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Female Characters in Malazan Book of the Fallen
Ženské postavy v Malazské knize padlých

Diplomová práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla úplný seznam citované a použité literatury.

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Podpis:

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Introduction

Now these ashes have grown cold, we open the old book.
These oil-stained pages recount the tales of the Fallen,
a frayed empire, words without warmth. The hearth
has ebbed, its gleam and life's sparks are but memories
against dimming eyes – what cast my mind, what hue my
thoughts as I open the Book of the Fallen
and breathe deep the scent of history?
Listen, then, to these words carried on that breath.
These tales are the tales of us all, again yet again.
We are history relived and that is aft, without end that is all.¹

Steven Erikson, a Canadian contemporary novelist, is praised for his complex characters of an abundant number in his extensive work. This thesis focuses on the female protagonists in his most ambitious and vast works, the decalogy *Malazan Book of the Fallen*. The main aim is to present the view that his characters are very diverse, unique and non-stereotypical. Therefore, it is possible to analyze these characters from many different angles, instead of focusing on only one direction.

This work strives to offer a thorough analysis of four chosen characters, who appear in the decalogy as protagonists, thus providing enough material for the examination. As a primary source, all ten novels of the decalogy were chosen, id est *Gardens of the Moon* (1999), *Deadhouse Gates* (2000), *Memories of Ice* (2001), *House of Chains* (2002), *Midnight Tides* (2004), *The Bonehunters* (2006), *Reaper's Gale* (2007), *Toll the Hounds* (2008), *Dust of dreams* (2009) and *The Crippled God* (2011). Each chapter, apart from the first one, contains a short description of the theoretical approaches that are applied on the particular character, since, as stated before, each of these characters is specific.

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Steven Erikson, *Gardens of the Moon: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen* (New York: Tor, 2004), 22.

The introductory chapter, "Welcome to the World of Steven Erikson," provides a basic information about the author of the decalogy, a brief overview of the plot and setting, as well as a short characteristics of the aspects where the female characters influence the reader's understanding of Erikson's fictional world.

The following chapter, "Apsalar," focuses on the often contradictory, but also traditional means Erikson uses when designing Apsalar's plot-line, drawing from, but at the same time extremely violating the traditional storytelling as described by Propp and Campbell. Later, the chapter discusses a parental relationship between deities and mortals. Lastly, the effect of the narration from different points of view are discussed, taking Apsalar's romantic interest as the major topic.

The next chapter, "Hetan," deals with a character of a barbaric nature and one of the main foci is the freedom of the sexual behavior of hers. The second part of the chapter presents Hetan's personality in relation with a concept of a Noble Savage.

The successive chapter, "Tavore," largely discusses the role of an unreliable narrator and the consequent effects of this choice of narration and how it affects the reader's understanding of the plot and the characters. Later, the chapter is devoted to an analysis of a romantic homosexual love and the picture of an ideal woman as such.

The last chapter, "Felisin," largely deals with tragedy in the traditional term and, once again, the influence of the god-like characters on the fates of the mortals.

The research for this thesis relied on publications concerning theory of literary interpretation, sci-fi and fantasy, feminism, creation and understanding of a literary character, and numerous works on related topics.

1. Welcome to the World of Steven Erikson

“*Gods, I wish the world was full of passive, mewling women. He thought about that a moment longer, then scowled. On second thoughts, what a nightmare that'd be.*”²

1.1 About the author

“A library, shelves of black wood in sharp relief, tomes bound to shiny leather, yellowed scrolls, a pitted, stained desk – Baruk felt he had but stolen a single glance into this chamber.”³

Steve Rune Lundin, better known under his pen name, Steven Erikson, is a contemporary fantasy author and a trained archeologist, anthropologist and a graduate of Iowa's Writer Workshop. He was born in Canada and spent some time in the United Kingdom. In the literary world, he is well-known for his epic series, the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*. This decalogy is accompanied by shorter novellas and a planned epic Kharkanas trilogy of which a first volume has been published in 2012 (another coming out at 2016, check later) and other novels from the same fictional world by Erikson's friend and co-writer, Ian Cameron Esslemont. *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, together with the other novels and novellas from the Malazan universe are based on a RPG characters and plot lines designed and gamed by Erikson and Esslemont⁴. Steven Erikson also wrote independent novels like *Willful Child* (2014) and *The River Awakens* (1998), and novellas like *The Devil Delivered* (2004) or *Revolvo* (2008).

² Steven Erikson, *Memories of Ice: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen*, (London: Bantam Books, 2009), 271.

³ Erikson, *Gardens*, 164.

⁴ Steven Erikson, “The World of the Malazan Empire and Role-Playing Games | Steven Erikson,” Official Site of Steven Erikson, accessed October 29, 2016, <http://www.steven-erikson.com/index.php/the-world-of-the-malazan-empire-and-role-playing-games/>.

1.2 About the cycle

“My anthropological back gets raised hackles with simple worlds and simple conflicts. Nothing's simple. Nothing ever was.”⁵

The cycle can be classified as high fantasy, a sub-genre of fantasy. C. W. Sullivan defines high fantasy as a fictional world that is logically cohesive and is treated as serious by the author.⁶ Even though it displays purely fantastical and invented elements, it is based and rooted in reality and the reader can draw understanding of the made-up world from our own history and well-known traditions and stories. The Malazan world truly fulfills this definition, the reader can see clear parallels with our own history in the conflicts and settings in the cycle. As an example I present an uprisings of subjugated desert cities against usurpers, or the social hierarchy and discreet intrigues in flourishing cities. Erikson goes even further by implementing also the stages of evolution of human kind, geological epochs and long on-going climate changes into his world, altering and adjusting them with magic and fabricated technology. These changes will be discussed in a greater depth in the next part of this chapter.

It is not easy to sum up the plot of the whole decalogy, as there are many independent stories that complement each other, or merely cross occasionally. Very briefly, the cycle revolves around an ancient conflict caused by bringing an alien deity, Kaminsod, into the world by a powerful ritual of a group of rebel mages. This desperate act, carried out in order to break free from tyranny of the cruel ruler of that time, failed. The god was torn to pieces and scattered across the land, however, he survived the destruction of his body, although he lost much of his power and strength. During the long period that followed, he repeatedly tried to find a place of his own in the hierarchy of the deities, however, he was rejected

⁵ Neil Walsh, "The SF Site: A Conversation With Steven Erikson," *The SF Site: The Best in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, last modified May 2000, <https://www.sfsite.com/06a/se82.htm>.

⁶ Peter Hunt, *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 2014), 437.

and other gods repeatedly crushed his efforts, ultimately chaining him to the earth. The Chained One, or the Fallen One, as Kaminsod was known in the world of Malaz was, due to his alien nature, a poison for the world and his chaining induced a deadly disease of the earth goddess, Burn. With Burn's death, all life would end in the world. Thus, one of the main dilemmas on the decalogy is a whether to set The Fallen One free and unleash his still significant power, or whether search for another solution that would save Burn. The Crippled God, even though he is weakened, often meddles into the affairs of mortals in order to gain more power. His effort, together with actions of other gods and goddesses are reflected into the mortal world and the plot of the decalogy is predominantly told by armies, empires and other realms.

Each novel introduces a high number of characters, often new and appearing only for a short time. Many first-time readers find it challenging to follow the story, as the characters alternate in a quick pace. Reading is also very frustrating, because of the high mortality of the characters, or their disappearance from the scene and consequent reappearance much later. The novels follow diverse stories of armies on march, free powerful cities or sometimes even whole realms. Most of the mentioned plots finally join loosely in the last novel, *The Crippled God* (2011) with a very surprising and unusual ending. Crippled God, the character presented as one of the main villains and a malevolent powerful force throughout nine previous novels is treated as a victim.

The whole decalogy is written in a complicated manner. Not only it presents an unusually high number of unreliable narrators, but the narration also does not follow one consistent time-line. Often the reader is almost literally dragged through fragments of seemingly unrelated stories from various ages, continents or even different realms in other worlds. At the end they are connected and fit in the massive puzzle of the plot, but it is often not easy to decipher the meaning of the few paragraphs taken from something obviously much more complex. As Cohan and Shires conclude, the plots have an interconnected structure that has to be understood prior to understanding the whole.

If we are to analyse a complex story, then, we often have to look beyond

single events and sequences, recognizing the degree to which they are not only inseparable from each other but also part of a larger syntagmatic organization, namely, the story's macrostructure.⁷

The multiple narrators contribute to the understanding, but also the confusion of the reader with their own points of view, they present the microstructures creating the vast plot net. They often provide a perspective of one event from two or even more different sides, thus enabling the reader to orientate himself in the large macrostructure. On the other hand, the reader is many times deliberately misled by these points of view, as the characters present the reader their thoughts, not the reality by "seeing only what they think they see, knowing only what they think they know, and believing only what they choose to believe,"⁸ as the author himself confesses.

The characters, both male and female, are each unique. The traditional approach to storytelling according to Propp can be summed up as follows:

The ordinary and often orphaned main character is pulled from his mundane world into an adventure which takes him through the "magic forest" (in science fiction, of course, the magic forest is outer space) with staunch companions to defeat a great evil and from which he returns older, wiser, and often wealthier and well wed.⁹

The characters in the Malazan Book of the Fallen often do not follow this traditional pattern. The age and social position of the characters vary from a form of an inexperienced child through mature adult to wise, or senile old being. Similarities with Propp's canonical hero will be mentioned also later in this thesis in chapters dealing with chosen characters.

⁷ Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 60.

⁸ Owen Williams, "Interview: Malazan Book of the Fallen Author Steven Erikson," *The Void Magazine*, last modified March 13, 2011, <http://the-void.co.uk/book/interview-damn-contrarian-steven-erikson-conversation-094/>.

⁹ C. W. Sullivan, "Folklore and Fantastic Literature," *Western Folklore* 60, no. 4 (Fall 2001): xx, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1500409?origin=JSTOR-pdf&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents. 284.

By many readers and literary critics, this decalogy is perceived as a feminist work. This view is caused by a frequent presence of powerful, deep, complex and distinct female characters, ranging from common human women through members of different races to worshiped female deities. This has not been a common approach in fantasy fiction. When we look at the history of this genre, it is evident, that male writers usually treated female characters as shallow, overly sexualized or from a misogynist view.¹⁰ The author himself agrees with a label of his work, as he admitted in one of the available interviews.

Of course I consider myself a feminist, in that I believe in equal opportunity for women and men, and that I continue to see all around me the persistent oppression of an intrinsically patriarchal society, and, finally, that the Malazan universe Cam and I created was explicit in its addressing that particular issue.¹¹

The expression fairness characterizes the overall interaction of female characters with others in the decalogy. Females, no matter the race or origin, are often seen as important, or influential figures. Naturally, for the Malazan world is diverse, there are exception but they are seen as weird, or even monstrous by the majority of the population presented in the series. As an example of these two views I present a commentary of one of the commanders of a mercenary company hired to protect a city of Capustan, where women are usually in a subordinate position. The company registered a very high number of new female recruits from the city, as the women were trying to escape the oppression. This new soldier proved her bravery and discipline in the first armed skirmish.

She looked down at the blood spattered across her uniform. "It has begun." Itkovian was silent for a moment, studying the recruit at his side. "The Capan are a foolish people, to deny freedom to their women. The truth of

¹⁰ Robin A. Reid, *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Westport, Conn. [u.a.]: Greenwood Press, 2009), 170.

¹¹ "In the Dragon's Den: Interview with Steven Erikson Part 1," *The Critical Dragon*, April 18, 2016, <https://thecriticaldragon.com/2016/04/18/in-the-dragons-den-interview-with-steven-erikson-part-1/>.

that is before me.”

She shrugged. “I am not unique.”¹²

Women are indeed an important part of almost every army in the cycle, many of them appearing among the highest ranks. As true soldiers, they are often brutal and terrifying, holding the discipline in the army if in command. “Detoran used to be a master sergeant, remember. I once saw a recruit stay at attention for a bell and a half after the poor lad's heart had burst to one of her tirades.”¹³ Moreover, as soldiers, they are usually not violent brutes, if not in a fight. Even though they are fierce, they maintain a wide range of relationships, from deep to shallow. The strength and determination of the female soldier characters also predetermine them, to serve as examples of women who protect the weak and often do what is right in the lands suffering from war chaos. Promiscuity is not an uncommon thing among the soldier, however, the following quotation shows Masan Gilani, a soldier, protecting a little girl whose mind was broken when she was raped during a riot and now automatically searches company of adults and tries to sexually satisfy them:

“Is that my sister hiding in there?”

Masan Gilani looked up at Corporal Shard. “Yes.”

A slightly pained expression on his face. “She won't tell me ... what happened at the estate. What happened ... to her.” He hesitated, then added, “Yours isn't the first cloak of the night she's crawled under, Masan Gilani. Though you're the first woman.”

“Ah, I see.”

“I want to know what happened. You understand that? I need to know.”

Masan Gilani nodded.

“I can see how it is,” Shard went on, looking away and rubbing at his face.

“We all cope in our own ways ...”

“But you're her brother,” she said, still nodding, “and you've been following her around. To make sure nobody does anything with her they shouldn't do.”

¹² Erikson, *Memories*, 190.

¹³ Erikson, *Memories*, 560.

His sigh was heavy. “Thanks, Masan Gilani. I wasn't really worried about you ...”

“I doubt you'd need worry about any of us,” she replied. “Not the squads here.”¹⁴

Of course there are also many examples of cruel behavior towards enemies, however, the characters belonging to the Malazan army, which is the one most followed in the novels, seem to often follow the motto of its former founding leader: “Do what is right.”¹⁵

Another good example of a severe punishment for cruel behavior towards females is the fate of Bidithal, a high mage with perverted view of the world. In his twisted faith he attempts to create his own cult of abducted girls who were cruelly circumcised and brainwashed in order to work for him as spies and acolytes. His actions are stopped by Karsa who, sick of the mage's perversion, castrates him and kills him.

Involuntarily, Bidithal drew in an agonizing breath and made to scream—
Something soft and bloody was pushed into his mouth.

“For you, Bidithal. For every nameless girl-child you destroyed. Here.
Choke on your pleasure.”

And choke he did. Until Hood's Gate yawned—¹⁶

This revenge is even more complex considering the development of the character of Karsa Orlong who is earlier presented as a rapist who takes women of his defeated enemies and calls it his “right”¹⁷ and later, after events that shaped him and made him more mature, he admits they were his “victims”¹⁸. Rape and abuse

¹⁴ Steven Erikson, *The Bonehunters: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen* (New York: Tor, 2007) 554.

¹⁵ Steven Erikson, *Toll the Hounds: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen* (New York: Tor, 2008), 684.

¹⁶ Steven Erikson, *House of Chains: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen* (New York: Tor, 2006), 581.

¹⁷ Erikson, *Hounds*, 758.

¹⁸ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 581.

of women is a part of the Malazan world, however, it does not debase the aim of the author to present a new unconventional view on women in literature. In his own words, “what matters is how those rapes are dealt with in the narrative.”¹⁹

1.3 Magic, Religion and Pantheon

Show me a god that does not demand mortal suffering. Show me a god that celebrates diversity, a celebration that embraces even non-believers, and is not threatened by them. Show me a god that understands the meaning of peace. In life, not in death.²⁰

The *Malazan Book of the Fallen* is one of the fantasy cycles that are fully based on supernatural, mainly on magic and existence of various deities that influence the events to a great deal. Even though there are many devices created due to high technology level, the human race relies on magic and is shaped by it.

“Sorcery, Karsa Orlong, that is the heart of the problem.”

“What problem now, woman?”

“Magic obviates the need for invention, beyond certain basic requirements, of course. And so we remain eternally stifled.”²¹

Magic in the Malazan world comes from other realms, known as the warrens and their more primitive and crude version, holds. They may be used only to draw power from it: “Open yourself to the Warren that comes to you — that finds you.”²² Or they also present a means of travel, when the realms may be entered and it's crossing presents a significant shortcut. However, such traveling is often dangerous. Each warren is different and has unique properties and is aspected, sometimes even connected with a race, like Tellan or Omtose Phellac. Warrens may have destructive nature, but also a healing one, as Denul does. Sorcery is also one of the reasons for the unusually his position of women in the different

¹⁹ “Dragon’s Den”

²⁰ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 696.

²¹ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 198.

²² Erikson, *Gardens*, 25.

societies, for it grants power. Mages, warlocks and witches are praised and feared for their talent, not for their gender. Warrens are also often homes for deities.

Mages and gods are important characters, not only for their actions, but also because of the insight they provide. Through their thoughts and dialogues, the reader is fluently introduced to the complicated concept of magic and deities, which are closely interconnected.

Gods and goddesses come to existence in more ways. The origin of the most old and often even long lost and forgotten gods is very unclear and cannot be explained. The younger gods were created either through belief and hope of their worshipers that manifested itself in the god, or they arise from mortals who cross “a force in nature, a confluence of energies. You begin to see things differently, to think differently. And others take notice of you – that's usually bad, by the way.”²³ Surviving a hardship or achieving something remarkable thus often ends up in unwanted ascendencies when mortals gain power and strength and they are generally “harder to kill”²⁴, however, “power draws power”²⁵ and the new ascendent might be in danger of the rivalry of the others. These ascendants may take a path of cultivating this power and ultimately become a god or goddess, or use their advantage only reluctantly and occasionally. A very unfortunate case of ascendency is an unwanted one, combined with a consequent worship of believers, as in the case of Dessembræ, the reluctant lord of tragedies. Once a mortal man suffering from a trauma resulting from a broken pact with other god became worshiped by other people. However, his cult is held mostly by his followers, not Dessembræ himself. This example shows one major approach towards gods in the world of Malaz. Apart from faithful worship, many people of Malaz accept the existence of the deities, but avoid interfering with them. The following quotation shows also the very cynical and disrespectful approach of many mortals towards gods:

“Togg's teats, Redmask, that's a long speech coming from you.”

“I hold words in contempt, Anaster Toc. What do you mean when you say

²³ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 196.

²⁴ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 196.

²⁵ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 196.

“Togg's teats”?”
“Togg's a god.”
“Not a goddess?”
“No.”
“Then its teats are...”
“Useless. Precisely.”
“What of the others? “Hood's Breath”?”
“Hood is the Lord of Death.”
“Thus . . . no breath.”
“Correct.”
“Beru's mercy?”
“She has no mercy.”
“Mowri fend?”
“The Lady of the Poor fends off nothing.”
Redmask regarded the foreigner. “Your people have a strange relationship with your gods.”
“I suppose we do. Some decry it as cynical and they may have a point. It's all to do with power, Redmask, and what it does to those who possess it. Gods not excepted.”²⁶

Again, the gender of the deities does not mean a significant difference, a range of gods and goddesses is worshiped across the world without emphasizing their gender. Gods and their followers are linked very tightly, the greater the number of worshipers, the greater the power of the god. However, the worshipers may hurt their god, even kill him when they act against his or her stated principles. Vice versa, the god may destroy his believers when he or she sees them as unworthy. The most significant case of such merciless slaughter was carried out by D'rek, the Worm of Autumn, when she could no longer stand greed spreading through her temples.

²⁶ Steven Erikson, *Reaper's Gale: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen*(New York: Tor, 2008), 192.

1.4 Races and Nations

“These tales are the tales of us all, again yet again. We are history relived and that is aft, without end that is all.”²⁷

Being set in a fantasy world, this cycle features many other races apart from the human race. However, the traditional fantasy creatures like dwarves, elves or goblins are not featured here. The Malaz universe contains a number of new original races with complex and into depth designed history, each with unique characteristics, appearance and natural environment in which it fits. Since the story often comes back into ancient and distant times, the reader is again confused by regular remarks on races that no longer exist in the present time of the main plot. Even the characters themselves are often not aware of their own connection to these races as their descendants.

Steven Erikson often relies on a formation of similarities between our own history and his work. Mainly for the human race, the real customs and patterns of behavior are reflected in the decalogy. Also other races can be biologically or in terms of character compared to the familiar. Sullivan's suggestion: “the creator of impossible worlds, has need of and uses folklore to make those imagined words accessible to the reader”²⁸ can be applied mainly for the young humanoid races. The lower list provides a brief overview of the most relevant races and their short characteristics.

The races can be also differentiated according to their relation to the world where majority of the plot takes place. The invading races come from different realms, the founding races are the ones who dwelt and prospered in this world and shaped it into the form in which it is in the course of the story, inhabited mostly by the human race.

²⁷ Erikson, *Gardens*, 22.

²⁸ Sullivan, “Folklore,” 279,

1.4.1 Eleint

An ancient powerful invading race of dragons that serves as a source and keeper of the diverse kinds of magic in the universe. T'iam, or Tiamatha is a mighty goddess of this race, a mother of all dragons. This time, it is not a mother of all, as in Burn's case. T'iam is the fiercest and most threatening of all dragons and does not display any caring and motherly tendencies. Being dead during the course of the novels and on the verge of resurrection, she is addressed as a “whore”²⁹ by her children, which effectively shows the nature of hostile and self-serving behavior of the eleint race. Since dragons are extremely powerful and treachery is in their nature, this race is feared in all the worlds. However, their might is also very tempting, for if one drinks dragon's blood, he or she becomes a soletaken, a being that is able to take a form of a dragon. This feature is further inherited in family, although the power is weaker in every next generation..This is very dangerous, as the dragon's blood can ruin one: “We are the blood of chaos, Ryadd Eleis, and when too many of us gather in one place, *the blood boils*.”³⁰ The blood can also easily turn into poison.

According to Stableford, slaying of a dragon proves bravery of a fictional hero in terms of the traditional European christian mythology. He also claims that there was a trend in the recent fantasy works and dragons are seen as “high-minded creatures blessed with uniquely ancient wisdom.”³¹ Erikson's dragons deflect from these two canonical roles. They are occasionally seen as teachers (soletaken Silchas Ruin) and powerful leaders (soletaken Anomander Rake) but many other dragons prefer force and cunning treacherousness more than wisdom and sobriety. Moreover, in the case of Silanah Redwings, among others, it is a she-dragon who watches over the order and fights against tyranny and oppression.

Other female dragons are a very important element in the decalogy, as their often selfish and cruel deeds influence whole nations. The male and female

²⁹ Steven Erikson, *The Crippled God A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen* (New York: Tor, 2011), 349.

³⁰ Erikson, *God*, 308.

³¹ Brian M. Stableford, *Historical Dictionary of Fantasy Literature* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2005),115.

dragons are portrayed without a significant difference, thus fulfilling Erikson's belief in male and female equality.

1.4.2 Tiste

This invading race consists of three major groups closely bound by their shared mythology and long history of mutual hatred and fights. According to cryptic and complicated mythical history presented in the cycle, these three, Tiste Andii, Tiste Edur and Tiste Liosan are branches representing pure darkness, shadow and light. These are “the first elements of existence. Energy and void and the ceaseless motion of the ebb and flow between them. These three forces – the first, the greatest, the purest.”³² All three branches are characterized as tall creatures whose past present and also the uncertain future is governed by the eternal conflict between the darkness and light, their mother and father.

Andii created by Mother Dark have deep dark color of skin, Edur, born from the coupling of Mother Dark and Father Light are gray and, finally, Liosan who are the children of Father Light are purely white. However, this division does not match the traditional canon of forces of evil and good.³³ Mother Dark and Father Light are not abstract entities, but true goddess and god, however, they have abandoned their children due to raging conflicts of all three Tiste and the deities themselves. For centuries, the three branches were left alone, for Mother and Father turned away from them. The relationships between Andii, Edur and Liosan move from openly hostile to restrained cooperation or ignorance in the different periods of time. Andii and Edur regularly come into contact with other races and take active part in the conflicts. Andii women are fully equal to men and they are often in command. Female powerful mages, assassins and soletakens are not exceptional in the decalogy. On the other hand, Edur women are in a slightly different position. In Edur culture, their femininity predetermines them to study magic and healing, and keep the history of Edur people remembered in stories as “knowledge was passed down every generation among the women”.³⁴ Men are

³² Erikson, *Gale*, 273.

³³ Stableford, *Dictionary*, 284.

³⁴ Steven Erikson, *Midnight Tides: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen*(New York: Tor, 2007), 92.

ultimately hunters and fighters and they respect their women and their unique role in the society. Unlike in the real world, where such female traits are often seen as inferior, once again, the male and female element is equal here. The worlds of Edur men and women differ and form two distinct, yet compatible concepts. As for Tiste Liosan, their appearance in the decalogy is scarce and male warriors exclusively are featured in the novels, therefore their culture and their relationship to their women remains unknown. From the few insights into their world, they appear to be of proud and disdainful nature, worshiping Father Light with a strong religious avidity.

1.4.3 Jaghut

A race of reclusive individualists with a very long life-span, maybe even immortal. Their domain was cold and Omtose Phellac, their natural warren was aspected for ice. They wielded powerful magic, however most of them were of thoughtful nature and they did not seek company of their kin, even though family bonds were strong among the Jaghut. “Jaghut feared community, renouncing society to be the birthplace of tyranny.”³⁵ They were rather tall, with greenish skin and small lower tusks.

