gender and were also shared by the protagonists themselves, which put them in a situation where they had to overcome these false assumptions first before everyone else. This shows that *the other* can have different forms and that maybe not every conclusion should lead to the prototypical discrimination of gender, but to the radical alterity which is based on misunderstandings or firm belief in opinions that had been formed a long time ago and the inability to adapt to new circumstances and changing views. Analyzing three works does not provide enough data to openly say that one form of *the other* prevails over another, but it is a sign this phenomenon, too, is evolving and can potentially lead to hypothesizing that radical alterity can be caused by different aspects more often these days than just gender.

The second concept that was analyzed was nature, which was proved to be shown in various ways as well. In Le Guin's work, it depicted Tenar's need to escape and to find her true self since nature was most prominent outside the Tombs and was closer to being dormant and almost non-existent inside the Tombs, especially inside the Labyrinth underneath. Shannon's work provided a different approach to this concept – the three enchanted trees that granted magical powers and immortality, out of which two were already destroyed. Together with the controversy of dragons, nature was shown rather through means of fantasy than identity issues, which contributed to the problem of *otherness* and the need to overcome the radical alterity which not only the protagonists were aiming to head toward, but the whole kingdoms as well. Nature was shown as a form of religious worship but also as an association with the story's antagonist, Lady of the Woods, which only added to the problematic view of nature by the majority and made the radical boundaries even more prominent. It is a strikingly different character of nature from the one Tenar experiences and it is never said whether complete reconciliation is achieved because while peace is likely to be established between the South, East, and West, the nature the Lady of the Woods depicted needed to be slain and it is never said whether the persecution of all those who worship nature will cease to exist. Rather than

being associated with escape and freedom, nature in Shannon's work brings more depictions of binary oppositions and never achieves complete interconnectedness, even though magic from the orange tree and dragons of the East become more accepted.

Nature is least present in Craddock's work where, aside from being a source of relish and reminiscence for Isabelle, it can be perceived through interpretation of the differences between Isabelle, who always strives to stay true to herself despite the fact she has been discriminated for many things her whole life, and Kantelvar who retreats further and further away from nature by leading an immortal life, changing bodies and having several mechanical body parts. In a way, he can be said to be associated with progress, which might often be pitted against nature, but at the same time, he is the one who is refusing to move on from the past and wants to fulfill the prophecy, whereas Isabelle's actions establish peace and show that women are as capable as men and therefore promise a future of less discrimination and more interconnectedness. Thus, nature in this story might be associated with identity, albeit in a different way than it was in Le Guin's work because the ultimate goal is not to find this identity but to fight for it.

In conclusion, nature, too, can have different forms, ranging from being far more general and internal, such as a search for identity, to being more associated with the tools of fantasy, such as magical trees and supernatural beings, and the ability to wield magic. The scope of this range shows that fantasy is just as fitting to show nature in ways it can be depicted elsewhere, regardless of genre, as it is to show new associations that come specifically from delving into fantasy fiction. Nature in all three works is shown as the designation the protagonists strive toward. There were exceptions, such as *Lady of the Woods*, but this could be due to the lack of arguments that she could be considered a part of the ecofeminist discourse at hand, and the antagonistic view of nature worship, but ultimately, nature plays a role in all three works in various ways and all protagonists can be described as being closer to nature.

The last few concepts, i. e. interconnectedness, spiritual connection, and folklore were being analyzed together. Tenar's spiritual connection with nature is represented by her search for identity. Despite her being a High Priestess, there is no goddess worship because rather than reverence, her position serves more like imprisonment. With folklore not having any ecofeminist aspects to speak of either, the emphasis lies more on spiritual connection, and interconnectedness, which is achieved by escaping the Tombs and also the bounds on Tenar's real self. Spiritual connection, however, is not explicit and can be perceived only through an interpretation which is one of the major differences between its depiction in Le Guin's work and in Shannon's where the spiritual connection is more direct through means of magic, i. e. the ability to eat the fruit from the enchanted trees, and through the bond the Dragon riders

share with their dragons. Another difference is that goddess worship plays a role and nature used to be worshipped in the past but now is considered heresy. The Lady of the Woods is considered part of the folklore, but since she seeks vengeance and destruction – a complete opposite of interconnectedness – it is reasonable not to see her as part of ecofeminist discourse. A much more prominent case of folklore with these aims is the story of Cleolind who founded the Priory of the Orange Tree. In conclusion, it can be said that all these concepts are much more intertwined into aspects that are typical for fantasy, such as magic and supernatural beings, and therefore, much more visible because they do not differentiate the protagonists from other characters only internally but also externally. Something similar is achieved in Craddock's work when Isabelle manifests the ability to wield magic. With her, however, it has more to do with goddess worship or folklore than it does with a spiritual connection with nature because she is the descendant of Saint Céleste who had the ability to give life to lifeless things. But even in this case goddess worship does not apply completely because rather than go with the prophecy that Isabelle is supposed to give birth to the new Savior, she goes against it.