Many extraordinary individuals arose from this race, among them a scholar often mentioned in the decalogy, Gothos, who studied the history and evolution of the world and created his Gothos's Folly, a tome from which mages, historians and others drew for centuries after its creation. The other significant Jaghuts remain known for much darker deeds, for their lust for power and domination. Jaghuts did not gather explicitly for the fear of temptation power presented, however, during their long history, dangerous individuals arose and became known as tyrants. A tyrant is “one whose blood was poisoned by the ambition to rule over others. This Jaghut Tyrant enslaved the land around it – all living things.”³⁶ Such behavior was seen as hideous even by other Jaghuts, not only by other races, and tyrants were battled and put into eternal prisons, as it was very hard to destroy them completely. These actions provoked the ritual of Tellan

³⁵ Erikson, *Gardens*, 367.

³⁶ Erikson, *Gardens*, 212.

of Imass race, who was much affected by a Jaghut tyrant. Their power lay in a mental influence:

While over them all, a presence invisible to their eyes, Raest flexed his will. His greatest joy came when his slaves proclaimed him god – though they knew him not – and constructed temples to serve him and organized priesthoods whose activities mimicked Raest's tyranny with such cosmic irony that the Jaghut could only shake his head³⁷

Female and Male Jaghut were not much different, both were equal.

1.4.4 Imass

This race in its origin, physiognomy and history clearly resembles Neanderthals of our own history. They are described as robust, shorter in height, with distinctively pronounced brows. Their customs when they were, long ago, at height of their powers, reflect the hunter and gatherer culture of people wielding simple tools and craft, as the following excerpt shows:

Heat and smoke from the hearths, the aromas of cooking meats, tubers, melted marrow. The nasal voices of the women singing as they went about their day's modest demands. The grunts and gasps of lovemaking, the chants of children. Someone might be working an antler tine, the spiral edge of a split long-bone, or a core of flint.³⁸

Their element is fire, for "Life is fire," he said. "With such words was born the First Empire. The Empire of Imass, the Empire of Humanity."³⁹

Imass race was closely connected with nature and environment, their mages, the bonecasters were capable of powerful rituals and healing. Women, again, stood equal with men and are often seen as mighty warriors and magic wielders. Kilava,

³⁷ Erikson, *Gardens*, 367.

³⁸ Steven Erikson, *Dust of Dreams: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen* (New York: Tor, 2010), 62.

³⁹ Erikson, *Gardens*, 214.

one of the most powerful bonecasters, is a devoted mother and wife, but also a terrifying and dangerous enemy to face. Maternity is a role that deeply affects her and when losing a child, she feels mother's grief that even drives her to an attempt to save two Jaghut children, enemies of the Imass: "They clung to her with their small, grubby hands, grim reminders of the child she had but recently lost."⁴⁰

During their exhaustive wars with the Jaghuts, Imass, drawing from the power of the fire of life, realized the growing losses and their decision to exterminate the Jaghut race lead to casting of the ritual of Tellan. It was performed by the first Imass soletaken and bonecaster, Olar Ethil. The ritual of this woman caused a separation of the most of the Imass from life. Thus, creating T'lan Imass from them, powerful immortal beings stripped of weaknesses brought by hunger, illness or exhaustion. Moreover, the ritual enhanced their abilities and strength. In the course of the *Book of the Fallen*, thousands of years after the ritual, these warriors appear in a very disturbing form of dry corpses, however, due to magic, they still retain their abilities. For the living, the appearance of T'lan Imass is often very unsettling:

Despite the sorcery, three hundred thousand years had taken their toll. The skin that stretched across the squat man's robust bones was a shiny nut brown in colour, the texture of leather. Whatever flesh it had once covered had contracted to thin strips the consistency of oak roots – such muscles showed through torn patches here and there. The creature's face, what Toc could see of it, bore a heavy chinless jawbone, high cheeks and a pronounced brow ridge. The eye sockets were dark holes.⁴¹

The Imass race presents the ancestors of the human race and Erikson again uses our own history to allow the reader to create a connection with the real world. Neanderthal people went extinct and there are various theories that indicate a possibility of our ancestors hunting and eating the Neanderthals and also mating with them, thus making them our ancestors⁴². In the world of Malaz, the violent

⁴⁰ Erikson, *Memories*, 22.

⁴¹ Erikson, *Gardens*, 180.

⁴² Kwang Hyun Ko, "Hominin interbreeding and the evolution of human variation," *Journal of Biological Research-Thessaloniki*, July 2016, xx,

hunts lead to a second, less powerful, ritual of Tellan. Again, this ritual was cast by a female bonecaster, Nom Kala, in order to avoid extinction from the hands of more evolved and skilled human race:

“escape from these ... children. Who would, in years to come – years they no longer have awaiting them – who would, then, have hunted down your kin. Your mate, your children. They would have killed you all without a moment’s thought. In their eyes, you were beasts. You were less than they were, and so you deserved less.”⁴³

A phenomenon mutual for both T'lan Immas, from the first and second ritual, is deep regret for their decision to deny death. Interaction with T'lan Imass is often marked with bitterness, futility, desperation and also mercilessness. They engaged in the affairs of human and other races, however, eternal fight was the only thing left for them. In their immortal form, they are feared warriors, often seen as emotionless by the living. After long centuries, they searched for release from the ritual from the hands of Silverfox, a living bonecaster born from magic, however, she denied them oblivion. Her motivation will be analyzed later in this thesis.

1.4.5 Forkrul Assail

In the decalogy, this race is not depicted in a great detail. During the course of the decalogy, it is believed to be long extinct, together with K'Chain race and other minor ancient ones. It is known that it is one of the founding races, however, their attitude towards all the other races is very hostile. Their physical appearance is described as tall, pale and skinny. Their body construction is very different from other humanoids: “There was something strange about its limbs....it possessed extra joints in the arms and the legs, and there was some kind of hinge across the creature’s breastbone. Its motion was oddly loose.”⁴⁴ This enables them to surprise

<http://jbiolres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40709-016-0054-7>.

⁴³ Erikson, *God*, 120.

⁴⁴ Erikson, *Tides*, 506.

an opponent with unexpected attack and force. Moreover, Assails wield a power of their voice, which has a psychological effect on others and can force them to submit to their will. Their physical endurance is also remarkable.

They often engaged in conflicts, bringing their concept of “justice” into it, which often resulted in brutal death of the participating parties. Just wars were often waged against other races. Their enemies saw them as “physically unique. In some ways more primitive, but as a consequence less ... specialized, and so less constrained. Profoundly long-lived, more so than any other species. Very difficult to kill, and, it must be said, they *needed* to be killed”⁴⁵ Their arrogance and egoism lead to a vast conflict between K'Chain Che Malle, which ended up in an almost full destruction of both races.

Again, male and female members of this race are equal and, again, the Assail women are the ones who actively participate in the final conflict of the decalogy.

1.4.6 K'Chain Che Malle

One of the ancient founding races that is believed to be extinct in the cycle. However, they do appear in the end and attempt to learn from the human race, in an effort to find a new place in the new world for them. The great reptile creatures from dawn of time are skilled in creating elaborate technical devices which they combine with magic. Even though belonging to the same race of reptilian creatures, K'Chain Che Malle may look very differently, as each of them is assigned a different role in the nest, be it a warrior Ve'Gath, with “fanged snouts, and the line of their jaws gave them ghastly grins, as if the implicit purpose of their breed delighted them”⁴⁶ or a hunter K'ell with swords “fused to the creatures' wrists”⁴⁷. In a true manner of a beehive, there are, apart from other specialized forms, also drones, whose “purpose had been as an excretor, producing an array of flavours to feed newborn Ve'Gath to increase muscle mass and bone density.”⁴⁸

Their communication, their lives, even forms of their bodies, are based on

⁴⁵ Erikson, *Tides*, 342.

⁴⁶ Erikson, *Dust*, 21.

⁴⁷ Erikso, *Memories*, 173.

⁴⁸ Erikson, *Dust*, 260.

chemical substance called flavours. K'Chain Che Malle perceive the world in a different manner than other races, relying on this biological system instead of a vocal one. An autopsy of a member of this race described in one of the novels proved their bodies to be unique: “these demons saw a different world, a more complete one, perhaps.”⁴⁹

Females are exceptionally important for this race, for the society of K'Chain Che Malle is based on matriarchy. A comparison with a beehive and a bee queen might be used to illustrate the behavior of this race, as it is the chosen female who breeds other K'Chain Che Malle in the particular nest and rules over them with an unquestionable authority. Due to the flavours, the matriarchs are able to pass all knowledge and memories on the next generations of the matriarchs. The following quotations shows the long tradition of this sharing and also the dangers of this practice. These thoughts of one of the last living matrons, Gunth Mach, also show her love and devotion to her lover:

In an unbroken line from each mother to every daughter, memory survived, perpetuating a continuous history of experience. Gunth Mach held in her mind generations of lives trapped in a succession of settings that portrayed the inexorable collapse, the decay, the failure of their civilization. This was unbearable. Knowledge was an unceasing scream in her soul. Every Matron was eventually driven insane: no daughter, upon ascension to the role, could long withstand the deluge. Male K'Chain Che Malle had no comprehension of this; their lives were perfectly contained, the flavours of their selves truncated and unsubtle. Their unswerving loyalty was sustained in ignorance. She had sought to break this pattern, with Sag'Churok, and in so doing was betraying the inviolate isolation of the Matrons. But she did not care. All that had gone before had not worked.⁵⁰

The long disappearance of K'Chain Che Malle from the world was caused by the ambition of their matrons and their overestimation of their own power:

⁴⁹ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 144.

⁵⁰ Erikson, *Dust*, 380.

Among the records found, then, it was learned that the Matrons, each commanding the equivalent of a modern city, had gathered to meld their disparate ambitions. What they sought, beyond the vast power they already possessed, is not entirely clear. Then again, what need there be for reasons when ambition rules? Suffice to say, an ancient breed was ... resurrected, returned from extinction by the Matrons; a more primitive version of the K'Chain Che'Malle themselves. For lack of a better name, my scholars at the time called them Short-Tails.⁵¹

This new subversion of K'Chain Che Malle, Nah'ruk, rebelled against the matriarchy and vast civil war almost wiped out this race. The complete history of this race is not known and there are also other catastrophes leading to K'Chain Che Malle extinction, mentioned. These could possibly be caused by Imass and Jaghut wars, for “the ice spoke to them with words of death.”⁵²

1.4.7 Other races

The above mentioned races gave rise to other, minor branches due to evolution and interracial breeding: “Barghast, Trell, Tartheno Toblakai,” said the seventh priest, his voice a rumble, “these are the surviving threads of Imass blood, no matter their claims to purity.”⁵³ Thus the reader may encounter also descendants or hybrids coming from the original races. Human race does not need further characterization, as it is based on the traditional concept of humanity inspired by our own history.

1.5 Female sexuality

“As everyone knows, sex is the glue that holds society together.”⁵⁴

In the cycle, female sexuality is presented in all the possible forms. Steven

⁵¹ Erikson, *Memories*, 365-366.

⁵² Erikson, *Gardens*, 226.

⁵³ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 25.

⁵⁴ Erikson, *Dust*, 41.

Erikson can be counted among the writers, even though this is mostly a domain of female authors, who are obviously trying to “recuperate female archetypal roles that have fallen into stereotypes; to recover a lost matriarchal tradition in myth and history; to deal explicitly with women-centered issues such as rape and gender inequality.”⁵⁵

The upper mentioned rape is a part of the Malazan universe. It often goes unpunished, however, very brutal actions against women or children are considered disgusting and scrawny.⁵⁶ Rape is a moving force for the affected women, often driving them to radical acts like joining the army, as corporal Picker, or, taking revenge, as scholar Janath Anar. In some cases, rape and abuse triggers succumbing to madness, resulting in death of the victim. The rape trauma can also awaken magic, which consequently leads to unleashing dangerous powers and further psychological decay.

There are also examples of an ideal harmony between partners on sexual and also emotional level, where sex and sensuality is used as a tool depicting the depth of a relationship between the characters. Such harmonious bond is shared between Torvald and Tiserra, or Whiskeyjack and Korlat. The latter mentioned, a human soldier and Andii soletaken face a tragic problem arising from the different length of human and Andii life-span, therefore their mutual admiration and touching devotion resulting from their sexual behavior highlight the romantic aspect of their relationship.

However, there are also very non-traditional strong-willed female characters understanding their sexuality as a tool. Lady Envy, a powerful and beautiful sorceress is a perfect example of a femme fatale, who follows her own goals and does not hesitate to use destructive magic. Interestingly, “while male authors are more likely to depict the witch as a figure of evil, female authors describe the witch as empowered and liberated from oppression.”⁵⁷ This is not the case of Steven Erikson. In the Malazan world, mages, soldiers, deities, ordinary folk and others do not seem to fall into gender stereotypes. There are both, men and women who can be classified as evil, neutral or good.

⁵⁵ Reid, *Women in Science Fiction*, 62.

⁵⁶ Erikson, *Gale*, 382.

⁵⁷ Reid, *Women in Science Fiction*, 41.

Sex often contributes to comic in the cycle, as an ideal example might serve two obese prostitutes who join the army in order to lose weight. They continue practicing their former profession, which results in many elevated and comic scenes in the cycle. Sexuality is a natural part of Erikson's female characters, not something to be hidden as shameful. It offers an insight into their diverse personalities.

As was mentioned before, magic is fundamental for the people in the decalogy and sexual behavior is not an exception. Common contraception like condoms⁵⁸ is mentioned, however, it is magic that secured the strong position of women in the society. Powers of Denul, a healing warren, and other rituals allowed women to avoid injuries, traumas and death during pregnancy and birth, thus allowing them to gain more independence. Homosexuality of both, men and women is nothing shameful in the Malazan world, however, this topic is closely connected to adjunct Tavore, to whom a whole chapter of this thesis is devoted, therefore the theme of homosexuality and lesbianism will be more widely discussed later.

A power of female sexuality and the miracle of birth is a recurrent theme in the novels and it is evident that magic has its place in it:

She had permitted Kilava's ritual ensuring a safe birth. But she had also made it clear that she desired nothing else, that this journey would be her own, and indeed, she was strong enough to make it. Yes, women could be frightening. In their strengths, their capacity to endure⁵⁹

Male characters that witness pregnancy and birth often show respect and awe, in some cultures it is considered a husband's duty to stand by side of his wife while she is in labor:

Does not the father kneel before the mother? In the time of birth? Does he not bow to the strength he himself does not possess? Does he not look into the eyes of the woman he loves, only to see a power strange and terrible –

⁵⁸ Erikson, *Hounds*, 339.

⁵⁹ Erikson, *Dust*, 63.

how it does not even see him, how it looks past – or no, how it looks *within*?
*Does not a man need to be humbled?*⁶⁰

The positive aspects of sexuality, the power and the reproduction, are not the only ones developed in the decalogy. The grim brutal reality of forced prostitution and unwanted pregnancy are also present as an influence shaping some character's personalities and also a tool for creating uncomfortable atmosphere.

⁶⁰ Erikson, *God*, 443.

2. Apsalar

“After what she's been through, she's going to settle for a life dragging nets?”⁶¹

The following chapter will focus partly on the contradictory and traditional means Erikson uses when designing Apsalar's plot-line. Later, the chapter discusses a parental relationship between her and a deity. Lastly, the effect of the narration from different points of view will be discussed, taking Apsalar's romantic interest as the major topic.

2.1 A Character in Literature

“We were never what people could be. We were only what we were.”⁶²

A literary character can be understood in many ways. Originally, According to Aristotle,

Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions.⁶³

This very early approach has varied since Aristotle's times and now there are various theories approaching the issue of a literary character. According do David Lodge and others, “character is only a convenient abstraction from verbal signs.”⁶⁴ Then, following other approaches, “an anthropological, biological or

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Steven Erikson, *Deadhouse Gates: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen* (New York: Tor, 2005), 211.

⁶² Erikson, *God*, 688.

⁶³ Aristotle, “The Poetics of Aristotle,” Project Gutenberg, last modified January 22, 2013, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm>.

⁶⁴ James Phelan, *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1.

psychological theory of persons can also be used in character analysis.”⁶⁵ Todorov “distinguishes two broad categories — plot-centered or apsyhological, and character-centered, or psychological narratives.” The approach, where a protagonist is treated as a real person and thus the analysis of his psychology can be based on real psychological research will be applied in this chapter, mainly in the part dealing with relationships. Apart from these examples there are many others, that vary in details. From the best known scholars studying literary characters, it is most convenient to name also Algirdas Julien Greimas, Seymour Chatman, Charles Crittenden and many others, since this topic is, at present, very wide.

A Character serves various purposes in a literary work. It can be used to enhance the action, to symbolize a certain feature or to emphasize a desired trait. For a part of the following chapter, the structuralist approach of Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell's concept of the monomyth will be used to define Apsalar's development. This character shows interesting twists, but also parallels with these two theories.

Vladimir Propp, after an exhaustive study of the Russian folk fairytale, came up with seven character types, that he claimed to find repeatedly narrative structures. Propp summarized this in his *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) These characters have certain specific functions. The villain is an evil person, who causes the hero to struggle, the helper aids the hero of the story, the donor prepares the hero and provides him with useful objects, the dispatcher sends the hero off for a quest ... The tale itself is, according to Propp, structured from various subsequent actions that start with the hero's leaving home and end with a success of a hero, usually in a form of a wedding, or gaining the throne. The hero must overcome various hardships and missions and slowly changes into his better self.

Joseph Campbell held a similar opinion and formed his theory that claimed that all mythic narratives are basically a version of one vast story. The hero undergoes “a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power,

⁶⁵ Peter Hühn, “Character,” *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, accessed March 19, 2017, <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/character>.

and a life-enhancing return.⁶⁶ He described this in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), where he introduced also his idea of an archetypal hero and his journey. In this journey, the hero, once again, sets out for an adventure, overcomes obstacles and returns as a with mythical gifts. Unlike in Propp's theory, the hero here has more varied options, he may not even return at all.

2.2 Instant heroine

“I wish to return home, Sergeant.”⁶⁷

Apsalar is one of the reappearing characters that can be found in five of the ten novels of the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*. As already suggested in the summary of her plot line (? needs to be discussed), she is a very complex and round character. Her development shows rather unconventional traits on many occasions. Many times, it contradicts a few of the traditional features and stages a hero of a story goes through, as they were stated in the theory of narration by Vladimir Propp or Joseph Campbell. On the other occasions, Apsalar's story can be seen as traditional.

The reader meets the innocent lowborn⁶⁸ child right at the beginning of the first chapter of the first book of the decalogy. This young girl is nameless and leads a simple existence on the shores of the sea. “We need to get one [net] ready for tomorrow. Dadda lost his last one – something in the deep waters took it and a whole catch, too. Ilgrand Lender wants the money he loaned us and we need a catch tomorrow. A good one.”⁶⁹ This simplicity of the small fisher village and life dependent on a small boat and the catch clearly shows a rather naive and inexperienced character. The original name of this girl is never revealed. Only moments before Cotillion seizes her body and mind in the outskirts of this village, he utters a sentence that is significantly more meaningful, than it may seem. “I've

⁶⁶ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 33.

⁶⁷ Erikson, *Gardens*, 422.

⁶⁸ Erikson, *Gardens*, 30.

⁶⁹ Erikson, *Gardens*, 31.

chosen her and I will choose her name as well.”⁷⁰ It is not only a new name with a meaning of a bad omen, what Cotillion chose for his victim. The child who was lost on the road in her home was consumed by the actions of the patron of the assassins. Sorry, despite appearance, cannot be treated as a new character. It is the patron of the assassins who acts. The reader is assured of this, when Sorry's image appears during an oracle. “The blood on her hands is not her own, the crime not its own. The cloth against her eyes is wet.”⁷¹ Only when Cotillion is forced to abandon his mission abruptly and leaves the now young woman, the reader witnesses a birth of a brand new character. Apsalar is an alloy of the memories, motivations and feelings of her possessor and her own personality. The latter was formed and influenced by the involvement of the wax witch, who protected the young vulnerable mind from the horrors Cotillion exposed her to. Once free of the god's will, the young woman finds herself nameless again, because of the shock. However, she definitely does not retain the childish shy characteristics, as when she wet herself from fear the day she was possessed. Being under an influence of a deadly ascendent, she absorbed his ambitious, confident and daring nature, as may be seen on her choice of her name, taking the name of a goddess of theft as her own.

“It's not good to take that kind of name, since she's a goddess. What about Salar?”

Her nose wrinkled. “No, I like Apsalar. Make it Apsalar.”

“But I just said ...”

“That's the name I want,' the girl insisted, her face darkening.”⁷²

Here, at this moment, the character Apsalar is finally realized, at the end of the novel. She finds herself far away from home and with many dangerous skills refined to perfection and ability to speak various languages. From her appearance, it is evident that the possessor subjected the young body to severe training, thus, shaping it according to his needs. The speed⁷³ at which Sorry became able to

⁷⁰ Erikson, *Gardens*, 34.

⁷¹ Erikson, *Gardens*, 85.

⁷² Erikson, *Gardens*, 308.

⁷³ Erikson, *Gardens*, 238.

move and “a lot of rough calluses on that small hand”.⁷⁴ This development is rather contradictory when compared with the traditional schema. The hero of the story is usually introduced as an ordinary person in the known environment and receives a call of an adventure, or is forced to leave his comfortable and safe home for another reason.⁷⁵ He or she gains experience and changes through the story, undergoing a metamorphosis. During this metamorphosis, the character might be “swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died.”⁷⁶ This is not the case with Apsalar. The biggest change and development of her character happened without being aware of the long exhausting process.

The original small girl is definitely gone. Even if not for Cotillion's influence, she, as a human being, has changed. She matured into an adult woman. All this, however, did not happen with her being actively involved in the process. She, as a disguise of a god, spent several years practically unconscious and woke up as someone new. Her skills and new abilities as an assassin are, thus, an instant and unnatural upgrade of the character. It has to be admitted, that she managed to gain a full control of her new abilities gradually, however, the short time after which she reaches a full realization is a significant shortcut in the traditional character development. This is not left without consequences. Apsalar's psychology was affected also in a negative way due to the pressure of the god's will. Her own abilities distress her, even though they save her life multiple times.

Throughout all the remaining four novels, Apsalar is trying to find comfort of a simple life of a fisherwoman, instead of adventure. Her story closes where it began, in the fishing village where she was born. In the traditional schema, the hero is often “purified” in a way, made better and generally prepared to the final climax of the story. In Apsalar's case, the journey is not about achieving and learning. She, being a human who learned, very painfully, what a full power of an ascendent means, avoids the enhancement and progress of her character. The ultimate goal for her is peace and detachment from the dramatic and dangerous turmoil of the wild Malaz world. Often, “the hero comes back from this

⁷⁴ Erikson, *Gardens*, 373.

⁷⁵ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 30.

⁷⁶ Campbell, *Hero*, 83.

mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”⁷⁷ Again, it is not entirely the case here. Apsalar's power cannot be said to be purely negative, or positive, as she herself perceives it as a gift and curse at the same time. Moreover, it is true that she uses her skills to help, many times even save the lives of her companions. But it is not her ultimate goal she follows. She desires peace and quiet, not fame, or recognition. Her abilities are significant, it is even suggested that she may surpass Cotillion in the art of assassination⁷⁸, however, she refused to follow his path. Her story ends with her finding harmony between her skills and her desire for an ordinary life. She is able to live in her village and tend to her garden, reunited with her lover. However, the deadly skills of both serve as a tool that protects their choice. They differ from the rest fishermen, for they are able to defend themselves.

Apsalar's father is an important figure for her. Her bond with her disabled only parent stayed strong even after her forced metamorphosis. Oblivious to his fate, she took up the quest to return back home, where she hoped to find him. During the course of the second novel, she encountered him and, despite the difficulties, she uncovered his identity and they were reunited. This is a reverse of a tradition, where it is a father of a damsel in distress, who sends the hero off to find her and bring her back home. It is Apsalar who faces a challenge of a difficult task⁷⁹ of recognizing her father and alluding a lure of a false supernatural power of Sha'ik. After these trials and happy reunion, it is expected from the characters from folk tales to lead a happy life and the story usually ends. A happy ending is a typical closure for a comedy⁸⁰, however, Apsalar's plot line does not include comic. Apsalar's father dies. Strangely enough, especially for the Malazan fiction world, his death is natural and free of suffering, as he died in his sleep. Here, right after the death of the biological father, another remotely fatherly figure should be considered. Cotillion, having many responsibilities and interests, did not give up such a valuable player in the game and both, indirectly and directly, manipulated Apsalar to pursue the path of the assassin. His paternal feelings towards Apsalar

⁷⁷ Campbell, *Hero*, 28.

⁷⁸ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 714.

⁷⁹ Propp, *Morphology*, 67.

⁸⁰ Jonathan A. Smith, *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2016), 86.

will be discussed later. For now, it can be concluded, that it is again the case, when the father in the traditional story also fulfills the role of the dispatcher. In this case, Cotillion sends the heroine off for a quest, which results in the minor development of the character and her final happy ending.

2.3 Like Father Like Daughter

“Consider this new tact the consequence of difficult lessons.”⁸¹

The dynamic relationship between the patron of the assassins and Apsalar is one of the most interesting ones in the decalogy. The mutual influence of these characters, a deity and a human being, uncovers the striking concept of an ascendent returning to his humanity. Ambitious Dancer, during his mortal life, paid many high prices in order to reach more power, ultimately becoming Cotillion, the assassin of the High House of Shadow. By ascension, he wished to “escape the nightmares of feeling.”⁸² This wish, however, did not come true and he openly admits that he “is haunted by helplessness.”⁸³ The reader is, due to Sorry's actions, lead to believe that Cotillion is an evil character. The author himself confirms that this ascendent “is not a nice man. He was never a nice man.”⁸⁴ Sorry, even though she is a mere young woman, is feared by seasoned soldiers, mages and even other assassins. She was never taken as a rightful member of her squad.

Though the woman had been with the squad for two years, still his men called her a recruit, and they would probably do so until the day they died. There was a meaning there, and Whiskeyjack understood it well. Recruits were not Bridgeburners. The stripping away of that label was an earned thing, a recognition brought by deeds. Sorry was a recruit because the

⁸¹ Erikson, *Chains*, 199.

⁸² Erikson, *Gates*, 501.

⁸³ Erikson, *Gates*, 501.

⁸⁴ Steven Erikson, "Steven Erikson Answers Your House of Chains Questions, Part 2," Tor.com, last modified December 2, 2011, <http://www.tor.com/2011/12/02/steven-erikson-answers-your-house-of-chains-questions-part-2/>.

thought of having her inextricably enfolded within the Bridgeburners burned like a hot knife in the throat of everyone in his squad. And that was something to which the sergeant himself was not immune.⁸⁵

Many characters openly admitted their distress when the possessed girl was near, some even claim they “never believed in pure evil before Sorry showed up.”⁸⁶ Sorry's aloof unnatural behavior and cold blooded murders clearly represent a young powerful god pursuing his goals. Even senseless cruel torture was not a taboo.

A memory returned to Whiskeyjack as he considered Dujek's words. On a brief attachment to the 5th, away from the siege at Pale, in the midst of the Mott Campaign, Sorry had joined them from the new troops arriving at Nathilog. He'd watched her put a knife to three local mercenaries they'd taken prisoner in Greydog – ostensibly to glean information but, he recalled with a shudder, it had been nothing like that. Not an act of expedience. He had stared aghast, horrified, as Sorry set to work on their loins. He remembered meeting Kalam's gaze, and the desperate gesture that sent the black man surging forward, knives bared. Kalam had pushed past Sorry and with three quick motions had laid open the men's throats. And then came the moment that still twisted Whiskeyjack's heart. In their last, frothing words, the mercenaries had *blessed* Kalam. Sorry had merely sheathed her weapon, then walked away.⁸⁷

This behavior, when reflected by Apsalar was another proof of the determination of the god. “*Yet Cotillion – Dancer — was no torturer. He was an assassin,*”⁸⁸ as she later recalls. The brutality was not meaningless, the public demonstrations of immense cruelty were only a tool to influence the army and turn it against the current empress, Laseen, as a punishment for the attempt to murder Dancer and Kellanwed.

⁸⁵ Erikson, *Gardens*, 114.

⁸⁶ Erikson, *Gardens*, 82.

⁸⁷ Erikson, *Gardens*, 113-114.

⁸⁸ Erikson, *Chains*, 325.

The newly acquired ascendant power gave former Dancer, now Cotillion, the abilities that made him able to endanger a large part of the pantheon, not to mention the lesser ascendants and mere mortals. Instead of succumbing to arrogance and ruthlessness common for gods, Cotillion and his companion Shadowthrone found themselves going in an exactly opposite direction. Their initial motivation to seek revenge was put aside and the surprising return to humanity lead to the almost not possible quest to end the world's greatest crisis of that time, the problem with the Crippled God. It is questionable what exactly caused this change and the resulting involvement in the immensely dangerous gambit, but it is highly possible that the possession of a young woman awoken feelings and remorse in the ascendant. Cotillion is often seen as a killer. However, it is Apsalar and few other characters through who the reader can see also the feeling and caring part of the assassin. His cold image is shaken when the reader is allowed to witness a scene where Cotillion effectively comforts a small boy who was brutally tortured and left to die, impaled on numerous spears. The ability to win trust of a child, introducing himself as uncle⁸⁹ and an effort to ease the deep trauma the boy suffers from shows a person who is not blind to the suffering around him. Apsalar is able to draw from his mortal memories. She came to understand that this part of him, the part that he wished to escape, did not vanish after ascendancy.

Indeed. Finally, my last set of borrowed memories – the most confusing of all. An assassin's. Once mortal, then Ascendant. Assassins bow to the altar of efficiency, Icarium, and efficiency is brutal. It sacrifices mortal lives without a second thought, all for whatever is perceived as the greater need. At least it was so in the case of Dancer, who did not kill for coin, but for a cause that was less self-aggrandizing than you might think. In his mind, he was a man who fixed things. He viewed himself as honourable. A man of integrity, was Dancer. But efficiency is a cold-blooded master. And there's a final irony. A part of him, in defiance of his need to seek vengeance upon Laseen, actually ... sympathizes. After all, she bowed to what she perceived

⁸⁹ Erikson, *Gates*, 500.

as a greater need – one of Empire – and chose to sacrifice two men she called friends to answer that need.

It is often the case that Cotillion regrets the cruel theft of the life of a small girl, turning her into someone she never aspired to be. His return to humanity and the ability to feel deep compassion is intensely visible on their interactions. “there had been nothing veiled in the words and silences exchanged between her and the patron god of assassins. A mutual recognition.”⁹⁰ He apparently feels connected with his former victim and once even openly refers to her as his daughter. A daughter who has a right to feel hostile towards him.

Panek broke in. “Uncle, do you have any children?”

He winced, looked away. “A daughter. Of sorts.” He sighed, then smiled wryly. “We had a falling-out, I’m afraid.”

“You must forgive her.”

“Damned upstart!”

“You said we must teach each other, Uncle.”

Cotillion's eyes widened on the lad, then he shook his head. “The forgiveness is the other way around, alas.”⁹¹

It is not only Cotillion's delusion. Also other characters recognize Apsalar as related to Dancer. And it is again the case, that they criticize the path of assassination.

You’re Dancer’s daughter. You must be, although I see no facial similarities – your mother must have been beautiful. It’s in your walk, and how you stand there. You’re his beget, and he was selfish enough to teach you, his own child, the ways of assassination. I can see how that troubles you. It’s there in your eyes. The legacy haunts you – you’re feeling trapped, caged in. There’s already blood on your hands, isn’t there? Is he proud of that? I should’ve drowned him then and there. Had I been drunk, I would have.

⁹⁰ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 36-37.

⁹¹ Erikson, *Gates*, 502.

The paternal feelings towards Apsalar go that far, that Cotillion even attempts to serve as a fatherly figure for her. He gives her advice on accepting her abilities as the key to other life paths. She “can choose others”⁹² mainly thanks to the ability to defend herself. As a much older adult, he serves as an adviser even when it comes to romantic relationships with Crocus, who later, accepted a name Cutter. He tries to guide the inexperienced young woman, explaining the confusing issues to her.

Cutter does not love the assassin within you. It attracts him, no doubt, because power does that... to us all. And you possess power, and that implicitly includes the option of not using it. All very enticing, alluring. He is drawn to emulate what he sees as your hard-won freedom. But his love? Resurrect our shared memories, lass. Of Darujhistan, of our first brush with the thief, Crokus. He saw that we had committed murder, and knew that discovery made his life forfeit in our eyes. Did he love you then? No, that came later, in the hills east of the city – when I no longer possessed you.⁹³

Apsalar herself feels sympathy towards the patron of the assassins. These two characters share intimate moments when they confess their fears and weaknesses to each other. The bond that originated from shared deep insights into their minds provided them with the ability to understand each other. The god sends her on various missions of assassination and spying to help her forget the loss of her lover, but also to aid his own causes. They support each other.

She glanced over at him. “You are so unsuited to be a god, Cotillion, did you know that?”

“Thank you for the vote of confidence.”

She reached up with one hand and brushed the line of his jaw, the gesture close to a caress. She caught the sudden intake of his breath, the slight widening of his eyes, but he would not look at her. Apsalar lowered her hand. “I’m sorry. Another

⁹² Erikson, *Chains*, 542.

⁹³ Erikson, *Chains*, 542.

mistake. It's all I seem to make these days.”

“It's all right,” he replied. “I understand.”

“You do? Oh, of course you do.”

“Complete your mission, and all that is asked of you will end. You will face no more demands from me. Or Shadowthrone.”

There was something in his tone that gave her a slight shiver. Something like ... remorse. “I see. That is good. I'm tired. Of who I am, Cotillion.”

“I know.”

However, there is also a distance between them and there are lines that both of them do not wish to cross. As Apsalar openly states: “I am not interested in becoming his servant. I possess too many of his memories, including his mortal life as Dancer, to be entirely trustworthy.”⁹⁴ Thus, their cooperation remains to be sometimes even reluctant, as their both are trying to keep the safe distance from each other, having enough of the unhealthy, too deep mental connection.

Apsalar understands the unimaginable burden on the shoulders of her creator and necessity that drives him. However, being the same as he is in nature, she also rebels against timidness and obedience. On her journey through the Shadow Realm, she encounters two obviously mischievous ghosts tied to two skeletons. She is well aware of the Shadowthorne's and Cotillion's meticulousness, when it comes to keeping the dangerous creatures of their realm where they are. However, having things her own way, Apsalar answers the call for help and frees the ghosts. She uses her authority of a personal assistant of Cotillion and is able to threaten them and make them obey her for a period of time, even though the ghosts by her side are potentially dangerous, later even revealed to be two dragons. Apsalar even rebels openly against Cotillion's companion, Shadowthrone. She prevents him from taking revenge on his former worshiper, risking her life in an extremely dangerous fight with beasts from the Shadow realm. Using the abilities she inherited from Cotillion, she exposes her creator to a conflict with Shadowthrone. This is again the proof of Cotillion's influence. Just like the patron of the assassins is willing to sacrifice not only his

⁹⁴ Erikson, *Chains*, 533.

own life and freedom, but also use and endanger others for a greater cause, Apsalar acts in the exactly same way.

Interestingly, Cotillion uses the pronoun *we*, when he refers to his time as Sorry. It is never revealed whether he fully absorbed the memories and the feelings of his victim, yet it is apparent that the physical connection left a significant mark on him. In his own words: “I walked in your bones, your flesh, Apsalar. The fisher-girl who became a woman – we stood in each other's shadow.”⁹⁵ She was not the only woman Cotillion had possessed during the course of the novels. It was for purely selfish reason in Apsalar's case. On the other hand, this supreme assassin possessed one of his worshipers, Lostara, in the middle of a battle to aid her, when she desperately wished to defend her loved one. Again, this female character provided a surprising insight for the ascendant and a bittersweet taste of humanity.

She realized then that he was weeping. Felt helpless before it. *What is this about?* “I took your anger, you said.” And yes, she could remember it, the way the power filled her. The skill with the swords was entirely her own, but the swiftness – the profound awareness – that had belonged to him. “I took your anger. Cotillion, what did you take from *me*?”

He seemed to shake his head. “I think I’m done with possessing women.”

“What did you take? You took that love, didn’t you? It drowned you, just as your anger drowned me.”

He sighed. “Always an even exchange.”

“Can a god not love?”

“A god ... forgets.”⁹⁶

Cotillion takes full responsibility for his actions while being present in another body, as follows from the further conversation. His worshiper, on the other hand, is touched by the memories, similarly as Apsalar. Lostara shares also other traits with her, for example understanding of the patron of the assassins, or troubles with love.

⁹⁵ Erikson, *Chains*, 542.

⁹⁶ Erikson, *God*, 155.

He was shaking his head. “You don’t understand. The blood on my hands ...”

“Is now on my hands, too, or have you forgotten that?”

“No. I possessed you ...”

“You think that makes a difference?”⁹⁷

It is also in this conversation, where Cotillion finally reveals his return to humanity. In his effort to end the crisis caused by the alien deity poisoning the world, but preventing other ascendants from tearing the Crippled God to pieces, he seems to be fully reconciled with the suicidal path he decided to follow and possibly “die in the name of love.”⁹⁸

As was mentioned before, Cotillion regrets the cruel treatment he subjected the small fisher girl to. He did not choose to erase his presence from her memory completely, or even kill her. Apparently, he saw it as an advantage for a lonely young woman he was leaving in an unknown land. And, as discussed earlier, he used Apsalar for his own needs. But he also expresses sympathy towards her and tries to be helpful. The very ending in the tenth novel, back in the fishing village where they first met, the story comes full circle. Apsalar and Cutter are reunited and determined to live a quiet peaceful life full of mutual love. As Cotillion and Shadowthrone watch from the distance, the relief that fell over all the four participants is more than evident.

In his wake, in the lengthening shadows, two figures took form. Moments later huge hounds appeared. One bent to sniff at the turnips, and then turned away. The figure with the cane sighed. “Satisfied?”

The other one nodded.

“And you imagine only the best now, don’t you?”

“I see no reason why not.”

Shadowthrone snorted. “You wouldn’t.”

⁹⁷ Erikson, *God*, 156.

⁹⁸ Erikson, *God*, 156.

Cotillion glanced over at him. “Why not, then?”

“Old friend, what is this? Do you still hold to a belief in hope?”

“Do I believe in hope? I do.”

“And faith?”

“And faith. Yes. I believe in faith.”

The moment of tranquillity where the father watches his long tormented daughter finding peace and happiness with a faithful lover seals the redemption they all were seeking. The happy endings of the stories are, according to Campbell, “transcendence of the universal tragedy of man.”⁹⁹ Apsalar was one of the fortunate characters in the decalogy, whose plot-line lead to such a happy ending. Her ending serves as a compensation for the reader for the violent, woeful and frustrating events in the final battle described in the last novel. The peace, love and comfort in this final scene serves as a soothing bitter-sweet conclusion of the massive decalogy.

2.4 Love From Two Perspectives

“I would take him from you, Cotillion. I would prevent you doing to him what you did to me.”¹⁰⁰

Apsalar's personal life and her feelings are one of her key features described in the novels. After her wake up from the possession, she encounters Crocus, a handsome young naive thief. This setting is rather typical and traditional. The male savior comforts the scared and lonely damsel and brings her to safety. The female character in such situation is “forced to cope with a hostile environment without appropriate strength or skills.” Apsalar was very vulnerable in that short time. Once she recovered from the shock and her memories came back, her helplessness gradually disappeared. Her original short weakness caused deep caring feelings in the young romantic thief and he easily assumed the role of a

⁹⁹ Campbell, *Hero*, 26.

¹⁰⁰ Erikson, *Chains*, 542.

companion and guardian.

The high number of narrators and their unreliability creates a very sharp contrast in this love story. The reader is presented with the thoughts of both participants of this relationship and the difference in their views is very distinct. While Apsalar wishes to subdue the assassin in her and the situations when she needs to kill people in self defense do not please her, Crocus sees inspiration in her skill. In his young naivety, he believes in stories and legends, not aware of the aching ugly reality. After the loss of his only relative, his uncle, he is in the similar emotional distress as Apsalar. Even though he is slightly reluctant to follow the path of an assassin, for “murdering killers was still murder”¹⁰¹, he finally decides to do it for Apsalar.

Aye, the Emperor had Dancer, yes? A companion, for a companion was what was needed. Is needed. Now, she has Cutter. Cutter of the Knives, who dances in his chains as if they were weightless threads. Cutter, who, unlike poor Crocus, knows his place, knows his singular task – to guard her back, to match her cold precision in the deadly arts.¹⁰²

“Vows of self-improvement alternate with feelings of unworthiness and moments of expansive self-feeling.”¹⁰³ Crocus misinterprets Apsalar's embraces¹⁰⁴ and views them as gratitude for his service. He attempts to change for her, while Apsalar craves for the innocent boy that would distract her from what she is. She needs mainly love and moral support and she views Crocus's development into Cutter as her fault and the ultimate proof of her being flawed. “There was nothing in her – nothing that she could see – worth the overwhelming gift of love. Nothing in her worthy of him.”¹⁰⁵ They are not able to communicate about this issue and the loss of the family and the feeling of confusion in the dangerous vast alien world make them vulnerable. Not being able to accept Cutter's development as an efficient

¹⁰¹ Erikson, *Chains*, 193.

¹⁰² Erikson, *Chains*, 193.

¹⁰³ Hugo G. Beigel, "Romantic Love," *American Sociological Review* 16, no. 3 (n.d.), 328, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2087605>.

¹⁰⁴ Erikson, *Chains*, 193.

¹⁰⁵ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 36.

assassin, Apsalar leaves him to protect him. She believed her influence was corrupting him and sacrificed her own happiness in order to save his life. After Apsalar leaves Cutter without a word, she finds herself heartbroken. By doing this, she willingly “ostracized from society”¹⁰⁶ and her plot-line changes from reluctantly positive into tragedy. Apsalar's and Cutter's story is openly addressing the issues of communication and expectations of the relationships in real life. The assassin background serves as a highlight of the problem.

Cotillion, using Apsalar for his own goals and trying to ease her suffering at the same time, assigns her a task “of a nature suited to his aspect, and to her particular talents.”¹⁰⁷ The long journey and assassinations of a list of people who were far from innocent was, in the god's eyes, supposed to help Apsalar and move on. However, one of Apsalar's parts still belongs to a young sensitive woman and the loneliness of the journey deepen her depression. Cotillion's visits and his news about Cutter's traveling with other women provide “more than sufficient fuel to feed her self-pity.”¹⁰⁸ Even after the encounter of the member of her old squad, people who knew her as Apsalar but also remember her as Sorry, she does not find comfort and soothing company. Gradually, she succumbs deeper and deeper into frustration, rejecting clumsy attempts of her former colleagues. Her tragedy lies in her own self-punishing and self-denial. Even after saving a life of one of them, who was threatened by Shadowthrone, she rejects a bonding moment. Quick Ben, a former acolyte of the Shadow, was well aware of Shadowthrone's vindictiveness for his old, yet unforgivable betrayal. Apsalar risked her own life when she saved him, yet Quick Ben's gratefulness, insight and understanding cannot reach to her.

Yet he held back, until Apsalar walked past him, then he reached out and brushed her sleeved arm.

She looked over.

Quick Ben hesitated, then nodded and said, “I know it was you, Apsalar. Thank you.”

“Wizard,” she said, “I have no idea what you are talking about.”

¹⁰⁶ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2007), 86.

¹⁰⁷ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 36.

¹⁰⁸ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 37.

He let her go. *No, what she wants ain't for us to give. She wants to die.*¹⁰⁹

“What love does, however, is to satisfy man's most urgent psychological needs, those produced by social isolation, by lack of any conceptual hold on the world in which he lives, and by lack of work satisfaction.”¹¹⁰ Apsalar, hungry for love and fearing it at the same time, is not able to establish close relationships. This disgust with her own life continues to haunt her and she suffers even more after Cotillion acknowledges Cutter's death, after he, by accident, loses connection with him and believes in his unfortunate end. Apsalar's torment is obvious and some other characters even realize the connection between her and the god who “comes to break her heart. Again and again.”¹¹¹ Her former lover's supposed death subdues the woman part in Apsalar and it is an important point for the course of the whole novel. The feminine part of Apsalar ceases to be important in this moment and her character changes back into an efficient assassin. Again, the dynamics between her and Cotillion surface one more time. She repeats the same patterns Dancer followed during his mortal life, killing to *fix things*. This apparent repetition serves as another reminder for the reader about the rise and fall of humanity. And the relativity of what it is. In order to save the lives of the people Apsalar reluctantly considered friends, and to protect the cause of adjunct Tavore, she mercilessly killed three hundred dangerous assassins. Tavore's protection was the final task from Cotillion. However, such efficient bloodshed was surprising even for the Shadowthrone, who watched and declared Apsalar free.¹¹²

The question of right and wrong arises multiple times in Apsalar's and Cotillion's plot lines and they are answered in the same manner. Humanity, compassion and faithfulness are the main themes the reader is confronted with through these two characters. Once again, Apsalar's inner conflicts she is trying to resolve and show Erikson's denial of the simple black and white world divided between good and evil. The intimacy of deep love and Apsalar's self-sacrifice in order to protect her lover are in a very sharp contrast with the cold murders.

¹⁰⁹ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 476.

¹¹⁰ Beigel, “Love”, 332.

¹¹¹ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 578.

¹¹² Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 714.

Apsalar often expresses her desire to get “away, from everything.”¹¹³ However, her feelings towards her victims are almost never openly revealed. She is absorbed in her own pondering on her love, but does not give the dead bodies any significant thought that could be found in the text. With only one occasion, when she purposely taunted a murdered of her friend and killed him in an unusually painful way.¹¹⁴ That is, again, an expression of her personal feelings of justice and protection of people she cares for. According to Phelan and Rabinowitz, the moral view of the real world of the reader, and the morals he or she is willing to accept in the story often differ. Many socially unacceptable things, murder included, are taken as fully justified once artificially created characters in a literary world commit them. It is apparent from the countless instances where a hero kills the main villain, together with the number of his servants and there is not even a trace of condemnation. The character is celebrated for the destruction.

It was only hinted in the novel, that it was again Cotillion who brought the news about Cutter being alive and well. Apsalar is seen as utterly broken after the massive bloodshed she caused and her character does not appear in the three following books. Only when she is reunited with Cutter, who matured and finally understood her, she finds happiness and redemption.

¹¹³ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 713.

¹¹⁴ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 713.

3. Hetan

““No glory to be found in crushing a crushed people,” Hetan observed, tasting the bitterness of her own words.

“Nor a people terrorized by one of their own.””¹¹⁵

This chapter will deal with a character of a barbaric nature and her freedom, represented by her sexual behavior and skills typical for barbarians aligned with nature. The second part of the chapter presents the character's personality in relation with a concept of a Noble Savage.

1.3 Feminism and Noble Savage

“What has been a request is now a demand.”¹¹⁶

The third chapter will focus on a character, whose analysis is best to be based on the key issue of feminism, that is, equality among men and women, and the literary concept of a Noble Savage.

Feminism, “a theory and/or movement concerned with advancing the position of women through such means as achievement of political, legal, or economic rights equal to those granted men”¹¹⁷ is nowadays elaborated in various directions, covering many fields. The political and legal rights were in the past granted to women via the “the vote, the attainment of legal control over property and person, and entry into male-dominated professions and institutional hierarchies.”¹¹⁸ The economical side was a struggle for women for centuries, while they fought to free themselves from “control of husbands and fathers but also from socially imposed roles and from separate spheres.” This struggle for equality

¹¹⁵

Erikson, *Dust*, 117.

¹¹⁶ Erikson, *Memories*, 263.

¹¹⁷ Karen Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 123, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174664>.

¹¹⁸ Offen, “Defining Feminism,” 123.

is an ongoing and continuous process, that is reflected in media, multicultural movements, all spheres of art, and feminism is even a part of the agenda of political parties.

The solid ground for women, the formulation of the basic ideas and ideologies, the assertion and protection of their rights can be traced back to the radical feminism.¹¹⁹ The feminist agenda registered many victories, mainly in Europe and America. These can be clearly seen in the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*. The decalogy follows and grants many female characters all the above mentioned rights, but also often addresses the problematic issues that remain to be solved.

As for the literature as such, the feminist movement enforced the female place in the society via presenting the issues that belong to the female domain and often criticizes the stereotypical images of a woman that can “vary, but they vary in response to different masculine needs. The flattering frequency with which women appear in literature is ultimately deluding: they appear not as they are, certainly not as they would define themselves.”¹²⁰ The female point of view in literature remains to be a topic of discussion. Elaine Showalter, in her *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) presents three main waves of female literature, that is the feminine, the feminist and, ultimately, the female phase of the development. The feminine phase includes many female authors, who were criticized in the past for copying the male style when writing about women, basically changing nothing on the situation. The other phase, the feminist one, is characterized as a very critical one towards the plight of the women. Finally, the female phase is supposed to introduce a balanced, authentic and valid female point of view, free of radicalism. Steven Erikson himself is know defender of the female rights, however, he clearly separates his work from the female domain as it was characterized. He, as a man, admits his male point of view and claims that the female psyche is “not for us [men] to know.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ellen Willis, “Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism,” *Social Text*, no. 9/10 (1984): 92, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/466537.pdf>.

¹²⁰ Cynthia G. Wolf, “A Mirror for Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature,” *The Massachusetts Review* 13, no. 1/2 (1972): 207, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25088222>.

¹²¹ Steven Erikson, “Ask Steven Erikson Your Crippled God Questions!,” Tor.com, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.tor.com/2014/11/05/steven-erikson-the-crippled-god-q-and-a/>.

The nowadays often glorified term, the Noble Savage, presents “free and wild being who draws directly from nature virtues which raise doubts as to the value of civilization,”¹²² simply, a human being uncorrupted by civilization, living in and drawing wisdom from nature. John Dryden, the main figure of the Restoration literature, is generally considered to be the father of the term and the introduction of the myth,¹²³ followed by many contemporaries. The term itself is rather oxymoronic, blending together the negative meaning of savage and the positive one of noble. The myth is applied widely in the literature, often concerning Indians and other people living in primitive conditions. As a setting, various contrasts between the civilization and nature are used, such as clashes in the American frontiers, known from the works of J. F. Cooper, or from the African colonies, as in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688).