Goddess worship is the most problematic of aspects because although it could be argued that it plays a certain role in at least two works, it does not rely as heavily on fertility. The most prototypical case of it is, therefore, missing and one could even argue whether this could still count as goddess worship that could be looked at through ecofeminist lenses. I argue it should not be completely overlooked because it is just another proof these concepts evolve and goddess worship should not be oversimplified into one image when it can have various forms of how to depict connection to nature, such as founding a priory that lives in harmony with one of the trees that were identified as nature in this thesis or having the ability to give life to the lifeless. It can be said, however, that out of all three concepts, interconnectedness is present in all three novels and although it has different forms, it is always depicted as a reconciliation of opposing sides and as the ultimate goal of all the protagonists. What this thesis showed is that interconnectedness can be achieved both among various parties of society just as much as it can be achieved in the minds of the individuals, going as far as only regarding the opposing sides within their inner selves.

Although not all concepts were present or equally prominent in all three works, analyzing them provided new perceptions of potential depictions of them or of how ecofeminism is and could be interwoven in the genre of fantasy. Analyzing merely three works out of the vast scope of what the genre has to offer does not in any way provide sufficient data to be able to categorize the role of ecofeminism in contemporary fantasy, but it did prove that talking about ecofeminism in fantasy is worthwhile because it showed fantasy has means of depicting

ecofeminism the other genres lack, such as magic, and it also provides space for more typical forms of ecofeminist features, such as a search for identity or the open discrimination of women in comparison to men. Further research would have to be done in order to establish patterns, both on works written by female and male authors because that too provides different forms of perspective on the dilemma of a conflict between the conventional and *the other* and how it helps in the search of the interconnectedness.

Conclusion

This bachelor thesis introduced ecofeminism as a key theory of the research that has been done on three selected contemporary fantasy works. By positioning ecofeminism in its historical context, it was highlighted it started as an activist movement which is a characteristic trait that retained its form through the movement's entire existence. Approaching ecofeminism from its roots also helped in drawing out which questions should be asked in relation to the standing of women and nature in comparison to the concepts that often stand on the opposing side and have the inclination to come off as dominating and supporting the idea of a hierarchy rather than heterarchy. The most essential aims of ecofeminism were presented and shown to be preserved also in ecofeminism which is being applied to literary discourse. The key concepts were introduced, namely *the other*, nature, spiritual connection, and interconnectedness, each capable of taking on various forms that not always have to lead to open discrimination but merely to the inability to perceive and believe that all things have their place in this world and are equally important.

The practical part of this thesis uncovered the forms of the key ecofeminist concepts that were introduced by analyzing them in three works of fantasy selected for this research. It was concluded the most common phenomenon is *the other*, which was frequently found in all three works, usually as a consequence of the environment the protagonists grew up in. The fantastic aspect of the novels created the baseline for the *otherness* to grow and it was the supernatural elements that made the protagonist stand on the opposing side from the rest. However, more often than not, the types of otherness were something that could manifest in other genres as well, such as isolation, prejudiced views, and prototypical discrimination of women.

Nature, too, had various forms in the selected works, ranging from the depiction of a character's search for identity, through being represented by sources of magic or supernatural beings, as a form of religion, to an utter lack of nature to speak of. Some forms were more typical for fantasy, and some were more general and could be applied to other genres of speculative fiction or other fiction. What analyzing nature showed, however, is that it does not necessarily have to dwell on the most prototypical meaning of nature there is and that looking beyond the realm of the physical world can open more doors to how ecofeminism can be displayed in fiction. Nature was shown to be more inclined to have the potential to be fully fantastic, because there were cases of magical representations of nature, whereas *the other* rarely differed from what it could stand for in other genres. It could be said that there are tendencies to put nature in a more fantastic element, but there were also cases that went against

this theory, and nature was shown through spiritual connection, a form of a religion, an entity that is struggling to survive or lacks completely. These were more general representations and they occurred more often.

Spiritual connection, goddess worship, and folklore were shown as the least prominent concepts in the three selected works, but just like *the other* and nature, they supported the idea of interconnectedness, which was argued to be the main goal of ecofeminism in general and considering it kept being mentioned frequently throughout the whole analysis, it stands to reason to acknowledge it as an essential part of all the selected fantasy works despite the fact interconnectedness was not represented by the same means by every author. It was more frequent that interconnectedness needed to be established between sides that didn't differ based on their gender. This suggests that the struggle between men and women is becoming a far less frequent representation of ecofeminism and that *otherness* and conflicts based on hierarchy can occur between sides where the gender plays a minuscule role. Tendencies that lead to *otherness* can therefore manifest in various environments.