Sometimes, the simple and pure powers of nature were exaggerated even that far, that the white man pursuing violent justice according to cruel civilized laws was contradicted by the Noble Savages and their “gentle rehabilitation,”¹²⁴ which proved to be a better solution, healing the subject from the corrupted ways instead of a death sentence. The differences between the white people and the savages of the wild were usually demonstrated on the physical superiority, toughness and health of the latter, but also the means of expression were compared. While the civilized white people used writing, the noble savages were very eloquent.¹²⁵ The Noble Savage has its place in numerous genres of literature, including sci-fi and fantasy, even though the original ideal is often customized, as will be shown in this chapter.

¹²² Lewis O. Saum, “The Fur Trader and the Noble Savage,” *American Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1963): 554, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2710973.pdf>.

¹²³ Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (London: University of California Press, 2001), 38.

¹²⁴ Saum, “Fur Trade”, 568.

¹²⁵ Edna C. Sorber, “The Noble Eloquent Savage,” *Ethnohistory* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1972): 229, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/480974>.

2.3 From a Free Predator to a Victim

“And perhaps that is the final, most devastating truth.”¹²⁶

Hetan is one of the few characters in the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, whose power lies in her free sexuality and dominance. She symbolizes the opposite of the traditional sexual roles in literature that very often “has not been kind to women, subject to oppression on the basis of gender and sexuality for centuries and largely ignored by the history books except as the wives and mothers of great men.”¹²⁷ Hetan is introduced as a fierce warrior and authoritative leader from the first moment she appears in the story. Being sent on an exploring mission to a highly unsafe area where mortally dangerous beasts, revealed as undead K'Chain Che Malle, roam the surrounding, she maintains firm discipline and takes full responsibility for her two “miserable brothers,”¹²⁸ as she calls them. Hetan proves to be a very efficient warrior early after her appearance in the fight with the K'Chain Che Malle hunters K'ell. Being born into a wild ferocious primitive tribe of Barghast people, her perspective on life seems to be rather simple and sharp-edged. She demonstrates this with her far from flowery speech, when she presents her interests that include “killing and riding men and little else.”¹²⁹

Her main interests are clear from the previous quote and illustrate the energetic and fiery culture of the Barghast tribes, for “to mourn is to feel a flower's slow death, hill bear. To bed a man is to recall the flower's bright glory”¹³⁰. This extreme understanding of life and death, the impulsive acts of body love and merciless passionate destruction of enemies are both fully manifested in the character of Hetan. She is one of the most outstanding characters who lead such life in the decalogy. Free sexuality and fight are practiced also by other female characters, for example Stonny Menackis, or many female soldiers of the Malazan army.

¹²⁶ Erikson, *Memories*, 334.

¹²⁷ Reid, *Women in Science Fiction*, 69.

¹²⁸ Erikson, *Memories*, 163.

¹²⁹ Erikson, *Memories*, 163.

¹³⁰ Erikson, *Memories*, 260.

In *Memories of Ice* (2001) Hetan, is presented to a reader as a female version of a male adventurer, resembling the archetype presented by Conan the Barbarian, or other heroes of sword and sorcery sub-genre. This kind of “fiction overlaps heroic fantasy considerably but is differentiated by its unashamed emphasis on action/adventure elements and by its generous hospitality to picaresque elements.”¹³¹ Hetan's story arc revolves around her mission to find and retrieve the religious artifacts that would return the old forgotten spirits to her people, heroically fighting monsters, mourning the dead companions and encountering other characters. As mentioned before, this unrestrained and strong-willed character may be understood as an example of a feminist mirror image of a typical male fantasy fighter.

The key issue of feminism, that is, to implement the equal rights and opportunities that are open to men, also to women can be fully applied here, even though many feminist would condemn her freedom. Hetan indeed uses all the available opportunities there are for her in her fictional world, many of them being considered as belonging to the male domain. In the peaceful moments of the plot, she clearly enjoys socializing with other women and men and the consequent “gossip.”¹³² She is hospitable, sharing food and drink with her companions and engaging them into carefree conversation. However, her straight and dominant nature forms also a less innocent part of her personality. Some of her actions can be viewed as an open sexual harassment, even on the verge of rape threats. Many men she takes as lovers are slightly put off by her direct approach, but willingly accept her demand for sex.

That grease had been something of a challenge the night just past, Gruntle reflected, but he'd managed none the less, sporting a formidable collection of bruises, scratches and bites as proof. Hetan had been ... energetic¹³³

There are multiple scenes where she impatiently takes a man she barely knows and pulls him “out into the darkness”¹³⁴ to have sex with him, not caring about the

¹³¹ Stableford, *Dictionary*, 393-394.

¹³² Erikson, *Memories*, 535.

¹³³ Erikson, *Memories*, 165.

¹³⁴ Erikson, *Memories*, 171.

opinion of the others. She clearly out-stands among the other female characters, who are disgusted with the “gross grunting and groaning from that hump of grasses over there”¹³⁵, yet Hetan also works as an element of inspiration that pushes these female characters into similar freedom, when they copy her. This self-confident and dominant behavior very typical for male adventurous characters results in an interesting clash in the traditional female and male roles.

Itkovian, one of the leaders of a religious military order of Fener, the Boar of War, caught Hetan's attention and his holy vow of celibacy even deepened her attraction. In her own bold style, she repeatedly expressed her carnal desires towards the soldier possessing a sacred title of a Shield Anvil:

“You talk too much, wolf.”

Itkovian fell silent, his eyes narrowing.

“Your mouth will be too busy when I bed you,” she continued. “I will insist.”

The Shield Anvil swung to face Brukhalian and Karnadas as they arrived. He saluted.

“There's some colour in your face, sir,” the Destriant observed. “Which was not the case when you returned from the walls.”

Hetan barked a laugh. “He is about to lie with a woman for the first time.”

Karnadas raised his brows at Itkovian. “What of your vows, Shield Anvil?”

“My vows remain,” the soldier grated. “The Barghast is mistaken.”¹³⁶

Itkovian, on the other hand, repeatedly rejected her proposals, being faithful to his god. It is true that he felt a certain level of attraction and he acknowledged that there was “a brutal beauty to this woman.”¹³⁷ He also questioned the principles of his faith, including the celibacy vow.

And perhaps that is the final, most devastating truth. The gods care nothing for ascetic impositions on mortal behaviour. Care nothing for rules of

¹³⁵ Erikson, *Memories*, 171.

¹³⁶ Erikson, *Memories*, 260.

¹³⁷ Erikson, *Memories*, 259.

conduct, for the twisted morals of temple priests and monks. Perhaps indeed they laugh at the chains we wrap around ourselves. Our endless, insatiable need to find flaws within the demands of life. Or perhaps they do not laugh, but rage at us. Perhaps our denial of life's celebration is our greatest insult to those whom we worship and serve.¹³⁸

However, despite the obvious mutual attraction, Itkovian never gives an open consent to physical engagement. Hetan seems to be unable to accept the notorious no means no. She obviously sees Itkovian's reluctance as an amusing invitation: "A game worth playing! Go on, then, dear rabbit! My elusive quarry, ha!"¹³⁹ She used even Shiel Anvil's own faith to make him uncertain, claiming that he "mocks his god"¹⁴⁰ by denying himself the sensual pleasures. This is an interesting turn in the feminist theory, that claims exactly the same opportunities for men and women alike. Hetan, not accepting the evident refusal, exerts pressure on her victim, copying exactly the same strategies that many feminists find unacceptable on men. Her character mirrors the "sexual terror in the ongoing construction and maintenance of male supremacy."¹⁴¹ This representation of a female character is not shown as a more noble, or mature than the male ones. Hetan represents the female power that is not better or worse when compared to the male one, she simply embraces the personal power as a whole, flaws included. It is also another woman, a new female leader of Grey Swords, that obviously did not realize Hetan's efforts could be classified as rape threats. After the murder of Itkovian's colleagues in the leading position and his abandoning of the Shield Anvil position, his new superior does not defend him, as she would surely do in a case a man was chasing a woman in this manner. The obvious double standards are rather unsettling, as the sexual harassment aimed on a man is openly ridiculed and the affected person is not supported in any way.

The two marines shot to their feet, grinning.

¹³⁸ Erikson, *Memories*, 334.

¹³⁹ Erikson, *Memories*, 334.

¹⁴⁰ Erikson, *Memories*, 260.

¹⁴¹ Dana Alice Heller, *Cross-Purposes: Lesbians, Feminists, and the Limits of Alliance* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1997), 141.

“And I would gossip!” Hetan shouted. “Shield Anvil! Itkovian holds to vows no longer, true? I can bed him.”

“If you can catch him,” the Grey Sword replied, one brow arching.

“If he had fifty legs I could still catch him!”¹⁴²

As it is clear from the previously stated, Hetan, literary, does not waste time with romantic courting. Especially the romantic style of the medieval courtly love requiring aloofness and withholding of affection from the woman and active wooing from the man¹⁴³ is not possible to connect with her impulsive character. All men she encounters and, mildly said, expresses interest in, complain about being hurt and exhausted, however, they also admit the “secret desires for self-destruction at hands of delicious woman.” This attraction towards Hetan proved to be irresistible even for her husband, Imass Onos T'oolan. Even though Hetan was already pregnant with twins, the result of her careless free sexuality, Onos obviously accepted her as his partner the first moment he saw her. In the novels, the beginning of their relationship is described very scarcely, fitting Hetan's already presented “courting technique” perfectly.

Hetan strode closer, offering a wink to the dark-haired woman, then settling her eyes once more on the man called Onos Toolan. “I see more than you imagine,” she said in a low voice. The young warrior cocked his head. “You do?”

“Aye, and what I see tells me you've not bedded a woman in a long time.”

The man's eyes widened—oh, such lovely eyes, a lover's eyes—“Indeed,” he said, his smile broadening. Oh yes, my lover's eyes...¹⁴⁴

Despite the briefness, an important detail needs to be pointed out here. It was the eyes Hetan noticed, not the rest of Onos's body. That is not common for her and her thoughts show the much deeper bond than a mere sexual interest. These are

¹⁴² Erikson, *Memories*, 535.

¹⁴³ E. J. Burns, “Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition,” *Signs* 27, no. 1 (2001): 23-24.

¹⁴⁴ Erikson, *Memories*, 732.

also the very last lines before the epilogue of *Memories of Ice*, the third novel in the decalogy. Hetan, the vigorous, indomitable young woman is not mentioned until novels nine and ten.

In *Dust of Dreams* (2009) and *Crippled God* (2011), the reader is exposed to a very new Hetan, who is significantly changed. Being a caring mother of two human twin sisters and one half-human and half-imass boy, and faithful wife of the Barghast clans leader, she obviously abandoned the careless behavior and her other qualities became more apparent. Supporting Onos in his very hard task of holding the unstable and rebellious Barghast clans under control, and taking care of three energetic children consumes her energy and Hetan suddenly appears as a rather typical housewife. This image differs greatly from her portrayal in the third novel. Her most striking attribute, the violent and dominant sexuality, is what is cruelly negated and turned against her in the most tragic way. After a violent death of her husband and the consequent turmoil amongst the clans, Hetan is hobbled, that is, crippled and forced to become a sexual object, “her feet chopped and can refuse no man or woman or, indeed, camp dog.”¹⁴⁵ All this happens very quickly and Hetan is suddenly, in a flick of a moment left as a widow and hobbled right in that night. She switches into another stage abruptly, not given a chance to grieve her loss. After the cutting off of her toes and the numerous public rapes, believing her husband and all three children to be murdered, she succumbed to a numb broken state. Her desperate thoughts reflect the self-blaming attitudes of the victims of sexual abuse.

Husband, I have betrayed you! In my misery, in my pathetic self-pity—I knew, I knew this was coming, how could it not? My children—I have abandoned them. They killed them, husband. They killed our children!

“Lift up to meet me, whore.”

Krin, I used to laugh at your hunger for me, sick as it was. Does my father’s ghost wait for you, Krin? Does he witness this, and what you demand of me? Does he understand my shame?

Krin now punishes me. He is only the first, but no matter how many there

¹⁴⁵ Erikson, *Memories*, 362.

are, the punishment will never be enough. Now . . . now I understand the mind of a hobbled woman. I understand.

And she lifted up to meet him.¹⁴⁶

The very explicit and exhaustive description of this brutal act, featuring the insights of multiple characters, is rather uncommon for the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*. The sexual violence is usually mentioned briefly, without details, serving only as the device for plot development. Rapes do happen numerous times in the decalogy and Hetan's fate stands as one of the most significant ones. She, like other women, is broken by this act, punished for her being better than the rapists. As more examples, it is convenient to mention for example a very bright scholar, Janath Anar, who was repeatedly raped and tortured by a much less intelligent and very brutish member of a political party, which could be very well compared to Spanish inquisition, or the lunatic devotees of French Revolution. Hetan's unmeasurable suffering is foregrounded for a purpose. Her fate may be seen as an allegory on the destruction of a powerful woman by the male patriarchal system. The Barghast women welcome the crippling due to two major reasons.

Firstly, it is evident that the average ungifted majority envied Hetan her talent and enjoyed her humiliation. She was not only a skilled and influential woman on a leading position, she was also able to enjoy the sexual freedom they were not allowed to. The first men to rape her did not dare to even approach her without her hands being tied, as they clearly sensed the danger, for “Hetan was a warrior, after all.”¹⁴⁷ The hobbling was the act of her utter destruction, both, as a woman and as a fighter.

Secondly, the tradition of hobbling uncovered the hidden aggressive side of the Barghast tribes, where the men often behave abusively towards their wives. In fact, Hetan, while engaging random men into sex, might have copied this violent behavior in order to prove her superiority. The ordinary tribe women thus see the hobbled ones as the means of their own relief.

She felt a flush of anger, like knuckles rapping up her spine. “Answer me

¹⁴⁶ Erikson, *Memories*, 390-391.

¹⁴⁷ Erikson, *Memories*, 389.

this, Bakal”—and she met his wide eyes unflinchingly—“how many times was your touch truly tender? Upon your wife? Tell me, how often did you laugh with your friends when you saw a woman emerge from her home with blood crusting her lip, a welt beneath an eye? 'Oh, the wild wolf rutted last night!' And then you grin and you laugh—do you think we do not hear? Do you think we do not see? Hobble her! Take her, all of you! And, for as long as she lifts to you, *you leave us alone!*”¹⁴⁸

The tradition deeply rooted in the clan's culture, that is, to sacrifice one of the women to keep the others safe from abuse clearly reflects the lack of freedom women had in this society. Hetan, punished for her bravery and independence, symbolizes the fight of the women for freedom and equality. Her horrible fate clearly points out to the dangers women may encounter in any patriarchal society, be it a fictional or a real one.

Partly, it was also motherhood and marriage, that played a role in Hetan's fall. In the third novel, where she was responsible mainly for herself, she was able to react extremely quickly to danger and survive victoriously mortally dangerous fights.. By “accepting the private sphere”¹⁴⁹ of being a mother and a wife, her alertness and readiness to face critical situations faded, what resulted in her inability to defend herself against a couple of simple women “too fat to fight.”¹⁵⁰

It may seem that the very brutal and tragic deaths of Onos and Hetan are the end, however, their romance has a happy ending after all. They are among the few exceptionally fortunate characters who were allowed to live on, due to resurrection. Steven Erikson himself acknowledged that he “saved Hetan because she, Toc, Tool, and all of you deserved it.”¹⁵¹ As will be shown in the following chapter of the thesis, Erikson is very keen towards the idea of gender equality and thus, his last addressing to the, you, to the readers, is the most important one. Hetan's sudden appearance in the very end of *Crippled God* is not only a return of a beloved character. It can be also understood as a message to the oppressed women. Even in the most cruel environment, with all hope lost, the fight for

¹⁴⁸ Erikson, *Dust*, 445.

¹⁴⁹ Wolf, “Mirror for Men,” 206.

¹⁵⁰ Erikson, *Dust*, 389.

¹⁵¹ Erikson, “Ask Steven.”

equality should never be seen as pointless.

He rose, the girls reaching up to take his arms, the boy clinging to one shin. And then he moved forward, taking them all with him. When the boy complained, Storii picked him up in her arms. But Onos Toolan walked on, his steps coming faster and faster.

It was not possible. It was—

And then once more he was running.

She must have heard his approach, for she looked up and then over, and sat watching him rushing towards her.

He almost fell against her, his arms wrapping tight round her, lifting her with his embrace.

Hetan gasped. “Husband! I have missed you. I – I don’t know where I am. I don’t know what has happened ...”

“Nothing has happened,” he whispered, as the children screamed behind them.

“Onos – my toes ...”

“What?”

“I have someone else’s toes, husband, I swear it—”

The children collided with them.

In the distance ahead, on a faint rise of land, Onos Toolan saw a figure seated on a horse. The darkness was taking the vision – dissolving it before his eyes. And then he saw it raise one hand.

Straightening, Onos Toolan did the same. *I see you, my brother.*

I see you.

When at last the light left the rise of land, the vision faded from his eyes.

3.3 The Noble Savage Amongst Savages.

“You are fools! You, your father! Your clans! All fools!”¹⁵²

¹⁵² Erikson, *Memories*, 275.

As stated before, there is a very clear difference between the portrayal of Hetan in the third novel and the ninth and the tenth one. This distinction, however, can be applied to the whole Barghast society as well. In the *Memories of Ice*, Hetan is part of the fraction of the Barghast characters who are introduced to the reader in a greater depth. The barbaric ways of the clans serve as a background for Hetan, her brother Cafal and their father Humberaull Taur. These three fit into their clans with their appearance. “White paint had been smeared on their faces, giving them a skull-like appearance. Braids stained with red ochre hung down to their shoulders, knotted with bone fetishes.”¹⁵³ They also wore the traditional “hauberks of holed coins – the currency ranging from copper to silver and no doubt from some looted hoard, as most of them looked ancient and unfamiliar.”¹⁵⁴

However, they differ greatly from the common Barghasts in their intelligence. These three present the Malazan version of a Noble Savage, a man aligned with nature, uncorrupted by civilization. Cafal and Hetan, “his female counterpart,”¹⁵⁵ are both connected with the spiritual world, wielding the magical powers of the shouldermen, the shamans, of the Barghasts. This spiritual power grants them the access to physical and also mental power. In *Dust of Dreams* and *Crippled God*, the other Barghast characters who are brought to the fore are clearly less intelligent, less powerful and much more envious and cantankerous. With the loss of the leading characters from *Memories of Ice*, the Barghast clans cause their own destruction by their nonsensical vengefulness and extreme brutality.

Hetan herself was described as “once a great warrior. She was once proud, her wit sharp as a thorn, ever quick to laugh but never with cruelty.”¹⁵⁶ The picture of the Noble Savages the reader was exposed to in the third novel is completely shattered and the horror of the pure savageness creates the very opposite view on the whole Barghast society. With the nobility being lost, the Barghasts represent “the bestial shadow of humanity.”¹⁵⁷

Even though mainly Hetan could be seen as frivolous and her own kin

¹⁵³ Erikson, *Memories*, 162.

¹⁵⁴ Erikson, *Memories*, 162.

¹⁵⁵ Erikson, *Memories*, 333.

¹⁵⁶ Erikson, *Dust*, 446.

¹⁵⁷ Erikson, *Memories*, 441.

often saw her that way. The more restricted women in the Barghast society even accused her of “rut with a dog if it knew how to kiss.”¹⁵⁸ However, these remarks can be judged as very hypocritical, as it is often the case the Barghasts are seen enjoying sex with strangers. Hetan, when talking about her preferences, uncovers also an interesting trait of hers, that is, being attracted to intelligence. In her own words, “clever heats the blood all on its own.”¹⁵⁹ Being able to value also sharp mind instead of focusing on the physical form shows Hetan's own wit. During the course of the novels, she proves herself to be intelligent and clever, thus being equal to her numerous lovers, the bright thinkers included. Even though she lacks experience with the progressed civilization, she balances this with her knowledge of nature and understanding of animals. She is able to scold and correct one of the brightest men in the whole decalogy, Kruppe, the head of a vast spy net, when she explains the psychology of his rebellious mount to him.

Now, stop clenching that mule with your knees – the beast hates it. Settle in that saddle as if it was a horse, for it believes itself to be so. It notes how everyone else rides, notes how the horses carry their charges. Its eyes never rest – have you not noticed? This is the most alert beast this world has ever seen, and don't ask me why.¹⁶⁰

Kruppe, a pampered, fat and spoiled man of the city, the peak of civilization, contrasts Hetan most sharply in *Memories of Ice*. They are true opposite, one representing the urban life with all the subtle intrigues and espionage, the other the raw natural world.

Intelligence and responsibility on the battlefield does not serve only Hetan herself. She, together with her brother and father, are the key to survival of the wild and hard to control Barghast clans. She fully supports her father in his efforts to keep the clan alliance not only verbally, she directly leads the dangerous mission to uncover the sacred artifacts, the “bones of the Founding Families.”¹⁶¹ This act allowed the Barghasts to find and wake their old gods, as well as a return

¹⁵⁸ Erikson, *Dust*, 389.

¹⁵⁹ Erikson, *Memories*, 535.

¹⁶⁰ Erikson, *Memories*, 593.

¹⁶¹ Erikson, *Memories*, 265.

to the advanced sailing technology and weaponry of their ancestors, which was lost during the course of the centuries. Thus, it is the woman who takes an active part in the return of the lost knowledge and skills to her people. This can be roughly compared to the myth of Prometheus, thanks to whom “mankind receives not only the physical fire in the fennel stalk, but also the subtler fire of reason and wisdom.”¹⁶² The Taur family, with a great contribution of Hetan, brought the wonder of technology to her people, as well as a soothing assurance of religion. However, as well as in Prometheus's case, these gifts proved to be destructive for Hetan and her relatives. Consequently to the reinvention of ships, her father tragically drowned, leaving the fragile alliance on Hetan's and Onos's shoulders. Furthermore, the Barghast gods were young and inexperienced, as the shamans clearly sensed. “They are stubborn! They lack all sophistication!”¹⁶³ Ultimately, the insecurity and pride of the spirits combined, directly caused the destruction of Onos, Cafal and Hetan. The deities did not respect the Imass as one of them and fueled the fury of Barghasts against him and his wife.

¹⁶² Olga Raggio, “The Myth of Prometheus: Its Survival and Metamorphoses up to the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21, no. 1/2 (1958): 45, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/750486.pdf>.

¹⁶³ Erikson, *Dust*, 123.

4. Tavore

“She’s a woman, and that alone makes her the most terrifying force in all the realms.”¹⁶⁴

This chapter, discusses mainly the role of an unreliable narrator and its consequent effects on the understanding, or lack of understanding of the character and its motivations. Later, the chapter is devoted to an analysis of a romantic homosexual love and the questionable representation of an ideal woman.

1.4 Homosexuality and Feminism

“Women who take women for lovers – the only crime is the loss to men, and so it has always been.”¹⁶⁵

Homosexuality remains to be a problematic issue even in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The religious protests against the equal right of LGBT communities and various actions, even referendums, as in Slovakia in 2015, aimed to suppress the outspoken part of these communities call for an equal effort to show homosexual people as a full-fledged part of the modern and tolerant society. The entrance of homosexuality in literature, mainly the female one which is the concern of this chapter, was one of the steps of the female emancipation in art, where the female characters abandoned the traditional roles.

The rescue motif was modified in later stories by Isaac Asimov, Ben Bova, Frank Herbert, and Orson Scott Card to include punishments for women who stepped out of their proper roles, such as the wives in Bova’s recent Asteroid Wars series (the first published in 2001) who are focal points for possessive anger and bargaining on the part of males, to the point where they are either killed, sometimes in extremely painful scenarios, or shunted

¹⁶⁴ Erikson, *God*, 499.

¹⁶⁵ Erikson, *Chains*, 239.

from one abusive relationship to another. The concept of female agency was as alien to the majority of 1950s-generation writers fostered by Campbell as was the idea that people could be happily homosexual.¹⁶⁶

Today's fantasy and science-fiction scene is extremely diverse and features all kinds of characters of various races, nations and multiple number of various cultures.

SF/F worlds offer unique environments in which to explore sexual identities that could exist outside the range of real-world scientific or cultural possibility. In some cases, genre works simply place the sexual identities that exist in our culture into an alternative history, such as worlds where homosexuality comprises the majority of the population and heterosexuality the minority. Other works, however, go beyond simply reimagining our own culture and its sexual modalities to speculate what form as-yet-unrealized sexual identities might take.¹⁶⁷

Many authors present their characters with different orientation as rounded and very complex persons, exploring the many psychological and social issues. From the typical Amazon-like stereotypes of female warriors¹⁶⁸ to witches in vampire worlds, as in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997) series, and also ordinary women.

The feminist theory and lesbianism often overlaps, the agenda of LGBT movement, as well as the many racial issues that also feature women abuse. All the mentioned share many common goals, mainly equality in society and securing of the equal rights.¹⁶⁹

Throughout history, there were lesbian authors daring to write about love between women, one of the most famous being Sappho, the poet from Ancient Greece, who linked her feminine poetry with her contemporary male poets.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Reid, *Women*, 174.

¹⁶⁷ Reid, *Women*, 222.

¹⁶⁸ Reid, *Women*, 8.

¹⁶⁹ Heller, *Cross-Purposes*, 79.

¹⁷⁰ Ellen Greene, "Apostrophe and Women's Erotics in the Poetry of Sappho,"

Even though there were many capable women writers like Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf and others, advocating the female issues of many sorts in the history, the literature was long lacking a singular homosexual female voice able to grasp lesbianism as a complex topic. “In the 1970s, a generation of lesbian feminist literary critics came of age”¹⁷¹ and the era of the female and homosexual authors began. It was needed “to develop a lesbian canon, and then to establish a lesbian critical perspective,”¹⁷² from which a solid ground for the writers could be established.

The exploration of the female place in the world and in the importance of the female issues became important with the rise of the power of women and persecuted minorities which ultimately lead to the current state of abundance of works dealing with all possible kinds of matters that the authors wished to advocate, or simply introduce to the wide public.

2.4 Unreliable Narrator

“Silent now, she gave nothing to the sky, and in that nothing, there was everything.”¹⁷³

Out of the many types of the narrators that the authors of fiction may chose from and experiment with their functions, the most fickle one seems to be the unreliable one. This concept was constructed by Wayne C. Booth.

In the ground-breaking *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), Wayne Booth who introduced readers to previously unexplored territory, where we would discover literature as a complex rhetorical and ethical act and our reading of literature as an intricate process of grasping our relation to implied author and narrator so as to discern and disentangle the strategies by which we are

Transactions of the American Philological Association 124 (1994): 41,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/284285.pdf>.

¹⁷¹ Bonnie Zimmerman, “What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Literary Criticism,” *Feminist Studies* 7, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 451,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3177760.pdf>.

¹⁷² Zimmerman, “What Has Never Been,” 454.

¹⁷³ Erikson, *God*, 655.

seduced by narratives. One marker of the book's influence is that many of its terms, especially implied author and unreliable narrator.¹⁷⁴

A narrator may be unreliable for many different reasons, from simply not caring about the truth, as in *Tristram Shandy* (1759), deliberately exaggerating the facts, as in *Moll Flanders* (1722), to being simply uninformed.

The limited third person point of view with occasional insight into the inner thoughts of the characters is one of the powerful devices in the narration in the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, for the reader is presented with and lead to believe the facts and assumptions that later in the novels prove to be untrue, thus shattering, or significantly altering his or her view on the plot. The narrator becomes unreliable in the point where it is clear that his or her perception differs from what is implied by the rest of the characters, or what can be deduced from the text as such.¹⁷⁵ In order to present a truly fallible narrator that is untrustworthy, and yet interesting for the reader, it is needed to provide “apparently divergent arguments,”¹⁷⁶ originating from the conversations and fact revelations. The *Malazan Book of the Fallen* features an unusually high number of characters, out of which a significant portion serve also as narrators. That gives a possibility for many misunderstandings on the reader's side and the author's intentional postponing of the delivery of the right facts, many times even leaving on the reader to chose from the possible interpretations.

3.4 A Tragic and Mysterious Figure

“The gods can have their war. We will not be used, not by them, not by anyone. I do not care how history judges us—I hope that’s well understood.”¹⁷⁷

According to Nancy Kress, “major characters need to participate in many different

¹⁷⁴ Elizabeth Langland, “Wayne C. Booth,” *Modern Language Association* 121, no. 2 (October 2005): 554, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25486336.pdf>.

¹⁷⁵ Greta Olson, “Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators,” *Narrative* 11, no. 1 (January 2003): 93, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20107302>.

¹⁷⁶ James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 4.

¹⁷⁷ Erikson, *Dust*, 134.

kinds of events. To do so believably, they need to have enough complexity so that readers accept them in these multiple roles.”¹⁷⁸ The word complexity can be indeed applied to the character of Tavore. However, there is a big problem with accepting her, on many occasions, in the novels. There are obscure details that regard her own life as such, including her deep romance which will be discussed later. She is featured in seven out of ten novels of the cycle and all of them will be used as a source for her analysis. Despite her abundant appearance, her personality, her views and her motivation remain to be hidden not only from the reader, but from most of the other characters as well.

Similarly to her relationship with T'amber, Tavore's rise to the position of the Adjunct of the empress is never explained. Again, the reader faces a simple and sudden announcement, that a female character plays a very powerful role in the Malazan world. This is one of the most striking examples of Erikson's complete and deliberate ignorance of the patriarchal society in the real world, which is so often reflected also in the fictional worlds. The commonly spread stereotype concerning the role of women is “not fair, but that's how it is. Men are more important in society because they do, in fact, hold the principal roles which govern it. Wars are more important than female thoughts in a drawing-room.”¹⁷⁹ The Adjunct and her function completely opposes this stereotype and the reader is not presented with any struggle of the females to gain power. Women simply have power in the Malazan world.

From being a daughter of a noble family, managing the mere “house affairs”¹⁸⁰ and who is present in only a tiny fraction of the plot of the *Gardens of the Moon* (1999), Tavore instantly joins the most powerful people at the court. By becoming an Adjunct, she takes a place of another woman, Lorn, who was murdered in the first novel of the decalogy. The Adjunct of the ruler of the empire, Laseen, is to be a “mage killer, the scorpion in the Imperial pocket,”¹⁸¹ carrying a sword made of otataral, “the ore that kills magic.”¹⁸² This man, or woman is

¹⁷⁸ Nancy Kress, *Dynamic Characters: How to Create Personalities That Keep Readers Captivated* (Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 2008), 3.

¹⁷⁹ Wolf, “Mirror for Men”, 205.

¹⁸⁰ Erikson, *Gardens*, 52.

¹⁸¹ Erikson, *Gardens*, 41.

¹⁸² Erikson, *Gardens*, 181.

obliged to act “as Laseen's voice, as her will”¹⁸³ and is supposed to give up the personal life, even personal views for that person “does not exist. She ceased to exist the day she became the Adjunct.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, this rank does not help to evaluate Tavore as a being at all.

The featuring of Lorn and the portrayal of her very conflicted feelings, her stream of consciousness and her personal struggle with the great responsibility she bears presents an Adjunct that the reader does not find in Tavore at all. Lorn made it clear what her rank meant to her and was determined to act on behalf of the empire exclusively. Tavore followed the interests of the empress only to a certain degree as was shown during the course of the novels. Similarly to her deep feelings towards T'amber, she shows devotion towards her family.

To secure her position, she actively took part in The Cull, the elimination of disloyal noble families, rebellious academics and other powerful people. Doing so, she included her own family house in the list, even watched her own sister, Felisin, being dragged in chains through streets. As it is revealed, this action was far from cold and calculated, as Tavore's parents were suffering from many health problems and on the verge of dying either way. And Felisin was protected by Tavore's agent, Baudin, who was supposed to save her from the mines in a short time. To keep her saving of her sister from Laseen's sight, Tavore coldly betrays and exposes Talon, the organization opposing the empress, to which Baudin belongs.

“In any case, back to the matter at hand. Tavore is of noble blood, and it's now clear that a truly covert element of Talons has returned to plague us, and has been making use of the nobility. Placing sympathetic agents in the military and administration – a mutually profitable infiltration. But Tavore is now the Adjunct, and as such, her old ties, her old loyalties, must needs be severed.” Pearl paused to tap a finger on the laid-out scroll before him.

“She has given us the Talons, Captain. We will find this Baudin Younger, and from him we will unravel the entire organization.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Erikson, *Gardens*, 197.

¹⁸⁴ Erikson, *Gardens*, 197.

¹⁸⁵ Erikson, *Chains*, 633-4.

All this is provided to the reader through other characters than those most involved, Tavore and Felisin themselves. This secret action behind the empress's back can be understood as the intention to raise doubts about the new Adjunct long before this character steps into the plot again. The obvious struggle between loyalties may show Tavore's good side when she cares about her own family. However, it is also a betrayal of the empire and thus, the countless amount of other characters, soldiers mainly, are gravely endangered. The latter is even more significant for the reader who was previously exposed to many army officers who lead their soldiers to unfortunate end because of their disloyalty, or simple incompetence. Again, as Reid, claims, women in literature were too often not given any significance when it comes to good and evil even in fairy tales, let alone the rest of the literature: "the struggles between three brothers (two iniquitous and one virtuous) to achieve success, is short on female characters, possessing precisely none, heroic or villainous."¹⁸⁶ Tavore partly serves as both at this point, considering her later mentioned actions.

Erikson intentionally hides almost everything concerning Tavore after she becomes the Adjunct. In *House of Chains* (2002), she leads an army for the first time, against the rebels supporting the Whirlwind apocalypse, the movement of the subjugated Seven Cities of the desert continent under the rule of Malaz. This rebellion, bloody, fierce, politically threatening the empire and causing huge economical loses, not to mention the immense losses of lives, is supported and fuelled by the Whirlwind goddess worshipped in the Seven Cities lands. The punitive response lead by Tavore was composed of new recruits mainly, as untested as the new Adjunct herself and throughout the whole novel, the reader is presented with the doubtful thoughts of the few experienced veterans marching with the army. Even Gamet, a character who knew Tavore since childhood, is not able to provide a detailed description of her, only the vague characteristics.

Blistig had come up on the other side, and he now added, "She remains too remote from us, Gamet. She is without our advice because we have no

¹⁸⁶ Reid, *Women*, 15.

chance to give it. Worse, we don't know her strategy.”

“Assuming she has one,” Tene Baralta muttered.

“Nor her tactics for this upcoming battle,” Blistig continued.

“It's dangerous, against Malazan military doctrine. She's made this war personal, Gamet.”

Gamet studied the Adjunct, who had now ridden ahead, flanked by Nil and Nether, and seemed to be studying the broken hills beyond which, they all knew, waited Sha'ik and her Army of the Apocalypse. *Personal? Yes, she would do that. Because it is what she has always done.*

“It is how she is. The Empress would not have been ignorant of her character.”

The many characters through whose point of views the story is unraveled again and again try to understand their leader, however, Tavore “remained unable to gauge her, to take her measure.”¹⁸⁷ The consequent dense atmosphere the reader is exposed to via the ever present worries of the soldiers who fear for their lives creates a significant tension. As Chatman puts it, the suspense and surprise in the plot “are complementary, not contradictory terms. The two can work together in narratives in complex ways: a chain of events may start out as a surprise, work into, a pattern of suspense, and then end with a "twist," that is, I the frustration of the expected result-another surprise.”¹⁸⁸ The uncertainty forces the reader to expect something very unexpected in the end of the novel, but fills him with worries at the same time. Tavore made it clear that she means to take charge, taking the legacy of one of the previously killed leaders of Malazan forces against the rebellion.

“Coltaine's tactics—”

“This is no longer Coltaine's war,” Tavore snapped.

Temul flinched as if struck. He managed a stiff nod, then turned on his heel and departed the chamber.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Erikson, *Chains*, 171.

¹⁸⁸ Chatman, *Story*, 60.

¹⁸⁹ Erikson, *Chains*, 176.

On the other hand, despite this strict and decisive behavior, she never reveals all her intentions, leaving even her commanders uninformed. Only once she openly shows her wit and understanding of the psychology of the army. When a child holding a sun-bleached bone appears during the first army gathering and the soldiers automatically see it a deadly omen: “this army of recruits now see themselves as already dead.”¹⁹⁰ Tavore, obviously puzzled and not able to cope with the consequent chaos and loss of discipline, is saved by the few veterans. These soldiers manage to turn the bad omen into a charm of luck, giving all soldiers small bones to wear as talismans. Tavore, in her unique cold style, accuses an officer against this practice from wearing a “non-standard uniform of the Fourteenth Army,” thus authorizing the positive turn in the army, that is to be known as Bonehunters in the future, due to these charms.

However, a mere understanding of the actions of others is far from comforting in the present situation and the overall feeling that Tavore does not deserve to be followed because “she has done . . . nothing”¹⁹¹ competes with the hope that she could be “cold iron,”¹⁹² a decisive, efficient and hard to distract commander able to achieve victory. The only insight into her competence in battle is provided via her younger sister Felisin, who knew Tavore all her life.

Tavore had claimed her brother's bone and antler toy soldiers, and in the rubble of the torn-up estate wall, where repairs had been undertaken by the grounds workers, she had arranged a miniature battle.

Only later would Felisin learn that her nine-year-old sister had been, in fact, recreating a set battle, culled from historical accounts of a century-old clash between a Royal Untan army and the rebelling House of K'azz D'Avore. A battle that had seen the annihilation of the renegade noble family's forces and the subjugation of the D'Avore household.

And that, taking on the role of Duke Kenussen D'Avore, she was working through every possible sequence of tactics towards achieving a victory.

¹⁹⁰ Erikson, *Chains*, 236.

¹⁹¹ Erikson, *Chains*, 304.

¹⁹² Erikson, *Chains*, 316.

Trapped by a series of unfortunate circumstances in a steep-sided valley, and hopelessly outnumbered, the unanimous consensus among military scholars was that such victory was impossible.

Felisin never learned if her sister had succeeded where Kenussen D'Avore – reputedly a military genius — had failed.¹⁹³

Also this reminiscence is far from clear, uncovering only the very unusual, even disturbing behavior of a child that grew to be the aloof Adjunct Tavore. Only when the first major battle between the rebels and the Malazan army is about to take place, the army worriedly observes the future battlefield prepared by the enemy as a “might as well paint a big red spot on the ground where he wants us to stand while he kills us.”¹⁹⁴ However, the night before the decisive battle, Gamet, in a form of a ghost, witnesses the utter destruction of the major part of Sha'ik's army in the hands of the ghosts of the holy Raraku desert itself. Gamet, as a truly unreliable narrator, is oblivious to his dying in his sleep, due to a burst blood vessel in his brain. Unaware of his ghost form, he joins the company of unknown soldiers with joy and charges against the sleeping Army of the Apocalypse. Only in the morning, the reader finally learns the truth hidden behind Tavore's unwillingness to share anything with her army. It is revealed that she had been suffering from dreams about the ghosts of the Malazan and other soldiers loyal to the empire, who died during the rebellion before Tavore was assigned to take charge.

“Last night,” Nil said, “the child Grub woke us. Led us to the ridge, so that we could witness the awakening. There were *legions*, Adjunct, that had marched this land a hundred thousand years ago. And Pormqual's crucified army and the legions of the Seventh on one flank. The three slaughtered clans of the Wickans on the other. And still others. Many others. Within the darkness last night, Tavore, there was war.”

“Thus,” Nether said, smiling, “you were right, Adjunct. In the dreams that haunted you from the very first night of this march, you saw what we could

¹⁹³ Erikson, *Chains*, 435.

¹⁹⁴ Erikson, *Chains*, 528.

not see.”¹⁹⁵

This was the first occasion when Tavore was shown knowing something that she should not be able to know. Due to otataral, any magical influence was supposedly impossible in her case, thus the prophetic dreams were very unexpected. According to Steven Erikson himself, he created the character of Tavore to be “unapproachable (even by me), and she knew things it was impossible for her to know.”¹⁹⁶ This approach of an author, to create a character that simply cannot be fully understood and analyzed is rather novel.

A character, his actions and “the thoughts in his head are key to our understanding the plot.”¹⁹⁷ Tavore brings the exact opposite into the plot. She serves as a source of doubts and, even more importantly, an agent of unexpected abrupt changes of this plot, with only a little explanation. Her final triumph over the rebellion, when she highhandedly killed Sha'ik, the holy leader chosen by the Whirlwind goddess, is extremely tragic, as it was her own sister, Felisin, hidden under the helmet which Tavore did not bother to take off from the corpse. The immense tragedy arranged by the cruel fate that lead Felisin into the hands of Whirlwind on her escape from the mines is told from her own perspective, seeing her own sister raising the sword against her in the next novel, *House of Chains*.

Then something punched into her chest, a stunning blossom of cold fire piercing through flesh, bone – and then she felt a tug from behind, as if something had reached up, clasped her hauberk and yanked on it – but it was just the point, she realized. The point of Tavore's sword, as it drove against the underside of the armour shielding her back.

Felisin looked down to see that rust-hued blade impaling her.

Her legs gave way and the sword suddenly bowed to her weight.

But she did not slide off that length of stained iron.

Her body held on to it, releasing only in shuddering increments as Felisin fell back, onto the ground.

¹⁹⁵ Erikson, *Chains*, 609.

¹⁹⁶ Erikson, “Ask Steven.”

¹⁹⁷ Kress, *Characters*, 50.

Through the visor's slit, she stared up at her sister, a figure standing behind a web of black, twisted iron wire that now rested cool over her eyes, tickling her lashes.

A figure who now stepped closer. To set one boot down hard on her chest – a weight that, now that it had arrived, seemed eternal – and dragged the sword free.

Blood.

Of course. This is how you break an unbreakable chain.

By dying.

I just wanted to know, Tavore, why you did it. And why you did not love me, when I loved you. I — I think that's what I wanted to know.

The boot lifted from her chest. But she could still feel its weight.

Heavy. So very heavy . . .

Oh, Mother, look at us now.¹⁹⁸

The reader, familiar with Tavore's effort to save her sister, is aware of Tavore's devotion to her family and so, the contrasting feelings of the two sisters work as an intensification of the extremely emotional scene. By killing Sha'ik, Tavore adds also another big mystery to the impenetrable net around her. Taking the recent revelation of dreams, the reader is kept doubting, whether Tavore was aware of Sha'ik's true identity, or not. The personality of Tavore is even more veiled by the doubts, as both options provide contradictory conclusions as to who Tavore really is as a human being.

This mystery follows Tavore until the end of the last novel of the decalogy, as well as other growing burdens that are never explained sufficiently. There is only one instance of an extremely limited insight into her mind, again, via another character. A healer, Deathsmell, enters Tavore's mind in order to heal her wounds after a fight and what he finds there makes this strong soldier weep like a child. However, he never specifies what exactly drove him into such broken and compassionate mental state.

¹⁹⁸ Erikson, *Chains*, 605-6.

The healer wept for some time.

No one spoke.

When the sobs began to subside, Balm leaned closer. “Corporal, what in Togg’s name is going on with you?”

“I – I can’t explain, Sergeant.”

“The healing worked,” said Balm. “We all saw it.”

He nodded, still not lifting his head.

“So ... what?”

“She let down her defences, just for a moment. Let me in, Sergeant. She had to, so I could heal the damage – and gods, was there damage! Stepping into view – that must have taken everything she had. Standing, talking ...” he shook his head. “I saw inside. I saw—”

He broke down all over again, shaking with vast, overwhelming sobs.

Balm remained crouched at his side. Widdershins and Throatlitter stood forming a kind of barrier facing outward. There was nothing to do but wait.

Tavore's own point of view is never offered, except a few paragraphs in the only two novels. One shows her shock and confusion after T'amber's death and the other one show her on the march, walking in front of her soldiers. Quite frustratingly, Erikson used this opportunity only to highlight Tavore's isolation:

“And of all the journeys she had undertaken, since the very beginning, this one – from the back of the column to its head – was the longest one she had ever travelled. And, as ever, she travelled it alone.”¹⁹⁹ In a character's own mind, the reader should rightfully expect to find the private information and secret thoughts.

“What goes on in their gray matter, where each of us is irrevocably different and irrevocably alone,”²⁰⁰ is not shown. Tavore does not offer her thoughts, only the emptiness and loneliness. The burden of leading the entire army towards almost certain death in a desperate effort to save what remains of an alien god, the psychological problems resulting from the loss of family and lover and many other issues remain hidden once again and at this point. However, at the close of the final novel of the decalogy, it is becoming clear that they will never be

¹⁹⁹ Erikson, *God*, 614.

²⁰⁰ Kress, *Characters*, 83.

revealed. The final weak physical state of Tavore, before the final battle, “like a starved child under that armour”²⁰¹ and her fainting before the fight show the effects of the great mental pressure put on her. The last snippet from her thoughts after the battle does not show a human being, a complex character. It only shows the immense exhaustion that the freeing of the Crippled God caused and the fatigue and resulting confusion Tavore suffers from.

Someone was rushing towards her. Another enemy. She could not even open her eyes, could not turn to meet him. One more death seemed too much, but she knew what waited within her. This need. This need ... *to finish.*

Do not attack me. Please. Someone stop him. Please.

I will kill him.

She heard him arrive and she dropped down into a crouch, spinning round, eyes opening – a heavy helm, an armoured body lunging for her. Her blade was a blur.²⁰²

The final reunion with her brother Gaanoes, whom Tavore did not see from the beginning of the first novel finally answers at least one mystery. The Adjunct never learned about the fate of their youngest sister Felisin and her own tragic role in it. Her reaction, right in the moment she recognizes Ganoes, also finally prove her dedication and deep love she has for her family, crushing the cold armor she built around her.

He caught her wrist, was rocked back by the force of the swing.

Pulled her close as she struggled.

Fumbled at his helm’s strap.

“Tavore! Stop! It’s me – it’s Ganoes!”

The helm came away, left his hand to thump on the ground – she stared up at him, disbelieving, and then, in her face, everything shattered.

“I lost her! Oh, Ganoes, *I lost her!*”

As she collapsed into his arms, frail as a child, Ganoes held her tight. One

²⁰¹ Erikson, *God*, 598.

²⁰² Erikson, *God*, 655.

hand against the back of her sweat-matted head, her bloodied face now pressed into his shoulder as she broke down, he found himself sinking to his knees, taking her within him.

And when he looked up, over at those Bonehunters, he saw that whatever they had been waiting for they had now found.

Like him, like her, they were settling down, to their knees. They were ... surrendering. To whatever was left inside them.

Muffled against his shoulder, through her sobs, she was saying his name. Over and over again.²⁰³

4.4 Unconditional Love

“This one's for you, T'amber. Virgin of Death, as far as you go.”²⁰⁴

Homosexual, or bisexual tendencies are not uncommon in the Malazan Book of the Fallen, even though these character traits are almost never discussed in great depth. Tavore and her partner T'amber are, however, a slight exception. They already appear as a couple with some history behind and are discussed multiple times by the other characters, since they did not exhibit their bond in public often. Their interaction as lovers is always merely hinted subtly and sometimes the reader might even come to a conclusion, that the assumption of Tavore and T'amber sharing intimate moments is simply made up only by the other characters. This way, by these remarks and their tone, Erikson made it very clear that homosexuality is not regarded as something to be detested in his fictional world. He also clarified the aloof and introvert nature of the two women.

As Gamet made to leave, Tene Baralta touched his shoulder. “Fist,” he said, “what is the situation with this ... this T'amber? Do you know? Why is the Adjunct being so ... cagey? Women who take women for lovers – the only crime is the loss to men, and so it has always been.”

“Cagey? No, Tene Baralta. Private. The Adjunct is simply a private

²⁰³ Erikson, *God*, 656.

²⁰⁴ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 634.

woman.”²⁰⁵

This wide acceptance of love between the same sex is strengthened also by the lack of negative comments. The society in which Tavore and T'amber live seems to lack any negative views on homosexuality, which is not an ordinary trait of literature dealing with homosexuality. There are some authors, Samuel R. Delany, for example, who “present homosexuality as an alternative to monogamous heterosexuality,”²⁰⁶ nevertheless, it is often the case, where homosexual couples experience open condemnation and vulgar threats, as Ciri and Mistle, from the *Witcher Saga*.

Tavore and T'amber present an obviously balanced couple equal in intelligence. They are both equally secretive about their relationship and lives as such, yet the small number of details Erikson provides the reader with create an image of very clever women. Both are skilled and efficient warriors and they obviously practice with weapons together as can be deduced from the following quote, even though they are never openly shown sparring.

A figure emerged. Dressed in hard leathers – light armour, Keneb realized with a start – and a longsword strapped to her hip. “Does the Adjunct wish to begin her morning practice?”

Keneb met those calm eyes, the colour of which gave the woman her name. They seemed depthless.²⁰⁷

T'amber is revealed as a skilled jewelry maker and painter. These three abilities melt T'amber into a hybrid character. According to Reid “The changes in how women characters have been portrayed in twentieth-century science fiction can be described as moving from housewife to hero,”²⁰⁸ and Tamber possess the skills of a woman delighting in art and feminine work, while she is able to defeat countless enemies in a sword fight. Again, this personality trait is incorporated into the story so it serves as a fact that influences the plot and forms the opinions and

²⁰⁵ Erikson, *Chains*, 239.

²⁰⁶ Reid, *Women*, 174.

²⁰⁷ Erikson, *Chains*, 602.

²⁰⁸ Reid, *Women*, 135.

relationships between the characters, instead of a simple notion that T'amber is an artist. By crafting the sigils, the badges worn on armor, for the soldiers of the Fourteenth army, thus sealing its nickname Bonehunters, she strengthened the position of her lover, Tavore as a leader of this army. The sigils made by her hand serve as a powerful symbol for the soldiers, giving them a sense of belonging. The sigils, in addition, reminded the soldiers of the Bridgeburners, the legendary elite division of the empire, thus securing their loyalty and stirring their feelings.

The sigil ... in silver, a city wall over which rose ruby flames, and the sloped tel beneath that wall, a mass of gold human skulls. The echo of the Bridgeburners' old sigil was not accident – *no, it was sheer genius. T'amber's genius.*²⁰⁹

Loyalty to Tavore proved to be of a great value later in the novels. The problematic issues that are to be discussed later in this chapter, concerning Tavore's weak social skills are balanced by T'amber and her sigils that speak to the army instead of its leader.