A conclusion was drawn that ecofeminism in fantasy does not come merely in one form which would span across the whole genre in aimless repetition, but that there are various approaches that can be taken, sometimes choosing open discrimination, but more often than not, seeing radical alterity as a conflict that can also come from within ourselves and needs our conviction first and foremost to achieve change before the whole society can follow. Without this realization, there is no understanding, and without understanding, there is no reason to even admit change needs to happen. In the beginning, however, awareness has to be raised and fantasy is and could continue to be one of the ways of doing so. One could argue fantasy's trait of escapism prevents us from seeing the connection of potential allegory of the world we live in, but sometimes it can be this allegory that highlights relations to reality for people who would not see them otherwise. Exploring this genre's potential should in no way stop here because fantasy continues to evolve and ecofeminist issues still prevail and what this thesis proved is that ecofeminism can play a role in fantasy. Further research can lead to new conclusions and possibly to a more patterned depiction of the key concepts of ecofeminism which could better the chance of reaching a change of perception of society at least to some extent. And that is what ecofeminism is about first and foremost.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá projevem ekofeminismu a rolí, kterou hraje v současné fantasy literatuře. Jde o směr, který se snaží vyvolat změnu ve společnosti. První část práce přistupuje k ekofeminismu v rámci jeho historického kontextu, který ho představuje jako aktivistické hnutí s cílem identifikovat podobnosti mezi diskriminací vůči ženám a vůči přírodě, upozornit na ně a následně se je snažit eliminovat. Myšlenky tohoto hnutí započaly v 70. letech ve Francii a postupně se dostaly do různých sfér, například do literatury. Ekofeminismus má dnes mnoho podob, ze kterých ne všechny jsou vzájemně kompatibilní, jeho podstata však zůstává stejná: klade otázky, které by měly vést ke změně hierarchické společnosti na heterarchickou, v níž jsou všichni členové vzájemně propojeni a ti, co čelí diskriminaci, nemusí o své přežití bojovat.

Ve druhé části jsou vysvětleny termíny, se kterými ekofeminismus pracuje, aby mohl identifikovat diskriminované skupiny. Konkrétně jde o termíny *druhý*, *příroda*, *spirituální spojení*, *uctívání bohyně* a *vzájemné propojení*. Označení *druhý* přibližuje způsoby, jakými jsou diskriminované skupiny vnímány – jako entita, která se radikálně liší od celku. Tím vzniká mezi dvěma stranami bariéra, která se nedá překročit a nelze je vnímat na stejné úrovni. Pojem *příroda* je v ekofeminismu chápán jak ve svém doslovném významu, tak ve významu přeneseném. Zde pak představuje vlastnosti, které mohou mít tendenci být asociovány spíše se ženami a tedy potvrzují, že přístup k ženám a k přírodě se v mnohém shoduje. *Spirituální spojení* a *uctívání bohyně* jsou jevy, se kterými pracuje spirituální ekofeminismus. Tato práce je představuje jako formy propojení, které mohou být identifikované, když postavy samy cítí vzájemné pouto s přírodou nebo když dané propojení vyvolává pocity uctívání a velebení místo znevažování a diskriminace. Asociace mezi ženou a přírodou jsou pak pozitivnější a zároveň naznačují, že propojení mezi nimi může mít nadpřirozenou povahu. Tato okolnost je charakteristická pro fantasy literaturu, kde podobné pouto může být vytvořeno prostřednictvím magie.

Cílem ekofeministického čtení literatury je pak tyto termíny identifikovat ve třech dílech současné fantasy literatury a dospět k závěru, jakou roli může ekofeminismus v daném diskurzu hrát a zda lze v jednotlivých dílech pozorovat změny. Termín *druhý* je definován jako následek izolace, předsudků, rozdílných názorů, ale zároveň jako typický projev diskriminace žen. *Příroda* je vnímána prostřednictvím spirituálního propojení, nadpřirozených bytostí a magie, ale také jako přesvědčení zůstat sám sebou. *Spirituální propojení* a *uctívání bohyně* nejsou přítomny ve všech třech dílech, ale ve všech případech vedou ke vzájemnému propojení, které je cílem ekofeminismu.

Ve výsledku tato práce dosáhla svých cílů a poukázala na různé formy diskriminace a znevažování, které mohou být součástí ekofeministického diskurzu. Je zřejmé, že tendence, které především vedly k diskriminaci žen, se mohou opakovat i v jiných sférách. Prototypický typ diskriminace žen je přítomný jen v jednom díle ze třech, zatímco ostatní nevytvářely bariéry na základě pohlaví, ale spíše na základě rozdílů zapříčiněných vnějším okolím, které by zasloužily zvýšenou pozornost. Tyto rozdíly, jako izolace, předsudky a konfliktní názory, zabraňují vzájemnému propojení, stejně jako diskriminace žen, která vedla ke vzniku ekofeministické teorii. Heterarchická společnost může vzniknout jen tehdy, pokud jsou všechny její části vnímány samy o sobě a jejich podstata není ovlivněna srovnáváním s tím, co se považuje za normu. Všechna tři díla tento fakt vykazují, hrdinky překonávají bariéry, kterými jsou charakterizovány jako *druhé*. Současná fantasy literatura tedy může být jedním z mnoha médií, která se snaží tuto zásadní změnu ve společnosti vyvolat. Zároveň si však výsledek této práce nečiní nárok být vnímán jako pevná reprezentace současných tendencí ekofeminismu. Tři díla představují značně omezenou oblast výzkumu, a tudíž rozšiřování obzorů může být jenom benefiční.

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