“Ah, yes. Well, I can make no claim regarding that. The design of that sigil was by T'amber's hand. There were jewelers in her family, I understand, and she passed a few years of her youth as an apprentice. Nonetheless, I do not see how that ceremony achieved little more than a confirmation of what already existed.”

“Adjunct,” Fist Keneb said, “it was your confirmation that was needed. To make it real. I do not wish to offend you, but before then, you were the Adjunct. You were Laseen's. Her property.”

Her expression was suddenly flat, dangerous. “And now, Fist?”

But it was Kalam who answered. “Now, you belong to the Fourteenth.”

“You belong to us,” Keneb said.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 539.

²¹⁰ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 538-9.

Tavore even openly uses “T'amber's words,”²¹¹ as she calls the quote of her recently deceased lover to restore the order in the lines of frustrated Bonehunters. T'amber's eloquence and her own formulation of the few sentences that kept the army from falling apart helped Tavore overcome her own inability to express what lies in her clever, yet closed to the world mind. Her speech was judged by the listeners as not very polished, however, it was enough for the soldiers to follow her once again.

Tavore Paran appeared on deck and delivered a *speech*.

A Hood-damned speech.

From Tavore. Tighter-lipped than a cat at Togg's teats, but she talked. Not long, not complicated. And there was no brilliance, no genius. It was plain, every word picked up from dusty ground, strung together on a chewed thong, not even spat on to bring out a gleam. Not a precious stone to be found. No pearls, no opals, no sapphires.²¹²

As mentioned before, the references to Tavore's and T'amber's intimate life are very scarce and subtle. Tavore is only informed that T'amber “awaits you in your chambers, Adjunct,”²¹³ on several occasions and it can be concluded that it might be a convincing proof of their relationship. Also during a fight, where T'amber is wounded, yet there is no time for expressions of devotion, “there was anguish on the Adjunct's face as she looked upon her lover, and it seemed she was struggling not to reach out.”²¹⁴ After T'ambers tragic death, when she sacrifices her life in order to allow Tavore escape the imperial assassins, her loss causes Tavore's immense sorrow. “Some things no mortal could hide, and one of those things was grief,”²¹⁵ and Tavore almost lost her position as a comander of the army, simply because of her succumbing to ignorance and depression. The loss of a lover was obviously intensified also by T'amber's own choice to give up her own life, which she openly confirmed, when another of Tavore's companions asked her

²¹¹ Erikson, *Gale*, 331.

²¹² Erikson, *Gale*, 330.

²¹³ Erikson, *Chains*, 185.

²¹⁴ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 691.

²¹⁵ Erikson, *Gale*, 328.

for an honest opinion:

“Tell me this, T'amber: between you and the Adjunct, whose life matters more?”

The reply was immediate. “The Adjunct's.”

It seemed that Tavore flinched then, but would not face them.

“And,” Kalam asked, “between you and me?”

“Yours.”²¹⁶

The final revelation after T'ambers death uncovered the elder goddess Eres'al from the ancient times, with an ape like form and intellect, to be present in T'ambers body shortly before her death. This goddess kept the woman from dying from many mortal wounds, allowing T'amber to escort her lover close to safety. Whether Tavore knew about the presence of this deity is never confirmed. It is indeed true that she once describes T'amber as “someone ... a lot more than she once was,”²¹⁷ however, this only evidence is far from sufficient. It was not possible for Eres'al to dominate T'amber completely, as Cotillion did with Apsalar, as the goddess lacked the mental capacity for that, being a deity from the dawn of human existence. It is hinted that they knew about and actively used the connection with Eres'al and about T'amber to be aware of T'amber being a host for an awakened deity who chose to aid Bonehunters, when Tavore approaches a soldier who was contacted by the goddess too and advises him: “T'amber says you must seek help. She says you know who.”²¹⁸ Tavore's consequent grief and immense loss might indicate the immense disappointment and shock, when her lover did not survive despite the help of a goddess herself. On the other hand, the following passage suggests that the Adjunct was not aware of the godly intervention.

“T'amber,” Grub said. “Only you and me can see. So watch, Lostara. Watch.”

²¹⁶ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 685.

²¹⁷ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 645.

²¹⁸ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 645.

The golden glow was coalescing, rising up from the corpse. A faint wind flowed past Lostara and Grub, familiar now, heady with the scent of savannah grasses, warm and dry.

“She stayed with us a long time,” Grub whispered. “She used T'amber. A lot. There wasn't any choice. The Fourteenth, it's going to war, and we're going with it. We have to.”

A figure now stood at a half-crouch over the body. Furred, tall, and female. No clothing, no ornamentation of any kind.

Lostara saw the T'lan Imass, thirty or more paces away, slowly turn to regard the apparition. And then, head bowing, the undead warrior slowly settled onto one knee. “I thought you said we were the only ones who could see, Grub.”

“I was wrong. She has that effect.”

“Who – what is she?”

“The Eres'al. Lostara, you must never tell the Adjunct. Never.”

The Red Blade captain scowled. “Another damned secret to keep from her.”

“Just the two,” Grub said. “You can do that.”

Lostara glanced over at the boy. “Two, you said.”

Grub nodded. “Her sister, yes. That one, and this one. Two secrets. Never to tell.”

“That won't be hard,” she said, straightening. “I'm not going with them.”

“Yes you are. Look! Look at the Eres'al!”

The strange female was lowering her head towards the body of T'amber.

“What's she doing?”

“Just a kiss. On the forehead. A thank-you.”

The apparition straightened once more, seemed to sniff the air, then, in a blur, vanished.

“Oh!” said Grub. Yet added nothing. Instead, taking her hand in his.

“Lostara. The Adjunct, she's lost T'amber now. You need to take that place.”

“I'm done with lovers, male or female.”

“No, not that. Just ... at her side. You have to. She cannot do this alone.”

The conclusion is impossible to be presented, as it is not possible to track the details that would support one argument or the other. Whether Tavore knew all the details about the loss of the love of her life is one of the countless mysteries that cannot be answered and which will be discussed later in this chapter. Eres'al's intervention and the touching final good bye is an interesting twist in the traditional portrayal of the ancient gods in our own mythologies, where the proud gods often prepared “a terrible fate”²¹⁹ for the mortals in their vanity and self-importance. Eres'al, the mother of humanity, apologizes for her failure to get also T'amber to safety.

5.4 An Ugly Swan

And this was a human truth, no more or less sordid than all the other human truths. Those without beauty compensated in other ways, the formal but artificial ways of rank and power, and that was just how things were the world over.²²⁰

While Tavore and T'amber share an equal level when the intellect is taken into consideration, they present also a very sharp contrast in physical beauty. While T'amber is often described as a “cold beauty,”²²¹ “perfumed lover,”²²² possessing “calm eyes, the colour of which gave the woman her name”²²³ and many other superlatives that describe her as very attractive, “the Adjunct stood in grim contrast, the poor woman.”²²⁴ Her face was “as plain as ever, a slash of bloodless lines comprising her features, her reddish hair trimmed shorter than was the style.”²²⁵ Even the rest of the body did not meet the standards and the typical proportions defining female attraction seem to be exaggerated on purpose, to create an unattractive image.

²¹⁹ Campbell, *Hero*, 103.

²²⁰ Erikson, *Gale*, 378.

²²¹ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 502.

²²² Erikson, *Chains*, 238.

²²³ Erikson, *Chains*, 602.

²²⁴ Erikson, *Gale*, 378.

²²⁵ Erikson, *Gardens*, 51-52.

Clothes were well made, but plain and virtually colourless. A match to her eyes, to the streaks of grey in her reddish, short-cropped hair, to her unyielding, unprepossessing features. She was tall, somewhat broad in the hips, her breasts slightly oversized for her frame. The otataral sword of her office was scabbarded at her belt – the only indication of her imperial title.²²⁶

The wide hips and plump breast are typical for the so called hour-glass figure, which is often regarded as an ideal of the female body. Tavore's figure and the character's comments may be seen as mocking of this standard, openly challenging the unrealistic demands of the society. From her own choice of clothes, it is also evident, that Tavore does not value beauty as such and does not feel a need to demonstrate her body as something to be admired. This striking contrast between her and her lover T'amber highlights the other, more important functions of a healthy relationship and mutual devotion and faithfulness. One of the characters provides and information, that T'amber was a concubine²²⁷ in the past, however, since all the narrators in the decalogy are utterly unreliable, this information should not be treated as an unquestionable fact. However, it may be also seen as another highlight of the importance of the inner beauty, since T'amber chose to leave her old luxurious life and willingly joined the side of an unattractive woman and sealed her fate with Tavore.

Erikson openly admitted the intention to create Tavore exactly as he did and he claims that every feature was chosen and used deliberately. Mainly her many mysteries and the sheer impossibility to understand this character fully by anyone play a key role in the decalogy.

It was no accident that Tavore, the leader of the Bonehunters, was a woman, and a confounding one at that. It's no accident that she was also a lesbian. It's no accident that she was plain, instead of breathtakingly beautiful. It's no accident that what she presented to others gave virtually no hint of her internal life, her hidden landscape, and, more poetically, her secret garden.

²²⁶ Erikson, *Chains*, 174.

²²⁷ Erikson, *Chains*, 239.

Simply put, it's not for us to know (and by 'us' I mean 'men,'). Is that frustrating? Well, not to me.²²⁸

Tavore, in his view, presents the secret feminine side of the human population, that can never be fully understood by the male part. Erikson fiercely defends the women right in his novels by the simple absence of any oppression in many cases and making the characters pay a brutally cruel price in case of a rape, or other crime aimed at a woman. However, he also creates a thick wall between him and one of his most important female characters to point out that he, as a man, does not feel capable of a full understanding of the feminity. He even makes his male characters feel the same, as in the case when one of Tavore's trusted army leaders died in his sleep shortly before the battle.

Keneb met those calm eyes, the colour of which gave the woman her name. They seemed depthless. He mentally shook himself. "Gamet died last night. I have just informed the Adjunct."

The woman's gaze flicked towards the command tent. "I see."

"And in the basin between the two armies, Sha'ik now stands ... waiting. It occurred to me, Lady, that the Adjunct might appreciate some help with her armour."

To his surprise she turned back to her tent. "Not this morning, Captain. I understand your motives ... but no. Not this morning. Good day, sir."

Then she was gone.

Keneb stood motionless in surprise. *All right, then, so I do not understand women.*²²⁹

T'amber does not explain her behavior, yet it is clear that she knows her lover well enough to judge when Tavore needs loneliness and when a moral support is needed. This social skill and empathy follow Tavore even after T'amber's death. Her shadow as an understanding partner and teacher of communication with other people may be traced back later in the novels, where Tavore shows a very

²²⁸ Erikson, "Crippled God Questions."

²²⁹ Erikson, *Chains*, 602.

unexpected instances of empathy.

These moments, when she reveals that she, in fact, knows every soldier in her army by name and even their life stories, or expresses a very truthful, acute, yet compassionate analysis of a broken marriage of a pregnant mother who lost all her previous children in a battle and her husband is lost in his own grief, unable to support her. In such instances, Tavore displays the “virtues of femininity, valuing empathy more highly than technical competence, patient diplomacy more highly than aggressive violence, and intuition (especially when magically aided) more highly than rationality.”²³⁰ However, Erikson shatters also this stereotype, making Tavore also very rational and capable of a focused and deadly aggression many times.

6.4 Deserved Loyalty and Natural Compassion

“And the final battle of the Bonehunter Regular Infantry was done.”²³¹

As mentioned before, Tavore and her obscure actions cause significant changes in the presented views and surprise the reader. One of the two most abrupt changes Tavore causes is her open denial of the empress and the very needs of the empire. After the victorious return back to Malaz, leaving the Seven Cities recovering from the rebellion behind, Tavore and the Bonehunters find the empire in chaos. The arrested leaders of the Whirlwind, Korbolo Dom and Mallic Rel, avoided punishment for their crimes and infiltrated the Malazan politics even further than they did before, unleashing instability, threatening Laseen's position on the throne and peace as such. Tavore's arrival, with strong and seasoned army behind her, is a crucial moment in the story. Her role as an Adjunct is to carry out the empress's will and aid her.

However, Laseen's plan to return stability into her starving empire cut off from food from the Seven Cities and its food supplies, is to sacrifice the Wickans. That is, the desert tribe warriors who supported the Malazans in their fight, saved many civilian lives and contributed immensely to Tavore's success. The Wickan

²³⁰ Stableford, *Dictionary*, 148.

²³¹ Erikson, *God*, 656.

lands, fertile and uncivilized are, according to Laseen, apt to feed the empire and the Wickan warriors coming to Malaz with Bonehunters are to be accused of the causing the misery of the common folk and publicly tortured and executed, in order to give the inhabitants a victim to take revenge on, for “The mob in the city below will soon turn upon itself if the proper victims are not delivered.”²³² Tavore fully realizes her responsibility as an Adjunct, but chooses not to betray her soldiers and refuses Laseen's proposal, which ultimately leads to the empress's death as the empire crumbles.

Tavore herself gave up her life, well aware that an open betrayal of the empress means her death sentence. However, this was also the moment when her own soldiers showed her the same loyalty she showed them and helped her walk through streets full of assassins. The motivation of Kalam, the man who was prepared to die for Tavore that night is even more moving, as he, too, was offered a high position and power over empire, in exchange for the Wickans. The following quote shows his own uncertainty. It is apparent that Tavore did not win the hearts of her army, nevertheless, she is able to inspire the unselfish motivations leading even to self-destruction in the name of something, the characters are not even able to name. Tavore unexplainably serves as a catalyst for other characters and mysteriously brings out the heroic part of them.

“Just as desperate as Laseen, then. The two of them, they asked you to choose between two mirror reflections. Which one was real? Which one was worth serving? You still haven't explained how Tavore did it.”

“She did it the way she seems to get all of us to do what she needs us to do.”

“Well now, that's been the one mystery no one's been able to answer, hasn't it? But, just like you, we follow. Kalam, I wish I could have seen you on that night in Malaz City. You must have been the holiest of terrors. So, just like the rest of us, you gave her everything you had. How does she do it?”

“She simply asks,” Kalam said.

Quick Ben snorted. “That's it?”

“I think so. No offers – no riches, no titles, nothing any of us can see as

²³² Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 682.

payment or reward. No, she just looks you straight in the eye, and she asks.”

“You just sent a shiver up my spine, Kalam, and I don’t even know why.”

“You don’t? More rubbish.”

The wizard waved his hands, “Well, Hood knows it ain’t chivalry, is it? She won’t even nudge open *that* door. No fluttering eyelashes, no demure look or coy glance ...”²³³

The Adjunct, saving many lives of brave Wickan men and women, lead the Bonehunters away from the empire, leaving it to its own crisis. However, even though the soldiers followed her, their loyalty to this woman was tested over and over by her aloofness and lack of social skills. Her position as leader is maintained by only few, influencing the rest of the army sailing into complete nowhere. The following quote shows one of the decisive moments that saved Tavore, the conversation between Ganoes Paran, her brother, and one of Bonehunter mages. Once again, as many times before, the answers are vague, but obviously enough for the characters to follow Tavore on the path, she refuses to reveal.

The wizard hesitated, looked over at the captain. “Ganoes,” he said, “tell me something.”

“What?”

“Tavore. Can we trust her?”

The question felt like a slap, stinging, sudden. He blinked, studied the man, then said, “Tavore will do, wizard, what needs to be done.”

“To suit her or her soldiers?” Quick Ben demanded.

“For her, friend, there is no distinction.”

Their gazes locked for a moment longer, then the wizard sighed. “I owe you a tankard of ale when it's all over.”

“I will hold you to it, Quick.”²³⁴

²³³ Erikson, *God*, 504.

²³⁴ Erikson, *Bonehunters*, 474-475.

The unapproachable Tavore, the great unknown of the decalogy, uncovers also the surprising and utterly unexpected side of Kaminsod, the Crippled God. Due to her decisions and actions, the main villain of the whole story is suddenly shown in a position of a victim of multiple terrible crimes. “A weak adversary creates a weak hero.”²³⁵ The Crippled God is presented as evil manifested throughout the novels and thus, the reader is lead to believe in a spectacular final battle with this monstrous villain and final victory of the gods, ascendants and races of the Malazan world against this usurper.

Tavore serves as a catalyst that turns the last novel into something, the reader would not guess. Despite the many horrible deeds the Crippled God does in the novels, from disfiguring and tormenting mortals to manipulating and scheming, the reader is gradually shown that “a god in pain is not the same as a god obsessed with evil.”²³⁶ Tavore is the main agent of this change, the bringer of compassion. In fact, this feature is one of the most important attributes she bears in the decalogy. And compassion, or, more precisely, an effort to make the reader feel compassion with various characters, is often present in the novels. Just like Tavore show the tender side of a supposedly monstrous and evil character, Erikson very often provides insight into the characters who are seen doing immoral deeds, while their deep feelings towards others, or other redeeming qualities are revealed too and it is simply impossible to judge them as evil. Tavore and her dedication serves as a guide for the reader to realize the fact, that many characters have flaws, even severe flaws, however, nothing is black or white in the Malazan universe. In Erikson's own words: “Nothing's simple. Nothing ever was.”²³⁷ It is never revealed how she acquired all the information about the chaining of the Crippled God, that caused him unimaginable suffering and blurred his mind with pain. Never is the reader allowed to see neither the source, nor the extent of the vast knowledge of this woman. And this mystery, this lack of explanation, is what highlights the role of the compassion.

While “power cares nothing for reason, nothing for justice, nothing for

²³⁵ Lee Sheldon, *Character Development and Storytelling for Games* (Boston: Cengage Learning PTR, 2004), 75.

²³⁶ Erikson, *Gale*, 98.

²³⁷ Walsh, "Conversation."

compassion,”²³⁸ and it fills characters with pride and often cruelty, the latter mentioned should not even need reason, nor justice. Compassion as a virtue and its huge importance in the world is shown through Tavore, a mere mortal human. All the other gods, ascendants and powerful races did not even once during the long centuries try to ease the suffering of the god who was dragged into their world against his will, As one of the ancient characters, Kilava, recalls.

She remembered the earth's pain when he was brought down from the sky. She remembered his fury and his agony when first he was chained. But the gods were hardly done with him. They returned again and again, crushing him down, destroying his every attempt to find a place for himself. If he cried out for justice, no one was interested in listening. If he howled in wretched suffering, they but turned away.

But the Crippled God was not alone in that neglect. The mortal realm was crowded with those who were just as wounded, just as broken, just as forgotten. In this way, all that he had become – his very place in the pantheon – had been forged by the gods themselves. And now they feared him. Now, they meant to kill him.²³⁹

Even though, finally, there are some ascendants willing to help Kaminsod to return to his home and save him from the greed of the other deities hungry for his power, nor Cotillion, or others explain their motivations sufficiently. It had to be Tavore to openly show kindness and reach to Kaminsod to help and even persuade others to see him as a victim, not as an enemy.

After a long, brittle moment, Kindly said, “Adjunct, we march to save the Crippled God. The problem is, as far as gods go, he’s not much liked. You won’t find a single worshipper of him in the Bonehunters.”

“Indeed?” Suddenly her voice was harsh. “And not one soldier in this army – in this *tent* – has not suffered? Not one here has not broken, not even once? Not wept? Not grieved?”

²³⁸ Erikson, *Gale*, 386.

²³⁹ Erikson, *God*, 301.

“But we will not worship that!” Kindly retorted. “We will not kneel to such things!”

“I am relieved to hear you say so,” she replied, as if the fires inside had died down as quickly as they had flared. Eyes on the map, trying to find a way through. “So look across, then, across that vast divide. Look into that god’s eyes, Fist Kindly, and make your thoughts hard. Make them cold. Unfeeling. Make them all the things you need to in order to feel not a single pang, not a lone tremor. *Look into his eyes, Kindly, before you choose to turn away.* Will you do that?”

“I cannot, Adjunct,” Kindly replied, in a shaken voice. “For he does not stand before me.”

And Tavore met his eyes once more. “Doesn’t he?”

One heartbeat, and then two, before Kindly rocked back. Only to turn away. Lostara Yil gasped. *As you said he would.*

But Tavore would not let him go. “Do you need a temple, Kindly? A graven image? Do you need priests? Sacred texts? Do you need to close your eyes to see a god? So noble on his throne, so lofty in his regard, and oh, let’s not forget, that hand of mercy, ever reaching down. Do you need all of that, Kindly? You others? Do you all need it in order to be blessed with the truth?”

The tent flap was roughly pulled aside and Banaschar entered. “Was I summoned?” And the grin he gave them was a thing of horror, a slash opening to them all the turmoil inside the man, the torment of his life. “I caught some of that, just outside. Too much, in fact.” He looked to the Adjunct.

“Blessed with the truth. My dear Adjunct, you must know by now. Truth blesses no one. Truth can only *curse.*”

The Adjunct seemed to sag inside. Gaze dropping back down to the map on the table, she said, “Then please, Septarch, do curse us with a few words of truth.”

“I rather doubt there’s need,” he replied.

This massive effort that left Tavore physically and also emotionally starved almost to death is not rewarded with such an optimistic outcome as the reader might expect. The truth about the fate of Kaminsod is once again veiled and Steven Erikson refuses to clarify, whether he truly traveled safely back to his home and to his worshipers, or he died in the effort. However, for Tavore, at least a bittersweet happy ending is provided when she is reunited with Ganoes and her contribution is finally recognized and appreciated by other characters.

“In Letheras,” said Brys, “there will be a statue of bronze raised in your likeness. I know, few will know what it means, what it signifies. But I will, Adjunct.”

“A statue?” Tavore cocked her head, as if considering the notion. “Will I be beautiful?” she asked, and before Brys could answer she formally bowed before him and then Queen Abrastal.

“I thank you both, for making my cause your own. For your losses, I grieve. Goodbye, Highnesses.”

They let her depart. And only Aranict heard Brys say, “Of course you will.”²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Erikson, *God*, 681.

5. Felisin

“Children are dying.”

Lull nodded. “That's a succinct summary of humankind, I'd say. Who needs tomes and volumes of history? Children are dying. The injustices of the world hide in those three words.”²⁴¹

This chapter largely deals with tragedy in the traditional term. The analyzed character is treated as a protagonist of a tragedy, mainly, but also further topics elaborating maturing and role of religion are addressed.

1.5 Tragedy in Literature

An ancient, final tragedy in frozen tableau, as a whole tribe faced slaughter at the hands of some unknown foe – *how many thousands of years ago did this happen, how long have these trapped souls held on to this horrifying, heart-rending moment? And now? Are they doomed to repeat that eternal anguish?*²⁴²

Tragedy is one of the oldest genres originating from the Ancient Greece as a form of a drama, side by side with Comedy. Aristotle insisted that “Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life.”²⁴³ The Tragedy in drama flourished for a considerable amount of time in the ancient theaters of Greece and Rome and even nowadays, the plays of Sophocles, Aeschylus, Pacuvius, Accius and other writers are read, even performed with modern alternations.

The tradition of tragic plays carried on throughout history to the modern age, and as the most notable authors of tragedies, Shakespear and his contemporaries, Jean Racine, Wagner, George Lillo and many others should be named.

²⁴¹ Erikson, *Gates*, 291.

²⁴² Erikson, *Gates*, 246.

²⁴³ Aristotle, “Poetics.”

Originally, the tragedy presents a character driven by the circumstances to a serious deed as murder, or disobedience of a kind of a prohibition. The character then faces the grim consequences and his fate is supposed to trigger a catharsis, “the pity and fear said to be experienced by audiences,”²⁴⁴ that provides a relief from the powerful emotions evoked by the tragedy.

“As our literatures evolve, the concept of tragedy extends far beyond the dramatic genre.”²⁴⁵ Tragedy, thus, is present in a wide range of works of literature nowadays and it often does not fulfill all the traditional requirements. The original Aristotle's idea about the characters who are better than real people is often not kept and tragedy is blended with other genres.

2.5 Tragic and Ordinary Character

The family tore itself apart, and there was nothing I could do about it. I was only a castellan, a glorified house guard. Taking orders. Even when a word from me could have changed Felisin's fate, I just saluted and said, “Yes, mistress.”²⁴⁶

Unlike the previously analyzed characters, Felisin's fate is one of the most tragic ones in the whole decalogy and ends with her absolute and irreversible death. The youngest member of a fallen noble house of Paran, sister of Adjunct Tavore, is right from the beginning described as being too fragile “for any world.”²⁴⁷ She is a child of an aristocratic family, kept separate from the toils of reality and her sacrifice coming from the hands of her own sister marks the beginning of the ruthless tragic path Felisin is doomed to follow. The opening scene of the second novel, *Deadhouse Gates*, begins with Felisin being chained and lead through the city. Being previously mentioned on only few vague sentences in the first novel of the decalogy, *Gardens of the Moon*, she is introduced to the reader through her own point of view and is featured in *Deadhouse Gates* and *House of Chains*. In

²⁴⁴ Phelan and Rabinowitz, *Narrative Theory*, 444.

²⁴⁵ George Steiner, ““Tragedy,” Reconsidered,” *New Literary History* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 1, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20057818.pdf>.

²⁴⁶ Erikson, *Chains*, 525.

²⁴⁷ Erikson, *Gardens*, 52.

the instance of her first appearance in *Deadhouse Gates*, she is found in an uneasy and threatening situation. A pampered child is brutally thrown into the harsh world she had never seen before.

Farmers and peasants lined the road, displaying nothing of the frenzy that had gripped their cousins in the city. Felisin saw in their faces a dull sorrow, a passion born of different scars. She could not understand where it came from, and she knew that her ignorance was the difference between her and them. She also knew, in her bruises, scratches and helpless nakedness, that her lessons had begun.²⁴⁸

Her life as a slave is presented in one of the most gruesome ways possible, when she becomes a prostitute in order to protect herself from the hardships of the otataral mines. As stated before, this change is very abrupt and shocking. Unfortunately for Felisin, she cannot be seen as an utterly innocent victim of a melodrama, who is threatened by a wicked villain²⁴⁹. Erikson never treats his major characters as either black, or white, or good, or bad. Felisin has flaws, which contribute to her tragedy.

Once again, her role as an unreliable narrator is of a great importance here, as the story unravels. First, the reader is lead to believe into the cruelty of the cold Adjunct and Felisin's utter loneliness. Only when Felisin and her two companions, scholar Heboric and Baudin, flee from the mines, it is revealed that the latter one is Tavore's agent, assigned to protect Felisin and save her from the mines. The tension created due to the incomplete and conflicting information the reader is provided with significantly influences the overall impression from the plot, that revolves around violent and turbulent Whirlwind rebellion. The raw ruthless and harsh reality of the empire in crisis is presented not only via the victims of the rebellion, but also via the inhabitants of Malaz as well.

²⁴⁸ Erikson, *Gates*, 28.

²⁴⁹ Kent G. Gallagher, "Emotion in Tragedy and Melodrama," *Educational Theatre Journal* 17, no. 3 (October 1965): 215, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3205160.pdf>.

Felisin's point of view provides the reader with her conviction about her doing the right thing when she acts as a sex slave for she had “no choice.”²⁵⁰ However, it is possible to trace opportunities to get help from others from dialogues and actions of other characters. Felisin's answer to them is often an open hostility, or numbness. Her noble origin and the consequent beauty is a powerful tool and, for a while, Felisin is aware of this fact.

Felisin had learned fast on the slave ship. She had nothing but her body to sell, but it had proved a valuable currency. Giving herself to the ship guards had been repaid with more food for herself, Heboric and Baudin. By opening her legs to the right men she had managed to get herself and her two companions chained on the keel ramp rather than in the sewage-filled water that sloshed shin-deep beneath the hold's walkway. Others had rotted in that water. Some had drowned when starvation and sickness so weakened them that they could not stay above it.

Heboric's grief and anger at the price she paid had at first been difficult to ignore, filling her with shame. But it had paid for their lives, and that was a truth that could not be questioned.²⁵¹

After coming to the mines, the local crime lord, “Beneth had picked her within hours of her arrival at Skullcup, the mining camp in the Dosing Pit.”²⁵² Given the strength and various talents of the previously analyzed characters, one would assume that Felisin will prove to be smart and will take her chance and use this opportunity to manipulate her lover. This is not the case, sadly. She is not able to further ease her condition significantly, for she is not able to overcome the pain and shame she is exposed to. Distrustful and hurt, she is too fixed on her miserable condition and makes wrong decisions, like consuming gifted drugs instead of selling them and gaining profit. Life of a prostitute is psychologically and also physically challenging for her.

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Erikson, *Chains*, 444.

²⁵¹ Erikson, *Gates*, 74.

²⁵² Erikson, *Gates*, 74.

He paused, his breath harsh as he studied her. “Hood's breath, girl, but you're beautiful. Show me some life next time. I'll treat you right. Get you soap, a new comb, lousebane. You'll work here in Twistings, that's a promise. Show pleasure, girl, that's all I ask.”

“Soon,” she said. “Once it stops hurting.”²⁵³

The beginning of this rough relationship starts auspiciously and Beneth gives her many promises: “for you I'll change things. I won't take any other woman. I'm king of Skullcup, you'll be my queen.” However, Felisin is not able to profit from this situation, although she tries hard to cope with it. Beneth was described as a violent, unscrupulous and dominant man who was also “astonishingly handsome.”²⁵⁴ With these characteristics, he fulfills the definition of an attractive dominant male lover with dark past from countless Harlequin romance novels that are “well-plotted, strong romances with a happy end.”²⁵⁵ The naive happy ending is not the case here and Beneth is presented in a harsh, yet truthful light of a brute with whom, no happy ending is ever possible. Consequently, Felisin's painful fate can be also seen as a mocking of the unreal and dangerous expectations women tend to have when encountering men like Beneth. This sober and realistic presentation of overly dominant men is more than needed in the times, when characters like Christian Grey from *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015) keep flooding the popular literature.

Nowadays, in our world, “many prostitutes consider discrimination, i.e., selection of customers, to be an essential right within their trade. In fact, working conditions are often judged by the degree of choice in clientele.”²⁵⁶ Felisin, placed in a completely different world bearing medieval features, does not have such choices and is absolutely dependent on the crime lord. Her thoughts do not revolve around safety in her work, or some twisted kind of etiquette. She, in order

²⁵³ Erikson, *Gates*, 74.

²⁵⁴ Erikson, *Gates*, 74.

²⁵⁵ Tania Modleski, “The Disappearing Act: A Study of Harlequin Romances,” *Signs* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1980): 437, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3173584.pdf>.

²⁵⁶ Gail Pheterson, “The Whore Stigma: Female Dishonor and Male Unworthiness,” *Social Text, A Special Section Edited by Anne McClintock Explores the Sex Trade*, no. 37 (Winter 1993): 39, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/466259.pdf>.

to survive, focuses solely on her having to “turn pain into pleasure.”²⁵⁷ The trauma of the rapes and serving as a sex slave for Beneth who also uses her to pay to his companions make Felisin seek refuge in the alcohol and drugs. Without these means of relief, she “felt her mind drag her ever closer to desperation.”²⁵⁸ She does accomplish a slight improvement of life conditions for her, Baudin and Heboric, but the great pressure put on her results in her refuge in hazy dreams induced by narcotics.

Unfurling her bedroll, she lay down. Her eagerness to sleep was preventing her from doing so. She stared up at the dark imperfections in the canvas weave, wishing she had some durhang or a jug of wine. The crimson river of her dreams had become an embrace, protective and welcoming. She conjured from memory an echo of the image, and all the feelings that went with it. The river flowed with purpose, ordered and in-exorable; when in its warm currents, she felt close to understanding that purpose. She knew she would discover it soon, and with that knowledge her world would change, become so much more than it was now. Not just a girl, plump and out of shape and used up, the vision of her future reduced to days when it should be measured in decades – a girl who could call herself young only with sneering irony. For all that the dream promised her, there was a value in self-contempt, a counterpoint between her waking and sleeping hours, what was and what could be. A tension between what was real and what was imagined.²⁵⁹

Felisin, in her misery, succumbs to ignorance and finds herself unable to plan ahead, even though she dreams about escape and vengeance. She is not cunning or experienced enough to use Beneth the same way he uses her. “Heboric's wrong. There's no point in thinking about tomorrow. Just the next hour, each hour. Stay alive, Felisin, and live well if you can.”²⁶⁰

The public reception of Felisin was rather hostile by some readers and her

²⁵⁷ Erikson, *Gates*, 80.

²⁵⁸ Erikson, *Gates*, 132.

²⁵⁹ Erikson, *Gates*, 169.

²⁶⁰ Erikson, *Gates*, 78.

character, who stands in a contrast with the heroic characters slaying enemies and dealing with high politics, was reprobated as weak, ungrateful and unlikeable. Steven Erikson does not agree with this judgment, as is apparent from his response:

Anything involving children and sex was written as examples of abuse, which is precisely what they are. And, as far as I can recall, the lives of any adult involved in that, in the series, did not end well. And as for the characters who suffered such abuse, I wrote them with all the compassion I could muster (hence my constant surprise at how judgmental and harsh some readers are regarding Felisin).²⁶¹

The problem in the already mentioned contrast between Felisin and many other major characters lies in the role they represent. While Apsalar, Hetan, Tavore and many other, female and male alike, are characters overcoming immense hardships and emerge victorious, even though damaged from all the experiences, Felisin is not a hero. The reader is over and over reminded by other characters of her fragility and childishness, about the shattered innocence. She does not force herself into choosing more complicated solutions and thus allows her abusers to scar her delicate soul more and more.

Even though Felisin is supported by Baudin and Heboric, they are not the right characters to effectively show her the right way, or protect her. Heboric, a historian and scholar, is an old man who spent his life studying history and philosophy and cannot possibly serve as a fatherly figure, not even in a reduced sense as Cotillion is for Apsalar. Baudin pretends to be a thug to survive among the slaves and he does not have an opportunity even to tell the young naive girl about his mission, because of the danger of her exposing him to Beneth. This fact and the resulting complications are Felisin's own fault, since she sees Beneth as an ideal lover for a long period of time. Baudin also hoped that she might be the same as her sister and brother, “resilient – it is a Paran trait, yes?”²⁶²

Felisin lacks a functional helper by her side, a character who works on

²⁶¹ Erikson, “House of Chains Questions.”

²⁶² Erikson, *Chains*, 181.

“advancing or furthering the event by supporting or assisting the subject.”²⁶³ Thus, the frustration slowly dominates this trio and Felisin turns more and more hateful. Wounded over and over, being beaten by Beneth for her weakness and succumbing to addiction, she represents a child who was left without protection in the cruel world. Her constant spiteful comments and complains may blur her true identity for the reader and she indeed often appears as an ungrateful, spoiled brat. She herself acknowledges this to herself, aware of the decaying broken state she slipped into, finally reminding the reader of the horrible pain that is the cause for her insufferable behavior.

Bitter fury grew like a wildfire as memories rose with demonic ferocity to assail her. *Beneth. You bastard. You closed your hands around a child, but what you shaped was anything but a woman. A plaything. A slave to you and your twisted, brutal world.*

*I used to watch that knife in your hands, the flickering games that were your idle habits. And that's what you taught me, isn't it? Cutting for fun and blood. And oh, how I cut. Baudin. Kulp. Heboric.*²⁶⁴

After the escape from the mines, she, Heboric and Baudin continue with keeping their tense and hostile relationship. Nevertheless, Baudin is determined to fulfill his role as a protector. The horrible conditions in the mines and his nature of a cold assassin result in a rather controversial scene where broken Felisin seduces him while they are on the run in an attempt to kill him. Baudin accepts her invitation and “his hands moved over her clumsily, as if he was trying to be gentle but did not know how.”²⁶⁵ After her unsuccessful attempt to stab him, he confesses that he killed Beneth and claims that the crime lord “deserved more pain, something slower, but there wasn't any time for that. He didn't deserve the mercy, but he got it.”²⁶⁶ Sex is, in this case, used a tool to highlight Felisin's change. The whole scene where she “willed calm into her own breathing”²⁶⁷ in an attempt to

²⁶³ Cohan and Shires, *Stories*, 69.

²⁶⁴ Erikson, *Chains*, 444.

²⁶⁵ Erikson, *Gates*, 188.

²⁶⁶ Erikson, *Gates*, 188.

²⁶⁷ Erikson, *Gates*, 188.

kill Baudin shows the sad truth, that there was strength and ability to calculate coldly in her. But it was openly displayed very rarely and she preferred induced numbness, instead of fighting the world fiercely.

Baudin openly admits that he did it to uncover Felisin's true nature. Sadly, he only found out that the mines took her innocence and it cannot be returned, as Felisin bitterly acknowledges to herself after this frustrating and turbulent encounter:

To see if you're still ... yes, you still are. Baudin knew that already. He just wanted to show you to yourself, girl. You thought you were using him but he was using you. He knew what you planned. Think on that. Think on it long and hard.²⁶⁸

The knowledge about the corruption of Felisin does not stop Baudin from protecting her, he even sacrifices his life in an attempt to save her. The moment of their final confrontation is one of the most powerful reminders of Felisin being but an abused helpless child.

She walked slowly to the thing that had once been Baudin. She sank down into the warm sand, reached out and lifted his head, cradled it on her thighs. He was aware of her, reaching up an encrusted, fused hand to hover a moment near her elbow before falling back. He spoke, each word like rope on rock. "I thought... the fire ... immune."

"You were wrong," she whispered, an image of armour within her suddenly cracking, fissures spreading. And beneath it, behind it, something was building.

"My vow."

"Your vow."

"Your sister ..."

"Tavore."

"She—"

²⁶⁸ Erikson, *Gates*, 189.

“Don't. No, Baudin. Say nothing of her.”

He drew a ragged breath. “You ...”

Felisin waited, hoping the life would flee this husk, flee it now, before—

“You ... were ... not what I expected ...”

Armour can hide anything until the moment it falls away. Even a child.
Especially a child.²⁶⁹

After Baudin's death, Felisin is, ironically, thrown into a path of a murdered religious leader Sha'ik and her two bodyguards guarding the body, waiting for a foretold resurrection. Felisin, being physically similar to the old Sha'ik, is accepted as a new high priestess and is forced by her new goddess to assume the challenging role, which will be discussed in the third section of this chapter. The Whirlwind's goddess's acceptance of Felisin can be seen as a second phase of her downfall. In *Deadhouse Gates*, it was mainly alcohol and drugs in what she sought refuge. In *House of Chains*, when she is given a new opportunity, she chooses a numbing embrace of the goddess instead of a clear judgement.

Felisin's unfortunate death in *House of Chains*, counts among the character deaths described from their own point of view, which further deepens the sorrowful impact on the reader. After the murder of the Whirlwind Goddess, she was left without guidance immediately before her fight with the Adjunct. Her fragility and mind of a hurt suffering child is fully revealed with her last thoughts: “I just wanted to know, Tavore, why you did it. And why you did not love me, when I loved you. I — I think that's what I wanted to know.”²⁷⁰ The catharsis that a tragedy should trigger might be problematic to achieve for the reader because of Felisin's displeasing and hateful behavior and her violent thoughts, however, her death finally fully unveils her fragility and the cruel fate that forced the two sisters to fight each other. Tavore being oblivious to Sha'ik's true identity deals the final blow, while the reader is fully aware of Tavore's desperate effort to find her lost sister and save her. Felisin's death and the horrible truth about it is an ominous motif appearing long after Felisin's departure from the plot and it threatens to shake Tavore's mental health, as already discussed in the previous chapter. For the

²⁶⁹ Erikson, *Gates*, 357.

²⁷⁰ Erikson, *Chains*, 606.

last time, in the moment of her death, Felisin's role of an ordinary human being lacking special talent or powers and who was forced to face unimaginably hard conditions is stressed. She stands in a contrast with other very young characters in the decalogy, even children, who were more capable and used their sober judgment to their benefit instead of shielding themselves from the whole world. Little Harllo successfully escaped from the mines and returned to his mother. Hetan small daughters, Stavi and Storii, fought an adult armed man determined to rape and kill them. On the other hand, the hardships Felisin was subjected to were indeed terrible and, despite her flaws, she deserves the reader's pity.

3.5 Fear the Gods

“Well, people have been getting in the way.”

“People, yes. Mortals.”

Quick Ben nodded, eyes narrowing. “We have been the weapons of the gods.”

“Tell me, High Mage, how does it feel?”²⁷¹

Felisin is another character whose life was significantly influenced, even ruined by the intervention of the gods. The link with deities is the feature she shares with her two remaining siblings. Tavore's role in shaping the Malazan religion has been already discussed and while she serves as an understanding savior, the brother, Paran, goes even further and treats the gods as equals. He does not hesitate to physically threaten them: “filled with a mindless, bestial rage, the captain *shook* the god.”²⁷² Unfortunately, these two features are not what the youngest member of the family possesses.

Felisin's relationship with the goddess starts very similarly as the possession of Apsalar by Cotillion, even though it is less forceful, as the domination is slow. However, while the patron of the assassins and Apsalar share a form of a parent and offspring relationship, this goddess uses Felisin only as a tool, which can be used and thrown away. The moment when “Dryjhna's power

²⁷¹ Erikson, *Dust*, 135.

²⁷² Erikson, *Gardens*, 300.

trickled into her,²⁷³ is described from her own point of view and Felisin, ignorant of the destructive power of the goddess, does not convey the true message to the reader about the sinister meaning of the moment when the two minds, the human and divine touch. The immense power that allows Felisin, becoming the highest priestess, Sha'ik, to control the air and sand, and the sudden throughout knowledge about the lives and all flaws of her servants does not make her stop and evaluate her new abilities. Sadly, it only fuels her vanity and the hate she feels towards her “dear sister.”²⁷⁴ The goddess and this childlike immature character prove to be more and more alike, both driven to madness and desire for destruction. Felisin, hating, but also fearing Tavore dreadfully, avoiding open challenges and hiding in the desert is more and more consumed by the Whirlwind goddess and even the last traces of the sober judgment leave her.

The Whirlwind Goddess is a mysterious figure for a long time and even Sha'ik, in the person of Felisin, does not bother to take an interest in the source of the power ravaging the desert. Only shortly before the decisive battle between the Army of the Whirlwind and the Bonehunters, the surprising truth is revealed. The goddess was, in fact, an Imass woman driven to madness by a broken heart. Due to her inability to die caused by the ritual of Tellann, she was doomed to stagger through the world and was able to draw power from a fragment of a warren.

It was her. And the flames confirmed his suspicion. *An Imass, trailing the chains of Tellann, the Ritual shattered – oh, she has no place here, no place at all.*

Chthonic spirits swarmed her burning body, the accretions of power she had gathered unto herself over hundreds of thousands of years. Hatred and spite had twisted them all into malign, vicious creatures.

Marsh water and mould had blackened the limbs of the Imass. Moss covered the torso like dangling, knotted fur. Ropes of snarled, grey hair hung down, tangled with burrs. From her scorched eye sockets, living flames licked out. The bones of her cheeks were white, latticed in cracks from the heat.

Toothless, the heavy lower jaw hanging – barely held in place by rotting

²⁷³ Erikson, *Gates*, 449.

²⁷⁴ Erikson, *Gates*, 450.

strips of tendon and withered muscle.

The goddess was keening, a wavering, eerie cry that did not pause for breath, and it seemed to L'oric that she was struggling.²⁷⁵

This horrible ache of heart was the key factor for the Imass to accept Felisin as her new priestess and also doomed both to an unfortunate end. The goddess, in her revengeful focus on violence, was murdered by one of her own mages, unable to see the danger coming from her own worshipers. Felisin, blinded by her self-centered self-pity and immaturity, contributed to her own death and the death of the Whirlwind Goddess as well. This religious devotion was clearly enforced and Felisin's relationship with her goddess was not of a worshiper, but of a naive vulnerable parasite, yet her position of Sha'ik and her presentations of the goddess's power were one of the key reasons why the Army of Apocalypse fought savagely and committed many acts of violence and bloodshed. Felisin's stream of consciousness is many times filled with philosophical pondering, yet it only further enhances her path towards oblivion.

Fragments of clarity – they were diminishing, withering like flowers in winter – as the hold of the Whirlwind Goddess tightened on her soul. *My sister traded me for the faith of the Empress, to convince Laseen of Tavore's own loyalty. All to serve her ambition. And her reward was the position of Adjunct. Such are the facts, the cold truths. And I, in turn, have traded my freedom for the power of the Whirlwind Goddess, so that I can deliver just vengeance against my sister.*
*Are we, then, so different?*²⁷⁶

Steven Erikson, an archeologist and anthropologist, immensely draws from our own history and his view and presentation of the role of religion his fictional world is very detailed. On the example of the Crusades, it can be shown that religion and religious devotion is a significant factor influencing the warfare. According to the study of Hassner and Horowitz, religion affected the Crusades

²⁷⁵ Erikson, *Chains*, 602-3.

²⁷⁶ Erikson, *Chains*, 507.

“in a way that significantly lengthened their duration.”²⁷⁷ The person of the Sha'ik, as a representation of the goddess had immense power over the simple warriors and served as their inspiration. Felisin's inner insecurity the reader is constantly confronted with serves as a foreshadowing of the miserable end of this character and also the catastrophic outcome of the rebellion itself. She can be also seen as a representation of a flawed religious leader, a criticism of the leaders in the real world, who often do not live and act according to the standards they preach.

As Felisin herself acknowledges, in the delusion of the godly power, the numbness caused by the goddess's anger is comfortable for her, just like the drugs and alcohol were in the mines. “I'm relieved by that, for it allows me to think on more important things. My nest of betrayers, for example.”²⁷⁸ This ongoing inability to learn from the previous experiences and refusal to perceive the world without a support of some form of an anesthetic is her doom. Even Heboric, the old caring scholar who tries to be a mentor for the young aristocrat abandons his efforts at this point and leaves Felisin in the power of the mad goddess.

The ancient nature from the dawn of humanity of the Imass woman who disguised herself as a human deity can be compared to the Barghast spirits who caused the fall of Hetan and her husband. This goddess does not understand the outer world and is fixed on her own views, unable to understand the complexity of the reality. She can be characterized as a demon, “a spiritual being, usually possessed of powerful magic and often of an evil disposition.”²⁷⁹ In the Christian culture, they are often linked to devils, the opposition of the God, moreover, in fictional worlds, they often serve as antagonists even without this connection.²⁸⁰ In the world of Malaz, where there are various degrees of ascendancy as a form of a divine hierarchy, the Whirlwind Goddess is not an influential, or immensely powerful deity, thus fitting the comparison. Unlike for Hetan, there is no other power to save Felisin from the madness and numbness, nor the goddess herself takes even a slightest measure of responsibility for her worshipers as Cotillion

²⁷⁷ Ron E. Hassner and Michael C. Horowitz, “Debating the Role of Religion in War,” *International Security* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 208, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40784652.pdf>.

²⁷⁸ Erikson, *Chains*, 445.

²⁷⁹ Stableford, *Dictionary*, 108.

²⁸⁰ Stableford, *Dictionary*, 108.

does. This striking difference between the young god, Cotillion, and the Whirlwind Goddess of the ancient times serves as a very sharp contrast of the generation of the gods. The elder gods, with the exception of Eres'al, are often presented as arrogant, vicious and dominant, seeing the mortals as mere pawns for their games. On the other hand, the younger generation of the gods currently worshiped in the time where the events of the rebellion are set, is of a more diplomatic and subtle nature. As shown on the example of Paran, the mortals no longer tolerate all the whims of the gods and the new deities are aware of the power of the mortals to threaten their existence. The elder gods are hugely forgotten and have lost their former glory and power, due to the upper mentioned arrogance. Their temples are mere “ancient stones latticed with cracks and entombed in moss.”²⁸¹ Their desires to be nourished “well with blood and split bones”²⁸² was replaced by the more polished ways of the modern mortals and their new gods. This may be seen as a form of a parallel with the Old Testament and New Testament. The bible first orders to fear the God and shows God's wrath when he punishes sinners, as can be seen on the example of the flood, or the fate of Sodom. The New Testament, the new age building on the foundations of the old one, shows the God as more merciful and forgiving. The Whirlwind Goddess represents the free rage, she feels no empathy with her worshipers.

Felisin is a prototype of a mortal suffering under the selfish power of the elder god, serving as an example of all the uncountable unfortunate characters whose lives were used and abused by the will of the ruthless deities in the decalogy.

²⁸¹ Erikson, *Gardens*, 126.

²⁸² Erikson, *Gardens*, 149.

Conclusion

And now the page before us blurs.

An age is done. The book must close.

We are abandoned to history.

Raise high one more time the tattered standard of the Fallen. See through the drifting smoke to the dark stains upon the fabric.

This is the blood of our lives, this is the payment of our deeds, all soon to be forgotten.

We were never what people could be.

We were only what we were.

Remember us.²⁸³

The analyzed characters indeed proved to be very complex and particularly unique in terms of what they represent and how they can be understood. The four characters that served as the topics for the analysis can be seen as representations of the most striking female character types in the decalogy. Erikson address a number of issues connected with the feminist theory and many of his protagonists display many qualities and abilities that are nowadays praised as a part of a personality of a self-confident, strong and self-sufficient woman. In his novels, the female characters are present and matter in a whole scale of concepts, from religious to political. However, his work is not one-sided and he creates characters that are far from perfect, face various crises and it is not always the case when they emerge victorious at the end of their plot-line.

Not only characters, but whole cultures of many different races featured in many different eras of the Malazan fictional world value the female part of society and Erikson created an environment, where abuse of women for a supposed weakness or inferiority either does not exist at all, is ridiculed, or the perpetrators are punished. Many times, it is the woman who carries out the revenge herself.

Apsalar is an example of a character whose development when it comes to

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Erikson, *God*, 688.

various useful and also very dangerous skills and vast knowledge was accelerated. This development, when Apsalar starts as a simple naive and uneducated girl and instantly turns into a dangerous assassin speaking various languages and knowing even the secrets of the history of the empire she lives in is very much different from the traditional approach. According to Propp, Campbell and their followers, the protagonist goes through a long, strenuous, yet rewarding journey. Apsalar is featured at the end of this journey and she deals with the positive and negative consequences of the above mentioned struggle, a concept that is never discussed after the simple boy gains half of the kingdom and the hand of the princess. Her character is outstanding and shows a revolutionary treatment of the problem of religion. She does not bow to the god responsible for her fate, yet she reluctantly accepts him as a true fatherly figure. She stands as equal with her divine parent and these two characters do not fit into the schema of a worshiper and worshiped, since they support, provide advice, but also hurt each other in a very human and familial way. Apsalar and her lover were used to address the often very problematic issue of a missing mutual communication between the partners and the problems arising from false assumptions about the other one.

Hetan is a character who challenges the traditional timid female role. She displays a very free and ravenous sexuality that is dominant, overpowering her lovers. Erikson created a prototype of an outstanding and fierce woman who treats sex as a natural and very desired part of life, able to grasp all the aspects of sexuality, both shallow, free and careless, and also devoted, faithful and psychologically deep. However, Hetan and her approach does not only serve as a praise of an independent woman. It is also a criticism of the dangers of the frivolous behavior that can lead to sexual harassment aimed at people who do not share the same views. Hetan and her insisting on her wants and insulting of men who deny her vulgar invitations even serve as a mirror image of the traditional schema when a male character, but also a real man, refuses to listen to the woman saying no, or expressing her disapproval in any other way. Hetan's tragic death and the violent and humiliating events before that serve as a warning and criticism of abuse of women. Her high position in the society ensured by the above mentioned characteristics causes also her downfall, as her own society is not able

to tolerate the free thinking, agile and strong-willed woman.

She, featured as an intelligent and joyful woman from a primitive nomadic tribe, able to connect with the nature and understanding it is also a modern version of a Noble Savage with the modern feminist characteristics. Her brightness stands in a sharp contrast with unpoetical people of her own kind who are treated as a representation of the true savages of the real world, brutally raping and literary destroying the Noble Savage who is better than they are.

Tavore is an immensely distinctive protagonist of the whole decalogy, since she is a woman able to command a whole army, conquer civilizations and even oppose the powerful deities of the Malazan world. This high position with the combination of her often emphasized plain physical appearance strikes as an example of a person for whom, mind, rather than beauty proves to be the most efficient tool in life. This lack of a pleasing appearance, together with the lack of verbal skills present her as a very uncharismatic and secretive character. This also leads to Erikson's very interesting approach to a protagonist's development and characterization, which is very hard, sometimes even impossible to see here. Tavore's motivations and desires, her whole inner world remains hidden from the reader all the time. This puzzling impression is purely intentional and Tavore presents the inner feminine world that is powerful, but also not possible to fully understand, mainly by men. Tavore's lesbian relationship with her lover is presented as a deep faithful and unconditional love, the one that could be even understood as an ideal example of love between partners. Tavore's immense losses, including the death of her lover and severe physical and psychological exhaustion present the example of a powerful will and the cruel necessity to sacrifice oneself in order to achieve ambitious goals for a good cause.

Felisin is a prototype of a tragic figure in the decalogy. She is a character who was not gifted enough to overcome an immense hardship, as the characters mentioned before and her downfall is caused not only by the events affecting her, but also by her own flaws, mainly vanity and weak will. She is designed to appear as a very unsympathetic and hateful character to emphasize the gruesome reality of forced prostitution. Through her, Erikson repeatedly addresses the painful issue of child neglect, abuse and exploit. Typical teenage lures like drugs and alcohol

are featured in Felisin's plot-line as the means leading to decay of personality and problems with copying with reality and communication with others. Felisin is also a character that serves as a prototype of a person affected by religion in a similar way as upper mentioned drugs. The ill treatment of fate which again serves as a means of escaping from reality instead of copying with it can be seen as a criticism of the hypocritical believers in gods. The destructive relationship between Felisin and her equally flawed and hateful goddess also appear to point at the human history of religion, where gods were often feared, rather than worshiped with true devotion.

Steven Erikson, as an author of a fantasy, proved the importance of this genre as it has evolved into the present diverse form. The imaginary worlds provide a vast number of opportunities for creating alternatives for the history and customs as we know it from the real world, thus effectively pointing to issues that are problematic. The question of female equality and the horrible treatment women, and not only women, face in everyday situations is still a matter that can be expected to progress further. Important political and cultural positions held by women are still challenged and sometimes even ridiculed. The Malazan world, where the majority does not even think about questioning the power of a leader only because of the gender, or where women are an indispensable part of religious life, even bringers of faith, serves as a powerful parallel targeting the often unjust reality. The *Malazan Book of the Fallen* is an ambitious work that certainly deserves its worldwide recognition and popularity and provides an abundant amount of material for further research.

Resumé

A stránka před námi se rozmazává.
Věk uplynul. Kniha musí skončit.
Historie nás opustila.
Pozvedněte ještě jednou rozedranou zástavu
padlých. Pohlédněte kouřovou clonou
na tmavé skvrny na látce.
To je krev našich životů, to je celá
odměna za naše činy, které budou brzy
zapomenuty.
Nikdy jsme nebyli takoví, jak se od nás čekalo.
Byli jsme jen takoví, jací jsme byli.
Nezapomeňte na nás.²⁸⁴

Práce se zaměřila na moderního autora fantasy, Stevena Eriksona, zejména na jeho nejznámější sérii, *Malazskou knihu padlých*. Cílem práce bylo prozkoumat roli ženských postav a přinést hlubší analýzu vybraných protagonistek. Toto téma bylo zvoleno na základě velké početnosti ženských postav a jejich obsazení do velmi významných rolí v obsáhlém a rozmanitém fiktivním světě Malazu. Jako podklad pro studium sloužilo všech deset románů ze série a četné publikace, které se zabývají problematikou teorie literární postavy, feminismu, a žánru sci-fi a fantasy. V hojné míře se také uplatnily četné odborné články, které se spojují s předmětem konkrétních analýz, ku příkladu články o specifických pojmech, nebo historických událostech.

Práce byla rozdělena na pět nerovnoměrně rozsáhlých kapitol. Každá z jednotlivých částí se zaměřila na specifické téma. První kapitola je zčásti i encyklopedickým úvodem do světa Malazu a obsahuje stručný souhrn informací o autorovi a zápletky v sérii. Dále se v této kapitole rozebírají důležité aspekty

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Steven Erikson, *Chromý bůh: příběh z Malazské knihy padlých* (Praha: Talpress, 2012), 927.

románů, jako například jednotlivé rasy a náboženství. Důraz je v popise kladen zejména na roli ženských postav. Již z této úvodní kapitoly je jasné, že ženskost v jakékoli formě je v tomto světě velmi důležitá a zastává nenahraditelnou roli. Čtyři vybrané postavy slouží jako jasné příklady směrů analýzy.

Ve druhé části dochází k analýze první vybrané postavy, Apsalar. Tato kapitola se zaměřila zejména na problematiku narativní výstavby, zejména rozvoje postavy. Apsalar začíná jako nevinná, naivní a nezkušená dívka. Hned vzápětí po jejím úvodu do děje je posedlá bohem asasínů, což způsobí její velmi rychlý vývoj, co se týče pohybových schopností a bojových umění. Získá také rozsáhlé vědomosti a jiné praktické dovednosti. Tento přístup, kde postava neučiní vlastně žádné vědomé kroky, aby dosáhla stav značného fyzického a psychického růstu je z pohledu Proppa a Cambella velmi odlišný od typické strastiplné cesty hrdiny, který se o výše zmíněné musí zasloužit. Erikson, vystavující Apsalar tomuto velmi zrychlenému a ulehčenému postupu se tedy spíše zaobírá tím, co se v tradičních mýtech a pohádkách již nevyskytuje, a sice dalšími efekty těchto darů. Apsalar se svými novými schopnostmi čelí velké výzvě v podobě vyrovnání se s touto náhlou změnou. Bůh asasínů s ní navazuje velmi netradiční vztah, kde ji otevřeně označuje jako svou dceru a snaží se jí pomoci s jejími těžkými volbami v cestě životem. Tento vztah je velice zajímavý a ukazuje něco, co se v reálném světě, ale také ve světě fantasy vlastně nevyskytuje, a sice upřímné božstvo, které lituje svých chybných skutků a snaží se je napravit, a také smrtelníka, který si je vědom těchto chyb, kvůli kterým trpí, ale boha neztracuje. Naopak, oba jsou si navzájem prospěšní a mají opatrně pozitivní vztah, který se skutečně přibližuje vztahu otce a dcery. Apsalar, jako mladá žena, také řeší milostný vztah. Na její postavě je velmi efektivně ukázán velký problém jakýchkoli vztahů, tedy problém neúspěšné komunikace. Apsalar se těžko vyrovnává se svými vražednými schopnostmi a touží po nevinné lásce a návratu k jednoduchému životu. Její partner ji, naopak, velmi často vidí jako chladnokrevnou asasínku a domnívá se, že Apsalar má v plánu v plné míře využít svou moc a má velmi ambiciózní plány. Hluboce miluje její nevinnou část a té vražedné se obává, ale je pevně rozhodnut podpořit ji. Láska obou je čistá a upřímná. Oba neumějí vyjádřit své pocity a točí se v kruhu, který nakonec končí sebeobětováním Apsalar, která svého vyvoleného opouští,

aby ho ochránila před zhoubným vlivem, o kterém je skálopevně přesvědčena, že na něj má. Příběh nakonec končí šťastně. Ve velké míře přičiněním boha, který zasáhne jako osoba životem o hodně zkušenější než dva mladí lidé. Na základě jeho dobře mířených rad a také svých vlastních rozhodnutí se pár v závěru opět setkává a obnovuje svůj vztah. Toto ukončení příběhu je opět v rozporu s Proppem a Campbellem. Apsalar přežije mnohá dobrodružství, ale nakonec se neusazuje na místě, které by její obrovský posun od jejího začátku charakterizovalo, ona se vrací přesně na místo, kde ji bůh posedl a žije jednoduchý a poklidný život prosté rybačky. Dalo by se říct, že se vrací v kruhu. Její schopnosti bojovat a přizpůsobovat se prostředí zde neslouží jako odměna za těžkou práci, nýbrž jako pojistka, která ji zaručuje efektivní obranu stylu života, ke kterému se rozhodla vrátit.

Další rozebíranou postavou je Hetan, u které se práce zaměřila na koncept svobodné sexuality a také na pojem vznešený divoch. Hetan je hned na první pohled velmi dominantní a živelná. Užívá si život plnými doušky a potěšení ze sexu je neoddělitelnou součástí její představy o spokojené existenci. Své četné partnery bere jako prostředek k dosažení svého cíle a v zájmu svých požadavků je často hrubá až násilná. Její postava nemá za úkol glorifikovat nespoutanou ženu, která sama rozhoduje o své sexualitě, nýbrž částečně poukazuje na fakt, že příliš mnoho škodí. Je patrné, že Hetan je se svým životem více než spokojená, což by měl být žádaný stav. Její chování také velmi často hraničí se sexuálním obtěžováním, nebo dokonce vyhrůžkami znásilnění nebohému muži, který je proti jejím návrhům. Hetan se později, po nalezení vhodného partnera, se kterým se rozhodne strávit život, mění na odpovědnou a věrnou manželku a matku. Své rodině je hluboce oddána. Je velkým paradoxem, ale také přirozenou věcí, že porodem a starostlivostí o potomstvo se její bojovný a nezávislý duch vytratí do pozadí, a právě toto snížení ostražitosti je její zkárou. Část jejích vlastních lidí z kočovného kmene bojovníků nesouhlasí s jejím extrémně volným a frivolním chováním v minulosti. Také volba jejího manžela a následná situace, kde oba zastávali vedoucí funkci ve sjednocených klanech umožnila opozici svrhnou a zabít náčelníka, Hetanina manžela, a na ni si vybit všechnu nahromaděnou frustraci. Toto nepřátelství a závist pramení z její volnosti a také inteligence, která

jí umožnila dosáhnout tak vysokou pozici. Hetan je hromadně znásilněna a odsunuta na nejnižší pozici v hierarchii vůbec jako zchromený sexuální otrok. Tohle odporné násilí spáchané v primitivním kočovném kmeni přímo vybízí k vidění Hetan jako vznešeného divocha, jelikož oplývá mnohými dobrými vlastnostmi a díky magii je schopna naslouchat a rozumět přírodě. Její sexuální chování je sice po dlouhý čas divoké a, jak již bylo zmíněno, mírně násilné, ale nikdy skutečně své výhrůžky nesplní. Jinak se k jiným postavám chová dobrosrdečně a skutečně ztělesňuje pověstného divocha, který je vznešený. Postavy odpovědné za její velmi špatný osud jsou, naopak, jednoduše primitivní divoši. Smrt klanů, které plně upadly do tohoto brutálního primitivismu, a následné vzkříšení Hetan a jejího manžela, vymazání jejích špatných vzpomínek a návrat jejich tří dětí se děje pomocí silné magie a za asistence nadpřirozených bytostí.

Kapitola pojednávající o Tavore je nejrozsáhlejší, jelikož je tato postava velmi důležitá v celé sérii a z hlediska analýzy se místy jeví jako velmi problematická. Tyto problémy vznikají kvůli velké tajemnosti Tavore. Autor části soustředěné kolem ní záměrně napsal tak, aby skutečně komplexní analýza jednoduše nebyla možná, jelikož je čtenáři téměř úplně odepřen vstup do mysli Tavore. Tento chybějící pohled a velmi zmatené a nejisté pocity jiných postav, skrze které je možné na Tavore nahlížet vytvářejí neproniknutelnou bariéru. Je možné dojít k jistým závěrům na základě konverzací a sledování Tavore při jejích velmi zřídka vyjádřených projevech citů, nebo několika útržků vzpomínek jejích sourozenců, ale to je tak vše, co byl autor ochoten nabídnout. Tavore se jeví jako velmi inteligentní a schopný vojevůdce a taktik, má překvapivě velký přehled o historii i současnosti, na druhé straně velmi pokulhává v komunikaci. Autor sám přiznal, že tento nedostatek materiálu k pohodlné a bezproblémové analýze je záměrem a Tavore má představovat tajemství a nedosažitelnost ženského světa. Tajemství kolem jejích skutečných pocitů slouží i jako prostředek k budování napětí.

Tavore je nucena zabít svou vlastní sestru, která se hrou osudu dostala do čela povstání proti impériu, které má Tavore za úkol potlačit. K zabití dojde, aniž by Tavore sňala mrtvole z hlavy přílbu. Čtenář je po celou dobu velmi dobře

obeznámen i se zoufalou snahou Tavore tuto ztracenou sestru najít a poskytnout jí bezpečí. Po souboji, který proběhne ve čtvrtém románu, není dlouhý čas jasné, jestli si Tavore je vědoma vraždy vlastního sourozence, nebo ne. Případné zjištění této hrozné skutečnosti by znamenalo její zhroucení se, což by mělo za následek mnoho katastrof, jelikož Tavore na ramenu nese velké množství odpovědnosti. Její případná rezignace, nebo dokonce sebevražda, by mohly úplně zvrátit obrovskou část zápletky celé série. Nebezpečí odhalení má čtenář neustále na paměti a milosrdnou pravdu o nevědomosti Tavore se dozvídá až úplně na závěr, po rozhodující bitvě.

Prostřednictvím této postavy se Erikson zaměřil také na ženský ideál krásy a představil nový náhled, který prezentuje vůdkyni disponující mnoha jinými aspekty, ale ne fyzickou atraktivitou. Tavore má atributy velmi žádané u ženského těla, a sice plná prsa a boky, které v jejím podání, v kombinaci s nevýraznými črty rozhodně nevyvolává přitažlivý dojem. I navzdory tomu zastává velmi důležitou pozici, hned po císařovně impéria, a je tedy jasné, že fyzický zevnějšek je pro mnoho věcí v životě nepodstatný. Dokonce i hluboký a oddaný vztah s jinou ženou, pro změnu oslnivou kráskou, očividně nestojí jenom na tělesné přitažlivosti, ale na něčem jiném. Původ a průběh tohoto lesbického vztahu opět nejsou vyličeny. Tavore a její milenka jsou jednoduše zobrazeny jako ideální fungující pár, který se navzájem podporuje na všech rovinách. Její partnerka je dokonce schopna vědomě obětovat vlastní život v zájmu Tavore a její důležité mise. Ve chvíli této hrozné ztráty je skrze Tavore v románech vyzdvižen do popředí jeden z nejdůležitějších hybných mechanismů celého díla, a sice soucit. Tavore vzbuzuje soucit, ale zároveň je také jeho nositelkou. Až poměrně pozdě v sérii, v sedmém románu, se konečně objevuje její pravý životní cíl. Velmi ambiciózní a riskantní plán zachránit před jistou smrtí boha, který byl do jejího světa zavlčen proti své vůli, násilím spoután a trýzněn nezměrnou bolestí. Jeho stále živé tělo může poskytnou obrovskou moc a většina domácích bohů a jiných bytostí v něm vidí zdroj. Smrt a vysátí této moci by pro svět představovalo nezměrnou zkázu kvůli válce, která by po uvolnění jeho potenciálu vypukla. Tavořin plán, vést armádu smrtelníků proti bohům samotným, a jiným rasám a uspět se jeví jako zoufalý. Spoutaný bůh, ve svém utrpení, činí mnohé

zavrženíhodné a ohyzdné skutky a je velmi dlouho líčen jako hlavní záporní postava celé zápletky. Tavore, v její tajemnosti, slouží jako důležitý katalyzátor pro změnu úhlu pohledu. Ona je prostředkem, působícím velmi zásadní a extrémně překvapivý zvrát, kdy se z antagonisty stává oběť, které je třeba spěchat na pomoc. Je to soucit s bolestí a strádáním, cesta k pochopení, že utrpení nutí jakoukoliv bytost k zoufalým pokusům o osvobození, které se můžou zdát přílišné. Tavore nakonec, s pomocí mnoha mocných bytostí, jež nakonec došly ke stejnému závěru, uspěje. Ve víru mnoha násilných událostí popsaných v románech je soucit zvýrazněn jako jedna z nejdůležitějších ctností.

Felisín, mladší sestra Tavore, je postavou vyloženě tragickou. U tří výše zmiňovaných postav, které se dožily konce série je jejich budoucnost je nastíněna pozitivně. Na rozdíl od nich Felisín umírá rukou své vlastní sestry, která nemá tušení, že je přímo odpovědná za smrt milovaného člena své rodiny. Zatímco Apsalar, Hetan a Tavore oplývají různými talenty a schopnostmi, což jim umožňuje přežít a dosáhnout úspěchu, Felisín reprezentuje postavu zcela obyčejnou. Je prototypem úplně běžného člověka, který ve krutém světě plného nelítostné politiky, silné magie a nekončících válek nemá téměř šanci. Všechny čtyři postavy mají i své podobné drobnější a výrazně méně komplexní ekvivalenty v méně důležitých, až okrajových postavách a můžou být chápány jako souhrn črt. V sérii je mnoho schopných asasínek s barvitým osobním životem, mnoho odvážných bojovnic, mnoho žen soužených láskou, ztrátou a osamělostí. Ale nevinných, až téměř naivních lidí či lidí, kteří se dostali do příliš nebezpečných situací, než jaké mohli zvládnout je v sérii nezměrné množství. Nespravedlnost světa, bezohlednost lidí s mocí větší než většina, a z toho vyplývající hrůzy otroctví, nucené prostituce, nebo eliminace nepohodlných vzdělanců, toto všechno je součástí životní cesty Felisín. Tavore, ovlivněna politikou dvora, dá svou vlastní sestru odvézt do dolů. Felisín, jako panenka ze šlechtické třídy, má ukojit žízeň chátřů a zabránit tak občanské vzpouře v císařství. Tavore si tak zajistí silnou pozici u císařovny a současně s Felisín vyšle najatého ochránce s úkolem pomoci mladší sestře utéct a dostat se do bezpečí. Problém nastává již v momentu, kdy je Felisín odvečena z domova. Její mládí a fakt, že nepodědila bystrou mysl jako její sestra, jí neumožňuje uvědomit si pravdu a místo toho upadá do hluboké

nenávisti a touhy po pomstě. Její volba stát se prostitutkou se může jevit jako dobrý tah, kdyby byla schopna kalkulovat a udržet si čistou mysl. Výhody, jež by z toho mohly vzejít a které by ulehčily útěk jí i pomocníkovi, ale není schopna dosáhnout. Naivně se zamiluje do sice přitažlivého, ale jinak jednoduchého a majetnického dohlázele. Románek má na ni velmi destruktivní vliv, jelikož skrze něj má volný přístup ke drogám a alkoholu, což vyústí v její závislost.

V tomto bodě je možné zkonstatovat, že postava Felisín je očividným poukázáním na život adolescentů v jakékoli době a světě. Naivní láska je brána krutě realisticky a vůbec nekončí šťastně, tak jako z červené knihovny. Dohlázele používá Felisín jako platidlo, bije a ponižuje ji. Felisín ho, z nedostatku zdravého úsudku, i nadále otrocky miluje. Tím znemožňuje pomocníkovi, kterého poslala její sestra nejenom udělat jeho práci, ale vůbec Felisín informovat o jeho úkolu ze strachu odhalení.

Felisín se sice ve své vlastní mysli jeví jako nevinná oběť okolností, pravdou však je, že neposlouchá dobře míněné rady několika postav v jejím okolí a vědomě ignoruje různé šance na zlepšení. Ku příkladu místo prodeje drog je radši sama konzumuje, protože je o hodně jednodušší žít v oparu otupělosti, než se postavit na vlastní nohy. I navzdory její pasivitě, se nakonec útěk zdaří. Je nenávratně poznamenaná a z nevinného dítěte je ztracený a zmatený adolescent, který prožil mnohé hrůzy a je pln zuřivé nenávisti.

Její následující cesta do srdce povstání je ukázkou dalšího nebezpečí, které na lidi jejího typu číhá. Felisín je přijata bohyně uctívaná povstalci a ustanovena její hlavní kněžkou. Toto Felisín okamžitě dostává do pozice svrchovaného vůdce povstání pouštních kmenů. Na tuto pozici Felisín není nijak připravena, jelikož, není jako Tavore a o vojenské taktice nemá vůbec žádné tušení. Přesně podle toho i její snahy končí, a když Tavore vyzve na souboj, umírá pod jejím mečem.

Zápletka, která se točí kolem bohyně, se dá chápat jako otevřená kritika náboženství, v případě, že se zneužívá jako prostředek pro útěk od reality, nebo pro prosazování vlastních sobeckých záměrů. Felisín se zcela odevzdá bohyni, která je vlastně úplně stejná jako ona sama. Krutá, zahořklá a plná nenávisti. Zneužívá svou kněžku pro vlastní účely a záměrně jí otupuje úsudek, stejně jako to dělaly drogy a alkohol. Felisín se ochotně podřizuje. Celý destruktivní koncept

krvavého povstání vedeného touto bohyní je ukázkou čiré nesmyslnosti agresivních náboženských konfliktů a hrozné zbytečnosti tisíců mrtvých. Naivní lidé, jako je Felisín, kteří se nechají zlákat vidinou jednoduchých a radikálních řešení bez toho, aby se obtěžovali zamyslet se nad sebestředností a arogancí tvůrců.

Výsledky práce jasně dokázaly předpokládaný závěr, a sice, že *Malazská kniha padlých* je skutečně zdrojem mnoha inspirativních a komplexních ženských postav, pomocí kterých autor poukazuje na množství problematik týkajících se žen v reálném světě. Zároveň tyto ženské postavy nepůsobí jako uměle vytvořen prvek díla určen jenom pro propagaci feminismu. Jak již bylo zmíněno v úvodu, tento problém, kdy by ženské hrdinky mohly působit rušivě a zbytečně děj prodlužovat nebo zpomalovat kvůli prezentaci ideologie, vůbec nenastal kvůli prosté absenci sexismu. Ženy i muži ve světě Malazu jsou jednoduše rovnoprávní a není k tomu nutné zdůvodňování nebo zobrazení ženy, která bojuje o své místo v dominantním světě mužů. Toto místo prostě má a tak se ženské postavy hladce začlenily do děje. Steven Erikson je současný autor a jeho dílo ještě nebylo předmětem skutečně podrobné analýzy. Nejenom ženské postavy jsou v jeho rozsáhlé a ambiciózní práci zajímavým podnětem k zamyšlení. Bylo by více než vhodné jeho práci v budoucnosti věnovat víc pozornosti. Jako další by bylo vhodné zpracovat, ku příkladu, problematiku střídání komična a tragična, nebo projevy grotesky a absurdna. Za zmínku by určitě stály paralely a rozdíly v historii reálného světa a tohoto fiktivního, nebo funkce náboženství v obou světech.

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ANNOTATION

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This thesis focuses on female characters in the fantasy decalogy, Malazan Book of the Fallen, written by Steven Erikson. Many of these characters are unique, or unusual and the main aim of this thesis is to analyse their functions in the novels and their non-stereotypical personalities, that significantly affected the whole series and caused it's originality and popularity. Four protagonists were chosen for a detailed analysis.

ANOTACE

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Tato práce se soustřeďuje na ženské postavy ve fantasy dekalogii, *Malazská kniha padlých* od Stevena Eriksona. Mnoho z těchto postav je jedinečných, nebo neobyčejných. Hlavním cílem práce je analyzovat jejich funkce v románech, jejich nestereotypní osobnosti a jejich vliv na celou sérii, který způsobil její originalitu a popularitu. K podrobné analýze byly vybrány čtyři protagonistky.